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Kate M. Manuel
Congressional Research Service

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Unlawfully Present Aliens, Higher Education, In-State Tuition, and Financial Aid: Legal Analysis

Abstract

[Excerpt] State measures that would *deny* or *provide* access to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid to unlawfully present aliens have been challenged on various grounds. While these grounds can vary depending upon the specific statute or practice in question, the grounds most commonly asserted appear to be violations of the Equal Protection and Supremacy Clauses of the U.S. Constitution. Thus, these provisions are the focus of discussion in this report, and the following paragraphs provide an overview of the basic principles implicated in discussions of equal protection and preemption.

Keywords

unlawfully present aliens, higher education, financial aid, state tuition, equal protection

Comments

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Unlawfully Present Aliens, Higher Education, In-State Tuition, and Financial Aid: Legal Analysis

Kate M. Manuel
Legislative Attorney

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Summary

The existence of a sizable population of “DREAMers” in the United States has prompted questions about unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility for admission to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid. The term *DREAMer* is widely used to describe aliens who were brought to the United States as children and raised here but lack legal immigration status. As children, DREAMers are entitled to public elementary and secondary education as a result of the Supreme Court’s 1982 decision in *Plyler v. Doe*. There, the Court struck down a Texas statute that prohibited the use of state funds to provide elementary and secondary education to children who were not “legally admitted” to the United States because the state distinguished between these children and other children without a “substantial” goal, in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Once DREAMers complete high school, however, they may have less access to public higher education. *Plyler’s* holding was limited to elementary and secondary education, and the Court’s focus on the young age of those whom Texas denied a “basic education” has generally been taken to mean that measures denying unlawfully present aliens access to higher education may be subject to less scrutiny than the Texas statute was. Thus, several states have adopted laws or practices barring the enrollment of unlawfully present aliens at public institutions of higher education. In addition, Congress has enacted two statutes that restrict unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility for “public benefits,” a term which has generally been construed to encompass in-state tuition and financial aid. The first of these statutes, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA, P.L. 104-193) bars the provision of “state and local public benefits” to unlawfully present aliens unless the state enacts legislation that “affirmatively provides” for their eligibility. The second, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA, P.L. 104-208) bars states from providing “postsecondary education benefits” to unlawfully present aliens based on their residence in the state unless all U.S. citizens or nationals are eligible for such benefits, regardless of their state of residence.

State measures that variously *deny* or *grant* access to public higher education, in-state tuition, or financial aid have been challenged on the grounds that they violate the Equal Protection Clause, like the Texas measure at issue in *Plyler*. They have also been alleged to violate the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which establishes that federal law is “the supreme Law of the Land” and may preempt any incompatible provisions of state law. Based on the case law to date, it would appear that states do not, as a general matter, violate the Equal Protection or Supremacy Clauses by excluding unlawfully present aliens from public institutions of higher education. On the other hand, access to public higher education has generally not been construed as a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA, such that it may only be provided to unlawfully present aliens if a state enacts legislation that affirmatively provides for their eligibility.

In-state tuition and financial aid have generally been seen as public benefits for purposes of PRWORA. However, courts have rejected the view that state statutes providing in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens are preempted unless they expressly refer to PRWORA, or to unlawfully present aliens being eligible. Courts have also found that IIRIRA does not bar states from providing in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens who complete a certain number of years of high school in the state and satisfy other criteria. In one case, the court reached this conclusion because it construed IIRIRA as barring only the provision of in-state tuition based on residence in the state, not based on other factors. In another case, the court found that IIRIRA did not create a private right of action such that individuals may sue to enforce alleged violations.

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The existence of a sizable population of “DREAMers” in the United States¹ has prompted questions about unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility for admission to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid. The term *DREAMer* is widely used to describe aliens who were brought to the United States as children and raised here but lack legal immigration status.² As children, DREAMers are entitled to public elementary and secondary education as a result of the Supreme Court’s 1982 decision in *Plyler v. Doe*.³ There, the Court struck down a Texas statute that prohibited the use of state funds to provide elementary and secondary education to children who were not “legally admitted” to the United States because the state distinguished between these children and other children without a “substantial” goal, in violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.⁴ The *Plyler* Court did not, however, purport to address unlawfully present aliens’ access to higher education, and several states subsequently adopted laws or practices barring their enrollment at public institutions of higher education.⁵ Congress has also restricted unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility for “public benefits,” a term which has generally been construed to include in-state tuition and financial aid.⁶

Emphasizing DREAMers’ ties to the United States, including their attendance at public elementary and secondary schools,⁷ some would permit them to remain in the United States legally, or expand their access to higher education. For example, in every Congress since the 109th, Members have introduced versions of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act—from which DREAMers take their name—that would create a pathway to citizenship for them, as well as remove certain restrictions on states’ ability to grant in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens.⁸ No such legislation has been enacted by Congress to date.⁹

¹ For estimates as to the number of persons who might benefit from enactment of some version of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, see generally CRS Report RL33863, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Issues and “DREAM Act” Legislation*, by Andorra Bruno.

² See, e.g., Immigration Policy Center, *Who and Where the DREAMers Are*, available at <http://www.immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/who-and-where-dreamers-are> (last accessed: Mar. 5, 2013).

³ 457 U.S. 202 (1982).

⁴ *Id.* at 205. The Texas measure was also amended, following its enactment, to authorize local school districts to deny enrollment to children who were not “legally admitted” to the United States.

⁵ See, e.g., ARIZ. REV. STAT. §15-1803(B) (“In accordance with the illegal immigration reform and immigrant responsibility act of 1996 ..., a person who is not a citizen or legal resident of the United States or who is without lawful immigration status is not entitled to classification as an in-state student.”); GA. CODE ANN. §50-36-1(a)(4)(A)(i) (defining *public benefit* to include adult education). The Georgia provision was challenged as part of the litigation in *Georgia Latino Alliance for Human Rights v. Deal*. See No. 1:11-CV-1804, Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief: Class Action (filed N.D. Ga., June 2, 2011). However, its enforcement, as to enrollment at public institutions of higher education, does not appear to have been affected by that litigation.

⁶ See Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), P.L. 104-193, tit. IV, §§401-435, 110 Stat. 2261-2276 (Aug. 22, 1996) (generally codified, as amended, in 8 U.S.C. §§1601-1646); Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), P.L. 104-208, Div. C, tit. V, subtit. A, §505, 110 Stat. 3009-672 (Sept. 30, 1996) (codified at 8 U.S.C. §1623). Neither PRWORA nor Section 505 of IIRIRA amended the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), so citations to them reference only Title 8 of the *United States Code*.

⁷ Cf. Juan Carlos Guzmán & Raúl C. Jara, *The Economic Benefits of Passing the DREAM Act*, Center for American Progress, Oct. 2012, available at <http://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/DREAMEcon-7.pdf>.

⁸ For discussion of the various DREAM Act bills, see CRS Report RL33863, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Issues and “DREAM Act” Legislation*, by Andorra Bruno; and CRS Report R43335, *Unauthorized Alien Students: Legislation in the 109th and 110th Congresses*, by Andorra Bruno. Versions of the DREAM Act would generally repeal Section 505 of IIRIRA, which bars states from providing “postsecondary education benefits” to unlawfully present aliens based on their residence within the state unless other U.S. citizens or nationals are eligible for such benefits, regardless of their state of residence. See, e.g., DREAM Act of 2011, H.R. 1842, 112th Cong., at §8(b). However, because of how Section 505 has been construed by the courts to date, it has arguably not served as a significant barrier to states’ ability to grant (continued...)

However, several states have passed their own DREAM Acts, which permit some DREAMers to receive in-state tuition or, less commonly, state financial aid¹⁰ (but cannot provide a pathway to citizenship because Congress has exclusive power over naturalization¹¹). The Obama Administration also began granting deferred action—a type of relief from removal—to qualifying DREAMers in 2012.¹²

Others, however, emphasize DREAMers' presence in the United States in violation of federal immigration law, and seek to ensure that public benefits are made available only to U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs), and lawfully present nonimmigrants.¹³ Several states have, for example, adopted measures barring unlawfully present aliens from attending public institutions of higher education.¹⁴ Certain states have also reiterated, or sought to expand upon, existing prohibitions upon unlawfully present aliens' receipt of public benefits in order to ensure that they do not receive in-state tuition or state financial aid.¹⁵

This report surveys key legal issues pertaining to unlawfully present alien students' access to higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid. It supersedes CRS Report RS22500,

(...continued)

in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens. See *infra* notes 106-113 and accompanying text.

