



Policy Brief: Tuition Equity

Instate tuition for undocumented youth in New Jersey is a matter of simple fairness and justice. The students for whom it makes a difference are New Jerseyans: they live here, they have been educated here, and overwhelmingly they intend to stay here and build careers and families. They are our neighbors and friends, our fellow New Jerseyans.

Their parents brought them to New Jersey. The actions of the parents have many different causes. Perhaps they needed to escape starvation or danger. Perhaps they had no economic opportunity at all in their native land. Whatever the reason, they came to New Jersey. While we in the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of New Jersey have compassion for these parents, this legislation is not about them. It is about their children, who themselves committed no willful act of illegal entry.

The legislation presently under consideration rightly requires New Jersey students who seek instate tuition and access to New Jersey financial aid to declare their intent to legalize their immigration status as soon as they can and to be eligible for the federal government's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. These requirements assure us that the New Jersey students helped here are those we want to help, those who want to build their lives in this country and overwhelmingly in this State, those who are here without a major blemish on their record.

The inclusion of access to financial aid is important, and we urge the Legislature to add this provision to the bill. Instate tuition helps a great deal, but without the financial aid provision many students would still not have the means to go to college, to study and make themselves fully ready for a promising career. Access to financial aid treats them as full participants in the promise of higher education. Taking a half step is not enough when a full step is available and ready.

Educating these young people is a financial investment in our State. It makes New Jersey more competitive; it makes a stronger and more able citizenry, right here in New Jersey. We need to do all we can to encourage these young people to reach their full potential, to become their best selves.

These young people are ours. They are growing up here, and they belong to all of us. They are part of our schools, part of our communities, and part of our State. We need to recognize the simple fairness and justice of acknowledging them as New Jerseyans.