



PHILADELPHIA BAR ASSOCIATION

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TO: All Members of the Senate Education Committee

FROM: Kathleen Wilkinson, Chancellor

DATE: May 15, 2013

RE: Senate Bill 713

I am writing on behalf of the 13,000 members of the Philadelphia Bar Association to express support for Senate Bill 713, known as the DREAM Act. This important bill would provide undocumented students who meet certain criteria the opportunity to continue their education in Pennsylvania and become a valuable part of our state's economy.

The bill allows undocumented students who have attended high school in Pennsylvania for at least two years and have graduated or received their GED to be eligible for in-state tuition rates at state universities and state-related institutions. This ensures that these students, most of whom were brought here at a very young age and are undocumented through no fault of their own, can continue their education and contribute to the economic success of our Commonwealth and nation.

There are currently twelve other states with similar procedures in place, including Illinois, Maryland and Texas, and the New Jersey legislature is considering a similar proposal. These states all realize that there is much to be gained by retaining and continuing to educate this group of individuals, and Pennsylvania should follow suit.

The Immigration Policy Center estimates that there are 30,000 students in Pennsylvania who could be affected by this legislation. These students are here, have worked tirelessly to attain their high school education, many times despite family separation or other adversity, and should be afforded the opportunity to continue their education.

There is great value to the Commonwealth in having a dedicated, hard-working group of students entering our institutions when they otherwise could not afford to or, quite frankly, are afraid to. Presently, Pennsylvania students who are undocumented pay out-of-state tuition rates to attend Pennsylvania's universities.

Pennsylvania has a proud tradition of making quality public higher education available to our residents. In 2010, the Wall Street Journal conducted a survey of top corporate recruiters to identify the schools that best prepare students to land jobs that are satisfying, well-paid and have growth potential. They found that graduates of top public universities are often among the most prepared and well-rounded academically, and companies have found they fit well into their corporate cultures and over time have the best track record in their firms. In the study, recruiters ranked the Pennsylvania State University first in the country in producing the best-qualified graduates.

But in order to become one of those sought after graduates, a student has to be able to afford the cost of tuition. At Penn State, basic tuition in the 2012-2013 academic year for in-state residents is \$15,562 per year for first and second year undergraduate students and \$16,826 for third and fourth year students. However, for out-of-state students, those numbers rise to \$27,864 per year for first and second year students and \$29,283 for third and fourth year students.

Over a typical four year course of study, the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition grows to nearly \$50,000. Under current law, the Commonwealth imposes this additional financial burden on potentially thousands of young Pennsylvanians who have done nothing wrong. Rather, they have done everything right – studied hard, achieved academic success and prepared themselves for college.

Under current immigration law, it is not possible for the majority of these students to adjust their status and apply for permanent residency or citizenship. Imposing a \$50,000 penalty on these bright young students because of the choices their parents made is contrary to our sense of fairness. SB 713 will restore equity to our tuition policy, opening the doors of opportunity to all our young people. SB 713 will also remove any fear of repercussions that undocumented students may face when choosing to enroll in a university, because it puts in place a standard procedure with regard to these students.

Senate Bill 713 is critically important to removing barriers to education, and also to cultivating a continuously improving and evolving workforce. In the words of a great Pennsylvanian, Benjamin Franklin, “An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest.” It is true for the individual and it is also true for Pennsylvania.

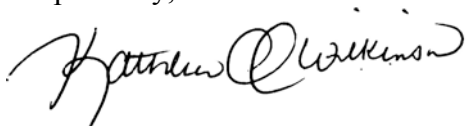
Investing in the knowledge and skills of our immigrant children through reduced in-state tuition will pay dividends to the individual in the form of increased earning power. It will also pay dividends back to the state, through increased tax revenue, entrepreneurial initiative and the leadership roles these highly educated individuals will play in our communities, our schools and our government.

Finally, on behalf of the Philadelphia Bar Association, I would like to thank Committee Chair Smucker, the prime sponsor of SB 713, and Committee members Leach and Williams, co-sponsors of the Bill, for your bipartisan leadership on this vital issue.

The Philadelphia Bar Association respectfully urges all members of the Committee to support this important measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kathleen D. Wilkinson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathleen" being more prominent than the last name "Wilkinson".

Kathleen D. Wilkinson, Esq.
Chancellor