⁹ The comprehensive immigration bill passed by the Senate (S. 744) in the 113th Congress includes provisions that would provide some DREAMers with a pathway to citizenship. See generally CRS Report R43097, *Comprehensive Immigration Reform in the 113th Congress: Major Provisions in Senate-Passed S. 744*, by Ruth Ellen Wasem.

¹⁰ See, e.g., 110 ILL. COMP. STAT. §660/5-88(a) (“[F]or tuition purposes, the Board shall deem an individual an Illinois resident ..., if ... [t]he individual graduated from a public or private high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma in this State ... [and] [t]he individual attended school in this State for at least 3 years as of the date the individual graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma ...”); MD. EDUC. CODE ANN. §15-106.8(b) & (c) (similar). Many state DREAM Acts require that unlawfully present aliens file an affidavit stating that they have submitted an application to legalize their status, or will submit an application as soon as they are able to do so. See, e.g., CAL. EDUC. CODE §68130.5(a)(4). However, opponents of state DREAM Acts have noted that these requirements have little practical significance because unlawfully present alien students generally cannot legalize under current law. See, e.g., Kris W. Kobach, *Immigration Nullification: In-State Tuition and Lawmakers Who Disregard the Law*, 10 N.Y.U. J. LEGIS. & PUB. POL’Y 473, 506 (2006/2007). It is, in part, to provide DREAMers with a means to legalize their status that Members of Congress have introduced versions of the DREAM Act and related legislation.

¹¹ See, e.g., *Chirac v. Chirac’s Lessee*, 15 U.S. 259, 269 (1817) (“[T]he power of naturalization is exclusively in Congress.”).

¹² See, e.g., Janet Napolitano, Secretary of Homeland Security, *Exercising Prosecutorial Discretion with Respect to Individuals Who Came to the United States as Children*, June 15, 2012, at 1, available at <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/s1-exercising-prosecutorial-discretion-individuals-who-came-to-us-as-children.pdf>. A federal district court has found that the Obama Administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative violates the INA. However, the same court subsequently found that it lacks jurisdiction to hear this challenge to DACA because the plaintiff immigration officers’ standing is predicated on the harm they would incur by being disciplined for failing to comply with DACA, and employment-related injuries are within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB). For further discussion of this case, see generally CRS Report R42924, *Prosecutorial Discretion in Immigration Enforcement: Legal Issues*, by Kate M. Manuel and Todd Garvey.

¹³ See, e.g., *Immigration Nullification*, *supra* note 10, at 498-500 (arguing that provision of in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens constitutes a poor use of limited financial resources, and “reward[s] illegal behavior”).

¹⁴ See, e.g., MONT. CODE ANN. §1-1-411(6)(c)(ii) (barring unlawfully present aliens from receiving state services, and defining *state service* to include “qualification as a student in the university system”); S.C. CODE ANN. §59-101-430(A) (“An alien unlawfully present in the United States is not eligible to attend a public institution of higher learning in this State.”); University System of Georgia, Board of Regents Policy Manual, at §4.1.6 (“A person who is not lawfully present in the United States shall not be eligible for admission to any University System institution which, for the two most recent academic years, did not admit all academically qualified applicants.”) (copy on file with the author).

¹⁵ See *supra* note 5.

Unauthorized Alien Students, Higher Education, and In-State Tuition Rates: A Legal Analysis, by Jody Feder.

Basic Legal Principles

State measures that would *deny* or *provide* access to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid to unlawfully present aliens have been challenged on various grounds. While these grounds can vary depending upon the specific statute or practice in question, the grounds most commonly asserted appear to be violations of the Equal Protection and Supremacy Clauses of the U.S. Constitution. Thus, these provisions are the focus of discussion in this report, and the following paragraphs provide an overview of the basic principles implicated in discussions of equal protection and preemption.

Equal Protection

The Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment bars states from “deny[ing] to any person within [their] jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”¹⁶ Aliens have been found to be encompassed by the Fourteenth Amendment’s usage of “person”.¹⁷ As a result, measures that would treat aliens differently than citizens may be subject to challenge on equal protection grounds. The level of scrutiny applied by the courts in reviewing such measures frequently determines whether the measure is upheld or struck down. With “rational basis review”, the challenged measure will generally be upheld if it is a rational means of promoting a legitimate government objective. The measure is “presumed constitutional”, and those challenging the law have the burden of negating all possible rational justifications for the classification.¹⁸ In contrast, with “strict scrutiny”, the challenged measure will be upheld only if the government can demonstrate that the measure is necessary to achieve a compelling interest and is narrowly tailored for that purpose.¹⁹ Courts have also applied other tests, falling between rational basis review and strict scrutiny, in some cases due to the persons or rights affected by the measure.²⁰

The level of scrutiny applied to measures that classify on the basis of alienage depends, in part, on whether the measure is federal, or state or local. Because Congress’s plenary power over immigration permits it to enact measures as to aliens that would be unconstitutional if applied to

¹⁶ U.S. Const., amend. XIV, §1.

¹⁷ See, e.g., *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202, 210 (1982) (“Whatever his status under the immigration laws, an alien is surely a ‘person’ in any ordinary sense of that term.”). But see *Mathews v. Diaz*, 426 U.S. 67, 78 (1972) (“The fact that all persons, aliens and citizens alike, are protected by the [constitutional guarantee of equal protection] does not lead to the further conclusion that all aliens are entitled to enjoy all the advantages of citizenship or, indeed, to the conclusion that all aliens must be placed in a single homogenous legal classification.”).

¹⁸ See, e.g., *Heller v. Doe by Doe*, 509 U.S. 312, 320 (1993) (“[T]he burden is on the one attacking the legislative arrangement to negative every conceivable basis which might support it, whether or not the basis has a foundation in the record[, and] courts are compelled under rational-basis review to accept a legislature’s generalizations even when there is an imperfect fit between means and ends.”) (internal citations omitted).

¹⁹ See, e.g., *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1, 11 (1967) (racial classifications must be shown to be necessary to some “legitimate overriding purpose”); *McLaughlin v. Florida*, 379 U.S. 184, 192, 194 (1964) (racial classifications “bear a far heavier burden of justification” than other classifications, and are invalid absent an “overriding statutory purpose”).

²⁰ See, e.g., *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515 (1996) (requiring the state to provide an “exceedingly persuasive justification” for its policy of maintaining an all-male military academy).

citizens,²¹ federal classifications based on alienage are subject to rational basis review, and have generally been upheld. For example, in its 1976 decision in *Mathews v. Diaz*, the Supreme Court upheld a federal law that barred LPRs who had not resided in the United States for five years from enrolling in Medicare Part B, because it viewed the measure as a valid exercise of the federal government’s authority to regulate the entry and residence of aliens, not as “irrational.”²² State and local measures, in contrast, have generally been subject to strict scrutiny,²³ unless (1) the restrictions involve “political and governmental functions,”²⁴ or (2) Congress has “by uniform rule prescribed what it believes to be appropriate standards for the treatment of an alien subclass.”²⁵ However, it is important to note that the Supreme Court decisions applying strict scrutiny to state or local measures that treated aliens differently than citizens all involved lawful permanent resident aliens (LPRs),²⁶ and the Court in *Plyler* expressly declined to apply strict scrutiny to the Texas statute because “undocumented status is not irrelevant to any proper legislative goal.”²⁷ Instead, the *Plyler* Court applied a level of scrutiny that has since come to be characterized as “intermediate scrutiny”, requiring the state to show that the challenged measure furthered a “substantial” goal.²⁸ Some have suggested, however, that the heightened level of scrutiny given to the Texas measure in *Plyler* reflects the facts and circumstances of the case—which involved a law that a majority of the Court viewed as depriving “minor children” of a “basic education”—and is not generally applicable to classifications involving unlawfully present aliens.²⁹

Neither education,³⁰ nor receipt of public benefits,³¹ has been recognized as a fundamental right for purposes of equal protection, such that its denial would result in the application of strict

²¹ See, e.g., *Kleindienst v. Mandel*, 408 U.S. 753, 765-70 (1972).

²² 426 U.S. 67 (1976).

²³ See, e.g., *Nyquist v. Mauclet*, 432 U.S. 1, 8 n.9 (1977) (“[C]lassifications based on alienage are inherently suspect, and are therefore subject to strict scrutiny whether or not a fundamental right is impaired.”) (internal quotations omitted).

²⁴ *Foley v. Connelie*, 435 U.S. 291, 295-96 (1978) (quoting *Sugarman v. Dougall*, 413 U.S. 634, 647 (1973)) (applying rational basis review to a New York law that barred noncitizens from becoming police officers on the grounds that states must have the power to “preserve the basic conception of a political community” for a democracy to function).

²⁵ *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 219 n.19. For further discussion of whether PRWORA provides a “uniform rule”, see *infra* note 67 and accompanying text.

