



Connecticut General Assembly's Commission on Equity & Opportunity
18-20 Trinity Street, Hartford, Connecticut

**Testimony from Werner Oyanadel, Senior Commission Analyst for the
Commission on Equity & Opportunity (CEO)**

Tuesday, February 13th, 2018 ~ LOB Room 2C – 11:00 AM

In support of Raised Bill HB 5031 "An Act Equalizing Access to Students Generated Financial Aid"

Good morning Sen. Bye, Sen. Linares, Rep. Haddad and all honorable members of the *Higher Education Committee & Employment Advancement* of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA). My name is Werner Oyanadel, Senior Commission Analyst for the CGA's Commission on Equity and Opportunity (CEO). I am here today in support of **Raised Bill HB 5031** "An Act Equalizing Access to Student-Generated Financial Aid."

For the record the mission of the CEO is to inform and engage all policy makers about constituent needs for the African American, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, and Latino and Puerto Rican populations in Connecticut. We are a nonpartisan agency with a data driven, cross-cultural approach to policy innovation and our primary focus – again – is to recommend legislation that aims at eliminating disparities by creating opportunities, building connections and promoting social change.

Many students either without immigration status or recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) in Connecticut high schools hopes to pursue higher education in our state after having earned a primary and secondary education in our state. Unfortunately, many are unable to achieve this dream because they are ineligible for all federal and state need-based financial aid. The 2011 legislation that granted in-state tuition rates to some of these students and the 2015 legislation that enabled more undocumented students to be able to qualify for instate tuition were important steps toward increasing access to higher education. Regrettably – again – many of these students and their families remain unable to afford the high cost of tuition without access to institutional aid – whether at in-state or out-of-state rates.

Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue; it is not taxpayer money. In Connecticut state colleges and universities are required by state statute to set aside at least 15% of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students. Students without immigration status contribute to this pool of money and they should have access to it.

I don't have to tell this committee the difference that an education can make in a student's life, and we, at CEO, consider it good public policy to expand higher education access for all Connecticut residents regardless of immigration status. Extending institutional financial aid to immigrants is an economic development investment for the future of Connecticut. A realistic path to college for these students will not only result in improved high school graduation rates, economic self-sufficiency, and increased college matriculation but it will also help expand access to higher education which, without doubt, will help increase both state revenues in the short term through tuition from new students and in the long term even higher revenues for our state coffers from the higher income and tax receipts achieved by these new graduates.



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I am sure you will agree with me that all students deserve access to higher education, which is necessary to sustain our economy – particularly when Connecticut will face significant labor shortages as a high proportion of our working population will be retiring at a higher clip in years to come. The ratio of workers aged 20 to 64 to person over the age of 65 is projected to decrease by almost 36 percent. This is so relevant that the Governor's Economic Report alerted lawmakers that this population-shift will increase pressure for our youth to provide social and support services for the elderly. Opening financial aid to students without immigration status is one sure way to address the pressing need for educational equity in Connecticut and help partially deal with current population changes affecting our state. Furthermore, the Connecticut legislature has adopted a goal of fostering progress among low-income and limited English-proficient students. Enabling access to higher education for undocumented students – or DACA recipients – who are often low-income and people of color will certainly help reach that goal.

What is Institutional aid?

- Institutional Aid is student-generated funds that colleges set aside from tuition payments in order to support students with financial need. Institutional Aid is funded by tuition revenue, not taxpayer money.
- In Connecticut, state colleges and universities are required to set aside a certain percentage of tuition revenue for institutional aid to students.
- Undocumented immigrant students, like all students, pay into the institutional aid pool but do not have access to this aid.
- Undocumented students should be eligible for institutional aid as are all other students who pay tuition.
- There is nothing in the Connecticut statutes and regulations that prevent undocumented students from accessing this aid.

The CEO supports HB 5031 and highly encourages the Higher Education Committee to do so as well.