

Dear Members of the Higher Education Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Carolina Bortolletto, I am an undocumented graduate of Western Connecticut State University, where I graduated in 2010 with a BA in Biology and minors in International Studies and Anthropology. I have been a resident of Danbury and now Brookfield for over 18 years. And yes, I am still undocumented. I am also co-founder and leader of the organization CT Students for a Dream. I stand in support of HB5031. This bill will equalize access to student-generated, institutional aid in CT public colleges and Universities for all CT's students regardless of immigration status.

I went to college and graduated from college before Connecticut had In State Tuition for undocumented students. This is the point of the story when people say, "if you did it, others can too, they just need to work hard". And yes, I did work hard. But the truth is, I was lucky. Lucky that WCSU offered me a merit scholarship at a time in my life when I didn't even know how to apply to scholarships. Lucky that my parents were able to scrape up money each semester for my tuition. But luck should have nothing to do with it.

Being able to pursue your dreams should not be a matter of luck. In my time with CT Students for a Dream, I've met countless students, many much more deserving and bright than me, who were unable to pursue their dreams of higher education, students who had to drop out of college, and most painfully, many students who didn't even allow themselves to dream of a future - too many to count. The obstacles that undocumented students face shed light on the reality that the system of meritocracy that we all believe that America is built on is really a sham. The truth is, no matter how hard most undocumented students try, for many, affording college is an almost insurmountable task. I know this as I am now pursuing my Masters. Since last summer, I have applied to over 60 private scholarships, I have 2 jobs, and I still had to take this semester off due to lack of funds. Most undocumented students are of low income, first generation families, many don't get the support they need at school or at home, that many of you around this table received in your college journey, Many must choose between supporting their families or paying for tuition and books for school. Further, undocumented students are not eligible for federal aid, state aid, and for most scholarships. And this bill would do nothing to change that.

This bill would not give all undocumented immigrant students a grant or scholarship, that's not how the existing system works. It would simply equalize access to the current system of the Institutional Aid. But you know what this bill will do. For the last 3 years, we have sat here, across from each other, and I have told each of you how this bill works, and how you must support it. For 3 years, today being the 4th, you have sat here for hours and hours and heard student after student, educator after educator tell you why this bill is fair, why this bill is important, and why we need to pass it this year.

But every year, the bill just doesn't quite make it. It's not on the priority list, it gets bogged down in politics and bargaining tables. So today I'm not asking you to move this bill out of committee. I know many of you support this bill because at its core, its goal is to increase access to higher education for our state's students - and that is goal this committee can get behind. But I don't need you to move this bill out of committee, I need you to support this bill once it gets to the floor.

Because 4 years is too long for our dreams to be put on hold. Because for 4 years, our students have cast aside and abandoned their dreams. Because for 4 years, Connecticut has lost on the potential of so many students who could have made this state a better place.

Progress for our communities on the national level has been an uphill battle - and each day more of us are losing hope that we can contribute back to this country. But right here, right now, Connecticut has a very real opportunity to win very real change on the state level and improve the daily lives of our immigrant

students.

I support HB5031 and encourage the committee to vote favorably on this issue.

Thank you for your time,
Carolina Bortolletto
CT Students for a Dream
Co-Founder, Communications and Grant Manager
WCSU, Class of 2010

