

Testimony before the
House Education Committee
On
HB 2139
By
Carla Rivas-D'Amico
Student, University of Kansas
24 February 2015

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee:

Thank you for allowing me to discuss this important piece of legislation, and why minority students and student groups feel so adamantly about this bill.

My name is Carla Rivas-D'Amico and I am a Venezuelan-American student at the University of Kansas. As a hispanic woman, I am all too familiar with the daily fear and dread that comes with being an undocumented young person. While both my family and I are documented, growing up I had many friends and close family acquaintances that were not. Every single day, I witnessed the reasons why they came to this country: to work hard, to build a better, safer life for themselves and their families, and to better themselves through the opportunity for an education. Sadly, being the child of “persons who are unlawfully present”, presents enough obstacles, without adding the unnecessary barrier to a college education this bill would pose if it passed.

Take for example my friend *Juan. Juan is undocumented, but he worked hard in high school and is passionate about learning. Truly, documented or not, I do not know a single other person who is as passionate as Juan about science and research. He is currently a Biology major at Pitt State University, and hopes to either continue his education through a doctorate degree or go on to medical school. Even with his passion for learning and now formal higher education, there will be barriers for Juan to cross that would not be present for a documented person. While he may have higher grades and be more qualified for a position than his documented peers, he will have a difficult time finding a job in his field simply because he does not have papers. Still, his four-year degree will assure him a much higher chance of creating a better life for himself and his family.

Take also direct testimony from his sister *Maria, who writes, “for almost 10 years my family and I have lived in fear of being taken away and sent back to my country where I would have never been able to achieve half of the things that I have accomplished. People refer to us as aliens, immigrants, and many other names but we are just people pursuing our dreams, trying to be better than what we are, so that our children don't have to live half of the hardship that their parents and grandparents have gone through. My parents have gone through so much just to give me a food, place to live, freedom and a smile. I could look at them and ask them why they brought me to a country where I'm not wanted because I'm doing something 'illegal' but instead I

can't thank them enough for giving me the life that they have given me. I have an amazing job where I love what I do, and most importantly, I can finally go to school to better myself and learn more to be successful. I honestly don't know what it would achieve to take that kind of privilege away from students that are hard working and are trying to help society be better. We aren't ruining Kansas or getting in anyone's way. We aren't taking away anything from anyone. All we ask is for a chance to just be able to be happy with our families and be allowed to have freedom. I just want to be able to learn, have freedom, support my family and provide for my daughter without any fear or obstacles.”

I stand here today and urge you to consider the harm that undocumented people who simply want the chance at higher education and their families would suffer. I also encourage you to consider whether or not taking the opportunity of undocumented persons to peruse higher education would meet our collective goals of a more educated, hard working and free Kansas for all. When we speak of the American dream, we speak of the American dream for all in this country, not for some. I urge you to allow all persons in this great state of Kansas, documented or not, a chance at the American dream. A chance at the dream to create successful, healthful, stable lives for themselves and their families can only benefit us all.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Carla Rivas-D'Amico, University of Kansas 2017