



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
House Bill 5031, An Act Equalizing Access to
Student-Generated Financial Aid**

Senator Bye, Senator Linares, Representative Haddad, and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee:

My name is Kaley Lentini, and I am legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5031, An Act Equalizing Access to Student-Generated Financial Aid.

The ACLU of Connecticut believes in equality for all people, no matter how much money they have, where they are from, or where their parents are from. By providing all students, regardless of immigration status, with the same opportunity to apply for and receive financial assistance to Connecticut's public universities and colleges, House Bill 5031 upholds each of these ideals. Right now, Connecticut has an opportunity to strengthen its chance for a better future by allowing the children of undocumented immigrants to invest in themselves and their educations.

Recent studies have shown that approximately 120,000 people in Connecticut are undocumented immigrants. Unfortunately, children whose parents are undocumented often find themselves unable to obtain the same financial assistance as their peers when they apply to college. If an undocumented student is able to overcome this barrier and begins to pay tuition and other university fees, he or she remains unable to apply for or receive financial aid, despite contributing to the same funding streams that supply financial aid for other students. This is unjust and wrong. By placing an unequal financial burden on both undocumented students and their families, Connecticut is hamstringing itself and its future.

Undocumented students who are simply seeking to attend college to better their lives should receive our state's support—they offer talents and skills that Connecticut should encourage and seek to benefit from,

not discourage and stymie by creating unequal barriers to education. It is only fair and equitable that these young adults, who have grown up and lived their whole lives in the state of Connecticut, get the same opportunities as their peers.

The ACLU of Connecticut has a long history of protecting the rights of immigrants in the United States through the realization of equal protection. Obtaining a higher education is critical for young adults to achieve their full potential. This bill would allow undocumented students to receive tuition waivers, tuition remissions, and grants for educational expenses, and allow them to work as student employees. Each of these would help young adults to better themselves, their families, and our state. Denying students these assistance programs is a blatant violation of equal protection under the law. Involving undocumented youth in our public educational system only improves civic participation and the wellbeing of our state overall.

We urge this committee to support this legislation to ensure that undocumented young adults have an equal chance to contribute to the success of our state.