

February 21, 2005

Senator Gary Nodler
State Capitol Building
Room 433
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Senator Nodler,

We would like to offer this testimony in favor of SB296 which makes students eligible for in-state tuition regardless of immigration status. FOCUS St. Louis' report, "New Americans: Building the Future of the St. Louis Region," highlights the challenges and opportunities that the recent increase of immigrant children into our school system, and indeed our society, brings to our region. All New American students, regardless of their immigration status, are entitled to attend public school through the completion of the 12th grade. Yet when they graduate from local high schools, they are often prohibited from continuing their education at community colleges and universities because of high costs and their immigration status. These are young people who will continue to reside in our communities. This is their home. Let's make it possible for them to contribute as much as they possibly can back to our society by allowing them to pursue their education.

Providing access to affordable college education for all our children is essential to the economic, social and cultural future of our region. As the research at FOCUS St. Louis has found, a strong academic foundation will lead to a more talented and creative workforce and cultivate committed community members. We are a region at a crossroads with a population of immigrant students growing astronomically over the past decade. From 1990 to 2000, the number of individuals born in countries other than the U.S. and living in metropolitan St. Louis increased by 65 percent. Recent studies conducted independently by FOCUS, East-West Gateway Council of Governments, and the Regional Chamber and Growth Association concluded that St. Louis, as a region, is not currently meeting the education demands of an idea-based economy in which technology is embedded in all economic sectors. Denying education to immigrant students means they will never contribute to the technological fields that need more workers in the region.

FOCUS St. Louis is an independent, non-profit, regional civic organization whose mission is to create a thriving, cooperative region by engaging citizens to participate in active leadership roles and to influence positive community change. One way we go about this work is to convene citizen-based task forces to examine particular policy issues relevant to the region. Last year, FOCUS released the report on New Americans in the educational system, which detailed more than 30 recommended actions related to the issue to improve the region. **Creating legislation to allow Missouri's undocumented immigrant students to pay in-state tuition at Missouri state colleges was one of these recommendations.** The full report can be found on the FOCUS web site at www.focus-stl.org. The FOCUS St. Louis task force consisted of more than 35 dedicated community members from across the region. They, along with the FOCUS Board of Directors, approve this recommendation. A group of citizenry continue to pursue the implementation of the recommendations given in the report.

Again, we strongly urge the support of the Senate Education Committee for SB296.

Sincerely,

Christine A. Chadwick
FOCUS St. Louis
Executive Director

Ann Rynearson
Implementation Team
Chair