

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

My name is Julian Shafer. I reside in Bridgeport, I am a teacher at Danbury High School, and I stand in support of HB5031. This bill will equalize access to student generated institutional aid in CT public colleges and Universities for all of Connecticut's students regardless of immigration status. As you may know this aid is especially important for undocumented students to access because its funds are raised through student fees regardless of immigration status.

We are all aware that the costs of higher education are increasingly inaccessible to all students every year. As a recipient of institutional aid myself at the University of Connecticut, I am acutely aware of the financial barriers that students face when trying to raise and access money for the expenses of each college semester. For that reason, I strongly believe that undocumented students, who pay as much as I did into institutional aid through their tuition, should be able to access their own money to go to school.

In the community I live in and the community I am grateful to work in I am privileged to know undocumented students who strive to give back to their communities, who want to build Connecticut into a state that we can all be proud to live in. Higher education is a pathway to success, not only for students who can access it, but also for the well being of Connecticut as a whole. By limiting undocumented student's ability to go to school, we are only hurting ourselves, our communities. I remember an undocumented student of mine who once told me about his dreams to become an engineer. He had a passion for math and science, but because of the high costs of college, he may not be able to pursue his dreams. The very least that Connecticut can do is allow this student and other undocumented students to access the aid that they pay for through their tuition. Without this aid, his pathways for success will be severely limited, and our ability to remain competitive and retain talents like his will be further diminished. Multiply this student's experience by the number of undocumented youth in our state, and you'll likely draw the same conclusions I have, that we are effectively shutting out thousands of children from pursuing their dreams and contributing all they can to Connecticut.

In order for Connecticut to live up to its progressive reputation and embrace the fiscal responsibility we seek, now more than ever it is important that we stand against discrimination and support the dreams of all our students. Let's make a statement and commitment that tells our country we support our undocumented communities, just like they support us.

I support HB5031 and hope the committee will vote favorably.

Thank you for your time,

Julian Shafer