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Prop 300 a threat to Adult Education

Ian Cross, Aztec Press

A significant number of Pima Community College students could become ineligible for adult education classes and in-state tuition rates if a ballot initiative is passed by the voters of Arizona on November 7.

If Proposition 300 passes, any Arizona resident unable to show proof of citizenship will be ineligible for in-state tuition rates and Adult Education courses at Pima or any other state university or college, according to the text of the proposition.

In addition, the amendment to the Arizona Constitution would prevent undocumented residents from receiving childcare subsidies.

Greg Hart, the Dean of Adult Education at PCC said, "Proposition 300 has enormous implications, not only for PCC Adult Education, but for the college, the university, and the state."

"Some number of people, and in many cases perhaps people who have been here for many years, will not be able to participate in adult education, be it to take English language classes or to get their GED, or even to learn to read and write," Hart said.

There are currently around 10,000 people in the Adult Education program at PCC. About 6,000 of those students are currently enrolled in some type of English as a Second Language course, according to Hart.

If Prop. 300 passes, undocumented students out of high school looking to enroll at Pima would become ineligible for in-state tuition. "Unless they can afford a college education that is 4 or 5 times what state residents are getting, they will have no access to higher education," Hart said.

In spite of the possible effects to Pima, the proposition's language still leaves much about the enforcement of the laws unclear, according to PCC Director of Government Relations Jacquelyn Jackson.

The text of the initiative does not specify how colleges are supposed to check the citizenship status of their students. "We really are going to see, if it passes, what the interpretive language

says,” Jackson said, “It's not that specific.”

“We don't know, for example, if people are going to have to bring in birth certificates or passports, we just don't know yet. I suspect that maybe driver's licenses may not be adequate,” Greg Hart said.

One condition of Prop. 300 is that colleges and universities would be required to report statistics on the number of students they turn away. The college only has to report the number of students, not any specific information about them. ”You don't have to name names,” Jackson said.

Hart, Jackson, and others are preparing for the consequences if the proposition does pass. “We are meeting internally as a group - coming up with what we believe will be some of the challenges if Proposition 300 passes. How will we handle the challenge of discovering whether people are citizens or legal residents?” Hart said.

Hart said that they are working with several scenarios of what would happen if Proposition 300 passes. “If we lose X number of students, how will we reorient ourselves in the community, what resources will be differently applied?” Hart said is one of the questions they are asking themselves.

While Pima prepares for the consequences of Proposition 300, several individuals and groups are working to support or speak out against Proposition 300.

State Sen. Dean Martin, a Republican from Phoenix's sixth district, sponsored the proposition. “Arizona is currently giving away millions of your tax dollars as subsidies to illegals,” Martin said.

Sen. Martin argued that illegal immigrants are unfairly getting state-subsidized tuition benefits while out-of-state students are required to pay the full cost of tuition.

This is not an issue of racial, ethnic, or national background, said Sen. Martin, “This is only about whether or not you follow the law in getting here.”

The 2004 Act “Protect Arizona Now” was supposed to end these types of benefits for undocumented residents, Sen. Martin said, but Gov. Napolitano created several “loopholes” around this legislation.

A bill that was intended to close these loopholes was vetoed by the governor last year, Sen. Martin said, “Now you have a chance to override the Governor's veto,” Sen. Martin said.

On Tuesday, September 26, the Pima County Interfaith Council met to discuss the implications of Proposition 300. The group stands firmly against the initiative, and the group met to organize a campaign against Prop. 300.

“If Prop. 300 passes, children, youth and hard-working Arizonans will suffer,” said Andrea Robson, co-chair of the Pima County Interfaith Council. “Prop. 300 would deny childcare to

children who are American citizens. Current law already requires that children must be citizens to receive a childcare subsidy.”

If Prop. 300 passes, both the children and the children's parents will have to show proof of citizenship in order to receive childcare benefits. “This proposal would strip American children of their rights,” Robson said.

The Pima County Interfaith Council's stance is that there would be negative effects on the state's higher education facilities. “This is an unfunded mandate that will divert funds from instruction and harm all students,” Robson said.

The group argued that there would be negative consequences for adult education, as well. “This bill would prohibit many immigrant parents from learning English, which they know is essential for full participation in American society,” Robson said.

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