

Greater Philadelphia Jewish Coalition on Immigration

Co-Chairs:

Judith Ginsberg
*Jewish Community Relations
Council*

Philippe Weisz
HIAS Pennsylvania

Member Organizations

HIAS Pennsylvania

*AJC Philadelphia/Southern New
Jersey*

*Anti-Defamation League of Eastern
PA/ Southern NJ/Delaware*

*Jewish Community Relations
Council of Philadelphia*

Jewish Social Policy Action Network

*National Council of Jewish Women –
Greater Philadelphia*

*Pennsylvania Immigration and
Citizenship Coalition*

Women of Vision

Steering Committee:

Diane Morgan
*Jewish Community Relations
Council of Philadelphia*

James Rosenstein
*AJC Philadelphia/Southern New
Jersey*

Rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro

Coordinator:

Ruhi Sophia Rubenstein
*HIAS Pennsylvania
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College*

Statement of HIAS Pennsylvania and the Greater Philadelphia Jewish Coalition on Immigration to the Senate Education Committee for Hearing May 15th 2013 on SB 713, providing in-state tuition for undocumented individuals.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in anticipation of the hearings to be held by the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee, May 15th, in Harrisburg. HIAS Pennsylvania has been helping new Americans integrate and contribute to this democracy for over 130 years, and we are delighted to see our democracy flourishing with the introduction of this bill. The Greater Philadelphia Jewish Coalition on Immigration is a collective of the leading Jewish organizations in the Philadelphia area, united in support for fair and just Immigration reform for our country and our state. The Coalition membership includes the major Philadelphia Jewish regional organizations.

The Jewish community has always been aware of education as the key to security and prosperity. We know that education has been the key to the successful integration of our own community, and that it will allow today's immigrant communities to meet the diverse economic and technological needs of Pennsylvania. As the population of Pennsylvania's Jewish community ages (along with the population of Pennsylvania in general), we are increasingly concerned that we receive care from skilled and well-trained professionals. We need immigrants in our state not just to harvest our vegetables and fruit, but to be our nurses, doctors, lawyers and social workers, serving and trained, in fact, for all sectors.

SB 713 is timely, as many youth now have lawful presence due to new federal policies. Since August 2012, over 2,000 youth and young adults have enrolled in the new federal program Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). This program allows these young adults who finished high school or GED access to employment authorization. Providing access to higher education will ensure that these young adults maximize their skills and capacities as they participate in the workforce.

Even though language of the bill refers to its beneficiaries as "undocumented individuals," we must point out that a growing number of the individuals who would benefit from this bill are currently lawfully present, with documentation, as a result of DACA. These children are already familiar with our state. Hundreds of these youth graduate from Pennsylvania's high schools every year without the same opportunities as their classmates. Many of these students have lived in our state for many years, and fully identify as Americans in all but their citizenship. When we deny these students the same opportunities that their citizen peers take for granted, we encourage them to seek low-wage, low-skill labor opportunities, instead of contributing to our society and economy at their highest potential.

S.T. is just one example of a person for whom the passage of this bill will open the doorway to opportunity. S.T. has been in the US since he was 14 and was selected for a prestigious summer internship for minority college bound students when he was in high school. After he graduated, however, he could not afford to attend college. S.T. is a deeply religious young man who volunteers with his church, often leading youth groups. But S.T. works odd jobs in construction and his hopes for higher education have been put on hold. He hoped to become a pastor, but that dream is fading due to the high cost of tuition.

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SB 713 provides a way for hard working students like S.T. to continue their education and contribute fully to society. It provides an incentive for all of these undocumented and DACA-recipient youth to finish high school and to attend college along with their friends and classmates. Studies show that states with in-state tuition have higher college enrollment and a lower high school drop-out rate of the affected youth.¹

State initiated DREAM Acts, with broad bi-partisan support already exist in 13 states.² In states where it has been implemented –many of which have much larger immigrant populations—the cost has been negligible, and the economic benefits to colleges have been positive. In-state tuition is not free tuition. All the Pennsylvania Dream Act provides is that students who have lived in the state for a certain number of years and have graduated from high school have the opportunity to pay the same tuition as other students who have attended school in Pennsylvania. These acts tend to increase school revenues because more students can afford to enroll in colleges at the in-state tuition rate.

The students affected are already here and their families already contribute to Pennsylvania's economy. This law would maximize the students' potential to contribute back to society. In 2010 alone, families headed by unauthorized immigrants paid approximately \$135 million in Pennsylvania state and local taxes. The Pennsylvania Dream Act gives students an opportunity to continue their education and return this investment to the Commonwealth by becoming productive, tax-paying citizens. Students who complete college earn 84% more income and generate more taxes than those who do not.

Pennsylvania needs to encourage population growth, particularly among the young and educated cohorts affected by SB 713. Pennsylvania is second only to Florida in the number of seniors over 65 who reside in the state. Our rate of growth is well below the national average. From 2000 to 2010, the Commonwealth grew at a rate of three percent while the nation as a whole had a nine percent rate of growth. If Pennsylvania is going to stay economically competitive, it must implement public policies that welcome young families-many of which are immigrants--to the Commonwealth, and keep their children motivated, educated and here.

For more information, Contact Philippe Weisz at pweisz@hiaspa.org or Judith Bernstein-Baker at jbernsteinbaker@hiaspa.org

¹ Stephanie Potochnik, "How States Can Reduce the Dropout Rate for Undocumented Immigrant Youth: The Effects of In-State Resident Tuition Policies," presented at the Population Association of American Annual Meeting, March 31-April 2, 2011.

² California, Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah, Washington and Rhode Island (by administrative rule).