

April 22, 2025

To: Senate Committee on Education K-16

Re: Senate Bill 1798

Position: Against

Honorable Chair Creighton and members of the Committee,

As a former elected school board trustee, a former high school teacher, and a mother to three teens in Texas public schools, I've spent years helping students prepare for their futures - through college and job applications, summer programs, and financial aid forms.

I have never viewed it as part of my job to ask students about their legal status, and my students have never viewed themselves as anything other than Texans. One of the most heartbreaking moments I've witnessed—on multiple occasions—is when students realize for the first time they lack documentation just as they're preparing to take the next step in their education. They thought they could apply to all available financial aid and scholarships. After years of working hard, dreaming big, and doing everything right in our public school system, they are suddenly faced with roadblocks they never saw coming.

Coming to Texas was not their decision, but it has become their home. As educators, we've invested in their potential, encouraged them to plan for college and careers, and told them that hard work would pay off. That's the American Dream. Why would we cut off their dreams just as they are ready to give back to the state that is their home?

My former student, Sofia, is a perfect example. She graduated from Houston ISD and attended a large public university here in Texas. She was an exceptional student, but she didn't qualify for most scholarships. Her mother worked long shifts at a fast-food restaurant and sold food plates she made on the weekends to help cover Sofia's tuition and living expenses. Even with access to in-state tuition and in-state financial aid, students like Sofia still contribute more in tuition and fees than the state spends in aid and formula funding combined.

Sofia and her mother could have given up—but they didn't. Their resilience, work ethic, and unwavering belief in the promise of education carried them forward. The Texas Dream Act made that possible. It gave Sofia the chance to pursue her goals and build a future here, in the only home she's ever known. As the oldest in her family, her degree and economic mobility have allowed her to contribute to her family, community, and local economy. It took her longer than four years, but she earned her degree and is able to contribute to her family and the local economy.

SB 1798 would deny opportunity to students like Sofia in each of our communities —not because they lack talent or determination, but because of something entirely outside their control. It would undermine years of hard work and investment, derail their dreams, and deprive Texas the benefit of their talents and contributions.

The Texas Dream Act isn't just personal, it's an economic imperative for our state. We need 192,000 more students to complete a degree, certificate, or other credential of value every year to meet the

state's workforce needs and achieve our Talent Strong Texas goals. This policy would move us backwards and put these credentials out of reach for ~20,000 Texans.

Sofia is not the exception. She is one of many Dreamers that President Trump wants to protect. The President said last December that Dreamers like Sofia are successful and we're going to have to do something with them. Without the ability to pay in-state tuition, it is much harder for Dreamers to be successful the way that Sofia has been. Texas has always been a place where hard work is rewarded, where opportunity is earned through effort. Let's make sure that promise remains true for every student who calls Texas home and continue the investment we've already made in their future and in Texas's future.

Sincerely,

Judith Cruz
Assistant Director, Houston Region
EdTrust in Texas

