

AB 1780

Ending Legacy Admissions

Assemblymember
Phil Ting
19TH DISTRICT



SUMMARY

California is home to many of the nation's premier colleges and universities. Attendance at these universities is prized because they ostensibly only admit the most meritorious students. But some private universities in California still give significant preferential treatment to students who are related to alumni or donors through a practice known as "legacy admissions". AB 1780 tackles this issue by prohibiting the use of legacy admissions in California.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, the "Operation Varsity Blues" scandal highlighted the lengths wealthy parents will go to get their children into elite universities. That particular case included committing the crimes of fraud and bribery. But this scandal also highlighted the many *legal* ways wealth and social connections skew the college admissions process. In response, the Governor signed AB 697 (Ting) in 2019 to bring transparency to the use of legacy admissions in California.

Legacy admissions have again come back to the forefront with the 2023 Supreme Court decision banning the use of affirmative action policies in admissions. Affirmative action policies are intended to improve educational and employment opportunities for traditionally marginalized groups. With this decision, the concern over how legacy admissions benefit the already privileged has resulted in nationwide conversations about stopping the practice.

Studies show legacy admissions practices disproportionately benefit wealthy and white applicants. A 2023 study used parental tax returns and college attendance records to evaluate the

impact of affluence on admissions outcomes. The research showed that, among students with the same test scores, universities admitted affluent students at higher rates than their less affluent peers. Further analysis at Harvard has shown that roughly three quarters of white legacy admits would likely not have been accepted without their connections, with over 43% of all white admits benefiting from preferential treatment.

These recent revelations have sparked efforts around the country to stop the inequitable practice of legacy admissions – with legislatures in Connecticut, Maryland, New York, Virginia, and Massachusetts all introducing legislation designed to address the problem.

THIS BILL

The state subsidizes tuition, research, and overall development of California's higher education institutions to promote educational equity and provide social mobility for all Californians. Institutions that give special advantage to the family of alumni or donors are engaging in a practice that directly conflicts with those goals while continuing to receive public funding.

AB 1780 continues the work of AB 697 (Ting) by prohibiting private colleges and universities from giving preference to legacy and/or donor applicants and enacting a civil penalty in the amount of Cal Grant funds received in the preceding year. This will ensure that all Californians will be given fair opportunity to be admitted to their dream school, regardless of who their parents are.

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SUPPORT

- Asian Americans Advancing Justice Southern California (Co-Sponsor)
- Campaign for College Opportunity (Co-Sponsor)
- College For All Coalition (Co-Sponsor)
- Diversify Our Narrative (Co-Sponsor)
- GENup (Co-Sponsor)
- Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE) (Co-Sponsor)
- uAspire (Co-Sponsor)
- AAPI Equity Alliance
- Alliance for a Better Community
- AAPIs for Civic Empowerment
- California Charter Schools Association (CCSA)
- Center for Asian Americans in Action
- Center for Empowering Refugees and Immigrants
- Class Action
- Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC)
- Faith and Community Empowerment
- Koreatown Youth and Community Center
- Latino and Latina Roundtable of the San Gabriel and Pomona Valley
- Los Angeles United Methodist Urban Foundation
- San Fernando Valley Young Democrats
- Southeast Asia Resource Action Center
- Thai Community Development Center
- University of California Student Association

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