



Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Maryland

Testimony in Support of SB 537 - Higher Education - Tuition Rates - Exemptions

TO: Chairman Pinsky and Members of the Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs Committee

FROM: Richard Kohn, Ph.D.

DATE: February 20, 2019

As a Unitarian Universalist, I affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and am committed to supporting justice, equity and compassion in human relations. I am a Professor at the University of Maryland in the Animal and Avian Sciences Department in the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources. I have taught and advised undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Maryland for the past 22 years, including pre-professional students who are taking a demanding and rigorous curriculum. I often advise students who transfer from community college.

I support this bill because I believe that allowing undocumented state residents to pay in-state tuition at any college in the state will benefit these residents, will benefit our local and state colleges and universities, and will benefit our state in general. The reason to give tax-paying undocumented immigrants in-state tuition is to help them attain the highest level of education possible. As students at our universities, they offer unique and diverse perspectives to our university communities, and as graduates they will be leaders and contributors to our state's economy.

Although attending a local community college is an excellent option for some students in certain majors, it is not the best option for every student. Community colleges do not offer coursework in every major, and obtaining an Associates' Degree before going on to a Bachelor's Degree can significantly increase the time and cost of education in some majors.

I support this bill to provide in-state tuition to undocumented students because of what these students can provide to our academic institutions. Undocumented students can only be admitted to our state universities if they have the grades and experiences to compete. These students have not only proven themselves to be hard-working and intelligent, but they also come from diverse backgrounds enabling them to provide our universities with their valuable perspective. Once they graduate, these individuals contribute to our state economy through their leadership, thus giving back to the state that subsidized their education.

On a personal note, some of my best teachers were immigrants, and I can't imagine that anyone could have taught subjects like social studies or foreign languages and cultures better than they could. Many of my colleagues at the University of Maryland are also immigrants, and our faculty is lucky to have some of the most talented experts in the world. Other immigrants use their education to become entrepreneurs or work for local businesses. We clearly benefit from the ability of talented immigrants to obtain a higher education, and we should strive to remove any unnecessary barriers placed on them.

Our state's economy is strong because of the strength of kindergarten to Ph.D. education in Maryland. Although everyone does not attend college or graduate school, everyone benefits from the education of experts and professionals in the state. There is simply no advantage to providing needless barriers to higher education for any students who want to pursue this path. These barriers may prevent some of the best students in the state from obtaining a higher education, and would weaken the state's economy.

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