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## LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Higher Education

From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director

Re: Senate Bill 654, "An Act regarding higher education opportunities for high school graduates in the Commonwealth."

Date: July 15, 2015

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference respectfully submits this testimony in favor of Senate Bill 654, "An Act regarding higher education opportunities for high school graduates in the Commonwealth." Senate 654 would make the college experience possible for more Massachusetts high school graduates by providing the same opportunities to those young adults currently excluded from certain benefits due to their immigration status. Senate Bill 654 would allow high school students, regardless of immigration status, who have attended high school for three or more years in the Commonwealth, graduated from a high school or attained the equivalent in the Commonwealth, to be eligible for in-state tuition rates and fees at the University of Massachusetts or any other state university or state college or community college in the Commonwealth.

The reasoning behind this policy change is clear. In many instances, young children of undocumented immigrants arrived in the United States in the care and custody of their parent(s) or guardians. Through studying at a public high school and attaining admittance to a public institution of higher learning, they have demonstrated a desire to become productive members of our society. The Catholic Church teaches the importance of human dignity and the unity of families. This simple policy change would honor both of those important missions. Regardless of immigration status, these young students deserve a chance to further their educational careers with the same advantages afforded to their peers.

Catholic scripture tells us to welcome the stranger. Every day the Church serves the Commonwealth's immigrant populations in our parishes, schools, charitable endeavors, and other institutions. Senate Bill 654 would allow certain undocumented immigrants to qualify for in-state tuition while meeting strict criteria. For many of these students, this is the only home that they have known. It would simply be wrong to deny higher educational opportunities to students based largely on the immigration status of their parents. In this spirit, we urge the committee to report Senate Bill 654 favorably.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.