Why Massachusetts Should Expand Dreamers’ In-State Tuition Eligibility

Massachusetts is a world and national leader in higher education … but not when it comes to opening the doors of opportunity to in-state immigrant students graduating from Massachusetts high schools.

“Dreamers,” undocumented students in Massachusetts, face significant barriers to higher education access and affordability in the state. This not only limits these students’ educational opportunities, but also dampens the economic potential of the Massachusetts economy now and in the future.

But this year, all of that could change. TheDream.US, the nation’s largest scholarship provider for Dreamers, is proud to join Massachusetts elected officials, higher education and business leaders, and other advocates and experts to call for expansion of in-state tuition eligibility. Massachusetts should join the 23 states and Washington, DC that provide in-state tuition access to the states’ undocumented students and the 17 states and DC that provide access to state financial aid. As a May 2023 editorial in the Boston Globe notes: “After more than 20 years of advocacy, it’s time to finally make the policy law.”

Background

In Massachusetts, only Dreamers with active Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protections are eligible for in-state tuition rates at state colleges and universities. Yet due to legal challenges to the DACA program and related barriers to new applicants, the vast majority of Dreamers graduating from Massachusetts high schools no longer are eligible for DACA.

As the Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) notes, “Tens of thousands of Massachusetts high school students graduate without the prospect of a college education because of their immigration status. Highly motivated students who have lived in our state all their lives must pay out-of-state tuition rates for public higher education (up to 4 times the in-state rate) without access to state financial aid, creating impossible barriers for low-income students.”

TheDream.US is the nation’s largest scholarship provider for Dreamers

In Massachusetts, we have supported 30 Scholars’ higher education dreams - but only at out of state Partner Colleges and via online options as a direct result of the current limitations in Massachusetts.

- **Deep roots and ties to Massachusetts.** Among the 30 Massachusetts high school graduates TheDream.US has supported, their median age of arrival to the United States is 10 years old. Most have spent the entirety of their teenage and high school years in Massachusetts.

- **Two-thirds of TheDream.US Scholars from Massachusetts lack DACA status and protections:** 67% of TheDream.US Scholars from Massachusetts are undocumented,
while 23% have DACA and an additional 10% have TPS. This underscores why limiting in-state eligibility to DACA students is damaging to these students and the state.

- **A missed opportunity to put their degrees to work in Massachusetts.** Across the country, hundreds of former TheDream.US Scholars are now putting their college degrees to work in their home states, including in the STEM fields, health and medicine, business, and education industries that are important economic sectors and essential to a vital state workforce. It is in Massachusetts’ interest to keep these students studying and succeeding in their home state and to make higher education accessible and affordable for more in-state Dreamers.

In a May 2023 editorial “**Give in-state college tuition to undocumented immigrants,**” the *Boston Globe* wrote in support of expanding eligibility:

"After more than 20 years of advocacy, it's time to finally make the policy law.

…Gov. Maura Healey called providing in-state tuition to immigrants without legal status ‘absolutely essential and a no-brainer.’ … The in-state tuition proposal has support from the state’s community colleges, state universities, and the University of Massachusetts, as well as the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce.

…DACA is not accepting new admissions, and an estimated 16,000 Massachusetts residents who would be eligible never obtained DACA status, according to the Migration Policy Institute.

Allowing these young people easier access to a college education would give them a chance at a better life. Currently, schools charge students without legal status the higher international or out-of-state rate, which many immigrants cannot afford to pay. At UMass Boston, a Massachusetts undergraduate faces a bill of $15,535 in tuition and fees next year, while an out-of-state student will be charged $37,211.

…The economic argument for providing in-state tuition has never been stronger … Massachusetts has a worker shortage … Adding more college-educated Massachusetts residents to the mix can only help … As [Northern Essex Community College President Lane] Glenn put it, ‘If we’re going to be economically competitive, we needed to do this yesterday.’"