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Karina Arango

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Fontbonne University, anticipation May 2015 Education Policy Intern with The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis

Testimony to the Coordinating Board for Higher Education and Steering Committee members of the Missouri Department of Higher Education coordinated plan.

My name is Karina Arango. I am an Education Policy Intern with The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis, generously funded by the Deaconess Foundation, and a student at Fontbonne University. I am here today to express the importance of accessibility and affordability to higher education for all Missouri students, specifically undocumented and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) students.

The state's core values were highlighted in the 2008 plan. One core value notes that the system is first and foremost focused on students so that each student can realize his or her full educational potential. Regrettably, some students in our state are not able to achieve their potential because they do not have access to postsecondary education. For some, this is a financial issue and it's critically important that affordability be addressed for all Missouri students.

But undocumented and deferred action students face even more formidable financial barriers. Under federal law, elementary and secondary education is assured to all students resident in the U.S. But at the postsecondary level, a population of talented and good willed students is being penalized for decisions and sacrifices made by their parents. Undocumented and deferred action students are being charged non-resident or international tuition rates to attend Missouri institutions. Unless they have significant financial means, which most do not, they are being barred from higher education.

Other states have organized to allow undocumented and DACA students to access state higher education institutions with the same tuition rates as their documented peers. It's time Missouri does the same because currently, these students' dreams have come to a halt.

This issue is important to the state, and it is important to me personally. I have seen family members, neighbors, and classmates treated unjustly. I am grateful to be a citizen, but I achieved that status only by luck because my mother gave birth to me here. Others were not so lucky, but from their earliest memories this is their home and they are committed to our region, our state, and our country. Education will help them honor that commitment.

It is important to note that Missouri can move forward and organize so that our students can realize, and importantly, accomplish their educational potential. For the next five years, Missouri needs to increase educational and economic opportunity for all of its students.

I offer you these three recommendations:

- o Support institutional policies to extend to undocumented and DACA students, who are graduates of Missouri high schools, the in-state tuition rate, not a higher international or out-of-state rate.
- o Clarify and defend state law that allows DACA students, who under federal law are lawfully present, the opportunity to benefit from A+ and other state aid programs for which they are qualified.
 - Work with the legislature to amend existing statutes related to need-based aid, such as Access Missouri, to extend eligibility to students who are lawfully present. (presently must be US citizen)

Allowing our undocumented and DACA students the opportunity to continue their education here is critical to Missouri's commitment to a diverse and talented community. They are committed to attaining their educational goals here and want to contribute to our state's wellbeing but how can they do that if their dreams appear to be denied? The state is dependent upon an educated citizenry and a skilled workforce and all Missouri students recognize that education is the key to success.