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Dreamers should be able to pursue American Dream *SB 1563 continues tuition equity for DACA program students*

SALEM – Children brought to the United States at young ages and then raised in this country as Americans should have access to the same tuition as their peers who were born here.

Providing that equity is the intention of Senate Bill 1563 – which passed with a 17-10 vote on the Senate floor today. The bill removes the requirement for undocumented students to apply for an official federal identification document to be eligible for resident tuition at public universities. It also affords Oregon Health and Science University the ability to exempt undocumented students from non-resident tuition rates.

“The students we are talking about got into school on their own merits, worked hard, and most of them couldn’t go to school without some support,” said Sen. Michael Dembrow, D-Portland, who co-carried the bill on the Senate floor with Sen. Peter Courtney, D-Salem. “With passage of this bill, these young people will have the confidence of knowing they can pursue their dream of higher education in expectation of this country finally getting to a more sensible immigration policy. These young people were raised with Americans, and raised like Americans. Some of them have served this country in the military. The only difference is that they don’t have certain documents. In all practicality, these students are Americans.”

In 2012, under the Obama Administration, the Department of Homeland Security created the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. This directed the department to defer action on individuals who meet the following criteria:

- Came into the United States when they were younger than 16;
- Have continuously resided in the United States for the past 5 years;

- Are students, GED recipients or honorably discharged veterans;
- Do not pose a threat to national security or public safety; and
- Are younger than 30.

The Oregon Legislature passed a tuition equity bill in 2013, which extended in-state tuition to DACA status students, also called Dreamers. The current administration has terminated the DACA program, and is no longer accepting applicants. This bill responds to this recent federal action to ensure DACA students continue to have access to in-state tuition and scholarship opportunities.

“When we gave Oregon Dreamers access to tuition equity, it made sense for us to link eligibility for tuition equity not only to longstanding residence in Oregon, but also to existing federal programs,” Dembrow said. “Dreamers were coming out of the shadows to show themselves and allow their potential to shine. Today, according to the state’s leading immigration attorneys, our connection with federal regulations puts Dreamers at risk and they find themselves collateral damage of a broken immigration system.”

Under the bill, students who are not citizens or lawful permanent residents will be able to receive scholarships, grants and other financial aid from the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. They would not be eligible for federal student aid.

“Oregon has thousands of undocumented or mixed immigration status young people, many of whom are protected with DACA status,” said Michael Dreiling, Oregon State Conference president of the American Association of University Professors. “Among this group are college students who aspire to become the first members of their family to complete a postsecondary degree. SB 1563 would allow these students to achieve this goal.”

According to a 2014 PEW Research Center study, Oregon is home to an estimated 130,000 undocumented immigrants. According to the American Immigration Council, more than 10,000 of them are DACA participants.

“Tuition equity has allowed me to successfully continue my higher education career,” Western Oregon University third-year student Cristina Garcia testified. “If it wouldn’t have been for tuition equity, there is no way that I would be able to afford paying over \$20,000 per year in tuition, compared to approximately \$9,500 in tuition.”

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

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