

## **DACA PRESS CONFERENCE**

**November 12, 2019**

**Elsa M. Núñez**

I would like to thank Attorney General William Tong for choosing to hold today's press conference at Eastern. I also want to recognize President Mark Ojakian, president of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System, for his leadership. Thank you to our students—Gina Lopez and Elena Ruiz—for agreeing to speak today. And I thank everyone for coming.

This is an important day in our nation's history. The Supreme Court of the United States of America is hearing arguments today that will decide the fate of more than 800,000 young people who deserve to be part of the American Dream.

In my view, this is another test of our country's moral fiber and character. Seven years ago, President Barack Obama signed the "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" executive order. DACA gave young people brought to this country as children a renewable deferment from deportation. If the Supreme Court rules in favor of the Administration's decision to terminate DACA, these students risk deportation and uncertainty.

We are fortunate that Connecticut was one of 17 states to ask the Supreme Court to rule on this case. Let me tell you how Eastern is involved.

Almost four years ago, Donald Graham, former publisher of the Washington Post and founder of TheDream.US foundation, was seeking two universities — only two in the entire country! — to launch a scholarship program to support students who were being denied access to public universities in their home state.

Mr. Graham approached Governor Dannel Malloy, who asked President Ojakian if there was school in Connecticut that would be a good candidate to participate in the program. President Ojakian called me, and I told him we would be honored to be chosen. In fall 2016, we enrolled our first group of Opportunity Scholars on this campus.

Today, we have 205 students on our campus who are funded by TheDream.US, including 175 from other states and 30 from Connecticut. I am so proud of them!

They are some of our best students—biology majors, business administration, health sciences, social work, mathematics, computer science. They have a cumulative 3.4 GPA and a retention rate of 96 percent — rivaling the likes of Harvard and Yale. And they are student leaders on our campus — all four officers in our Student Government Association are Opportunity Scholars.

DACA students have added immeasurably to our campus community. They are proud to be at Eastern and they make their families proud. Mr. Ojakian, your faith in Eastern has been rewarded by this amazing group of young Americans — working hard to make a difference in our communities and our nation.

They are also living proof of why DACA must be upheld, for they represent more than 4,000 other DACA students in our state and more than 800,000 in our nation who also deserve the promise of a college education.

As proud of I am of our Dreamers, I am equally proud of the State of Connecticut and its leaders. Three years ago, Mr. Ojakian made a commitment to the DACA students in the room today. And Attorney General Tong and his staff are standing tall on the national stage by participating in the 17-state coalition that is asking the Supreme Court to uphold DACA.

In addition, as of this spring, DACA students from Connecticut will be able to access state financial aid to help them pay for their education. I am proud to be here in Connecticut as we stand fully behind DACA students.

All of you are here today because you also want to stand tall for what we believe in. These are the moments in our history when we can reaffirm the greatness of the American democracy. I pray we meet the test once again.

I welcome you again to Eastern and to today's event! It is now my pleasure to introduce my friend and the leader of the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities System, President Mark Ojakian.