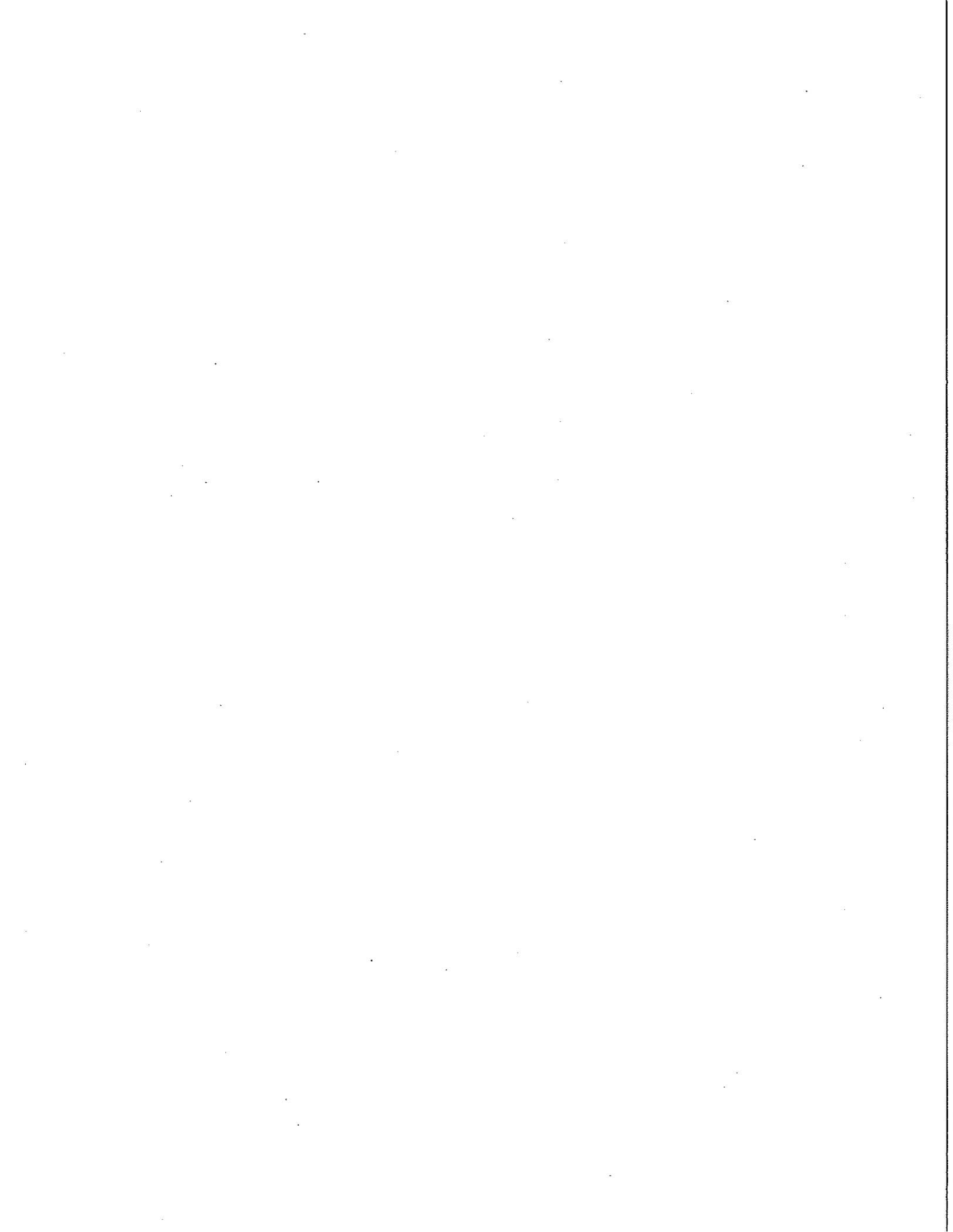


Dear Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I, Eric Cruz Lopez, call on the members of the Judiciary committee to pass and vote favorably on Senate Bill 427: AN ACT CONCERNING CHILDREN IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND GUARDIANSHIP APPOINTMENT. This bill would allow youth to be able to file for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) up to the age of twenty-one instead of the current eighteen years old, which is limited by the state's definition of a minor child. I am a part of Connecticut Students for a Dream which is a statewide youth led network fighting for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. We do this through many strategies including community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy. Our organization is made up of our members and leaders, who are high school aged, college aged, and young adults from the entire state of Connecticut. We have active teams in Danbury, Hartford, New Haven, Norwalk/Stamford, and Willimantic.

I personally work with many undocumented unaccompanied minors and know that some of them have brothers or cousins in the same situations they are in but are ineligible for SIJS because they have aged out. We have to begin to consider that many of the minors that flee their country do so because of fear and threats to their lives. These students do not just journey over to the US for a fun vacation they are fleeing for survival. Many of the minors age out of the program because they do not have any help to find legal counsel or have any connections to resources that would enable them to be able to realize that they qualify for SIJS. So, now on top of fleeing violence and poverty by yourself as a minor, you have to face being undocumented, you have to face not having health insurance, you have to face trying to feed yourself, and you have to somehow find a way to a legal status. Often times it is SIJS that is the status that these young adults need and that they qualify for.

Through this we are not asking for a whole new law but just to amend the definition in this specific instance. We can also look to other states like New York and Maryland where they have raised the age to 21 for SIJS. By doing this we can be able to grant a safe haven to minors who otherwise would have to live in the shadows as undocumented and be exploited for their labor or live in poverty for their whole lives.



I urge the committee to vote favorably on S.B. 427 fro the sake of these children and youth.

Thank you,

Eric Cruz Lopez