

Written Testimony of

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Before the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

HB 5031 AA Equalizing Access to Student-Generated Financial Aid

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Good morning Senator Beth Bye, Senator Art Linares, Representative Gregory Haddad and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. My name is Orlando Rodriguez. I serve as the Research and Policy Development Specialist for the Connecticut Education Association (CEA) and as our organization's chief economist. CEA is Connecticut's largest teachers' union representing active and retired teachers across the state.

CEA strongly supports HB 5031 *An Act Equalizing Access To Student-Generated Financial Aid*.

HB 5031 builds on Connecticut's DREAM Act by making a unique group of Connecticut residents (i.e., undocumented students) eligible to receive financial aid from an institution's *tuition* set-aside. These tuition set-aside monies are derived from 15 percent of each student's tuition payment and they do not include state or federal funds.

The legal status of these undocumented student residents is in limbo because Congress has not been able to resolve their legal status once and for all. All other Connecticut residents attending a state institution of higher learning have access to these funds. Only the DREAMers are singled out and denied eligibility.

Connecticut's competitive advantage has long been its educated workforce. However, Connecticut has seen too many of its college-bound graduates head for distant states, many of whom ultimately settle outside of our borders. At a time when the state's need for competitive graduates is at an all-time high, we should dismantle hurdles that diminish access to our public institutions of higher education. This bill is another step in the right direction.

As public school teachers, we recognize that students can be energized by their future aspirations. By providing equitable tuition assistance to a population of students who, most often by no fault of their own, attend our schools without legal immigration status, we make such dreams and aspirations more possible.

This can only lead to a more highly educated and better Connecticut.

Thank you.

