

Chicago Tribune, August 2, 2011 (Page 1 of 2)

## **For undocumented immigrants, 1 barrier to college falls**

### **Quinn signs DREAM Act, which sets up fund for private scholarships**

By Monique Garcia, Tribune reporter  
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Gov. Pat Quinn on Monday signed a measure into law creating a privately funded scholarship program for documented and undocumented immigrants, a move supporters hailed as a civil rights victory as other states have recently moved in the other direction on immigration.

The Illinois DREAM Act creates a nine-member commission that will oversee the scholarship fund, which is aimed at removing one of the biggest barriers to higher education for immigrants: cost.

"It is a special day, a historic day, a landmark day where we in Illinois, the Land of Lincoln ... we say to all people of our country and our state, we want everybody in, and nobody left out," Quinn said during a bill-signing ceremony in the Pilsen neighborhood.

The measure narrowly passed the House and easily passed the Senate. Some opponents said they worried such a law would encourage illegal immigration to Illinois, while others said they were reflecting voters' opinions back in their districts.

To qualify for the private scholarships, students must have attended school in Illinois for at least three years, received a high school diploma and have at least one parent who immigrated to the United States. The scholarships will be good at both private and public colleges in the state.

The new law also allows families of immigrant students to participate in the state's two college tuition savings programs and requires high school counselors to take training on ways to help undocumented students find ways to pay for college.

"We need information," said Arianna Salgado, an undocumented immigrant who said she was told by a counselor she would not be able to go to college because she would not qualify for financial aid. That didn't deter Salgado, who recently graduated from high school and plans to attend Dominican University in the fall, thanks to private scholarships.

"Now I know that our high school and college counselors acknowledge us and know that we exist and will be able to inform us more," said Salgado, who spoke at the ceremony and drew a standing ovation. "We deserve the same opportunities to continue with our higher education because we have the same dedication and commitment as our peers."

But getting in to college is only part of the battle because undocumented students face an uncertain work future once they graduate.

"The reality is I am in grad school, but I have one more year to graduate and I don't know what to do next," said Tania Unzueta, a 27-year-old student at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Unzueta said the inability to enter the workforce means students stay in school longer until they can figure out their next move or wait for laws to change.

Chicago Tribune, August 2, 2011 (Page 2 of 2)

Supporters say that's why they will continue to fight for comprehensive immigration reform in Washington, noting the new state law is an important but small step forward.

"Each generation must be allowed to participate in all of the opportunities that America has to offer in order for freedom to advance," said Rep. Edward Acevedo, a Chicago Democrat who sponsored the legislation. "If you live here, if you came here for a better life, if you dedicate yourself to the American dream, you are an American, and our nation depends on it."