



OREGON DREAMACTIVIST

To: Senate Higher Education Committee
From: Vince Jones, Health and Science School, Beaverton, Oregon
Date: March 19th, 2013
Re: Testimony in Support of Tuition Equity

Chair Hass and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mario Mesquita, Admissions Counselor at Portland State University. I am writing you today in support of the thousands of determined students seeking higher education everyday, looking for their next steps after graduating from high school or community college. Tuition Equity will only strengthen Oregon's growing community allowing all residents to have equal access and in-state tuition in our state. As an educator who has worked at the community college and university settings, I have personally witnessed the challenges faced and how discouraging the present denial of in-state tuition on undocumented students can be on many levels; their psyche, motivation to graduate from high school, as well as the ability to pursue their dreams and career goals.

In 2010, the Beaverton School Board unanimously passed a resolution in support of federal and state legislators to "support the Dream Act and any related legislation that provides qualified immigrant students with a pathway to legal residence and completion of their education." Many students and families came out to support and testify at the school board meeting and described the challenges and impacts of restrictions on their families. I myself have worked with students who have dropped out school after realizing the near-impossibility it is to pursue higher education; how difficult it is for them to see their American-born siblings, or friends, get a job with ease, obtain a driver's license, and apply to universities without worry. These students are hard working individuals that only work in support of the community we all live in, but some are the 4.0 GPA students taking IB or AP course work; others are attending school while working two jobs to contribute to their families' home. No matter who the student is, the common shared value is their education.

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Let's truly prove right the notion of "Try hard and in the United States of America you will succeed," as well as why education is so highly valued. After all, education is the backbone for success. Even with our recent economic downturn, foreclosures, and families tightening their belts, students are still determined to find ways to come to college and the university. As members of our community of Oregon, with the support of Tuition Equality and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, better known as DACA, these students will not only be on the pathway to graduate from colleges and universities, but will be able to practice, work, contribute back, and strengthen Oregon itself.

I can only hope that Oregon will follow the lead and pass legislation similar to the Texas Dream Act passed in 2001. It has been both successful and popular with the public and passed in the Senate with zero "no" votes. It has reduced the drop-out rate, encouraged access to college in a population that has faced many obstacles, and has come at very little expense. Once Oregon passes this legislation I truly will be able to tell all students that they are valued, and that their hard work in school can only lead to achieving their dreams and aspirations. They will no longer be hidden in the dark but at the end of their educational journey will stand proud with diploma in hand and full life of opportunity ahead of them. All students need to know that they are an important part of Oregon's community. And Tuition Equality sends exactly that, a message that everyone is valued.

Thank you for your time and look forward to the Passing of Tuition Equality!

Mario Mesquita
Concerned Oregon Community Member in favor of Tuition Equality
Admission Counselor
Portland State University