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'Dreamers' appeal to AG

Young undocumented immigrants protest in-state-tuition suit



Beatriz Molina burns a copy of a high-school diplo- ma to protest Attorney General Tom Horne's suit vs. Maricopa Community Colleges.

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'Dreamers' protest outside Ariz. Attorney General's Office

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By Daniel Gonzalez

One by one, they set fire to copies of high-school diplomas on Tuesday outside the offices of Arizona Attorney General Tom Horne.

The 50 protesters then placed ashes from the burned diplomas inside an urn and attempted to deliver them to Horne, claiming he is "burning up" the dreams of young undocumented immigrants who want to attend college.

It was the latest in a series of escalating protests by young undocumented immigrants known as "dreamers" and their supporters in an attempt to persuade Horne to drop his lawsuit against the Maricopa County Community College District.

Horne filed a lawsuit in June to block the community college district's policy that allows undocumented students to pay in-state tuition if they receive federal work permits under President Barack Obama's deferred-action program. The program allows young undocumented immigrants to stay in the U.S. temporarily without the threat of deportation.

Horne says the policy violates a state law approved by voters in 2006 that bars undocumented immigrants from paying in-state tuition.

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Stephanie Grisham, Horne's spokeswoman, said Horne would not drop the lawsuit

The community-college district says the policy complies with state law because undocumented immigrants approved for Obama's program receive federal work permits, and state law says those documents are acceptable to establish proof of legal presence for tuition purposes.

Pima Community College has adopted a similar policy allowing deferred action recipients to pay in-state tuition.

Horne is considering filing a lawsuit against Pima Community College as well, Grisham said. In October, Horne's office sent a letter to college officials asking them to explain how the college is providing in-state tuition to deferred-action recipients without violating state law.

During Tuesday's protest, four people were arrested by Arizona Department of Public Safety officers after they refused orders to leave the lobby of the attorney general's office in Phoenix after the building had closed. Another three people were arrested during a similar protest at the attorney general's offices in Tucson, according to organizers of the protests.

The protests were timed to a court hearing scheduled for today to determine the schedule for the lawsuit.

In recent weeks, 11 other people have been arrested during protests at the attorney general's offices, organizers say.

On Tuesday, dreamers and supporters burned copies of a high-school diploma and a graduation cap and gown to symbolize the waste of education for undocumented immigrants who attended public school in Arizona but won't be able to afford college if they have to pay out-ofstate tuition, said Beto Soto, field director for Citizens for a Better Arizona, the group that organized the protests.

"They are burning diplomas because that is the message that Tom Horne is telling them," Soto said. "That all of the investment in their education ... was for nothing.'

Raquel Guerrero, 26, an undocumented immigrant brought to the U.S. from Mexico when she was 2, received deferred action in February.

She is enrolled at Estrella Mountain Community College in Avondale after receiving deferred status in February.

If Horne's lawsuit is successful, her tuition will more than triple, she said.

The district charges \$81 per credit for in-state tuition compared with \$322 per credit for out-of-state tuition, according to the MCCCD website.

"I'm going to be priced out of school," said Guerrero, who spoke at the protest in Phoenix.

Obama's program took effect on Aug. 15, 2012. It is intended to protect so-called dreamers undocumented immigrants brought to the U.S. as minors — from deportation if they meet certain criteria. Those approved for the program can remain temporarily in the U.S. for two years and also receive federal work permits.

As of Aug. 7, at least 15,798 undocumented immigrants in Arizona had received deferred action.

Maricopa County Community College District does not keep track of the number of deferred-action recipients enrolled in the district's 10 colleges and two skills centers. But the number is in the hundreds, said Tom Gariepy, a district spokesman.

Of the nearly 27,000 students at Pima College for the fall 2013 semester, there were 155 deferred-action recipients, the college told Horne in a letter.

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