

Assembly Higher Education Committee Hearing

Tuesday, March 15th at 1:30 PM

State Capitol, Room 437

Chairman Block, Assemblyman Cedillo, and Committee Members,

I am Robert Birgeneau, Chancellor of the University of California, Berkeley.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today on behalf of Assemblyman Cedillo's bill, AB 130.

The University of California supported AB 540 because we believe that the education of undocumented students benefits not just individuals, but also our state. By allowing undocumented students, who are products of California high schools and have earned admission to college, to pay the same tuition and fees as their fellow California residents, we not only treat our young people justly and fairly, but also reap for the state the benefit of its considerable investment in their education.

I consider it an honor to represent these worthy students from my campus. They are pursuing the dream of higher education and the hope of contributing to our state and our nation as productive citizens.

Although AB 540 opens the doors of higher education in a way that allows many more students to achieve their full potential, AB 540 is not enough absent some financial assistance. The vast majority of undocumented students come from low-income families and are unable to pay the full cost of their education. Without aid, the cost of attending Berkeley, for fees, housing, books, etc. is around \$31,000 per year. In many cases, this can be more than the total family incomes of undocumented students. Lack of aid places unduly heavy work and loan burdens on undocumented students. By comparison, their fellow California residents who qualify for aid from families with low incomes are required to contribute only \$8,500 to their education through work-study and loans.

That is why I am grateful for Assemblyman Cedillo authoring this bill, AB 130.

AB 130 would allow for all students who qualify for a nonresident tuition exemption under AB 540 to be eligible to compete for scholarships that are paid for with private donor funds and awarded by the University.

As Chancellor, I have personally interacted with many prospective donors who have great sympathy for the challenges faced by undocumented students and would readily provide scholarship support. AB 130 is critical to allowing the University lawfully to give financially needy undocumented students the opportunity to receive scholarships to support their education.

UC Berkeley students are truly some of California's best and brightest—they are our state's future. This includes our undocumented students who need your help to overcome the obstacles of financing a public higher education.

AB 130 is a critical component of ensuring that these students can attend UC Berkeley, and achieve degrees that allow them to contribute to the economic and social vitality of our state. Ultimately, of course, federal legislation will be required for these deserving students to obtain citizenship.

At Berkeley, it has been my privilege to get to know a number of these students.

Many undocumented students do not realize their status until they arrive at university. One student whom I met learned for the first time that he was undocumented when he moved to Berkeley from a community college and applied for financial aid. Determined to obtain a Berkeley degree, he took on a full-time job. This burden together with the stress of being a transfer student, led to a nervous breakdown. With the help of an outside agency, he was able to graduate. I never saw a person who was more proud of his degree!

Our undocumented students are people with tremendous initiative and courage who are willing to work very hard for their education. Sadly, they are carrying burdens far beyond what we expect of our other students. They need and deserve our support.

Again I want to thank Assemblyman Cedillo for introducing AB 130. I also thank Chairman Block and the other Committee members for giving this bill your consideration.

I respectfully request on behalf of UC Berkeley that you support this bill.

Thank you.