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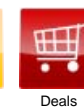
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Debate resumes over reduced tuition for undocumented students

Proposal calls for reduced rates for undocumented students

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By Nancy Reardon Stewart
Patriot Ledger State House Bureau

Posted Jul 21, 2011 @ 11:50 AM



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BOSTON — A hearing on a controversial proposal to allow children of undocumented immigrants to pay the same reduced tuition rates as state residents at public colleges drew nearly 100 people, half of whom stood up to testify.

None of them rose to speak against the bill, a surprising turnout for an issue that for months has intensified the already tense discussion over illegal immigration in the Bay State.

Some lawmakers fighting the bill suggested after Wednesday's hearing that people who oppose it may have been hesitant to go on record with their

opinion.

The state's Republican lawmakers oppose it, as well as a number of Democrats, making it an issue that has also sharply divided the Legislature against the usual partisan lines.

The hearing's overwhelming show of support for extending cheaper rates to undocumented students was also notable because last June a House budget amendment to bar illegal immigrants from taking advantage of the lower rates failed by only four votes. A similar amendment passed the Senate, but was dropped in the final budget.

In Massachusetts, a student must be a legal state resident to qualify for the reduced, in-state tuition rates offered at all public colleges and universities.

Those who voted to ban access to undocumented students argue that reduced tuition is a benefit reserved only for legal, tax-paying residents.

"I understand the value of having an educated population and that makes a lot of sense, but at the root of it all is the definition of the term 'illegal immigrant,'" said state Rep. Geoff Diehl, R-Whitman, who was not at the hearing but made immigration reform a key part of his election campaign.

Diehl said his stance reflects the opinion of his district, which covers Whitman and Hanson.

"My district would not be for providing tuition to illegal immigrants," Diehl said. "If this comes to the floor, my vote would represent the opinion of my district."

State Rep. Thomas Calter, D-Kingston, who sits on the committee on higher education that held Wednesday's hearing, said he sees a lot of momentum to get the bill to the House floor, but isn't certain if there are enough votes to pass it.

Calter, who has long opposed the measure, also said he's re-evaluating his position. He spent all day Tuesday meeting with people on both sides of the issue, and expressed surprise that none of the opponents gave any formal testimony for the committee.

"As people put their paradigms aside, and put their biases aside, and listen to the data, there's a pretty compelling argument it's in

the best interest of the Commonwealth that we do what 14 other states have done," he said.

The bill doesn't have his vote yet, he said, but he will vote to send it to the floor for further debate.

In addition to Gov. Deval Patrick, the committee also heard from immigration lawyers, immigrant advocates, community and religious leaders, teachers and students.

They argued that undocumented students should not be punished because as children, they had no choice but to follow their parents to this country.

Painting it as a matter of equal access to education, they said many of the students were high achievers who have been shut out of the opportunity to attend college because they can't afford it. Marie St. Fleur, a former lawmaker who now works for Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, said the city had six valedictorians this year in that exact situation.

The difference between the resident and non-resident rates is sizable. At the University of Massachusetts, Boston, state residents pay \$7,419, compared to \$14,179 for non-residents.

At Bridgewater State University, commuter students who are residents pay just \$910 in tuition, plus student fees. Non-residents pay \$7,050, plus fees.

According to the bill, undocumented students who have attended high school for at least three years and are accepted to college would be eligible for the reduced rates. They also would be required to sign a sworn affidavit indicating they have applied or would apply for citizenship or legal residency within 120 days.

Nancy Reardon Stewart may be reached at nstewart@ledger.com.

