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In-State Tuition At Risk for Virginia DREAMers; Study Finds Extending College Access a Low-Cost, High-Reward Investment

New report contrasts the low costs with large future economic benefits of boosting college attendance

RICHMOND, VA – The expected lifetime earnings of a Virginian with a bachelor’s degree is \$2.7 million, almost twice that of a Virginian who has a high school diploma but who has never attended college, according to a new report from The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, a fiscal and economic research organization in Richmond. The study also finds the cost to colleges and the state of providing access to in-state tuition for students with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals immigration status is small compared to the potential economic benefits.

“Creating real opportunity for all Virginians to pursue a college education provides significant returns to the students and the state without being a significant burden on Virginia’s colleges or taxpayers,” said Laura Goren, Research Director of The Commonwealth Institute.

In addition to the economic and fiscal benefits of expanding college attendance, the report shows that the number of DACA-approved students who are enrolling in public colleges and universities is modest compared to overall enrollment fluctuations at Virginia colleges.

About 1,300 immigrant students with DACA status were enrolled in public colleges and universities in Virginia in Fall 2016 according to the analysis. That’s about four out of every 1,000 students attending a Virginia public college or university. Most of these students--and their younger peers who are not yet college-age--are at risk of eventually losing access to in-state tuition with the expiration of the federal DACA program.

“I have lived in the state of Virginia for the 16 years I’ve been in this country. I am currently a junior at a Virginia four-year public institution working towards my degree that I plan on using to give back to my community,” said Paula Alderete, a student at George Mason University. “As a DACA-mented

immigrant, soon to lose the protection, I fear the uncertainty that lies ahead. Will I have to sacrifice my education because I cannot afford it?"

In April 2014, Attorney General Mark Herring announced that the state would allow students who have been shielded from deportation under the federal DACA program and otherwise meet the state's residency requirements to pay in-state tuition rates at Virginia colleges and universities, rather than higher out-of-state rates. Since then, Virginia legislators have rejected proposals to roll back in-state tuition for these young Virginians. But without state or federal action, the expiration of the federal DACA program would eliminate this in-state tuition access. The 2018 General Assembly session includes several bills to address this impending loss of in-state tuition.

"Under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program I'm able to qualify for in-state tuition but due to repeal of the program I'm faced with the reality that I won't be able to continue with a career path," said Yanet Limon-Amado, a student at Virginia Commonwealth University. "Our community in Virginia already meets all requirements for in-state tuition other than immigration status. Virginia should act to pass tuition equity legislation. It's not only common sense policy but would benefit our institutions of higher education and economy."

The full report, *In-State Tuition Is a Common Sense, Low-Cost Investment for Virginia*, is available at www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org.

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