²⁶ See, e.g., *League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC] v. Bredeisen*, 500 F.3d 523 (6th Cir. 2007) (noting that the Supreme Court has never applied strict scrutiny to a state or local measure affecting aliens who are not LPRs); *LeClerc v. Webb*, 419 F.3d 405, 416 (5th Cir. 2005) (noting that the Supreme Court “ha[s] never applied strict scrutiny review to a state law affecting ... other alienage classifications [than LPRs]” and citing, as evidence of this, *Toll v. Moreno*, 458 U.S. 1 (1982) (foregoing equal protection analysis in a case involving lawful nonimmigrant aliens); *De Canas v. Bica*, 424 U.S. 351 (1976) (foregoing equal protection analysis in a case involving unauthorized aliens); *Plyler v. Doe*, 457 U.S. 202 (1982) (applying modified rational basis review in a case involving unauthorized aliens)).

²⁷ *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 220-21. See also *id.* at 223 (“Undocumented aliens cannot be treated as a suspect class because their presence in this country in violation of federal law is not a ‘constitutional irrelevancy.’”).

²⁸ *Id.* at 220.

²⁹ See, e.g., *Kadmas v. Dickinson Public Schools*, 487 U.S. 450, 459 (1988) (stating of *Plyler*, “We have not extended this holding beyond the ‘unique circumstances,’ that provoked its ‘unique confluence of theories and rationales’”) (internal citations omitted); Laura S. Yates, *Plyler v. Doe and the Rights of Undocumented Immigrants to Higher Education: Should Undocumented Students Be Eligible for In-State Tuition Rates?*, 82 WASH. UNIV. L. REV. 585, 592 (2004) (“Since *Plyler*, the Supreme Court has posited that the intermediate scrutiny standard is only applicable when state legislation affects undocumented children in the area of public education, and even then only when the legislation enjoys neither implied nor express [federal] congressional approval.”) (internal quotations omitted).

³⁰ *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 220-21 (quoting *San Antonio Indep. School Dist. v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1, 35-38 (1973) (finding that education is not a fundamental right)).

scrutiny. The *Plyler* Court subjected the denial of access to public elementary and secondary education to intermediate scrutiny. However, as previously noted, this degree of scrutiny may reflect the facts and circumstances of the case. Similarly, receipt of public benefits has generally been seen to fall within the “area of economics and social welfare,”³² and classifications affecting such interests, standing alone (i.e., not involving a suspect classification of persons), are generally subject to rational basis review.³³

Preemption

The doctrine of preemption, in turn, derives from the Supremacy Clause of the U.S. Constitution, which establishes that federal law, treaties, and the Constitution itself are “the supreme Law of the Land, ... any Thing in the Constitution or Laws of any state to the Contrary notwithstanding.”³⁴ Thus, one essential aspect of the federal structure of government is that states can be precluded from taking actions that would otherwise be within their authority if federal law would be thwarted thereby.

Because the Constitution entrusts Congress with the power to regulate immigration,³⁵ state or local measures that purport to regulate immigration—by determining which aliens may enter or remain in the United States, or the terms of their continued presence—are, per se, preempted, regardless of whether Congress has legislated on the matter.³⁶ Other measures, which affect aliens, but do not constitute regulation of immigration, could also be found to be preempted, depending upon the scope of any congressional enactments. Specifically, federal statutes may preempt state and local measures in one of three ways:

1. the statute expressly indicates its preemptive intent (*express preemption*);
2. a court concludes that Congress intended to occupy the regulatory field, thereby implicitly precluding state or local action in that area (*field preemption*); or
3. state or local action directly conflicts with or otherwise frustrates the purpose of the federal scheme (*conflict preemption*).³⁷

(...continued)

³¹ See, e.g., *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr.*, 473 U.S. 432, 440 (1985); *Village of Belle Terre v. Boraas*, 416 U.S. 1, 8 (1974).

³² *Dandridge v. Williams*, 397 U.S. 471, 485 (1970).

³³ *Graham*, 403 U.S. at 371-72.

³⁴ U.S. Const., art. VI, cl. 2.

³⁵ Courts have located the source of federal immigration power in various provisions of the Constitution, and in the inherent power of sovereign nations to control the terms upon which noncitizens may enter and remain within their borders. See, e.g., *Nat’l Fed’n of Indep. Bus. v. Sebelius*,—U.S.—, 132 S. Ct. 2566, 2600 (2012) (Congress’s powers under the Commerce Clause); *Arizona v. United States*,—U.S.—132 S. Ct. 2492, 2498 (2012) (power to establish a uniform rule of naturalization); *Nishimara Ekiu v. United States*, 142 U.S. 651, 659 (1892) (“It is an accepted maxim of international law, that every sovereign nation has the power, as inherent in sovereignty, and essential to self-preservation, to forbid the entrance of foreigners within its dominions, or to admit them only in such cases and upon such conditions as it may see fit to prescribe.”); *Henderson v. Mayor of New York*, 92 U.S. 259 (1876) (power to regulate interstate commerce); *Chy Lung v. Freeman*, 92 U.S. 275 (1875) (power to regulate the admission of noncitizens); *The Passenger Cases*, 48 U.S. 283 (1849) (power to regulate foreign commerce).

³⁶ See *De Canas v. Bica*, 424 U.S. 351, 355 (1976).

³⁷ See, e.g., *Crosby v. Nat’l Foreign Trade Council*, 530 U.S. 363, 373 (2000); *English v. Gen. Elec. Co.*, 496 U.S. 72, 78-79 (1990); *Silkwood v. Kerr-McGee Corp.*, 464 U.S. 238, 248-49 (1984); *Pac. Gas & Elec. Co. v. State Energy Res.* (continued...)

State actions in fields that have traditionally been subject to state regulation are sometimes said to be accorded a presumption against preemption whenever Congress legislates in the field.³⁸ Education has historically been seen as a local, not a federal, matter.³⁹ However, a presumption against preemption does not appear to have been applied, to date, in any case involving unlawfully present aliens' access to higher education, in-state tuition, or financial aid. To the contrary, at least one court has questioned whether a presumption against preemption continues to apply in the immigration context.⁴⁰

Two federal statutes are generally noted in discussions of whether state measures regarding unlawfully present aliens' access to public higher education, in-state tuition, and state financial aid are preempted. The first of these, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), enacted in August 1996, defines *state public benefit* to mean:

(A) any grant, contract, loan, professional license, or commercial license provided by an agency of a State ... or by appropriated funds of a State ...; and (B) any retirement, welfare, health, disability, public or assisted housing, postsecondary education, food assistance, unemployment benefit, or any other similar benefit for which payments or assistance are provided to an individual, household, or family eligibility unit by an agency of a State ... or by appropriated funds of a State, and generally bars states from providing such benefits to unlawfully present aliens unless they enact legislation that “affirmatively provides” for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility.⁴¹ PRWORA also generally bars U.S. government agencies from providing *federal public benefits*—which are defined in the same way as state public benefits⁴²—to unlawfully present aliens and other aliens who are not “qualified aliens” for purposes of PRWORA.⁴³ The second statute, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) of 1996, enacted a little over a month after PRWORA, bars states from providing “postsecondary education benefits” to unlawfully

(...continued)

Conservation & Dev. Comm'n, 461 U.S. 190, 203-04 (1983). The delineation between these categories, particularly between field and conflict preemption, is not rigid. *See English*, 462 U.S. at 79 n.5 (“By referring to these three categories, we should not be taken to mean that they are rigidly distinct. Indeed, field pre-emption may be understood as a species of conflict pre-emption: A state law that falls within a pre-empted field conflicts with Congress' intent (either express or plainly implied) to exclude state regulation.”); *Crosby*, 530 U.S. at 373 n.6 (similar).

³⁸ *See, e.g.,* *Meditronic, Inc. v. Lohr*, 518 U.S. 470, 485 (1996) (“In all pre-emption cases, and particularly in those in which Congress has ‘legislated ... in a field which the States have traditionally occupied,’ we ‘start with the assumption that the historic police powers of the States were not to be superseded by the Federal Act unless that was the clear and manifest purpose of Congress.’”) (internal citations omitted); *Wyeth v. Levine*, 555 U.S. 555, 565 (2009) (similar).

³⁹ *See, e.g.,* *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717, 741 (1974) (“No single tradition in public education is more deeply rooted than local control over the operation of schools.”).

⁴⁰ *Cf. Martinez v. Regents of the University of California*, 241 P.3d 855 (Cal. 2010) (“The parties disagree as to whether a presumption against preemption exists. The point is unclear. In the past, the high court has indicated that a general presumption against preemption applies even in the context of immigration law. However, more recent high court authority suggests that no particular presumption applies. We need not resolve the question here because, as we explain, we find no preemption even without a presumption.”) (internal citations omitted).

