

Testimony in Support SB 932 before the Senate Education Committee
March 24, 2015
Maria Cristina Gonzalez Vasquez

Chair Roblan, Vice Chair Knopp and members of the committee good afternoon. First I would like to thank you for the opportunity to come before you all today. My name is Maria Cristina Gonzalez Vasquez, I'm here in support of Senate Bill 932 Access to Opportunity.

My story began in a small town in Mexico where my sister and I were excluded from the elementary school because my mother was one of the first women to get a divorce to escape domestic violence. Without a college education or skills my mother could not get a job that would support both of us so she decided to come to the U.S, save money and send for us so we could have more opportunities and possibly a college education. As a child growing up in a household always surrounded by abuse and pain, my only escape was school. In my mind from a very early age I knew that I had to go to college and obtain a degree and have a career. My dream as a girl was not to be a princess but to be independent and free, but most importantly live without violence. I knew that a college education could prevent my current family and future family from more abuse and the poverty we lived in.

No female in my family has attended college; I am the first one. I attended Portland Community College for four years because I had to take breaks to work and was unable to pay for more than four credits, the equivalent of one class, at a time. I had to be very creative on how to pay for college. As many other undocumented students, I had to work multiple jobs, drop out for a term or two so save and balance a family, and many others responsibilities. I worked cleaning houses and was involved in student government and volunteering I was unable to finish in three years for these reasons. From there, I transferred to Portland State University to obtain my degree in Public Health. I applied and received three scholarships to go to PSU, the Diversity scholarship

which paid 12 credits each term until graduation, the equal access scholarship and \$2500 from the Hispanic chamber of commerce. I thought that I did not have anything to worry about. I thought my last two years of college to achieve a degree in public health were secure. But when I transferred to PSU I learned that I was not ineligible for tuition equity and would have to pay out of state tuition.

Now my dream seems impossible. Even with all the scholarships I had, I was only able to pay for one class, Organic chemistry, and the fear of not knowing how long it would take to graduate and if my scholarships were not renewed did not make the subject any easier. I am here to urge you to approve SB 932, that will help resolve the barriers I face to complete my degree.

I want a college degree not only to have a better future but also to escape the past of abuse I lived. A college education for me is the difference of repeating all my family members' history or breaking that pattern and starting a new life. College is already hard enough for those of us that are undocumented, not receiving financial aid is a double burden, but paying out of state tuition is a challenge that many of us cannot overcome. I respectfully ask you to please vote "yes" on SB 932 Access to Opportunity.

Thank you

Maria Cristina Gonzalez Vazquez