



Testimony Submitted to the Joint Committee on Higher Education
In support of H.1281/S.817, *An Act to Ensure Tuition Equity for Massachusetts Residents/An Act providing access to higher education for high school graduates in the Commonwealth*
By Amy Cooper, LWVMA Immigration Specialist
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In Massachusetts, tens of thousands of high school students cannot look forward to a college education because of their immigration status. Although these students have lived in the state for most of their lives and have done well in high school, they are required to pay out-of-state tuition rates in order to attend college. At UMass, tuition for out-of-state students is more than twice the in-state tuition rate. For other state colleges and universities, the out-of-state rate can be much higher, and for students without status, there is no possibility of financial aid. This results in an unsurmountable barrier for many young immigrant students.

While DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) and TPS (Temporary Protected Status) students may be eligible for in-state tuition, these groups make up only a small percentage of the Commonwealth's immigrant student population, where 1 in 6 residents is foreign born and their children represent a large share of the public school population.

This bill would allow students who attended high school in MA for at least three years, graduated from high school, or attained their GED here to pay in-state tuition rates with some conditions. The Senate bill would also include state financial aid.

Passing this bill would not only help students; it would also benefit our state, where enrollment in public higher education has declined by over 10% since 2015. As has been demonstrated in the 23 states and D.C., which already extend in-state tuition to immigrant students, tuition equity promotes academic success, lowers drop-out rates, increases attendance in institutions of higher education, and raises student incomes and tax payer contributions. Helping students go to college in MA would give them a real connection to the state, and many more would stay to join the workforce and contribute to the growth of the economy.

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 44 local leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, believes that all levels of government have the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment, and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation, or disability. LWVMA believes that employment opportunities in modern, technological societies are closely related to education; therefore, the League supports programs to increase the education and training of disadvantaged people. In addition, LWVMA supports programs that would inform individuals of their civil rights in education, employment, and housing, and of the opportunities open to them. The League stands in solidarity with immigrants and our partners in the immigrant rights community.

For all these reasons, the LWVMA supports this bill and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee. Thank you for your consideration.