⁴¹ 8 U.S.C. §1621(c) & (d).

⁴² 8 U.S.C. §1611(c).

⁴³ 8 U.S.C. §1611(a). Further, PRWORA generally bars aliens who are qualified aliens from receiving federal means-tested public benefits for five years after their admission into the United States in a qualifying status. 8 U.S.C. §1613. PRWORA does not define *federal means-tested public benefits*, and the executive branch has generally taken the view that Medicaid, food stamps, supplemental security income, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and the state Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) are the only federal means-test public benefits. *See* CRS Report R43221, *Noncitizen Eligibility for Public Benefits: Legal Issues*, by Kate M. Manuel. For further discussion of federal public benefits, as well as the meaning of *qualified alien*, see generally *infra* notes 84-89 and accompanying text.

present aliens based on their residence in the state unless other U.S. citizens or nationals are eligible for such benefits, regardless of their state of residence, but does not define *benefit*.⁴⁴ IIRIRA has been described as “narrowing” states’ authority under PRWORA,⁴⁵ but this early characterization of IIRIRA may have been undermined by subsequent interpretations of IIRIRA, discussed below.⁴⁶

State Restrictions on Access

State measures that would deny unlawfully present aliens access to public institutions of higher education and in-state tuition have been challenged by plaintiffs and commentators on the grounds that they violate the Equal Protection or Supremacy Clauses. However, the limited case law to date suggests that restrictions on access to higher education do not, as a general matter, deprive unlawfully present aliens of equal protection. Such restrictions have also not been seen as preempted by PRWORA as a general matter, although specific measures could potentially be found to be preempted, or otherwise impermissible, on other grounds. Restrictions on access to in-state tuition have also been seen as permissible. In-state tuition has generally been considered a public benefit, and PRWORA and IIRIRA restrict the circumstances in which states may provide public benefits to unauthorized aliens. PRWORA has also been construed to restrict unlawfully present aliens’ access to federal and state financial aid.

Public Higher Education

To date, it does not appear that any state measure barring unlawfully present aliens from public institutions of higher education has been found to be impermissible on equal protection grounds. The Supreme Court’s 1982 decision in *Plyler v. Doe* has generally been taken to mean that the Equal Protection Clause precludes states from denying unlawfully present alien children access to public elementary and secondary schools.⁴⁷ However, *Plyler* did not purport to address access to higher education, and several aspects of the Court’s 5-4 decision in *Plyler* suggest that its applicability in the context of higher education may be limited. In particular, the Court noted both the young age—and the lack of culpability⁴⁸—of those whom Texas would have deprived of the

⁴⁴ 8 U.S.C. § 1623. The INA defines *national of the United States* to mean “(A) a citizen of the United States, or (B) a person who, though not a citizen of the United States, owes permanent allegiance to the United States.” INA § 101(a)(22); 8 U.S.C. 1101(a)(22). It should also be noted that some have questioned whether “benefit” has the same meaning for purposes of PRWORA and IIRIRA. See *Martinez v. Regents of the Univ. of Cal.*, 83 Cal. Rptr. 518, 531 (Cal. App. 2008), *rev’d on other grounds*, 241 P.3d 855 (Cal. 2010).

⁴⁵ See *Martinez*, 83 Cal. Rptr. at 530 n.15.

⁴⁶ See *infra* notes 106-113 and accompanying text.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., *Hispanic Interest Coalition of Ala. v. Gov. of Ala.*, 691 F.3d 1236, 1245 (11th Cir. 2012) (striking down Alabama requirements regarding verification of the citizenship and immigration status of students enrolling in public elementary and secondary schools on the grounds that they “significantly interfere[d] with the exercise of the right to an elementary public education as guaranteed by *Plyler*”), *cert. denied*, *Alabama v. United States*, 133 S. Ct. 2022 (2013); *LULAC v. Wilson*, 908 F. Supp. 755, 785 (C.D. Cal. 1995) (striking down those provisions of California’s Proposition 187 that purported to bar unlawfully present alien students from public elementary and secondary schools).

⁴⁸ The Court repeatedly described those affected by the Texas measure as “minors” and “minor children”. See, e.g., *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 220, 240. It also noted that these children “can affect neither their parents’ conduct nor their own status,” and denying them an education because of their parents’ conduct would be “contrary to the basic concept of our system that legal burdens should bear some relationship to individual responsibility for wrongdoing.” *Id.* at 220 (quoting *Trimble v. Gordon*, 430 U.S. 762, 770 (1977) (striking down a provision of Illinois law that permitted illegitimate children to inherit by intestate succession only from their mothers, while legitimate children could inherit (continued...))

“basic education” needed for democratic self-governance and economic self-sufficiency⁴⁹ in determining that the Texas measure warranted heightened scrutiny.⁵⁰ This heightened scrutiny, in turn, resulted in the measure being invalidated because none of the goals proffered by the state—which included protecting itself from an “influx of illegal immigrants” and preserving state funds for use in educating students who are likely to remain within the state—was “substantial”.⁵¹ Some commentators have suggested that state laws barring unlawfully present aliens from public institutions of higher education should be subject to a similar level of scrutiny because higher education currently plays the same socio-economic role that primary and secondary education played in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵² However, no court appears to have adopted this view, and contrary arguments could be made.⁵³ For example, one could argue that college students are adults, who have the ability to conform their conduct to “societal norms”,⁵⁴ and that lack of access to higher education does not result in the “enduring disability” of illiteracy noted by the *Plyler* Court.⁵⁵ Perhaps because of this uncertainty as to the standard of scrutiny that would be applied, post-*Plyler* challenges to state measures denying unlawfully present aliens access to public institutions of higher education have generally been brought on grounds other than equal protection, usually preemption, as discussed below.⁵⁶

Federal district courts have found preemption in two cases, although neither case should be construed to mean that state restrictions on access to public institutions of higher education are preempted as a general matter.⁵⁷ To the contrary, as explained below, the first case found

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from both their mothers and fathers, in part, on the grounds that “penalizing the illegitimate child is an ineffectual—as well as an unjust—way of deterring the parent”).

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 221-23. The Court specifically emphasized that it viewed the denial of an education to “some isolated group of children” as contrary to the Fourteenth Amendment’s goal of abolishing “governmental barriers presenting unreasonable obstacles to advancement on the basis of individual merit.” *Id.* at 222-23.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 223.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 228-30.

⁵² See, e.g., Laura A. Hernández, *Dreams Deferred: Why In-State College Tuition Rates Are Not a Benefit under the IIRIRA and How This Interpretation Violates the Spirit of Plyler*, 21 CORNELL J. L. & PUB. POL’Y 525, 536 (2012); Johnny Sinodis, *The DREAM Act Still Just a Dream for Now: The Positive Effects of Creating a New Path to Lawful Status by Encouraging Military Enlistment and the Pursuit of Higher Education*, 2 L.J. FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE, 159, 176-78 (2011); Kari E. D’Ottavio, *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals: Why Granting Driver’s Licenses to DACA Beneficiaries Makes Constitutional and Political Sense*, 72 MD. L. REV. 931, 954 (2013).

⁵³ Cf. *Regents of the Univ. of Cal. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles Cty.*, 225 Cal. App. 3d 972, 981 (1990) (“There is, of course, a significant difference between an elementary education and a university education.”).

⁵⁴ This is potentially significant because the *Plyler* Court distinguished the unlawfully present alien children from their parents, in part, on the grounds that children “can affect neither their parents’ conduct nor their own status,” while their parents, as adults, have “the ability to conform their conduct to societal norms, and presumably the ability to remove themselves from the State’s jurisdiction.” *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 220.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 222. The *Plyler* Court also noted that there are no “[c]ompulsory school attendance laws” as to higher education. *Id.* at 222-23.

⁵⁶ For example, the plaintiffs in *Equal Access Education v. Merten*, discussed below, challenged the policy of denying admission to unlawfully present aliens adopted by Virginia public institutions of higher education on the grounds that it violated the Supremacy, Due Process, and Commerce Clauses. 305 F. Supp. 2d 585, 611 (E.D. Va. 2004). However, the court denied the Due Process claim, in part, because it found that unlawfully present aliens had no property right in an admissions decision that does not take their immigration status into account. It similarly denied the Commerce Clause claim because it did not view the potentially diminished remittances that unlawfully present aliens denied a higher education would send home as significantly burdening foreign commerce. *Id.* at 305 F. Supp. 2d at 608-14.

