

Testimony of President Joe Bertolino
Southern Connecticut State University
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee Public Hearing
February 13, 2018

Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

As President of Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven, Connecticut, I support HB 5031. This bill will play a vital role in providing access to tuition-based institutional aid for all students at Connecticut's public colleges and universities, regardless of their citizenship or immigration status.

Southern sets aside about 18 percent of its tuition income - almost \$11.3 million - to provide institutional aid to its students. This is approximately three percent more than the allocation mandated by the Board of Regents. Of this total, \$9.2 million was designated as need- based and \$2,068,226 was non-need based financial aid.

All students pay into this fund through a partial allocation of their tuition payments. But undocumented students are unable to benefit from it, despite the fact that they are also contributors.

We at Southern believe that this is fundamentally unfair, and that this practice goes against our institution's core values of equal access and social justice.

The only way to allow undocumented students to access critical financial aid is for the state legislature to pass the above referenced bill. By doing so, our lawmakers would continue a historic tradition of expanding access and affordability to underrepresented populations.

This issue has come to the fore at a time when more students than ever are struggling to make ends meet at Southern, and our sister institutions. The passage of the bill under consideration would boost our students' chances of degree completion without the looming specter of overbearing financial hardship.

And, after earning their degree, they will join the 85 percent of our 1,200 annual graduates who remain in Connecticut as taxpaying, productive members of our state's economy.

In closing, I ask the committee to support HB 5031. This legislation will ensure the fair and equitable availability of institutional aid for students at Southern and throughout our public higher education system - regardless of their socioeconomic or immigration status.

I thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,

Joe Bertolino
President
Southern Connecticut State University