



Comments before the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee
House Bill 2787 – Tuition Equity
By Jeff Stone, Executive Director
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March 19, 2013

Chair Hass, members of the committee, my name is Jeff Stone and I serve as the Executive Director of the Oregon Association of Nurseries. I am pleased to lend the nursery and greenhouse industry's support to House Bill 2787 and move the state forward on issues impacting our undocumented youth in the state.

The economic footprint of the nursery and greenhouse industry

The nursery and greenhouse industry remains the state's largest agricultural sector despite a severe economic downturn. As the nation's second largest nursery state with over \$744 million in sales, our growers ship their products throughout the country. Nearly 75% of nursery stock grown in our state leaves our borders – with over half reaching markets east of the Mississippi River. Nursery association members represent wholesale and Christmas tree growers, retailers and greenhouse operations. Our members have spent generations as stewards of the state's natural resources. We believe that economic vitality can go hand in hand with sustainability and long-term environmental health. Our top grossing nursery operations reside within the counties of Clackamas, Marion, Washington, Yamhill and Multnomah. While we have statewide reach with the numerous agricultural suppliers – if you think of nursery operations our main footprint is from Boring to Medford.

Agriculture is a critical part of the Oregon economy. It represents 15% of the state's economy, 1 in every 8 jobs, and Oregon State University's study estimates gross farm and ranch sales at \$5.255 billion for 2011, an all-time record.

Tuition equity has very real human, social and economic consequences

The OAN believes that access educational attainment directly results in increased earnings. By providing instate tuition we stand a greater chance of strengthening the state's economy.

The communities of the undocumented individuals in our state are consumers, pay taxes, work at restaurants, nurseries, dairies and a variety of jobs throughout the private sector economy. There are very real economic consequences to the economy of the state if we lose a workforce and serious impacts on the social and human side of equation by forcing bright minds, regardless of country of origin, to encounter barriers to education and success.

The Oregonians who will benefit from HB 2787 already are part of the fabric of our communities. Their families work for local businesses, shop at our local grocery stores and attend our local public schools. President Barack Obama has already bestowed approval to children brought to the United States to be able to seek educational opportunity and Oregon should do its part.

Tuition equity makes college attainable to undocumented children

Oregon needs to be a state where intellect and determination is the metric for success. It is important that the opponents and proponents of tuition equity understand that the bill does not provide free tuition to undocumented students. HB 2787 does not provide a discount over their Oregon peers or displace any qualified students. Moreover, passage of the bill will not result in awards of state or federal financial aid or subsidized loans. Finally, passage of tuition equity does not guarantee admission to any Oregon university.

What passage of this bill does is give a talented student and opportunity to improve their educational goals and be supportive of children who have only known Oregon as their home.

It is time to pass tuition equity in Oregon

OAN urges the Oregon legislature to extend the opportunity for higher education to all students who are part of Oregon's communities, regardless of their immigration status. Better education will result in a stronger economic and improve our community.

We give a lot of credit to legislators who have been steadfast advocates for tuition equity. Senate President Peter Courtney deserves special recognition for seeing this issue clearly 10 years ago. It takes time to pass legislation and this bill's time has arrived.

The Oregon Association of Nurseries encourages you to favorably consider House Bill 2787. We are proud to support this bill alongside a coalition of business and education advocates.