⁵⁷ For example, in some cases, state or local measures that would bar unlawfully present aliens from renting housing have been found to be “thinly veiled” attempts to regulate aliens’ entry into the United States and the conditions of their (continued...)

preemption based on the language of the specific state statute at issue, while the court in the second replied upon an interpretation of PRWORA that has not been widely adopted. In the first case, *Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama v. Bentley*, a federal district court found that provisions of Alabama’s H.B. 56 that bar “any alien who is not lawfully present in the United States” from enrolling in or attending “any public postsecondary education institution in this state” were per se preempted because the state attempted to regulate immigration by relying upon its own definition of who is lawfully present, instead of the federal one.⁵⁸ However, an appellate court subsequently vacated the injunction barring enforcement of these provisions after they were amended to remove the language the district court had found imposed the state’s definition, rather than the federal definition, of who is lawfully present.⁵⁹ In the second case, *League of United Latin American Citizens [LULAC] v. Wilson*, another federal district court found that the provisions of California’s Proposition 187 barring persons who are “not authorized under federal law to be present in the United States” from admission to public institutions of higher education were preempted because “Congress ... occupied the field of regulation of public postsecondary education benefits to aliens” when it enacted PRWORA.⁶⁰ The *LULAC* court offered no rationale for this conclusion, however, and its interpretation of PRWORA has been expressly rejected by another federal district court.⁶¹ The *LULAC* court’s interpretation also arguably does not reflect the prevailing interpretation of PRWORA. In other cases, dealing with benefits unrelated to higher education, courts have found that PRWORA does not preempt the field of aliens’ access to benefits because it expressly permits states to provide public benefits to aliens who are not “qualified aliens” in specified circumstances.⁶²

Challenges on other grounds, not involving equal protection or preemption, may also be possible depending upon the facts and circumstances surrounding particular state measures. For example, beneficiaries of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) initiative are currently challenging their exclusion from Virginia community colleges on the grounds that the state’s determination that they are ineligible to establish Virginia domicile is “contrary to Virginia law.”⁶³

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continued presence and thus preempted by federal immigration law. *See, e.g.,* *Lozano v. City of Hazleton*, 724 F.3d 297, 315 (3d Cir. 2013), *cert. denied*, *City of Hazleton v. Lozano*, 2014 U.S. LEXIS 1740 (Mar. 3, 2014).

⁵⁸ Case Number 5:11-CV-2484-SLB, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 137846, at *69-*80 (N.D. Ala., Sept. 28, 2011). Previously, in *Equal Access Education v. Merten*, a federal district court had suggested that a policy of denying admission to unlawfully present aliens could constitute a preempted regulation of immigration if the state were to use its own standards, as opposed to federal ones, in determining who is unlawfully present. 305 F. Supp. 2d 585, 611 (E.D. Va. 2004). However, the court did not actually find that the practice in question was preempted, and the case was subsequently dismissed on standing grounds. *Equal Access Educ. v. Merten*, 325 F. Supp. 2d 655 (E.D. Va. 2004).

⁵⁹ *Hispanic Interest Coalition of Alabama v. Bentley*, 691 F.3d 1236, 1242-43 (11th Cir. 2012).

⁶⁰ No. CV 94-7569 MRP, 1998 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 3418, at *24-*26 (C.D. Cal., Mar. 13, 1998). Prior to PRWORA’s enactment, the *LULAC* court had found that Proposition 187’s provisions restricting access to public institutions of higher education were not preempted by federal law. *See LULAC*, 908 F. Supp. at 786. However, after PRWORA’s enactment, it viewed the measure as preempted by PRWORA. *See LULAC v. Wilson*, 997 F. Supp. 1244, 1256 (C.D. Cal. 1997).

⁶¹ *Equal Access Educ.*, 305 F. Supp. 2d at 605.

⁶² *See, e.g.,* *United States v. Alabama*, 691 F.3d 1269, 1300 (11th Cir. 2011); *Kaider v. Hamos*, 975 N.E.2d 667, 678 (Ill. App. 2012); *Martinez*, 241 P.3d at 855.

⁶³ *See Orella v. State Council of Higher Educ. for Va.*, Complaint for Declaratory Relief (filed Arlington County Circuit Court, Dec. 17, 2013) (copy on file with the author). Virginia seems to have initially adopted the policy of denying unlawfully present aliens access to public institutions of higher education in response to a 2002 memorandum from the state Attorney General, which asserted that, although “no federal or state statute ... precludes an institution from admitting an applicant known to be an illegal alien,” “[a]s a matter of policy, ... illegal and undocumented aliens (continued...) ”

In-State Tuition

State measures that would deny unlawfully present aliens in-state tuition would also appear to be permissible as a general matter. At least one commentator has suggested that the holding of *Plyler* should be extended not just to access to higher education, but also to eligibility for in-state tuition.⁶⁴ However, no court appears to have adopted this view, and it would seem difficult to maintain given that in-state tuition is generally seen as a public benefit, as discussed below, and federal law restricts unlawfully present aliens' receipt of public benefits. PRWORA, in particular, establishes a "default rule" that unlawfully present aliens are ineligible for public benefits unless a state enacts legislation that "affirmatively provides" for their eligibility.⁶⁵ Thus, state measures that essentially reflect PRWORA's default rule—that unlawfully present aliens are ineligible—seem unlikely to be found to be preempted by federal law. Such measures also seem unlikely to be found to violate the Equal Protection Clause because Congress established the default rule that unlawfully present aliens are generally ineligible for public benefits, and its plenary power over immigration extends to restricting aliens' eligibility for public benefits. As previously noted, federal measures limiting aliens' eligibility for public benefits are subject to more deferential review than state measures, and will generally be upheld so long as there is a reasonable basis for the limitation.⁶⁶ Further, the Supreme Court has indicated that states may impose restrictions upon aliens' receipt of public benefits that would otherwise be impermissible if Congress has "by uniform rule prescribed what it believes to be appropriate standards for the treatment of an alien subclass."⁶⁷ Thus, while two pre-PRWORA Supreme Court cases invalidated state measures that barred certain aliens from receiving in-state tuition and state financial aid on equal protection grounds,⁶⁸ these cases should not necessarily be construed to mean that similar measures would

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should not be admitted into our public colleges and universities ... when doing so would displace a competing applicant who is an American citizen or otherwise lawfully present here." Commonwealth of Virginia, Office of the Attorney General, Immigration Compliance Update, Sept. 5, 2002 (copy on file with the author).

⁶⁴ See *Dreams Deferred*, *supra* note 52, at 533 ("If the purpose of *Plyler* was to remove unreasonable obstacles to education, a legislatively created barrier—such as increased tuition rates—must violate it.")

⁶⁵ 8 U.S.C. §1621(d).

⁶⁶ Compare *Mathews*, 426 U.S. at 85 (upholding, under rational basis review, a federal law that barred LPRs who had not resided in the United States for five years from enrolling in Medicare Part B) with *Graham*, 403 U.S. at 366-70 (applying strict scrutiny in striking down Pennsylvania and Arizona laws that barred or limited receipt of state "general assistance" by LPRs).

⁶⁷ *Plyler*, 457 U.S. at 219 n.19. Several courts have suggested that state measures affecting aliens remain subject to heightened scrutiny, notwithstanding PRWORA's enactment, because PRWORA does not provide a uniform rule for states to follow since it permits states to decide whether to grant certain benefits to aliens. See, e.g., *Ehrlich v. Perez*, 908 A.2d 1220 (Md. 2006); *Aliessa v. Novello*, 754 N.E.2d 1085 (N.Y. 2001). However, other courts have taken the opposite view, and even if PRWORA were found not to provide a uniform rule, state measures restricting unlawfully present aliens' access to in-state tuition could potentially still be subject to rational basis review on other grounds. See, e.g., *Soskin v. Reinertson*, 353 F.3d 1242, 1255 (10th Cir. 2004); *Cid v. S.D. Dep't of Social Servs.*, 598 N.W.2d 887, 892 (S.D. 1999). For example, at least one court has suggested that in-state tuition is distinguishable from access to higher education, and a state's interests in denying in-state tuition may be seen as more substantial than Texas's interests in *Plyler*. See, e.g., *Regents of the Univ. of Cal.*, 276 Cal. Rptr. at 202 ("The state's legitimate interests in denying resident tuition to undocumented aliens are manifest and important. ... There is, of course, a significant difference between an elementary education and a university education.")

⁶⁸ See *Toll v. Moreno*, 458 U.S. 1, 12-13 (1982) (finding, by a 7-2 margin, that a Maryland law which denied certain lawful nonimmigrants domiciled in Maryland in-state status for tuition purposes was preempted because it "impose[d] additional burdens not contemplated by Congress" on these aliens); *Nyquist*, 432 U.S. at 7-12 (striking down, by a 5-4 margin, a New York law that made LPRs ineligible for state educational financing unless they signed a declaration of intent to become a citizen on the grounds that the state lacked a compelling interest for discriminating against LPRs). It should also be noted that both cases dealt with lawfully present aliens.

necessarily be invalid post-PRWORA, particularly insofar as the measures affect unlawfully present aliens.

