

## **Regents weigh illegal immigrants' tuition waivers**

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### **Body**

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Luis Ramos graduated in the top 10 at Morrow High School two years ago and started taking classes at Clayton State University.

With a GPA of 3.5, he's been accepted as a transfer student at Georgia Tech.

But Ramos' parents brought him into the United States illegally when he was 10. Because of a recent policy change by the Board of **Regents**, that means Ramos would have to pay out-of-state **tuition** to attend Tech, putting his dream out of reach.

On Wednesday, the 19-year-old from Mexico stood before a microphone and urged a panel representing the **regents** to reverse that decision.

"I plead to the Board of **Regents** to give students like me the opportunity to show we are not a negative statistic," Ramos said during the hearing at the Clarkston campus of Georgia Perimeter College.

Undocumented college students are in the spotlight because Georgia's immigration reform law - SB 529 - is about to go into full effect July 1.

Since 1999, the **regents** had given state colleges the leeway to grant a limited number of **waivers** to **illegal immigrants** who graduated from Georgia high schools, along with student athletes and artistically gifted students. That allowed some undocumented students to pay in-state **tuition**.

But last spring, the attorney for the **regents**, Burns Newsome, advised them to end the **waivers** for **illegal immigrants**, saying the practice is at odds with SB 529. Now, the **regents** are having a series of public hearings to get input on the issue.

About 30 people spoke at the hearing Wednesday. Almost all urged the **regents** to restore the **waivers**.

For low-income students, the difference in **tuition** bills can be huge. At Georgia Tech and Georgia State University, for example, in-state students pay \$1,946 per semester vs. \$7,785 for out-of-state students.

Ten states, including California and Texas, allow undocumented high school graduates to pay in-state **tuition**, according to the National Council of La Raza, a civil rights organization.

Several of those states define requirements for in-state **tuition** that don't focus on immigration status, said Melissa Lazarin, an education expert at La Raza. States may simply require a student to graduate from a high school in the state after living a certain number of years in state.

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Some require undocumented students to sign a statement saying they plan to seek legal status if possible.

Georgia officials estimate roughly 100 students may be receiving the **waivers** statewide.

Ramos, who attended Clayton State under a **tuition waiver**, believes many more could qualify.

This year, he said, his alma mater will grant high school diplomas to about 100 undocumented students.

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