

N.J. Senate puts off vote on college fees for illegal immigrants until Monday

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The state Senate has postponed a vote to Monday on whether illegal immigrants, who must pay out-of-state tuition to attend New Jersey public colleges, will be allowed to pay just the much lower in-state rates.

The Senate had scheduled a vote on the issue for Thursday, but after a long debate about legalizing gay marriage — a proposed bill that met defeat — legislators decided to table the in-state measure until next week.

Proponents of the in-state bill said they were not disappointed and noted the delay would them give still more time to make their case for giving undocumented students better access to public colleges.

“We’ve waited eight years to have this vote,” said Cid Wilson, vice chairman of the board of trustees for Bergen Community College and a vocal supporter of the bill. “We can wait a few more days.”

The bill would benefit an estimated 2,000 illegal immigrants, those who support the measure say. Those advocates add that those immigrants sometimes must forego college because of their inability to pay out-of-state rates. Those rates are often twice as high as in-state tuition, which is about \$11,000 for a four-year public university.

“It’s going to be tough,” said Wilson, of Leonia. “If it passes, I think it will be very close. We need to remind the legislators that this is not an immigration bill; it’s an education bill.”

Under the proposed measure, illegal immigrants could attend college at in-state tuition rates if they show they have gone to a high school in the state for at least three years, received a high diploma or its equivalent from a state school and provide an affidavit saying that they have applied to immigration authorities to legalize their status.

“There are no special privileges here [for undocumented immigrants],” said Charles “Shai” Goldstein, executive director of the New Jersey Immigration Policy Network, a major proponent of the campaign in support the bills. “The bill has been redrafted over the years to make it as strict as possible.”

Legislation languished in both houses of the state legislature for years.

But the issue got a boost last year when an immigration advisory panel convened by Governor Jon Corzine included among its key recommendations that illegal immigrants be permitted to attend college at the same rate as other New Jersey residents.