



Increasing Access to Higher Education for Undocumented Students in Virginia Legislative Fact Sheet and Resource Guide

Undocumented students in Virginia do not have equal access to higher education. Students without legal status are ineligible for in-state tuition rates even if they meet all other in-state tuition requirements. For many undocumented students, education is a pathway to earning higher wages and investing in the Commonwealth. Due to the lack of federal government response on creating a legal pathway to citizenship, many states across the country have created resources and opportunities that allow immigrant youth to obtain driving privileges, health insurance, and in-state tuition rates at public universities. Twenty states allow in-state tuition for undocumented students.

Immigrant Youth in Virginia

An estimated 272,000 people live in Virginia who are currently undocumented. More than 26 percent of them have lived in Virginia for at least five years. Approximately 17 percent are young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are interested in obtaining a professional degree. Currently, Virginia allows immigrants who hold unexpired Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status and meet residency requirements to qualify for in-state tuition. Out of the 10,100 Virginians who hold DACA, more than 1,200 have enrolled in Virginia colleges and universities because of Attorney General Mark Herring interpretation of the current law in 2014. If, however, a federal lawsuit ends the DACA program, which the current Presidential Administration advocates, these 1200 students would lose access to in-state tuition. In addition, those without DACA status have no access to in-state tuition.

Why is Tuition Equity Important?

Welcoming All: Undocumented immigrants are our neighbors and friends who deserve an opportunity to accomplish their dreams. One way to protect them and create a welcoming environment is having an inclusive Commonwealth that would allow undocumented youth to continue with their education.

Workforce Development: Virginia's businesses need skilled workers. In a study conducted by the Virginia Employment Commission and Virginia Commonwealth University, there are an estimated 27,000 job vacancies requiring an Associate's degree or higher, and more than 18,000 of the vacancies require a Bachelor's degree. Industry sectors for job vacancies include healthcare, technology, transportation, and education. The Migration Policy Institute found that current DACA recipients are already working in those fields, with many others aspiring to join similar industries. Virginia's businesses need these students.

Contribute to the State Economy: Undocumented students want to invest in Virginia economic growth. Many have established their career path in the state and want to stay here investing in taxes, local and state economies, and creating job opportunities. According to The Commonwealth Institute data, individuals who graduate with an associate's or bachelor's degree earn on average \$40,000 to \$60,000. Virginia should encourage these motivated students in becoming contributing workers and taxpayers.

Additional Tuition for Virginia's Public Universities and Colleges: Virginia's community colleges, like others around the nation, are facing decreasing enrollments due to low unemployment and declining high school graduations. This initiative would likely increase enrollment in Virginia's community colleges, thus providing additional tuition. In the universities, undocumented students, because they are not eligible for Pell grants or other financial aid, would pay the entire share of their in-state tuition.

Legislation for 2019 General Assembly

Legislation will be introduced for the 2019 General Assembly to allow undocumented students (both DACA holders and others) who meet residency requirements to pay in-state tuition at Virginia's colleges. Most likely, the Senate and House Education Committees will consider the bills. VICPP urges support for this important legislation. The following organizations have supported the legislation:

NOVA Chamber of Commerce
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
Virginia Commonwealth University
George Mason University

For more information, contact Ms. Yanet Limon-Amado at Yanet@virginiainterfaithcenter.org.

Sources

Migration Policy Institute, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/data-hub/deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca-profiles> and <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/unauthorized-immigrant-population/state/VA>

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, <http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/In-State-Tuition-is-Common-Sense-Investment-2018.pdf>

National Immigration Law Center, <https://www.nilc.org/issues/education/basic-facts-instate/>

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