



# Dream Act would provide aid to illegal immigrants

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ALBANY —

Legislation to provide financial aid and other assistance to college-bound illegal immigrants is gaining political support in New York a year after the idea withered in Albany and Washington.

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act is being pushed by powerful Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver. Now, fellow Democrat Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Republicans who share control of the state Senate are interested in discussing the bill.

Known as the Dream Act, the bill would provide a way to help poor immigrant families afford college through the state Tuition Assistance Plan and academic assistance programs. It would also create a commission to raise money for scholarships.

“Our immigrant families, like many struggling in these trying economic times, need financial help to achieve their educational goals,” said Silver. “Investing in these inspiring students represents an investment in our future.”

Immigrant community leaders and Latino legislators say national and state political trends are helping their cause. In New York, the Latino vote has been courted by Republicans and Democrats.

“We can no longer exclude New York’s Dream youth from the promise of higher education afforded their classmates,” said Chung-Wah Hong, executive director of The New York Immigration Coalition.

New York would join Texas, New Mexico and California in offering financial aid to immigrant children, including illegal immigrants. In New York, lower in-state resident tuition at public colleges has been offered since 2002 to illegal immigrants. A federal Dream Act proposal that would provide federal financial aid to college-bound immigrants and a pathway to citizenship for younger adults has been stalled by Republican opposition in Congress.

New York's proposal is expected to be debated by the Legislature in its budget negotiations and could surface as early as Cuomo's budget presentation on Tuesday if he endorses the idea. The roughly \$132 billion budget is forecast to have a deficit of more than \$1 billion.

Senate Republican spokesman Scott Reif said the GOP conference, which balked last year because of cost, will consider several proposals, including Silver's.

This year, the Senate majority is controlled by an alliance between Republicans and breakaway Democrats that is expected to send more progressive proposals like the Dream Act to floor votes.

Jeffrey Klein, a Bronx-Westchester Democrat who is among the chamber's leaders, is making a top priority of the Dream Act. His proposal would provide \$19.5 million a year for the state financial aid from a licensing fee on the proposed expansion of casino gambling. He estimates the fee could generate \$28 million to fund the academic assistance programs in the act and create the commission to raise money for scholarships.

"We have a tremendous opportunity to help educate thousands of smart young people from around the world who have moved here to pursue the American dream," he said.

Cuomo proposed three upstate casinos in his State of the State address earlier this month, but he wants to devote all the money to schools and the counties and municipalities where casinos are built.

The labor-backed, progressive Fiscal Policy Institute estimates the cost of the Dream Act to be \$17 million a year, while the Senate Republicans a year ago estimated the cost at as much as \$30 million.

Advocates have estimated the cost at \$20 million.