

Testimony of President Daisy Cocco De Filippis, Ph.D.
Naugatuck Valley Community College
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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“This is a great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live together--black and white, Easterner and Westerners, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu--a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in “The World House”, Chapter VI of
Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?

It was morning and Capital Community College was resplendent as it hosted the proceedings of the March 13, 2014 meeting of the Connecticut Board of Regents for Higher Education. The room had become quiet as young people rose to take the microphone to speak about their American Dream. I remember feeling in awe of their courage and dignity as the “Dreamers” spoke of their experience in Connecticut and pleaded with the Board of Regents to consider extending to them the benefits of institutional scholarships.

It was a moment to reflect on how far we had come and how much further we need to go in support of this vulnerable population. After all, by passing a bill in 2011, the Connecticut legislature’s response to the Dreamers had been humane and fair-minded, granting them the right to in-state tuition and even an ID number so that they could work, provided they had completed their high school studies in Connecticut and did not have a criminal record.

This past fall, standing in Waterbury City Hall, joining a group of Dreamers invited by Congresswoman Elizabeth Esty to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month and to recognize the significant contributions of Students for a Dream in Connecticut, I was proud to embrace Angelica Idrovo, NVCC’s own alumna, recipient of the Fairfield County Community Foundation Pascualano Scholarship to attend UConn. Angelica is a bright and shining young star in Connecticut, recently selected by *Hartford Magazine* as one of their “40 Under 40” honorees of 2018 for her advocacy work as a Dreamer. I was once again reminded of the significant talent and contributions our Dreamers make to the communities they inhabit each and every day.

Public higher education and, in particular, community colleges exemplify what is good, true and just about our nation. Most community colleges were founded in Connecticut in the 1960’s as an outcome of President Johnson signing the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Higher Education Act in 1965. We realize that these young dreamers embody the continuing struggle for civil rights and opportunity in the twenty-first century. We are almost there in Connecticut. We need to take this extra step.

Granting students the opportunity to apply and receive institutional scholarships at our colleges is only fair. After all, 15% of the tuition these students pay (they get no financial aid), earned as they work and study, goes to support the needs of other students. A parallel with the founding principle of “no taxation without representation” comes to mind. Why should these students, some of our more vulnerable young people, have to incur the expense of paying tuition whose benefit they are only permitted to receive at 85% percent? What does it say that we grant them identification so that they can work, but deny them access to support that would go far in ensuring that their earnings would provide them entrance into the middle class and permit them to contribute significantly to the tax base of Connecticut’s economy?

They are the “Dreamers” because they envision a life as engaged, contributing and educated residents of this generous and so beautiful State. Let Connecticut rise to lead as it has done historically for justice, equality and opportunity. The time is now. The dream is not impossible.