



Welcoming All to Virginia

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) is working to make Virginia a more equitable place, with increased access to opportunities for all communities. As people of faith, we share the foundational values of loving our neighbors, caring for the vulnerable and uplifting the marginalized members of our communities.

An estimated 272,000 people live in Virginia who are currently undocumented. More than 200,000 of them have lived here for at least five years. Our neighbors who are undocumented pay taxes, go to work and study alongside everyone else.

VICPP advocates legislative solutions to end the barriers that our neighbors face. Several bills filed by this year's General Assembly work toward those ends. VICPP will continue to track and update these bills.

Priority 1: Driving Privileges for Immigrants

In most parts of Virginia, one needs to drive to work, school and the doctor. Unfortunately, not everyone who lives and works in Virginia has access to a driver's license. Our roads would be safer for everyone if all Virginians took the same road safety driving test. This would also mitigate some of the detention and deportation of our neighbors who are immigrants, as any interaction with Virginia jails or courts puts them at increased risk of being targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

Eleven states have already granted access to driver's permits or licenses to people who are undocumented. In these states, traffic incidents, including hit and runs and fatalities, have fallen by up to 40 percent. Virginia should pass legislation to make our Commonwealth more inclusive and safer for everyone.

There are currently bills sponsored by Delegates Wilt, Kory, and Boysko to increase access to drivers' permits.

Priority 2: Tuition Equity for All Students

In Virginia, in-state tuition is available to students who hold Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status. Out of the 12,000 Virginians who hold DACA, more than 1,200 have enrolled in Virginia colleges and universities, qualifying for in-state tuition. In 2014, Attorney General Mark Herring issued a decision granting this access. However, the Trump Administration announced that DACA will be terminated as of March 5, 2019. Due to the phase-out of the program, 120 DACA recipients are losing their status every day, and after March 5, that number will increase to more than 400.

For Virginia to be truly equitable, we should provide in-state tuition to all Virginia students who reside in the Commonwealth. As DACA is ended, DACA-holding students currently eligible for in-state tuition will have their education interrupted or ended by increased tuition costs. Delegates Boysko and Kory have introduced legislation to make sure that our community members who are pursuing higher education have access to in-state tuition.

Other bills:

Educational Support for Those Learning English

Delegate Kory has a bill to increase English language instructors in schools with a high percentage of English Language Learned (ELL) students.

Equal Opportunity for Women

There are several bills proposed for this session to prohibit discrimination due to immigration status, gender identity or sexuality and to ensure that women receive the same compensation as men in the workplace. Del. Simon has introduced legislation to use gender neutral language in government documents.

Collaboration with ICE

VICPP is monitoring bills filed for legislation that would limit/prohibit local law enforcement collaboration with ICE. (This is the number one Welcoming All priority from our member survey.) Conversely, if bills that are hostile toward immigrants and refugees are introduced, VICPP will oppose them.

Additional resources

DACA statistics:

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles>

DACA and In-State Tuition in Virginia Analysis by TCI (2015):

http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/big_potential_DACA_in-state_tuition_v21.pdf

NILC Backgrounder on In-State Tuition:

<https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/basic-facts-instate/>

Undocumented Immigrants Statistics in Virginia:

<http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/VA>

DMV Stakeholder Study:

https://www.dmv.virginia.gov/documents/Report_Driving_Credentials_for_Resident_Immigrants_11_14_16.pdf

The Commonwealth Institute 'Getting out of first gear on training and testing Virginia drivers':

<http://thehalfsheet.org/post/156037163173/getting-out-of-first-gear-on-training-and-testing>