



To: Senator Dominick Moreno and members of the Senate Education Committee
From: Katrina Riggles, School Counselor, Center School District—San Luis Valley and Government Relations Representative, Colorado School Counselor Association
Date: April 11, 2019
Re: Support of HB 19-1196 Financial Aid for Students with In-state Tuition

The Colorado School Counselor Association (CSCA) would like to submit this letter of support for HB 19-1196 and thank Sen. Moreno for bringing this bill forward.

I have been in the Center School district for 19 years, and in that time have witnessed a culture change within our school and community. The town of Center is a rural community of very high poverty with approximately 650 students district-wide. Of the secondary student population in Center, 88% are potential first generation college graduates and 38% will be first generation high school graduates.

Through the support of various funding opportunities by the legislature, such as the Colorado Counselor Corps Grant and the School Health Professionals Grant, we have made tremendous strides in helping our young people reach their future goals. With these supports the legislature has funded, we have increased our post-secondary education or military attendance from 20% in 2004 to about 80% in 2018. A 15% jump came in 2013 when ASSET legislation passed allowing a significant number of our students to have a more affordable path to college with in-state tuition. However, the realities of pursuing post-secondary education with few scholarship or financial aid options have made it difficult to almost impossible for many of my students to actually attend college or continue especially after the first year of college when many local resources are exhausted.

As a school district, our core beliefs are focused on increasing academic achievement for ALL students and on helping ALL students be successful in life. As a counselor and a school, we have fully embraced career development. However, for my undocumented students, I have to go against everything I ethically believe and counsel them to consider options that are less than what they could potentially pursue. As I engage in career development and exploration with my high school students, so much of what I teach--the value of post-secondary education, the importance of finding a career that is of personal meaning and matched to individual skills, and avenues to reach education and career--do not apply to many of my students with limited access to funding for postsecondary options.

I would like to share the story of Heriberto. He was a leader in our school, smart, an accomplished distance runner, and involved in every club and activity. When I contacted him about possibly testifying today, he was unable to because he is in New Mexico working for spring break. He works several jobs, works every break, and saves all of his money for school. Although he could not be here, he wanted you to hear his story.

"To whom it may concern:

I want to thank everyone for taking the time and energy to listen to my story that is similar to thousands of others. My name is Heriberto Chaparro and I am a current DACA student attending Colorado State University. As a student I am no different than everyone around me CSU. We are all a community of students with goals, aspirations, and dreams that will someday contribute positively to the future of our state and country. What sets me apart from that student body is my immigration status.

My senior year in high school, was when I truly understood how much of an impact my status posed to my dreams of attending a university financially. I worked double to keep and improve my grades to earn scholarships. As a DACA student, I am not eligible to attain state financial aid or student loans. The private loans that are available to me have such a high interest rate that it makes it nearly impossible for me to pay off these loans. Now that I am currently in school, I find myself having to work two jobs and still manage 19 credit hours to graduate on time and to keep myself afloat with housing, food, and my tuition. My education is the most important aspect in my life from this point forward.

As a pre-med student working my way towards medical school, I am far beyond determined. I for one can say that having some financial support will help me stress a little less on the present and focus a little more on my future. DACA students are no different than other students; we are all brought together with the main focus and priority to successfully earn an education. What makes us different is our roots, our disparities, and the resources available to us to achieve that goal. I solely believe that with the financial help of the state, it would be a resource that DACA and eligible undocumented students will have that will boost the morale and confidence to pursue a post-secondary education."

I hope that something in Heriberto's story strikes a chord with you; however, I want you to know that Heriberto is the exception. He is one of the lucky ones. Most of my students don't have the opportunities that Heriberto has through a significant opportunity like the Dream Scholarship.

There are so many other students that are stories of not only lost potential, but a story of lost financial contributions to our communities:

- Reynaldo, who wanted to be a teacher, now works in a potato warehouse and lives with his mom to help support his younger siblings. He recently came to me and told me about his hopelessness.
- Francisco, the boy who had to raise himself after mom was deported, who could fix anything and wanted to be a mechanic. Now he jumps from agricultural warehouse to warehouse trying to earn a paycheck.
- Jose, who attended school for a year and had to drop out, now labors in seasonal agriculture.
- Twin sisters Yulissa and Selena, smart enough to each be a CEO of major corporations, work seasonally and are raising babies of their own. Their hopes for a better future now placed in the opportunities only available to their children.

I am asking you today to continue the investment you have made in many of my by funding their K-12 public education. Help us keep our best and brightest in CO by providing them financial access to a higher education degree or credential and assisting them to be strong contributors to our CO economy. Be a part of changing the culture of poverty that has impacted our rural community for so many generations. This is in the best interest of not only the students I have shared stories with you today, but also all of Colorado as we endeavor to create a more inclusive and financially secure Colorado.

Note: CSCA is happy to answer any questions or provide additional information through our lobbyist, Tonette Salazar at tonette@t2salazar.com.