

Undocumented-immigrants tuition bill fails to get votes

By DIANE D'AMICO Education Writer and DEREK HARPER Statehouse Bureau | Posted: Monday, January 11, 2010 | [8 comments](#)

A bill that would allow some undocumented immigrants to pay in-state tuition at the state's public colleges failed to make it to a vote in the state Legislature Monday.

The bills were on the agenda for the last day of the session in the state Assembly and Senate but were pulled after supporters failed to get enough votes for passage.

"We were so very close," Fernando Trevino, state coordinator of Democracia Ahora said.

Democrats said the bill was about four votes short of passage in the Senate, with opposition from conservative districts.

Shai Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, called the Senate adjourning without a vote on the issue "unconscionable." Lawmakers paid too much attention to "xenophobes" who opposed it, he said, despite it facing no serious opposition from colleges or universities.

Officials at Richard Stockton College and Rowan University said the effect of the bill would likely have been fairly small at the four-year colleges since affected students would still not be eligible for most financial aid.

Atlantic Cape Community College officials said they have room for more students, so they could have benefited from additional tuition revenue. Illegal immigrants can attend ACCC as an international student but would have to pay the much higher rate of \$372 per credit for the first year. They would then be allowed to pay the in-county rate of \$93 per credit, under the proposal.

Trevino said the coalition of groups working for the bill will continue the fight, but admitted it would be more difficult in the new administration.

The bill would have allowed illegal immigrants who had attended three years of high school and either graduated from high school in New Jersey or obtained their equivalency degree in the state, to pay the in-state rate at the state's two- and four-year colleges.

Supporters said the bill would benefit the state by giving talented students who had worked hard and succeeded in high school to a chance a college degree and a good job, and contribute to the economy. Opponents said it was giving state privileges to illegal residents.
