Currently, establishing proof of citizenship or immigration documentation status is required to be eligible for in-state tuition rates at public colleges in Massachusetts, barring hundreds of resident, undocumented immigrants from in-state rates every year. The In-State Tuition Bill seeks to change this requirement to proof of having lived in Massachusetts for three years, graduated from a Massachusetts high school, and an affidavit of intention to pursue citizenship.

■ The Bill

S603: “For legislation relative to equal access to higher education and generating revenue for the commonwealth”

■ Elevator Speech

I know you agree that education provides an opportunity to succeed. Our state, however, is in a state of calamity because there are a group of ambitious undocumented students for whom hope of an education has been dashed because they cannot afford out-of-state tuition.

Many of these students came of their parents' volition and are being punished for a choice they did not make. These students who have lived here for most of their lives and have excelled in Massachusetts high schools have not been privileged with in-state tuition simply because of the stigma that surrounds their status and, as a result, do not have the tools to acquire a job that can support them.

By granting them in-state tuition, the state gains 2.5 million dollars and gains the chance to make a difference in a young adult’s life.

You can help support Senate Bill 603/House Bill 1175 by convincing your colleagues that Massachusetts will not be socially behind Texas, the first state to pass the bill, in understanding the importance of granting higher education to all residents.
Undocumented immigrants in this country pay all the usual taxes. On a federal level, 8 million of the 12 million anywhere else.

Tuition, particularly when they can’t get the in-state price other tax-paying Massachusetts residents the out-of-state students. It doesn’t make sense when the state charges approximately $4,305 to $9,704. The theory behind this discount is that residents pay the taxes that subsidize the approximately $10,811 to $22,157 per year while in-state students pay. Or, maybe I’d have the $2.5 million dollars the state stands to gain from allowing all Massachusetts high school grads to pay in-state tuition, regardless of documentation status.

This particular question is central to the anti-immigrant rhetoric. The funny thing is, the line that marks what is legal and is illegal in immigration is full of misunderstanding. The immigration system itself is so riddled with potholes and waiting periods that an individual can come into this country following all the rules, enter the expensive and lengthy process of becoming a citizen, and slip into “undocumented” status nonetheless thanks to bureaucratic nonsense.

I fail to understand why a child, even one as young as a day old, can be brought to this country by his or her parents and suffer the indignity of being called an “illegal” and regarded as a criminal. These kids grow up American, have American friends and keep up with American trends. Many of these children speak English with no discernable accent, and our country deports them away from the place they consider to be their home back to a country that is foreign to them.

They’ll do well in school, apply to and be accepted to college, but be unable to go because of cost. This is a sad reality for students across the board, leading some intelligent kids to forgo higher-cost private schools for the local State U. But for undocumented students, there is no lower-cost State U. Regardless of how long they’ve lived in Massachusetts, of whether they pay taxes or are graduates of Massachusetts high schools, they are charged the out-of-state tuition, ranging from $10,811 to $22,157 per year while in-state students pay approximately $4,305 to $9,704. The theory behind this discount is that residents pay the taxes that subsidize the schools. This difference in price makes sense when the state schools admit out-of-state residents, or international students. It doesn’t make sense when the state charges other tax-paying Massachusetts residents the out-of-state tuition, particularly when they can’t get the in-state price anywhere else.

And yes, contrary to popular belief, immigrants pay taxes. On a federal level, 8 million of the 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country pay all the usual taxes through IRS-issued tax identification numbers. They are consumers, they rent and purchase houses, they work hard in the service jobs that bolster the American way of life. They are not entitled to most of the benefits of those taxes, such as Social Security…or, in Massachusetts, in-state tuition rates. Additionally, undocumented students are barred from applying for federal aid, further exacerbating the burden of the higher price they are charged to go to school.

These kids put their dreams on the back burner. They read comments under online news articles decrying them as outsiders and declaring that they can only go to college after every American citizen who applies is accepted first. They get called “moochers,” get told to “go back home,” and read that they shouldn’t “take spots in the classroom from our children.” The principle of competition in college admissions is abandoned, and the fact that Massachusetts college presidents testify that immigrant students would be filling empty seats is disregarded. Massachusetts has the chance to make some extra money filling those seats, but instead the door is slammed in the faces of immigrant kids.

