



Connecticut Students for a Dream

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**Testimony to the Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee**

January 30th, 2018

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Camila Bortolletto, I am a Co-Founder and Campaign Manager for Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D), a statewide youth-led network fighting for the rights of immigrant youth and families in CT. We seek to empower youth through community organizing and working for social change. Our organization represents hundreds of immigrant youth and families across the state.

The proposed ‘Student First’ consolidation plan of the 12 community colleges would greatly impact the immigrant students and families in our organizational membership and that we represent. Community colleges serve a large number of immigrant and low-income youth in the state of CT. Community colleges have been an avenue for success and to higher education for many of our immigrant students, allowing them to pursue a higher education on a tight budget while balancing demanding work and family responsibilities.

The ‘Students First’ consolidation proposal puts potential financial savings first, not students.

A concern that we have which will greatly affect immigrant students is that community colleges may lose their specific Foundations which provide scholarships to students. Because undocumented immigrant students don’t qualify for federal, state, or institutional aid in CT, these donor funded foundation scholarships are the only scholarship help that undocumented immigrant students will get. They often mean the difference between attending and not attending college.

As a result of the consolidation, colleges will lose their unique identities and their ability to respond to individual communities needs. It would put at risk some of the support services and resources that are most used by immigrant and low-income youth. For example, institutions like Norwalk and Capital Community College get certain grants from the federal government for serving high percentages of students of color (ie. being a Hispanic serving institution) and are able to use that money to focus on providing support for those populations. If the system is functioning as one school, these individual schools will lose those grants and the ability to better serve a population that looks very different than a school like Quinebaug Valley Community College.

The plan also says that the consolidation plan will combine ‘low-enrolled’ classes across campuses, with the goal of not duplicating classes. However the consequences if doing this will greatly impact immigrants and low income students who don’t often have the ease of mobility across cities that other students would. This population overwhelmingly relies on public transportation, making accessing nearby cities for classes not a realistic option. This will reduce their educational opportunities and delay their graduation.

As these examples show, many times when significant changes to our education systems are made, it is low-income, immigrant, students of color and other marginalized groups that suffer the most. We do not want to see that happen with this consolidation plan.

Thank you for your time,  
Camila Bortolletto, *Campaign Manager*  
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