

SB 783:

Access to Higher Education for Immigrant Students in Missouri

- **Encouraging educational attainment for all Missouri children is good education and economic policy.** More students enrolling in our colleges and universities mean more tuition payments, more diverse educational experiences on campus, and a climate of pursuit of higher education in our K-12 schools. Missouri will need a highly-educated and diverse future workforce to compete in the 21st Century economy, and encouraging Missouri students to continue their educations is an effective and efficient way to accomplish this goal. Meanwhile, Congress is likely to consider the Development, Relief, and Education of Alien Minors (DREAM) Act during this session. The DREAM Act would allow undocumented students who were brought to the U.S. at a young age and attended high school in the U.S. to adjust their immigration status through attending and completing college or joining the military as long as they demonstrate good moral character and other requirements necessary for citizenship.
- **Helping immigrant students attend colleges and universities through offering in-state tuition creates a positive educational climate for all Missouri students.** We cannot afford to have parts of our student bodies around the state who know that higher education is not an option for them because the cost is too high, and, therefore, give up on K-12 academic excellence. In addition, cash-strapped universities should not have to spend precious resources to invest in personnel and technology necessary to verify individuals' immigration statuses. That money is much better spent on education.
- **Helping immigrant students attend colleges and universities shows Missouri's commitment to fixing our nation's broken immigration system.** Obviously, we need comprehensive immigration reform to address the brokenness of our immigration laws. By helping hard-working, bright students to attain higher education, Missouri affirms its commitment to educational excellence and immigration reform. In-state tuition can help defray the cost for students to attend as well as ensure that hard-working undocumented students can pursue their education as Congress considers the DREAM Act and Immigration Reform.
- **Several states extend in-state tuition and federal law does NOT prohibit postsecondary educational institutions from admitting or offering in-state tuition to undocumented immigrant students.** States around the country recognize this, and nine have passed legislation specifically extending in-state tuition benefits regardless of citizenship status. While states are not required to accept undocumented students for postsecondary education as they are for K-12, they are certainly not prohibited from doing so. Federal law only addresses postsecondary educational *benefits*, a term that has been conclusively interpreted in federal courts to mean payments or transfers (such as financial aid and loans) to households or individuals.
- **Immigrant students deserve a chance to pursue their educational dreams on their way to U.S. citizenship.** The students that would benefit from this bill have already overcome significant obstacles to pursue higher education, including mastering English, excelling academically, and coming up with the money to pay the significant tuition costs without any financial aid. We benefit as a state from their dedication to preparing themselves to be productive members of our society. We must remember that the vast majority of these students will become U.S. citizens when they can finish weaving their way through the maze of immigration laws. It is in our best interest to encourage them to pursue an education on their way.