At least one commentator, apparently concerned about PRWORA's restrictions on the provision of public benefits to unlawfully present aliens, has also suggested that in-state tuition should not be viewed as a public benefit because it does not involve "direct financial assistance", or payments of money, to students.⁶⁹ However, the only court to have addressed the issue held otherwise, finding that a California law—which permits unlawfully present aliens who complete at least three years of secondary school within the state and meet other criteria to receive in-state tuition—provides a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA because in-state tuition involves a calculable amount.⁷⁰ This decision was subsequently overturned on other grounds,⁷¹ but the view that in-state tuition constitutes a public benefit has been espoused by another court and the Colorado Attorney General.⁷² This view (i.e., that in-state tuition constitutes a public benefit) would also appear to be supported by cases addressing whether other government services and assistance constitute public benefits for purposes of PRWORA. These cases have generally found that a public benefit is something that "assist[s] people with economic hardship,"⁷³ and could "create [an] incentive for illegal immigration."⁷⁴ An argument could be made that in-state tuition is a public benefit in light of these decisions on the ground that it makes college more affordable for needy students.⁷⁵ Some have also suggested that eligibility for in-state tuition is an incentive for illegal immigration.⁷⁶

It is, however, important to note that, insofar as it is a public benefit, in-state tuition is a benefit for the student, not the student's household, and PRWORA neither authorizes nor requires states to restrict the eligibility for in-state tuition of U.S. citizen students whose parents are unlawfully present aliens.⁷⁷ Some states have recently sought to classify U.S. citizen students who reside within the state as "out of state" residents because their parents—who also reside within the state—are unlawfully present aliens. These states have sometimes argued that they "are merely complying with federal law" in adopting such measures.⁷⁸ However, courts have uniformly

⁶⁹ See *Dreams Deferred*, *supra* note 52, at 526. The State of California made a similar argument in defending a statute permitting unlawfully present aliens to receive in-state tuition based upon their completion of at least three years of secondary education in the state, discussed below. See *Martinez*, 83 Cal. Rptr. at 531.

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ See 241 P.3d 855 (Cal. 2010).

⁷² See, e.g., *Ruiz v. Robinson*, 892 F. Supp. 2d 1321 (S.D. Fla. 2012); State of Colorado, Dep't of Law, Opinion No. 12-04, June 19, 2012, at 5 (copy on file with the author).

⁷³ *Rajeh v. Steel City Corp.*, 813 N.E.2d 697, 707 (Ohio App. 2004) (workers' compensation not a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA because it is a "substitutionary remedy" for a negligence suit).

⁷⁴ *County of Alameda v. Agustin*, 2007 Cal. App. Unpub. LEXIS 7665, at *10 (1st App. Dist., Div. One, Sept. 24, 2007) (rejecting the argument that "child collection support services" and the issuance of a court order requiring child support payments constituted state public benefits and, thus, could not be provided to an unauthorized alien in the absence of a state law that expressly provided for noncitizens' eligibility).

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Opinion No. 12-04, *supra* note 72, at 5 ("Assistance is defined as 'aid' or 'help.' It is quite clear that Metro State's new discounted tuition would be a significant aid or help to students who qualify. After all, the very purpose of Metro State's plan [to provide discounted tuition to unlawfully present aliens] ... is to make attending college easier for certain students (that is, to 'help' them attend college).").

⁷⁶ See, e.g., Hans A. von Spakovsky & Charles Stimson, *Providing In-State Tuition for Illegal Aliens: A Violation of Federal Law*, The Heritage Foundation, Nov. 22, 2011, available at <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2011/11/providing-in-state-tuition-for-illegal-aliens-a-violation-of-federal-law>.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., *Ruiz v. Robinson*, 892 F. Supp. 2d 1321 (S.D. Fla. 2012).

⁷⁸ *Ruiz*, 892 F. Supp. at 1330. See also *A.Z., a Minor, by B.Z., Her Guardian v. Higher Educ. Student Assistance* (continued...)

rejected this view as “fundamentally misconstru[ing]” PRWORA, which does not purport to restrict the provision of public benefits to U.S. citizens,⁷⁹ and as impermissibly distinguishing between similarly situated U.S. citizens based on their parentage. One court, in particular, emphasized that these measures would “classify U.S. citizens as aliens, and in doing so, create a second-tier of U.S. citizenship that depreciates the historic values of Plaintiffs’ citizenship by affording Plaintiffs some of the benefits that other similarly situated U.S. citizens enjoy but not all of the benefits.”⁸⁰

Financial Aid

Neither courts nor commentators appear to have raised any significant questions about the permissibility of state measures denying *state* financial aid (i.e., financial aid provided using only state funds⁸¹) to unlawfully present aliens post-PRWORA,⁸² perhaps because financial aid has been widely recognized as a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA and IIRIRA. This means that any state that would provide state financial aid to unlawfully present aliens must enact legislation that affirmatively provides for their eligibility, as required by PRWORA.⁸³ Also, depending upon the interpretation of IIRIRA that is adopted, the state may need to avoid conditioning eligibility upon residence when enacting such legislation. See “State Measures Granting Access: In-State Tuition,” below.

PRWORA has also been construed to bar unlawfully present aliens from receiving *federal* financial aid. Amendments made to the Higher Education Act in 1986 permit those “in the United States for other than a temporary purpose” who can provide evidence from immigration officials of their intent to become permanent residents to qualify for federal financial aid.⁸⁴ These amendments could, on their face, potentially be read as permitting at least some unlawfully present aliens to receive federal financial aid.⁸⁵ However, consistent with the view that PRWORA “invalidated all existing” federal, state, or local measures regarding noncitizens’ eligibility for

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Authority, 48 A.3d 1151, 1156 (N.J. Super. 2012) (similar).

⁷⁹ *Ruiz*, 892 F. Supp. at 1330; *A.Z.*, 48 A.3d at 1156.

⁸⁰ *Ruiz*, 892 F. Supp. at 1331.

⁸¹ *See, e.g.*, *Pimentel v. Dreyfus*, 670 F.3d 1096, 1099 n.4 (9th Cir. 2012) (finding that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a federal public benefit, even though it is provided through the states, because it relies on federal funds).

⁸² Prior to PRWORA’s enactment, a state measure restricting certain alien’s right to in-state tuition was struck down by the Supreme Court in a 1982 decision issued shortly after *Plyler*. *See Toll v. Moreno*, 458 U.S. 1, 12-13 (1982).

⁸³ 8 U.S.C. §1621(d).

⁸⁴ An Act to Reauthorize and Revise the Higher Education Act of 1965, and For Other Purposes, P.L. 99-498, §407(a), 100 Stat. 1480 (Oct. 17, 1986) (codified, as amended, at 20 U.S.C. §1091(a)(5)). *See, e.g.*, *Mashiri v. Dep’t of Educ.*, 709 F.3d 1299 (9th Cir. 2013), *as amended*, 2013 U.S. App. LEXIS 11050 (9th Cir., May 30, 2013) (declining to order the Department to provide federal financial aid to the plaintiff because he failed to present any proof that he was in the United States for other than a temporary purpose).

⁸⁵ Indeed, prior to PRWORA’s enactment, the Department of Education (DOE) interpreted this provision as permitting noncitizens granted temporary resident cards, or who had suspension of deportation cases pending before Congress, to receive federal financial aid. *See U.S. Dep’t of Education, The Student Guide: Financial Aid from the U.S. Department of Education: Grants, Loans, and Work Study, 1989-1990*, at 71, quoted in CRS Report 89-435 EPW, *Alien Eligibility Requirements for Major Federal Assistance Programs*, by Joyce C. Vialet and Larry M. Eig (out of print, available upon request).

public benefits to the degree that these measures conflict with PRWORA,⁸⁶ the Department of Education has determined that only those aliens who fall within PRWORA's definition of *qualified alien* are eligible for federal financial aid.⁸⁷ This definition includes LPRs; aliens granted asylum; refugees; aliens paroled into the United States for a period of at least one year; aliens whose deportation is being withheld; aliens granted conditional entry; and Cuban and Haitian entrants.⁸⁸ All other aliens are not qualified aliens, although certain aliens who have been subject to domestic violence are treated as if they were qualified aliens.⁸⁹

State Measures Granting Access

State measures that would grant unlawfully present aliens access to public institutions of higher education, in-state tuition, and financial aid would also appear to be generally permissible. Because access to public institutions of higher education has not been viewed as a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA, states may generally provide for unlawfully present aliens' access without enacting legislation to this effect. In-state tuition and financial aid, in contrast, have generally been viewed as public benefits. This means that states must enact legislation that affirmatively provides for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility for such benefits. Also, depending upon the interpretation of IIRIRA that is adopted, states may need to base unlawfully present aliens' eligibility on factors other than their residence in the state (e.g., high school attendance and graduation in the state).