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Comments (14)

TOWNIE47 4 hours ago  Report Abuse

Children of illegal immigrants do not deserve the same benefits that we LEGAL Americans have. What don't our lawmakers understand about ILLEGAL???? Sorry state of affairs.

lacky 4 hours ago  Report Abuse

undocumented immigrants ? who have those here in the great commonwealth?

chiefbroman 4 hours ago  Report Abuse

Nobody opposed it because the people that oppose it are working and can't show up to these 'hearings'.

coconut1077 4 hours ago  Report Abuse

Lemme get this right....this state is in debt up to an over it's eyeballs and want to cut back on everything from schools, insurance, retirement BUT CAN FIND THE MONEY TO SUPPORT ILLEGAL'S?!?!?! WTF?! It's not enough that they are taking jobs, housing, and stealing cars, they want free schooling too?!?! AND I BET THEY DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH!! Any school I went to a valid birth certificate was required, not a 'sworn affidavit indicating they have applied or would apply for citizenship or legal residency within 120 days.'

Is it me or is this completely ridiculous??

Rokkon 4 hours ago  Report Abuse

Yeah, debate. So I will tell someone from NH that you will have to pay a higher tuition rate than someone who is ILLEGALLY in this country? Yep, seems fair.

keepinitsimple 3 hours ago  Report Abuse

Who is the legislator that originally proposed this?

Too many LEGAL residents can't even afford in-state tuition.

I understand that education is important for all but this absolute insanity.

If you really want to be a help to others, you have to be healthy yourself.

Massachusetts, and the rest of the country, is not that healthy.


We cannot keep giving and giving.

If the illegal parents if these kids, really want to help with their kids education, get documented themselves, work to become citizens, pay taxes. Maybe the gov't can create a work pool where the parents and kids have to assist state workers, cleaning streets or whatever and where ever extra help is needed.


wildcat 3 hours ago  Report Abuse

This kind of thinking/logic/ legislation is why you simply cannot argue with the ideology of liberalism. Liberalism and liberals are

perverted. Their thinking is upside down. Up is down. Down is up! There should be zero debate..yet in this progressive liberal perverted state, the governor is proposing/ pushing legislation to provide in-state tuition for 'illegals' WTF?

backinpembrokeagain 3 hours ago  Report Abuse

No one was there to speak against the bill because we're all WORKING!!! Do something on the weekends when we are off and we'll be there!!!!

djstevak 3 hours ago  Report Abuse


Please remember to vote when Brian Joyce, Deval Patrick & other politicians who favor benefits for criminals are up for re-election...

Richard Struh 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

If this wasn't so sad, it would be comical.

craftyelf25 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

This whole 'debate' infuriates me. First, I think the legislators need to go back to college themselves because they can't seem to understand the definition of illegal. Secondly, if a person is 'undocumented' and you are supposed to provide documentation to prove who you are, where you are from, etc. then you have not met the requirements. I didn't have any say in where I was born either, so what if I want to go to any state college in the country? Should I then be given the state resident tuition rate? This state is cutting programs in schools at every level from Kindergarten through High School. The legislators argue that we want to have an educated society. How about starting with the children who are here legally? How about them a well rounded education from the beginning? I would have loved to finish college but I could not afford it. However, the people that were being rehabilitated from alcoholism (amongst other things) were going for free. It almost makes me want to burn my birth certificate and become a drunk. GET REAL Unfortunately I could not make it to the debate because I had to go to WORK to pay for all of this crap. 'As people put their paradigms aside' ... perhaps I should put my work ethic aside, get plastered, go apply for Section 8 and whatever else I can get for free and then get some free tuition. Oh wait - I can't - I'm an American citizen and a resident of Massachusetts.

imcndbl 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

Don't treat me special - treat me like an illegal alien....

mom1 2 hours ago  Report Abuse

Do you notice how they use the term 'undocumented' instead of 'illegal'. Do they think it is right for us to charge a student from say New Hampshire or Maine \$14,179 at U Mass or \$7,050 at Bridgewater and let someone here illegally pay \$7,419 or \$910?? Makes no sense. If you are here illegally, you are breaking the law and are not living by the same rules as the legal residents of the state, end of story. I find it hard to believe that not one single person spoke out against this.

cobra 1 hour ago  Report Abuse


While we are on the topic of college. Let's investigate the cost of tuition country wide and ask this question. Why does the cost out pace inflation by a wide margin. What a scam and what a scam the illegals are running in this country.

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