Above all, I fail to understand how, in a country that fundamentally does not punish individuals for the actions of others, a minor can be treated like a criminal for the immigration decisions of his or her parents.

Maybe that’s what I don’t understand about “illegal.”

Thankfully, undocumented students and their supporters have worked to end the injustice of being charged unfairly for out-of-state tuition by engaging in what is one of the most important forms of American education: civic participation.

The In-State Tuition Bill simply seeks to treat taxpaying Massachusetts residents as in-state students when they work towards a higher degree, regardless of documentation status. Everybody who wants to see Massachusetts do right to these kids can write to our state legislators and Governor Deval Patrick and urge them to get this bill passed.

Op-Ed Piece

“What part of ‘illegal’ do you not understand?”

If I had a dollar for every time I read or heard those words while researching the In-State Tuition Bill currently facing the Massachusetts legislature, I feel like I’d have enough money to send every undocumented immigrant student to college myself at the out-of-state rates they’re currently charged. Or, maybe I’d have the $2.5 million dollars the state stands to gain from allowing all Massachusetts high school grads to pay in-state tuition, regardless of documentation status.

This particular question is central to the anti-immigrant rhetoric. The funny thing is, the line that marks what is legal and is illegal in immigration is full of misunderstanding. The immigration system itself is so riddled with potholes and waiting periods that an individual can come into this country following all the rules, enter the expensive and lengthy process of becoming a citizen, and slip into “undocumented” status nonetheless thanks to bureaucratic nonsense.

I fail to understand why a child, even one as young as a day old, can be brought to this country by his or her parents and suffer the indignity of being called an “illegal” and regarded as a criminal. These kids grow up American, have American friends and keep up with American trends. Many of these children speak English with no discernable accent, and our country deports them away from the place they consider to be their home back to a country that is foreign to them.

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Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Vanessa

From the bill hearing:

“I had intended to shake hands with and get to know the students who testified, but the meeting ran longer than we expected and unfortunately, our time was limited. Before we left Cynthia gave a whispered introduction of Morgan and I to Renata Teodoro, one of the students who had testified—this turned out to be essential in building the connection with the Student Immigrant Movement later
on. More immediately, as this was very early on in the semester, the bill hearing served as an excellent primer to the issues surrounding the in-state tuition debate. I hadn't realized before going just how long this battle has been.”

*From a rally of student supporters at the State House:*
“The students in attendance also brought posters to demonstrate their positions on the issue, and were invited to read them between speeches. It was a moving experience to hear them call out for justice and education. Additionally, attending the rally showed SIM [the Student Immigrant Movement] that Morgan and I were serious about getting involved, and when we met with them afterwards the atmosphere was much warmer.”

*Morgan*

*From a rally of student supporters at the State House:*
“We asked individual students, some our age and others no older than ten years old, what this meant to them. At the beginning, many of the students refused to talk to us so I decided to try to connect using my broken Spanish and suddenly I had broken a barrier. Many thought it was funny or admirable that I was trying so hard and thus granted me an interview. That was the best feeling in the world, to overcome that barrier. It really made me realize how important it is to try to relate to someone, even if you make terrible mistakes, such as my grammar.”

*From a meeting with Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz:*
“The biggest dilemma Vanessa and I overcame was not making the meeting but actually getting the meeting to go on once we got there. Apparently, her secretary on issues such as these forgot to inform her that we would have a camera with us and, as her press advisor was absent, she was concerned about speaking to a camera. We gave her our list of questions and finally she agreed with the condition that if we were to use the footage for anything else but for our final presentation that we would contact her press advisor for clearance. We, of course, agreed.”

**Update (September 2010)**
The bill was ordered to study by the Senate on July 21, 2010. Effective defeat of bill.

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**For more information**

**In-State Tuition**
- SIM: http://www.simforus.com
- MIRA: http://www.miracoalition.org