Public Higher Education

Under current law, states would not appear to be barred from granting unlawfully present aliens access to public institutions of higher education. They would also not appear to be required to enact legislation that "affirmatively provides" for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility on the ground that access to higher education has generally not been viewed as a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA. Some commentators have suggested that it should be viewed as such because institutions of higher education rely upon federal and state funds in educating students,⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Kaider*, 975 N.E.2d at 673. *See also* *Pimentel*, 670 F.3d at 1101 ("Upon enactment of the Welfare Reform Act, however, Washington's food stamp program automatically conformed to the new eligibility requirements concerning aliens."); *Doe v. Wilson*, 67 Cal. Rptr. 2d 187, 190 (Cal. App. 1997) (upholding regulations terminating a state program that benefitted unauthorized aliens because the program was "rendered immediately illegal by [PRWORA]"); *Dep't of Health v. Rodriguez*, 5 So. 3d 22 (Fla. App. 2009) (finding that the program in question was created prior to PRWORA and not subsequently reenacted, so its services could not be provided to unlawfully present aliens).

⁸⁷ *See* U.S. Dep't of Education, *Federal Student Aid Handbook, 2013-2014, Vol. 2*, at 1-24 to 1-27, Apr. 2013, available at <http://ifap.ed.gov/fsahandbook/attachments/1314FSAHbkVol2Ch2.pdf>. The difference between DOE's interpretation pre-PRWORA and that post-PRWORA could potentially be significant if Congress were to enact legislation that permitted unlawfully present alien students to remain in the United States while their legalization is pending, but did not categorize them as qualified aliens.

⁸⁸ 8 U.S.C. §1641(b)(1)-(7).

⁸⁹ *See* 8 U.S.C. §1641(c).

⁹⁰ *See, e.g.,* Perla Trevizo, *Georgia Bill Banning Illegal Immigrants from Public Colleges Advances*, Mar. 5, 2012, available at <http://timesfreepress.com/news/2012/mar/05/georgia-bill-banning-illegal-immigrants-public-col/> ("Proponents argue that higher education is a federal public benefit because colleges and universities receive federal funding, and illegal immigrants aren't eligible for federal benefits."); George G. Cleveland & Chris Whitmire, *Bill Would Bar Illegal Immigrants from Public Colleges*, WINSTON-SALEM J., Mar. 5, 2013, available at http://www.journalnow.com/news/state_region/article_c4f5654e-8609-11e2-8279-001a4bcf6878.html; Jennifer L. Maki, *The Three R's: Reading, 'Riting, and Rewarding Illegal Immigrants: How Higher Education Has Acquiesced in* (continued...)

and the *LULAC* court characterized access to higher education as a public benefit in a decision issued shortly after PRWORA's enactment.⁹¹ However, the *LULAC* court did not articulate any rationale for viewing access to higher education as a public benefit, and another district court subsequently adopted the opposite view based on the definition of *public benefit* given in federal law.⁹² This definition encompasses "postsecondary education ... or other similar benefit[s] for which payments or assistance are provided to an individual, household, or family eligibility unit by [a government] agency ... or by appropriated funds."⁹³ In particular, the latter court noted that admission does not involve "payments" to students or their households.⁹⁴ Admission could arguably also be said not to constitute "assistance" if this term is interpreted in light of its plain meaning as "aid" or "help."⁹⁵ The case law generally construing the meaning of public benefit for purposes of PRWORA also suggests that access to public higher education is unlikely to be viewed as a public benefit. These cases have generally taken the term *public benefits* to refer to resources that "assist people with economic hardship,"⁹⁶ and could "create [an] incentive for illegal immigration."⁹⁷ An argument could be made that eligibility to enroll at a public institution of higher education does neither of these things. Eligibility to enroll, if acted upon, creates an obligation for the alien to pay, rather than provides for payment to the alien. Also, the availability of nonimmigrant visas for foreign students arguably lessens the need to enter or remain in the United States unlawfully in order to attend public institutions of higher education.⁹⁸

In-State Tuition

States would also not appear to be barred from providing in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens so long as the state complies with PRWORA and, potentially, IIRIRA in doing so. PRWORA generally prohibits states from providing public benefits to unlawfully present aliens unless they enact legislation that "affirmatively provides" for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility, and in-state tuition has generally been viewed as a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA. Some state statutes providing public benefits, such as in-state tuition, have been challenged on the grounds that the statute is barred by PRWORA because it does not expressly reference PRWORA, or clearly specify that unlawfully present aliens are eligible.⁹⁹ This view

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the Illegal Presence of Undocumented Aliens in the United States, 13 WM. & MARY BILL RTS. J. 1341 (2005).

⁹¹ *LULAC*, 1998 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 3418, at *24-*26.

⁹² See, e.g., *Equal Access Educ.*, 305 F. Supp. 2d at 605 ("PRWORA does not govern college admissions for illegal aliens. As a result, not only has Congress failed to occupy completely the field of illegal alien eligibility for public post-secondary education, it has failed to legislate in this field at all.");

⁹³ 8 U.S.C. §1611(c)(1) (federal public benefits); 8 U.S.C. §1621(c)(1) (state and local public benefits). However, certain things are expressly excluded from these definitions (e.g., professional or commercial licenses for nonimmigrants with employment-based visas). See 8 U.S.C. §1611(c)(2)(A)-(C); 8 U.S.C. §1621(c)(2)-(3).

⁹⁴ See, e.g., *Equal Access Educ.*, 305 F. Supp. 2d at 605.

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Opinion No. 12-04, *supra* note 72, at 5 (relying on the "plain meaning" of *assistance* as "aid" or "help").

⁹⁶ *Rajeh*, 813 N.E.2d at 707 (workers' compensation not a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA).

⁹⁷ *County of Alameda*, 2007 Cal. App. Unpub. LEXIS 7665, at *10 ("child collection support services" and the issuance of a court order requiring child support payments not public benefits for purposes of PRWORA).

⁹⁸ See U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, Student and Exchange Visas, *available at* <http://www.uscis.gov/working-united-states/students-and-exchange-visitors> (last accessed: Mar. 14, 2014) (listing the various visas available to nonimmigrant students and their immediate family members).

⁹⁹ *Martinez*, 83 Cal. Rptr. at 1155-58. The appellate court in *Martinez* also viewed the California measure at issue as impliedly preempted by PRWORA because it stood as an obstacle to Congress's stated purposes in enacting PRWORA. *Id.* at 542-43. It based this conclusion, in part, on the congressional findings included in PRWORA, which (continued...)

appears to be based on the conference report accompanying PRWORA, which states that “[o]nly the affirmative enactment of a law by a ... legislature and signed by the Governor after the date of enactment of this Act, that references this provision, will meet the requirements of this section.”¹⁰⁰ However, as enacted, PRWORA does not require that states refer to either PRWORA, or to the aliens being unlawfully present, and reviewing courts have found that there are no such requirements. In reaching this conclusion, the courts have noted that Congress has elsewhere required states to reference specific provisions of federal law when enacting particular measures, and PRWORA does not do so.¹⁰¹ Thus, they concluded, Congress is presumed not to have intended to impose such a requirement with PRWORA. Courts have also found that nothing in PRWORA requires states to include in any enactments making unlawfully present aliens eligible for public benefits language that “clearly put[s] the public on notice that tax dollars are being used to benefit illegal aliens,”¹⁰² although one court did suggest that a state could not be said to have “affirmatively provided” for unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility if it were to “confer[] a benefit generally without specifying that its beneficiaries may include undocumented aliens.”¹⁰³ At least one court has also found that state legislatures may delegate to administrative agencies or local governments the authority to determine whether unlawfully present aliens are eligible for particular benefits.¹⁰⁴ However, the significance of these decisions in the higher education context may be limited by state statutes which require that new tuition classifications be created and/or approved by the legislature.¹⁰⁵

What, if any, limits IIRIRA may impose upon states enacting legislation that would provide for unlawfully present aliens’ eligibility for in-state tuition is less clear because the courts have taken different approaches in the two challenges decided, to date, to state laws permitting unlawfully present aliens to receive in-state tuition based on high school attendance in the state. Some have suggested that these measures run afoul of IIRIRA insofar as they do not provide for all U.S.

