

February 19, 2018

Chairman and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am a Kansan, a U.S. citizen, and part of the first generation of students whose life changed thanks to the in-state tuition law. I wear all of those labels proudly as I meet people from all around world in Washington, DC, where I moved to get a master's degree in public policy and now work. Over 13 years ago, I was an undocumented high school student who, despite belonging to the National Honor Society, being president of multiple clubs and winning a national award in journalism, still had little chance of continuing my education. The in-state tuition law allowed me to attend the University of Kansas (KU), an opportunity that defined who I am. Today, as I go to work at a job that I love, I am continuously grateful that my state and its legislators decided that my dreams and my education mattered.

When I look back at my time growing up in Johnson County, it is hard to remember how hard it was being a recent immigrant thrown into a completely new school and culture. I still remember sitting for hours my freshman year with a Spanish-English dictionary translating my homework word-by-word. By my senior year, universities accepted me to programs I could never afford without access to student loans or any other type of financial help. I knew of no educational options that would allow me to pursue my dreams. Serendipitously, the in-state tuition law passed right after I graduated from high school. The law allowed me to attend KU where people judged me by my character and intellect. I lived in the dorms and attended classes like any other student. Yet, when signing the required in-state tuition affidavit promising to become a legal resident when eligible, I was reminded that my education was a privilege that others had worked restlessly to afford me. Education gave me a voice at a time when I was not supposed to exist. It empowered me to find myself.

In 2010, I became a US Permanent Resident and a few years ago I became a naturalized citizen. I struggle to think what my life would be like without the the in-state tuition law. The law allowed me to pursue my love for public policy, it drove me to get my master's degree and pushed me to leave a full-time job to take internships without a guarantee of success. Few people that interact with me today know the long journey that brought me to DC. However, I think about the privilege that is being a first-generation student who used HB 2145 often. I am thankful to my home state of Kansas for instilling me values that I carry with me as I navigate the policy world in DC. I am proud of the path I helped paved and even prouder still that Kansas legislators continue to believe that access to education is a policy worth defending. I urge lawmakers to continue to support in-state tuition for other young Kansans like me.

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