

February 10, 2018

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

My name is John Castelluzzo, and I am a high school counselor at Brien McMahon High School in Norwalk, Connecticut. I am providing this letter to support the enactment of HB 5031. I feel that this bill would help undocumented students gain vital access to institutional aid at the Connecticut state public colleges and universities, particularly considering that they pay into this pool of funds just as other students with legal immigration status do.

Throughout my ten years as a counselor at Brien McMahon High School, which has an extremely diverse student population, I have witnessed and observed the many challenges that undocumented students face in regards to being able to secure funds for their postsecondary education when compared to many of their peers. A vast majority of these students possess a very strong work ethic, and oftentimes are forced to balance their academic responsibilities with non-academic related obligations such as part-time jobs or caring for younger siblings. Last school year, in speaking with a 12th grade student who I had been working with since his freshman year of high school, he revealed to me that he was an undocumented student. He admitted that over the prior year and a half, he had lost a great deal of motivation to succeed academically because he felt that his postsecondary options were very limited and restricted due to his undocumented status. He worked very hard outside of school helping his parents with their respective jobs as well. Even though he possessed both tremendous academic and athletic (he had been a member of the school's wrestling team for four years) potential, he had recently become discouraged as he felt that much of this hard work may not make a significant impact on his future educational and professional aspirations. It is students such as these who would truly benefit the most from obtaining access to institutional financial aid. He is just one of countless amounts of students both in Norwalk and in Connecticut at large who could potentially view a postsecondary education as more attainable if a bill such as HB 5031 was enacted.

In summation, I feel that undocumented immigrant students who contribute to the tuition revenue at in-state Connecticut public universities should also be able to access institutional-based aid just as any other student would. In terms of education equality, it is simply the right and just thing to do. Therefore, I reiterate my support for the passage of bill HB 5031. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

John Castelluzzo

School Counselor

