



Testimony of Juan Hernandez, Vice President 32BJ SEIU
H.B. No. 5031
February 13, 2018

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Juan Hernandez and I am the District Director for SEIU 32BJ in the State of Connecticut. I am writing on behalf of our members to strongly urge you to support H.B. No. 5031, An Act Equalizing Access to Student-Generated Financial Aid.

32BJ represents over 4,500 men and women in the State of Connecticut and 163,000 up and down the East Coast. Our members are the backbone of the property industry – building workers; security officers; and office, school, theatre, stadium and window cleaners. 32BJ members come from 64 different countries, speak 28 different languages, and represent a microcosm of immigrants as well as families with long histories in the U.S. We all share the American Dream, a commitment to making life better for working families, and a fundamental respect for the dignity of all people.

Connecticut has taken important steps in the fight to give undocumented youth equal access to higher education. In 2011, Governor Malloy made the dream of attending college closer to a reality for undocumented youth when he signed a bill into law that allowed undocumented high school students access to in-state tuition rates. Despite this great first step, far too many of our youth are still unable to access our State's higher education programs due to prohibitive cost barriers. Because undocumented students are unable to apply for federal financial aid to assist with the cost of college, the eligibility to pay in-state tuition without the attachment of access to aid, means that many students are unable to afford our State's great schools. Without access to student-generated financial aid, in-state tuition at the University of Connecticut's main campus for the 2017-2018 academic year is nearly \$29,000.ⁱ At this rate, a bachelor's degree, earned in 4 years, will currently cost an unauthorized student nearly \$120,000 to achieve.

The students and the families that H.B. No. 5031 will help have built their lives in our State. They work here, they pay taxes here, and they are active and engaged members of our communities. The estimated 130,000ⁱⁱ undocumented immigrants currently living in CT comprise 3.6% of our population of 3.5 million.ⁱⁱⁱ Undocumented immigrants make up about 5%^{iv} of our labor force and collectively pay almost \$136 million dollars in tax to the State.^v Connecticut's immigrant community is as much of a contributing and positive force in our State as any other, and it is only right that we give undocumented students who have earned a high school diploma in our state the same access to an affordable degree and quality education that their peers have access to. At a time when the state of Connecticut is experiencing a budget deficit, we need to do everything in our power to encourage our talented students to stay in our State, keep their resources here, and eventually become wage-earners and taxpayers in our community.

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Moreover, at this current moment when the future of Deferred Action for Undocumented Students—a federal program established under President Obama which grants certain eligible minors a temporary and renewable period of deferred action and makes them eligible for a work permit and that the Trump Administration ended in September 2017—hangs in the balance, we need to do what’s within our power as a state to create opportunity for all young people seeking education and opportunity.

20 States and Washington D.C. have passed tuition equity laws or policies that allow unauthorized students to access in-state tuition rates and 5 have allowed undocumented students to access state education grants or scholarships.^{vi} It’s the fair and equitable thing to do, and our state should follow suit.

We strongly urge the legislature to pass legislation to ensure that prohibitively expensive education does not prevent our young people from fulfilling their potential and achieving their dreams. By expanding access to student-generates financial aid to all of our State’s eligible high school youth, we are not only investing in their future, we are also investing in our financial future and health as a State. Please do the right thing and support H.B. No. 5031.

ⁱ <http://admissions.uconn.edu/cost-aid/tuition>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2014/11/18/appendix-a-additional-tables-4/> (Table A1)

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/09>

^{iv} Figure based on CT Department of Labor Statistics (<https://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/laborforce.asp>) and Pew Research Center Statistics (<http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/09>) (Table A2)

^v http://itep.org/itep_reports/2015/04/undocumented-immigrants-state-local-tax-contributions.php#.Vp_k8Igo7cs (Table 1)

^{vi} <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/news/2017/12/21/444414/obstacles-unauthorized-students-face-postsecondary-education/>