

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 stops the use of legacy admissions in California by prohibiting institutions that still practice it from being publically subsidized through the Cal Grant program.

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 Cal Grant program was created to promote educational equity and access for all Californians by using public dollars to subsidize the cost of higher education. 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 by prohibiting colleges and universities that give preference to legacy and/or donor applicants from receiving public Cal Grant dollars. This will ensure that public dollars are only being spent at institutions that give all Californians a fair opportunity to be admitted to their dream school, regardless of who their parents are.

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