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Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today at this hearing.

My name is Anahi Ortiz Fierros. My birthday gift on November 9, 2016 was a slap to the face. It was like a glacial bucket of water was thrown at me. We had a new president elected and it felt as if everything was ripped out of my hands. Whatever hope I had for advancing in life had diminished like a candle being blown out. I came here at 8 months old with my parents looking for success in our future. This is the only home I have ever known.

I applied to a specific high school in Staten Island where I lived that has an excellent nursing program - this is what I wanted to go to school for. However, I wasn't informed until my senior year that in order to graduate with my nursing boards, I would need a social security number. No white scrubs. No proud nursing pin. No nursing certificate. All the years that I had been working so hard and the hours spent at my clinical placement at an elederly home felt useless.

Soon after, applying to college became a roller coaster experience for me. First I was filled with excitement and was proud that I would be the first one in my family to attend college. The spotlight turned to me waiting for my achievement. Then when I began looking for scholarships, my heart would tighten in my chest, praying that no social security number was required. Unfortunately, most did. It didn't feel like there was anyone in my school who could help me.

Luckily, I became a youth member at Make the Road New York, an organization that supports young people like me. This year I also became the President of the "Dreamers" club in my school so that I could support other students like me. Make the Road NY and the Dreamers Club made me realize that our communities need more representation and resources. Thousands of people are fighting for DACA, their status, and to gain a stronger voice and I'm one of them.

I believe that education is power and with knowledge we can organize our communities to make a change. For the last few months I have learned that I cannot live with fear all my life and if I want to pay off the sacrifice that my parents made by leaving everything behind, I need to be that voice for them and for my Mexican community. I think about how different it would be if I could help and educate others about their situations in college, to reach out to students in this community and start a group where counselors and teachers can be educated.

Now I have some hope. Young people fought for the NYS Dream Act for almost a decade and made it happen. Finally the Dream Act is now opening a door for me, my family and my

community to access state financial aid. My hopes of attending BMCC to pursue nursing next year now feels possible.

I'm here today to ask for your help - for myself and all the other students across the state who qualify for the NY DREAM Act. We need to do right by the legacy of the young people who fought so hard for so many years to make access to financial aid possible for undocumented students. The students who did not even get the opportunity to benefit from this law themselves.

Since the bill was signed and the application launched over the summer, we have hardly heard a quiet whisper from the state, our schools or post secondary institutions about DREAM. If I hadn't been connected to Make the Road New York, I would not have known about the opportunity or had any support in applying. When the Excelsior Scholarship launched it was heard loudly across the country. We need that kind of noise now to make sure students who are eligible know about DREAM.

Most students haven't gotten the information they need or the support in applying. High school counselors and frontline staff at postsecondary institutions need to be trained. I know students whose colleges have told them they need to apply to FASFA in order to get access to the DREAM Act. Not only is this wrong, it puts undocumented students and families at risk. There are students who have received award letters from HESC asking them to please accept their award of zero dollars. Or for very small amounts, with no explanation. Can you imagine how that must make someone feel? Just more confusion, uncertainty and despair. Other students have waited for months after submitting their application only to have their colleges drop their classes because they could not make a payment.

And as a senior, I was not able to apply for financial aid alongside my peers. November is financial aid month. And while everyone in my class was filling out paperwork and determining their future, I had to wait. Because the DREAM Act application was not able to be completed by current High school seniors because of an issue with the application that requires us to submit a diploma. Which of course we don't have yet. That still has not totally changed. We need to do better.

I know that $27 Million that was dedicated to funding the NYS DREAM Act. I'm here today to ask what that money has been allocated to. Are any of those funds dedicated to education, outreach and training? This bill could potentially impact the lives of 146,00 young people who have been educated in New York public schools that would now be able to receive state financial aid for the first time. It has been estimate that only 5-10% of the 4,500 undocumented students who graduate from New York high schools each year go on to pursue college degrees. This is a disgrace. The state needs to do everything it can to make sure students are able to pursue their dreams of attending college and access the NY DREAM Act.

I end this by saying that education is a human right and should be accessible to everyone regardless of their immigration status. In a few months I will graduate. I will continue to fight to make my dreams come true. I need you to help fight for everyone else.