

In-state tuition for illegal immigrants fizzles

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A bill to let illegal immigrants obtain in-state tuition rates at public universities failed yesterday when legislative leaders, lacking votes for passage, did not schedule a vote on the last day of the lame-duck session.

The outcome disappointed advocates for illegal immigrants who have long argued current rules are unfair to college students who were children when their parents immigrated illegally.

"It's a defeat for a basic principle of morality and civilization, which is that you don't punish children for what their parents did or didn't do," said Shai Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network.

Opponents say the bill flouted federal law and would have deprived state colleges of the money out-of-state tuition would bring in. Supporters countered it would bring in paying students who would not have attended at all.

The bill passed Senate and Assembly committees last week.

It would have made the lower in-state tuition -- generally about half as high as rates for non-New Jersey residents -- available for illegal immigrants who are state residents and who attended high school in New Jersey for at least three years, received a diploma or equivalency, and attest they intend to apply for citizenship if they have not already.

The Office of Legislative Services, a nonpartisan body that works for the state Legislature, estimated the bill would have no direct effect on state revenue but said it was unable to determine the effect on college revenue.

Ten states -- including New York, Texas, California and New Mexico -- let illegal immigrants pay in-state tuition.

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