

Testimony before the
House Education Committee

On
HB 2139

By
Ramiro Sarmiento,
Former President of the Hispanic American Leadership Organization
University of Kansas
23 February 2015

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

First and foremost I want to thank you for providing the opportunity to discuss this very important issue and taking the time to consider different perspectives on the matter at hand. My name is Ramiro Sarmiento and I sit before you a student, a brother, a classmate, a friend, and a Kansan. As the brother of two undocumented siblings, the best friend to an undocumented student at Wichita State University, and a classmate to hundreds of undocumented students at the University of Kansas, I cannot express my extreme disappointment and opposition to this bill.

I have seen first hand the dreams and goals of some of these students. These students include my friend Maribel, who graduated High School by my side 3 years ago, an incredibly bright young woman. Who had better grades than most and an even bigger hunger for success. Instate tuition made a college education possible for Maribel despite being an undocumented student. But possible does not mean easy. Maribel's family like many other families, lives pay check to check and financing a college education WITH instate tuition is a herculean task. Today, Maribel - a full time student - works 35 hours a week while maintaining stellar grades. Maribel's dad, who is also undocumented, works countless hours to assist with tuition. Between the two, Maribel is able to pay her monthly tuition bills. Maribel will be graduating next spring with a Bachelors Degree in Social Work and is planning on attending graduate school, although she doesn't know how she's going pay for that either. Maybe this time around she'll work 50 hours week.

However, Maribel is one of the lucky ones. My sister Karla, the smartest I have ever met. Graduate from high school 6 years ago. Karla, was more than ready for college and had the goal of becoming an Architectural Engineer. But coming from a struggling single undocumented mother household, college was not going to be possible. Karla, made the selfless decision to work full time, sacrificing her own dreams goals to help our family. Thanks to Karla, there is always food on the table and the utilities are seldom disconnected.

Karla takes one class per semester at the community college in town and makes slow progress on her dream to become an engineer in the state of Kansas. This are some of the very real struggles that students already face even with instate tuition. These students work tirelessly to obtain an education despite the odds being against their favor. Eliminating instate tuition for undocumented students would mean Maribel doesn't graduate next Spring and Karla will face an even bigger challenge to her education. Please do not robe the state of Kansas of countless Social Workers and Engineers. They are Kansans too and they love our state as much as you do.

Thank you for your time, I will stand for questioning at the appropriate time.

Ramiro Sarmiento