Good evening Legislators,

My name is Elena Ruiz. I am a junior at Eastern Connecticut State University. I am a Dreamer from the state of Georgia blessed to be in Connecticut to pursue higher education through the dream.US Opportunity Scholarship. I am fortunate to stand before you in this hearing to advocate for the future of higher education in Connecticut. This is an opportunity like none other that would have been impossible in Georgia as an undocumented youth.

This year through Eastern’s SGA I became Vice Chair of the Student Advisory Committee, a sub-committee to the Board of Regents. As a member I have a voting position on the board that entitles me to directly impact the decisions concerning the students of Connecticut. By contrast, the Georgia Board of Regents for Higher Education is made up of predominantly affluent white males and females. They have autonomous ruling to govern, control, and manage the University System of Georgia which includes 26 of most prestigious universities in the state.

These men and women wrote into law, banning myself and some other 23,000 undocumented students from the right to apply to the most prestigious institutions in Georgia and from seeking any state or federal financial aid. Moreover, Georgia provides tuition assistance to excelling high school students that graduate with a 3.0 GPA or higher. I was eligible to have up to 90% of my tuition covered, but the members of the Georgia Board of Regents decided for me.

Through the generosity of Donald E. Graham and other philanthropist some 120 Dreamers from Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina to name a few, have been welcomed to the state of Connecticut, a state that does allow us to pursue our dreams.

I commend the Board of Regents and the Legislature for making the students participate in their decisions and allowing our voices to be heard. It is my purpose, however, to persuade you to invest in higher education.

I have heard an overwhelming amount about the distress of fellow students concerning the debt they have accrued in pursuing higher education in Connecticut the last two years of residing here. In addition, the states universities and community colleges' exhausted effort to try to balance their budgets when receiving a mere 39% of their budget from the state. This has resulted in a couple hundred dollar increases in tuition for the last several years.

The potential to investing in higher education has unlimited positive consequences. It could be a billion-dollar industry employing a vast number of the labor force and educating the work force of tomorrow.

It is time to invest in the future of tomorrow to reassure prospective graduates of CSCU in a positive future for Connecticut. This would only persuade them to remain in Connecticut for an indefinite number of years upon graduating.