

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB637

Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out of State Tuition

Exemption Eligibility

Committee: Education, Energy and the Environment

Date: February 28, 2024

Position: Support

Good afternoon, my name is Michelle Lainez, I am here today to express my strong support for Senate Bill SB637, specifically addressing Higher Education – Undocumented Students – Out of State Tuition Exemption Eligibility. I'm a resident of District 17, and a proud youth leader of United We Dream, the nation's largest immigrant youth led network.

The enactment of this SB637 directly influences my lived experience and many other undocumented students like me. I went to school in Montgomery County Public Schools nearly my whole life, but housing insecurity made my family's journey end up in a brand new state for nearly a year. We relocated back to Gaithersburg, Maryland in 2019, and I found myself in a challenging situation related to college tuition. Despite graduating from Gaithersburg High School as part of the Class of 2020, I encountered the obstacle of being charged out-of-state tuition due to having one year instead of three tax filings, and relocating for that year made filing taxes for my mother so much harder than anticipated.

Unfortunately, this rendered me ineligible for the Maryland Dream Act, which would have otherwise facilitated the pursuit of higher education for me. Being undocumented and low-income, narrowed down my options regarding college options. I dreamed of going to the University of Maryland and I had planned to attend one of the best community colleges, Montgomery College, which is only ten minutes away from my house. However, my aspiration ended quickly after finding out that I was not going to be able to afford the tuition.

Today I am fortunate enough to have found a university that understands the struggles and legislative barriers that undocumented students face when trying to pursue higher education. I am graduating from Trinity Washington University with a degree in Criminal Justice this upcoming spring with the hopes of providing support for my community and eventually attend law school.

I believe that addressing and rectifying such issues through legislation, as proposed in Senate Bill SB637, is essential in ensuring fair and equitable access to education for all students, regardless of their immigration status or financial circumstances.

For these reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on SB637.