

March 19, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Education,
From: Lizbeht Marquez Gutierrez
RE: Senate Bill 958

Chair Wagner, Vice-Chair Thomsen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Lizbeht Marquez, I am a student at Western Oregon University, and I am a Policy Associate for the Oregon Student Association. I am here to urge your support for SB 958 to establish the Dreamers Access Program.

On average, students face financial barriers in their education because tuition and fees continue to increase. If the student is a citizen, they are eligible to apply for grants, work-study, and loans to help alleviate the costs. This is not an option for undocumented students who wish to pursue or are pursuing higher education. Undocumented students are not eligible for financial aid and have to resort to apply for private scholarships, which are scarce or pay out of pocket. Paying out of pocket is a huge burden for students and their families. Paying out of pocket for their education discourages undocumented high school students from applying to college. For the undocumented students who are enrolled, it is difficult for them and their families to continue to pay out of pocket that they have to drop out.

As previously mentioned, there are not enough options that undocumented students can turn to fund their education. The Dreamers Access Program would greatly benefit undocumented students because it makes higher education accessible and affordable. This program ensures that higher education is a possibility and that undocumented students can reach their full potential. I believe that all people, regardless of their documentation status, deserve the equal access and opportunity to pursue their goals.

I have attended the Unidos Club on campus, which is a support system to anyone who identifies as undocumented and/or are DACA recipients and I have heard the struggles students face. Many of them are struggling to pay for their education because they don't have the financial resources to turn to. I know an undocumented student who was a senior and had to drop out because they could no longer afford their education. It's difficult for me to understand why undocumented students are exempt from financial assistance just because they lack documentation. They are students who are also working hard to create a better future for themselves and their community. When all students have access to the full range of financial resources in order to complete their education, Oregon wins. The Dreamers Access Program makes higher education accessible to undocumented students because it would remove an arbitrary financial barrier that exists for some Oregon students.

This is why I support SB 958, and highly encourage this committee to pass it. Please remember how this bill will help prevent undocumented students from dropping out and encourage undocumented students to pursue higher education. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Lizbeht Marquez
Western Oregon University
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