

DAILY NEWS

New York

Governor still refuses to say whether he will support funding for New York State DREAM Act in 2014 budget



Cuomo remains uncommitted even though bill has 22 sponsors in Senate and Assembly Dems have allocated \$25 million to provide tuition assistance to many undocumented immigrants who want to attend college

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CHRISTIE M. FARRIELLA FOR DAILY NEWS

Gov. Cuomo has yet to say whether he'll pony up and fund state DREAM Act, which would provide financial to undocumented immigrants who have their sights set on college.

Will Gov. Cuomo finally allocate funds in the state budget to make it possible for immigrant students to attend college? Or will he continue to avoid taking a position on an issue that's vital to the future of thousands of young New Yorkers?

That is the question New York DREAMers, whose future could very well depend on the governor's decision, are anxiously asking .

So far the Governor is keeping his mouth shut. Not even the fact that Assembly Democrats included \$25 million in the upcoming spending plan to fund a state DREAM Act has been enough for Cuomo to take a position.

"As DREAMer from New York whose dream is to attend college and accomplish my goal of one day becoming a lawyer, I am thrilled to hear that the New York state Assembly is including the DREAM Act in the budget," said Katherine Tabares, a Make the Road New York Dreamer.

Tabares, who was born in Colombia, is a 3.9 GPA student at LaGuardia Community College. In a few months she will transfer to Hunter College.

"However, due to my immigration status, there is no funding offered by the state government for me to continue my higher education journey," Tabares said.

If the Senate — where the bill already has 22 sponsors — and the governor do their part and include funding for the DREAM Act in their budgets, as the Assembly did, Tabares' problem — and that of 200,000 other students in New York State — would be resolved.

"This is an investment that will enrich our future, strengthen our economy and help thousands of our children realize their dreams," said Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver (D-Manhattan).

The New York Dream Act would not give undocumented students a path to legalization or citizenship. What it would do is expand the state's Tuition Assistance Program to include qualified, undocumented young people in New York who, like Tabares, are striving for a higher education.

Undocumented students already qualify for resident tuition status for universities and colleges in the state and city systems, but they can't apply for state-backed financial aid.

"The New York State DREAM Act is going to open the doors for young undocumented New Yorkers to pursue their American Dream like generations that came before them," said Assemblyman Francisco Moya (D-Queens), a sponsor of the act.

Last Monday, Democratic state Sens. Adriano Espaillat, Rubén Díaz, Martin Malavé Dilán, José Serrano and Gustavo Rivera called on Cuomo to include the state DREAM Act in the budget.

"For what would amount to a budget increase of roughly one-hundredth of one percent, we can extend New York's Tuition Assistance Program to every New York student who wants to go to college," the senators said in a joint statement.

Citing a study by the Fiscal Policy Institute that affirms that bachelor's degree holders pay an additional \$3,900 in annual state taxes, the legislators assured Cuomo that TAP funding for the undocumented would more than pay for itself within six years.

"The New York State DREAM Act is the smartest, soundest investment that we can possibly make in workforce development and our state's future," the senators said.

Peralta, who filed a motion last Monday to require the state Senate's Higher Education Committee to vote on the bill, wrote in a separate letter to the Governor: "Giving DREAMers a chance to succeed, is not only morally right, it is a savvy financial investment."

Yes, it is. Hopefully, Cuomo will be faithful to New York's progressive history and include funds for the DREAM Act in the state budget.

The Governor's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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