

## Testimonial

February 21, 2015

House Education Committee  
Opposition to HB 2139

Dear Chair Highland and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gabriela Silvestre-Mercado and I am a first generation American and Kansan. For sixteen years of my life I paid taxes, studied, and lived as an undocumented student in Salina, Kansas. I graduated with a 3.5 GPA was in the top ¼ of my graduating class at Salina High School South, I was on the honor roll of my high school, and I graduated with National Honor Society. I worked hard in school and at work because I knew education would give me a voice and way to be an active and contributing member of my community.

My journey in the U.S began over 16 years ago when I moved to Salina, Kansas as a 3-year-old girl; as a 3-years-old, I was not aware of what was going on and I had no say. I graduated from Salina High School South in 2013. As soon as I filled out first application to college, I realized I would not be able to apply for FASA, because I am not a United States citizen. With my good grades and hard work I was able to obtain grant money and a scholarship based upon my scholastic achievement. Still, even with the grant and scholarship money I had earned, that my family would never be able to afford my education to send me to college. Thankfully, Kansas is, one of many states that allow undocumented students to sign a required affidavit promising to become a legal resident when eligible in exchange for paying instate tuition, I was reminded upon signing my affidavit that that my education was a privilege. With the instate law it has allowed my parents to send me to college and help me achieve higher education. I know I have to still continue working hard despite the uncertainty of my future. Education has been the key to open up new doors for myself and because of the instate law it has allowed me to go to school to further my education. I will continue to contribute to the state where I grew up by becoming a nurse and helping people in my community as well as anyone who needs it. Kansas is the only home I have ever known and, in my heart, I know I am a Kansan.

Right now, I am a sophomore in college and plan to apply for nursing school this following fall. I am committed to finishing school, becoming a nurse, and paying taxes and being an active part of my community. The lessons I have learned at Kansas State University in Salina have never left me. The in-state tuition law has ignited my love to learn more about how a well-made law can have a huge impact on individuals but still see how complex the policy process can be. I would love to learn more about the complexities and become an active part in my community, to show that with one person the world could change for the better of the country. I am still attending college to get my CNA license. I hope when Kansas legislators think of the in-state tuition law they think about Kansas' future and the type of people that will want to have once they have finished their degree and set off to help our state become notice for our successful achievements and people. I will never forget how difficult this path has been to walk and the opportunities that the in-state tuition law has awarded me. I am thankful that elected officials believe that giving bright and hard-working young people a chance to contribute is good policy. I

have a dream just like Martin Luther King, JR did; my dream is to make sure that I prove them right. Please vote no on HB 2139.

Your fellow Kansan,

Gabriela Silvestre-Mercado  
Salina, KS