

Posted on Fri, Nov. 28, 2003

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Law prevents some from getting lower tuition
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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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MIAMI - Juan is a straight-A student who graduated from high school this year with a 4.0 grade-point average and dreams of becoming a journalist. But the 18-year-old Colombian won't be pursuing his career goal anytime soon.

He's among the thousands of immigrant students who fall under a federal law that prohibits public universities from charging lower in-state tuition unless all legal out-of-state students receive the same rate.

For Juan, who did not want his last name used because he feared he could be deported, it's particularly frustrating. His family left Colombia when he was 12 with hopes of providing him and his younger sister better future in the United States.

"I'd love to go to the University of Florida, but it's unimaginable the amount of money that I have to pay. can't afford it," said Juan, who lives in southwestern Florida where he works part time at a restaurant and takes a few community-college classes.

Out-of-state or international tuition typically costs more than three times in-state tuition. At the University of Florida, Juan would have to pay nearly \$14,000 compared with the in-state charge of about \$3,000.

Florida is among a growing number of states where efforts are under way to re-examine the issue. In the past two years, Oklahoma, Washington, Illinois, New York, California, Utah and Texas have passed laws to reduce the cost of tuition for immigrant students.

State Rep. Juan Zapata said he would propose legislation next year that would help students such as Juan by allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition at state colleges and universities. A similar bill did not pass earlier this year.

"This bill establishes, for tuition purposes, that if you went to a Florida high school you wouldn't have to pay the out-of-state tuition," said Zapata, a Republican from Kendall, a Miami suburb.

'The Dream Act'

The Urban Institute, a Washington-based nonpartisan research organization, estimated that 50,000 to 60,000 undocumented immigrants graduate from U.S. high schools every year and about 3,300 to 5,300 undocumented students graduate from Florida high schools. It is currently not known how many students are paying the out-of-state tuition or what happens to them once they graduate from high school.

"Florida has the fourth-biggest immigrant population. In this sense, Florida should pass this bill. It's long overdue," said David Skovholt, director of Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center, an organization that help promote immigrants' rights.

In Congress, the Senate Judiciary Committee has approved legislation that would permit immigrants who have lived in the United States for at least five years to apply for legal resident status once they graduate from high school. The measure would eliminate the provisions of the current federal law that discourages states from providing in-state tuition to undocumented student immigrants.

The federal legislation, dubbed "The Dream Act," is sponsored by Senate Judiciary Chairman Orrin G. Hatch, R-Utah, and Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill. The measure is expected to be considered by the Senate and the House next year.

David Ray, spokesman for the Washington-based Federation For American Immigration Reform, which advocates limits on immigration, argued that these policies undermine national security and encourage illegal immigration.

"The states that pass these laws play the part of the problem but not the solution," Ray said. "It's not consistent with the security needs of the country. We can't set a precedent that they can get away with illegal immigration. They are illegal aliens and should not be given taxpayers' subsidies."

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