



H.B. 2787—Tuition Equity

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

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Chair Dembrow, Vice Chair Huffman, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss tuition equity for Oregonians and to provide comments in support of House Bill 2787.

I joined the University of Oregon just six months ago after spending several decades as an administrator and faculty member at the University of Arizona and most recently at the University of California, Irvine. I am delighted that my first opportunity to testify formally before the Legislature is on a matter involving students and how best to sustain the educational aspirations of Oregon's high school graduates.

The conversation in which you are engaged is important and merits the serious consideration that you are giving it. The state supports higher education based on a theory: the theory of the relationship between the government and individuals, and the idea that economic and social mobility for individuals results in the betterment of society. It is a simple perspective and one that we know to be true.

It is the theory that impressed Abraham Lincoln, who took time out in the Civil War in 1862 to sign the Morrill Act, the legislation that created land grant universities and the national commitment to public research universities. President Lincoln knew higher education was the key to individual social and economic mobility, and as a consequence to the general public interests of our society. Access to education underlies the very idea of our democracy.

I believe that tuition equity is in this spirit—the long-held policy we have in public universities that access to education must not depend on status or stature. Tuition equity gives youth who have attended Oregon's schools, worked hard and earned a diploma a path to a future by allowing access to the same resident tuition rates as their peers. Their success enables Oregon's future.

California Assembly Bill 540

As you may know, California passed tuition equity legislation in 2001 and has tracked the effect of that measure ever since. California's decade of experience suggests that there is little risk and much good to be gained by enabling a state's youth who grow up and graduate from the state's high schools to attend the state's universities regardless of documentation status.

California Assembly Bill 540 (AB 540) is a California law enacted in 2001 to exempt students who meet certain eligibility requirements from paying nonresident tuition at California public colleges and universities, similar to those proposed in H.B.2787. AB 540 exempts students from paying nonresident tuition at California public colleges and universities if they meet all three of following requirements:

1. Attended a high school in California for three or more years.
2. Graduated from a California high school or received a High School Equivalency Certificate issued by the California State General Education Development (GED) Office, or received a Certificate of Proficiency resulting from the California High School Proficiency Examination.
3. Is a non-immigrant as defined by federal law; that is they do not hold a visa.

The third provision limits eligibility to U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, certain students with immigrant visas (including approved petitioners), and students with no legal immigration status such as undocumented students. AB 540 requires undocumented students who meet the other eligibility requirements to certify they are taking steps to legalize their immigration status or will do so as soon as they are eligible. In enacting AB 540, the state recognized that many high school students attended elementary and secondary schools in California for most of their lives and are likely to remain in the state, but are precluded from obtaining a more affordable college education because they are required to pay nonresident tuition.

So what was the impact of AB 540? The most recent report indicates that the number of students enrolled in the University of California under the provisions of their law has been about 600 undergraduate students. Overall, for the California State University, University of California and California Community Colleges systems, about one percent of all students were granted in state tuition rates under AB 540 in 2010. These students have been able to take advantage of higher education, with all the benefits to them and to the state in a way unlikely before the law. The financial impact on the University is quite modest, especially when compared to the benefits to individual students and their families.

It is important to recognize that AB 540 students continued to face greater challenges because of ineligibility for financial aid. Effective January 2013, AB 540 students are now eligible to receive private, institutional and state aid under legislation, AB 151, passed in 2011.

Conclusion

I applaud your leadership in making tuition equity a priority for early hearings. I believe that it is in Oregon's interest to enable all of our students to participate in higher education, to find their passion, define their purpose and then build the foundation for a life and a career. That is what public universities and resident tuition do, and that privilege should be extended to Oregon's youth who grow up here with a dream to live and work in the state that is their home.

Thank you for your attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.