



INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA-UAW

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GARY CASTEEL, Secretary-Treasurer

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Senator Dante Bartolomeo, Representative Willis and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Julie Kushner. I am the Director of UAW Region 9A and reside in Danbury, CT.

I am here today to testify 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 for undocumented Connecticut students at Connecticut public universities and colleges.

Just last year, the 2200 Teaching and Research Assistants at the University of Connecticut, members of UAW Local 6950 were successful in forming a union and negotiating a terrific first contract. Working with these new members has been a privilege, and has afforded me the opportunity to participate more directly in matters related to higher education. Our members are on the frontlines teaching and working with some of the brightest young minds in our state. It is on their behalf that I urge you to support SB 147, so that every student whether a citizen or undocumented has the same opportunity to education regardless of their economic status.

In 2011, this legislature passed the Dream Act giving undocumented students the opportunity to pay in-state tuition when attending our public universities. It is now our responsibility to make this dream a reality by granting access to financial aid. Institutional aid is funded by tuition revenue; it is not taxpayer money. In Connecticut, state colleges and universities are required by state statute to set aside at least 15% of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Although undocumented, those that do attend our public universities and colleges contribute to this pool of money but have no access to it. It's really quite simple -- undocumented students should be eligible for aid the same as other students who pay tuition.

All students deserve access to higher education, regardless of economic or immigration status. Providing the path to higher education for all will increase graduation rates and increase state revenue through tuition from new college students and increase tax revenue from higher incomes of college graduates. Access to higher education will help close the large achievement gap in Connecticut between white and minority students, low income and higher income students, and English Language Learners (ELL) and non-ELL students.

I would also like to appeal to you as a parent with three children who came up through the Danbury public schools. Danbury is a community that is enriched by its diversity. My children grew up with children that came from all corners of the globe. These kids became part of our lives -- many grew up in families that had become citizens, but others were from families that were undocumented. I can tell you that it is just plain wrong for any child to be held back, to face financial obstacles in a state like ours.

Future doctors, teachers, and engineers will watch their dreams disappear if we do not step up and do what is right. Providing these students with the economic means necessary will only create a better Connecticut.

Thank you for your time. I strongly support SB 147 and hope the committee will vote favorably on SB 147.

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