The immigrant demographic in Massachusetts makes in-state tuition a particularly relevant issue. In 2010, it was estimated that there are 912,310 immigrants living in Massachusetts. Approximately 160,000 of these individuals are undocumented. Out of that population, it is projected that about 14,285 are children under age 18, or about 800 per school year. H.2109 would benefit not only the hundreds of students that would be affected by this legislation annually, but the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The Bill

Bill H.2109: “An Act regarding higher education opportunities for high school graduates in the commonwealth”

Elevator Speech

Massachusetts values education and access to opportunity perhaps more than any other state. However, not all of Massachusetts’ high-achieving high school students are able to attend college. Through no fault of their own, students without legal permanent residency are categorized as ‘out-of-state’ students even if they have attended a Massachusetts high school for over 3 years. This means that they must pay out-of-state tuition, which can be three to five times more expensive. Undocumented students are allowed to attend college but the high tuition rates prevent them from doing so. The inability of hundreds of students to continue their post-secondary education stunts the economic and social growth of our communities. We have already invested in their futures and helping them continue their education will keep these students out of low-income jobs. Over time, tuition costs and tax revenue from undocumented students will provide a valuable source of revenue for the Commonwealth. Education is the vehicle of progress and we cannot continue to roadblock progress in our communities. Will you publicly support Bill H.2109 and educate your staff or fellow representatives about the bill’s immense economic and civil benefits?
Excerpt from Storybook

Elaine, a high school teacher in Boston, congratulated Maya one day on her MCAS scores when Maya began crying. She told Elaine that because she was undocumented, she would not be able to take advantage of the college scholarship awarded to the highest scorers. As a public school teacher, Elaine spent her energy working to help students obtain these very goals. However, regardless of Maya’s hard work, intelligence, or commitment to learning, she would not be able to attend college because she was not able to pay the tuition.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Victoria

Laura and I attended SIM [Student Immigrant Movement] Camp 2012 on February 25 and 26, held at UMass Boston. For two days, we learned how to advocate for the rights of undocumented students, change the education system and work to overhaul the way undocumented students are limited in their post secondary options by teachers, guidance counselors and the higher education school system in general.

I made a number of connections, particularly with the other Brandeis students that were present and with the SIM member who guided our group. There were four Brandeis students, including me and Laura, and we were able to use the breakout sessions of the conference to discuss how to effectively re-start the Brandeis Immigration Education Initiative and how to spread awareness of challenges facing undocumented students to the Brandeis community.

Beyond spreading awareness, we learned the skills to implement real actions, ranging from protests and marches to one-on-one conversations with policy makers and lobbying. After attending SIM Camp, Laura and I had an in-depth understanding of how SIM operates, what their mission is and how to go about working towards that mission. SIM Camp was designed as a way for undocumented high school students to come together and learn how to advocate for change.

It was an emotional and intense weekend full of stories, discussion and action around increasing opportunities for undocumented students. SIM Camp was an eye opening experience for me in that, through spending two days with the leaders of SIM and having continuous conversations with students, I was able to see and hear about the impact that in-state tuition would have on real individuals.

Laura

We met with Representative Denise Provost the first time we went to the State House as a class. Her aide, Mark Kennedy, was also present. We learned about the history of the in-state tuition bill and why it was having such a hard time getting passed. We learned the names of the representatives that voted against the bill. We met because Representative Provost wanted to work towards advocating more for the in-state tuition bill. She believed that SIM could push further and get the bill passed. She had just learned that the movement had decided to shift its strategy and not lobby for the bill. She spoke about the importance of continuing the struggle and pushing for the bill and hoped to change SIM’s mind. However, I strongly agreed with SIM’s decision and change in strategy and thought that Representative Provost was not being fully understanding of what the needs of SIM members were. There is great value in grassroots movements; lobbying for the bill was going to lead to another majority of votes against it.

We made a connection with Representative Provost, keeping in contact regularly with her aide, Mark. He was very helpful in answering our questions and giving us resources with important data on undocumented students. From this data we learned how economically beneficial in-state tuition is to the state.

The meeting went pretty well because it was informative and we got an insider’s tips on who or what was blocking the bill but it could have been more productive if Representative Provost had accepted SIM’s decision to no longer lobby for the bill.

Update

As of August 20, 2012 the bill died in the Joint Committee on Higher Education. Its sponsor, Representative Denise Provost, plans on reintroducing it in the next legislative session.

For more information

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition