

Futures Held Hostage



"My future was already written out before I even noticed [I was undocumented] ...My future was predetermined" -- Marco.

Like Marco, thousands of undocumented Hispanic students are accepted into universities, yet they cannot afford to attend. They are unjustly denied at the federal and state level, the opportunity to go to college because of their background. Discriminating in this way, opposes the United States' founding principles and best interests.

The U.S. is a melting pot of cultures, identities and backgrounds. Our diversity is what makes us such a powerful nation today. Founded by immigrants, we have promised from our beginning that all people are created equal and are entitled to a life of liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Yet despite our most revered principles, history has shown that we have practiced the contrary and we continue to do so today.

Despite having little to no part in choosing to immigrate to the United States illegally, undocumented youth unfairly confront immense economic, legal and social obstacles. Under the 1982 Supreme Court case *Plyer v. Doe*, the federal law guaranteed undocumented children a k-12 education. The government realized that refusing an education would create a "lifetime of hardship" and a "permanent underclass" of undocumented youth. Times have changed and the government must adapt. A high school diploma is no longer sufficient. It does not allow for socio-economic mobility and thus, a college degree is indispensable.

According to Educators for Fair Consideration, a non-partisan and non-profit organization, state laws have jurisdiction over college tuition rates, enrollment, and state-based financial aid for undocumented students. In the majority of states, they are ineligible for financial aid and have to pay out-of-state tuition. Thus, a college education can be nearly four times more expensive than for an in-state resident.

Nationwide, undocumented students do not qualify for federal financial aid, loans, grants or work-study. With no means to pay in-state tuition, currently their only hopes of accessing higher

education depend on the limited scholarships that don't require U.S. citizenship or legal residence.

Other than through monetary aid, few policies exist to help undocumented students attend college.

The U.S. News & World Report states that DACA, a federal policy, grants them a two-year amnesty from deportation, a provisional legal status and a Social Security Number. Even though this opens up new doors for some, undocumented students still cannot access federal or state-based financial aid or in-state tuition.

One last hope that lingers in the future for undocumented students is The Dream Act. This legislative proposal as reported by the Dream Act Portal, would provide them with a route to citizenship if they go to college or serve in the military. However, since the act does not require in-state tuition for undocumented students, their hope of obtaining a college degree rests solely on work-study and student loans.

Undocumented students have lived most of their lives in a state and should qualify for in-state tuition and state-based financial aid. It is unjust for a state to acknowledge their residency for taxes but deny it for college tuition.

Marco describes this injustice. *"Some people think that immigrants suck all the benefits without giving anything back to the state. That's not true. We pay our income taxes, sales taxes and property taxes. We do contribute to the state"*.

Undocumented students are being punished for pursuing opportunities to give back to their community by striving to become the nation's future leaders. As stated in Educators For Fair Consideration, it is in the best interest of each state to grant undocumented students an affordable access to college for many reasons.

First of all, under *Plyer v. Doe*, undocumented students are entitled to an education. They are also exemplars for a new generation. They succeed academically and are ambitious and hardworking people.

Undocumented students are also critical to our economy. With more people retiring than working, social security is giving out more welfare than it's collecting. Since the immigrant population has more youth than elderly, they will contribute to payroll taxes for a long time. Yet for their contribution to be significant, they need higher paying jobs resulting from college degrees. Similarly, we should maximize our investment in their education. With resources already spent on their k-12 education, it is only logical to help them pursue a college education through in-state tuition. With this degree, their tax contribution would be substantial, they could support their families and would need less government assistance.

We are discriminating against fellow Americans, who know no other place than home than the U.S. The only risk in granting undocumented students access to higher education is that they give back to their country.

In order to address this at the federal level, it is essential that we pass The Dream Act. This would provide undocumented students with access to federal work-study and student loans and the possibility of legal residency. Most importantly, at the state-level, it is imperative that states pass tuition equity bills and provide state-based financial aid to undocumented students.

We need to uphold America's promise; every hardworking American deserves an affordable access to higher education!