

Testimony of Elena Tapia,  
President of the Connecticut State University American Association of University Professors  
To  
The Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee  
March 1, 2016

Dear Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Elena Tapia. I reside in Mansfield Center, CT. I am President of CSU-AAUP and Professor of Linguistics at Eastern Connecticut State University. I stand in support of SB 147: AN ACT ASSISTING STUDENTS WITHOUT LEGAL IMMIGRATION STATUS WITH THE COST OF COLLEGE. This bill would equalize access to institutional financial aid at Connecticut public universities and colleges to all students regardless of immigration status.

My father, aunt, and uncle came to study in the U.S. in the 1940s and later became naturalized citizens. Even so long ago, their studies and rich lives in the U.S. would not have been possible without the scholarships and assistance they received from their host institutions. They became productive doctors and professors and made exemplary contributions to their communities. For these personal reasons, I believe SB 147 should be passed.

That was long ago, and now I live in a state that unfortunately and embarrassingly has one of the largest achievement gaps between low-income students and their non-low income peers in the nation. According to The CT Mirror, "The 'Nation's Report Card' -- a U.S. Department of Education test given to students in every state -- shows that Connecticut continues to have the largest achievement gap between its minority students and their peers in five of the 12 indicators. In the remaining areas, Connecticut is still close to having the largest gap in the nation."<sup>1</sup> Granted, the achievement gap in our schools is not directly related to undocumented university students receiving financial aid, but the income inequities are part of the same piece.

Educators for Fair Consideration ([www.E4FC.org](http://www.E4FC.org)) report that "most undocumented college students have lived in the U.S. most of their lives, have learned English, have excelled academically in high school, and want to pursue a college education." If Connecticut wants to close the gap and to be viewed as a state that supports opportunity, SB 147 should receive unanimous approval. Nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations prevents undocumented students from accessing institutional financial aid.

In early February of this year, CSU-AAUP and the CCSU-Student Government Association held a Summit on "Inequality and the Crisis of Public Higher Education" at Central Connecticut State University. The CT Higher Education Matters website describes those who came to speak: "Some speakers were academics, from the CSU system, other public universities in Connecticut (UConn) and nearby states (UMass Amherst/Dartmouth, University of Maine), and from private schools, large and small (Yale, the College of St. Rose). These academics shared research and experiences revealing not only the causes of inequality and the problems facing higher education, and but also the shortsightedness of the government that does not understand [the] value and importance [of higher education]." In 2011, Connecticut enacted a law allowing in-state tuition for undocumented students. It is time to take the next step and to allow undocumented students to receive the financial aid that they help to pay into and that their classmates already receive. Ensuring equality of access to higher education is a matter of justice that ensures everyone who works hard has a fair shot at success.

I support SB 147 and hope the committee will vote favorably on SB 147. It is essential that we make this investment in the future of Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration,



Elena Tapia  
CSU-AAUP President

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas, Jacqueline Rabe. Nov. 8, 2013. "Nation's Report Card: CT continues to show largest achievement gap." *The CT Mirror*.