

Dear Mr. Chair and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mary Esparza. For the past ten years of my life I lived, studied, and paid taxes as an undocumented immigrant in Kansas. As a Kansan, I am thankful for everything that my state has given me as an immigrant. I am determined to show my thanks and give back. I have worked hard and studied through preschool, elementary and now attending high school. This committee hearing and this legislation now gives me the opportunity to tell the state of Kansas and you, the members of the Committee, how thankful I am for the instate tuition law. Without this law, it would be extremely hard for me to continue my education and follow my dreams. Throughout my middle school and my high school years I was an honor roll student. Also, in high school I am a varsity soccer team member, an advanced art student and was a member of our school band my freshman year. Education has been a big part of my life; it has given me the opportunity to open doors and see what life has for me after high school. As an immigrant, the instate tuition law shows me, and other immigrant students like me, that our state legislators believe that our dreams also matter.

My journey in the U.S began 16 years ago. I was brought from Mexico when I was only one year of age. My parents, as soon as I was able to go to school, they did the best they could to help me start my education. It was very difficult for my family to help me with my school work because the only language we spoke was Spanish. As I grew up, little by little, I was learning English with the help of my ESL teachers. I am a former senior at Salina Central High School. I will be graduating in May and hopefully be attending college in the fall. I have been planning for college carefully. I know that my family will not be able to afford my education unless we access a student loan or receive scholarships. My goal is to continue my education and study dental hygiene, but there are very little programs in Kansas for that type of field. Wichita University is known to be one of the best programs for dental hygiene and I have been accepted there, but the only problem is that I will not be able to afford it for all four years. It will be a great opportunity to have instate tuition so college can be affordable, for my parents and I, to pay for college and continue my education. I would be one of the few in my family to go to college and make my loved ones proud of what I can accomplish.

Recently, I have qualified for the deferred action program with the Department of Homeland Security. This means that I am now legally allowed to work in the US, and I can stay and continue education in Kansas. I am now ready to graduate high school and start working for my college degree and use that degree to start making all my goals a reality. I hope when Kansas Legislators think of the instate tuition law, they think of the future of Kansas and what the immigrant students bring and give to the state. I am thankful that elected officials believed that giving bright and hardworking students a chance to contribute to Kansas was a bright idea. I make sure I live to wake up every day and prove them right. Please agree and vote to protect instate tuition for all Kansas students. Please vote no on HB 2139.

Sincerely,

Mary Esparza

