

Vote on illegal immigrant tuition rates uncertain

Monday, January 11, 2010

Last updated: Monday January 11, 2010, 1:19 PM

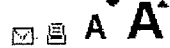
BY ELIZABETH LLORENTE

The Record

STAFF WRITER



2 Comments



Whether the state Legislature will vote on a controversial bill that would allow illegal immigrants to attend public colleges at in-state tuition rates, which are usually half the out-of-state costs they're usually charged, remained uncertain today, the last day of the lame-duck session.

The bill's chief sponsor, Sen. Ronald Rice, D-Essex, on Friday said that the measure appeared to be about four or five votes short of the 21 needed to pass. Rice said he likely would withdraw the bill at some point today if it seemed doomed.

THE BILL

S1036: Allows certain undocumented aliens to qualify for in-state tuition rates at public institutions of higher education.

2nd Reading in the Senate

Rice, Ronald L. as Primary Sponsor

Cunningham, Sandra B. as Primary Sponsor

Ruiz, M. Teresa as Primary Sponsor

The measure's sponsor in the Assembly, Rep. Gordon Johnson, D-Englewood, indicated that it seemed to have enough support among his colleagues, but that the assembly probably would vote on the bill only if it remained on the Senate's agenda and passed.

The bill's supporters said they are still hoping for victory, after eight years of watching the bill languish in legislative committees, which must release a measure before both houses can act on it.

"It's do-or-die today," said Charles "Shai" Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, and one of the measure's most vocal supporters. "We're still cautiously optimistic that it'll be put up for a vote."

The measure was scheduled for a vote in the Senate on Thursday, but was delayed to today.

The measure would allow illegal immigrants to attend college at in-state tuition rates if they show they have gone to a high school in the state for at least three years, received a high diploma or its equivalent from a state school and provide an affidavit saying that they have applied to immigration authorities to legalize their status.

Undocumented students would still have to fully cover the tuition themselves, however, since they do not qualify for financial aid and most scholarships.

The bill would benefit an estimated 2,000 illegal immigrants, those who support the measure say. Those advocates add that those immigrants sometimes must forego college because of their inability to pay out-of-state rates. Those rates are often twice as high as in-state tuition, which is about \$11,000 for a four-year public university.

Outgoing Gov. Jon Corzine supports the bill, but Gov.-elect Chris Christie has said he does not. Like many opponents of the measure, Christie says that making allowances for illegal immigrants would be rewarding law-breakers.

Supporters of the bill say that these children's illegal immigration status is not their fault because they were brought here by their parents. They say the children should not be punished for an act in which they had no say.

"Anyone who believes in civilization, who believes that children shouldn't be punished for what their parents did or didn't do, would support this," Goldstein said. "All the research has been made available to the legislators, all the compromises have been made – the bill has become stricter in the last eight years – there's nothing more to do now."

"Failure to vote for this is failure to stand up to the xenophobes."