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state that “[i]t continues to be the immigration policy of the United States that (A) aliens within the Nation’s borders not depend on public resources to meet their needs, but rather rely on their own capabilities and the resources of their families, their sponsors, and private organizations, and (B) the availability of public benefits not constitute an incentive for immigration to the United States.” See 8 U.S.C. §1601(2)(A)-(B).

¹⁰⁰ *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996: Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3734*, H.R. Rpt. 104-725, 104th Cong., 2^d Sess., July 30, 1996, at 383.

¹⁰¹ *Martinez*, 241 P.3d at 1296 (“Congress has shown it knows how to require a state specifically to reference a federal law when it wishes to do so, because it has done just that numerous times.”); *Kaider*, 975 N.E.2d at 674 (similar).

¹⁰² *Martinez*, 83 Cal. Rptr. at 544, *rev’d*, 241 P.3d at 1296; *Kaider*, 975 N.E.2d at 674.

¹⁰³ *Martinez*, 241 P.3d at 1296. The court further found that resorting to the conference report and PRWORA’s legislative history in construing “affirmatively provides” is inappropriate, since the plain meaning is clear. *Id.* at 1295. See also *Kaider*, 975 N.E.2d at 672.

¹⁰⁴ *Kaider*, 975 N.E.2d at 678. In other words, in the *Kaider* court’s view, while PRWORA requires that legislation must be enacted that “affirmatively provides” for unauthorized aliens’ eligibility for public benefits, it does not preclude the delegation of certain authority from the legislative branch to the executive branch, or from a state government to local governments. Another court has indicated that it views the judicial branch as similarly entitled to provide for unauthorized aliens’ eligibility for any benefits within the court’s power to grant. *Cano v. Mallory Mgmt.*, 760 N.Y.S.2d 816 (2003) (even if ability to sue for negligence were a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA, the court could extend such benefits to unauthorized aliens). However, PRWORA refers to measures being “enacted,” and certain parties challenging unauthorized aliens’ eligibility for law licenses have asserted that, while courts could be said to “adopt” rules, they do not “enact” legislation. See generally CRS Legal Sidebar, Can Unauthorized Aliens Obtain Law Licenses and Practice Law?, by Kate M. Manuel, Jan. 25, 2013, available at <http://www.crs.gov/LegalSidebar/details.aspx?ID=316&Source=search>.

¹⁰⁵ See, e.g., Opinion No. 12-04, *supra* note 72, at 7 (noting the existence of such a statute in Colorado among the reasons that a community college system could not provide for in-state tuition for unlawfully present aliens).

citizens and nationals to receive in-state tuition. However, in the most recent of these two cases, *Martinez v. Regents of the University of California*, the California Supreme Court upheld a California statute which provided that all students (other than nonimmigrant aliens) are exempt from paying nonresident tuition at public institutions of higher education if they attended high school in California for three or more years, graduate from a California high school or attain the equivalent thereof, and meet other criteria. A state appeals court had found that this statute ran afoul of IIRIRA because it effectively provided in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens based on their residence in the state, without also providing it to U.S. citizens and nationals residing in other states.¹⁰⁶ The California Supreme Court reversed, however, because the statute specifically conditioned eligibility for in-state tuition upon high school attendance and graduation within the state. Thus, the high court found that the measure did not conflict with IIRIRA since IIRIRA refers to in-state tuition based on residence, not based on high school attendance and graduation.¹⁰⁷ Further, because the high court viewed the statute as unambiguously providing for in-state tuition based on high school attendance and graduation, not residence, it declined to consider the legislative history materials that the appellate court had viewed as evidencing an intent to benefit unlawfully present aliens.¹⁰⁸ However, the high court also expressed the view that, even if the legislative history were to reflect such an intent, there is “nothing ... legally wrong with the Legislature’s attempt to avoid [IIRIRA] ... mere desire to avoid the restrictions provides no basis to overturn the [California statute].”¹⁰⁹

Previously, however, in *Day v. Sebelius*, the federal district court in Kansas dismissed a suit filed by out-of-state students alleging that a Kansas statute like the California one was barred by IIRIRA, on the grounds the students lacked standing and had no right to sue to enforce IIRIRA. Specifically, as to standing, the court found that the plaintiffs could not demonstrate that they were injured in fact by the Kansas statute, given that the statute did not apply to them, and they paid out-of-state tuition both before and after its enactment.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the court found that IIRIRA did not create a private right of action, which means that individuals cannot sue to

¹⁰⁶ *Martinez*, 83 Cal. Rptr. at 538-41.

¹⁰⁷ *Martinez*, 241 P.3d at 863-64 (“The fatal flaw in plaintiffs’ argument concerning [IIRIRA] is their contention that [the California statute’s] exemption from paying out-of-state tuition is based on residence. It is not. ... If Congress had intended to prohibit states entirely from making unlawful aliens eligible for in-state tuition, it could easily have done so.”). Some commentators have faulted this interpretation, on the grounds that it “creates a semantic loophole so large that it swallows the rest of the statute. Under this strained reading of 8 U.S.C. § 1623, Congress did not mind if states afford in-state tuition rates to illegal aliens as long as the word ‘residence’ was avoided.” *Immigration Nullification*, *supra* note 10, at 510; Ralph W. Kasarda, *Affirmative Action Gone Haywire: Why State Laws Granting College Tuition Preferences to Illegal Aliens Are Preempted by Federal Law*, 2009 B.Y.U. EDUC. & L.J. 197 (2009); Kyle William Colvin, *In-State Tuition and Illegal Immigrants: An Analysis of Martinez v. Regents of the University of California*, 2010 B.Y.U. EDUC. & L. J. 392 (2010).

¹⁰⁸ *Martinez*, 241 P.3d at 865.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 866.

¹¹⁰ 376 F. Supp. 2d. at 1033, 1039-40. Furthermore, the court noted that even if the plaintiffs had suffered an injury in fact, they still failed to demonstrate that a favorable court decision with respect to most of their claims would redress that injury because they would still have to pay out-of-state tuition if the Kansas statute were invalidated. *Id.* at 1034. Standing requirements, which are concerned with who is a proper party to raise a particular issue in the federal courts, derive from Article III of the Constitution, which confines the jurisdiction of federal courts to actual “Cases” and “Controversies”. U.S. Const., art. III, §2, cl. 1. The case-or-controversy requirement has long been construed to restrict Article III courts to the adjudication of real, live disputes involving plaintiffs who have “a personal stake in the outcome of the controversy.” *Baker v. Carr*, 369 U.S. 186, 204 (1962). Plaintiffs appearing before an Article III court must generally show three things in order to demonstrate standing: (1) they have suffered an “injury in fact” that is concrete and particularized; (2) the injury is fairly traceable to the challenged action of the defendant; and (3) the injury is likely to be redressed by a favorable decision. *See, e.g., Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife*, 504 U.S. 555, 560-61 (1992).

enforce it.¹¹¹ The court's decision was subsequently affirmed by a federal appeals court,¹¹² and the Supreme Court declined to grant certiorari.¹¹³

Following the *Day* decision, the Washington Legal Foundation (WLF) filed several complaints with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) alleging that certain in-state tuition laws violated IIRIRA. The WLF specifically called on DHS to enforce IIRIRA against states that offer in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens based on high school attendance in the state on the grounds that the *Day* court had found that private individuals cannot do so.¹¹⁴ DHS does not appear to have responded publicly to these complaints, although it elsewhere expressed the view that states may decide whether to provide in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens.¹¹⁵ However, litigation currently pending in state court in Texas raises the possibility that private individuals could potentially bring suits challenging at least some state practices in providing in-state tuition to unlawfully present aliens based on standing as state taxpayers.¹¹⁶

Financial Aid

Fewer states provide state financial aid to unlawfully present aliens than provide in-state tuition,¹¹⁷ and neither plaintiffs nor commentators appear to have raised significant issues regarding states providing for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility for state financial aid, separate and apart from their eligibility for in-state tuition. However, in the event of such a challenge, it seems likely that state financial aid would be found to constitute a public benefit for purposes of PRWORA and IIRIRA for reasons previously discussed. Thus, state measures that would provide for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility would generally be seen as permissible so long as the state enacts legislation that makes clear that unlawfully present aliens are eligible.¹¹⁸ The state may also need to provide for unlawfully present aliens' eligibility upon some basis other than residence in the state, at least given one of the two interpretations of IIRIRA to date.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ *Day*, 376 F. Supp. 2d at 1039-40.

¹¹² *Day v. Bond*, 500 F.3d 1127 (10th Cir. 2007).

¹¹³ *Day v. Bond*, 554 U.S. 918 (2008).

¹¹⁴ Press Release, Washington Legal Foundation, WLF Files Civil Rights Complaint Against State of New York Regarding Benefits for Illegal Aliens (Sept. 7, 2005); Press Release, Washington Legal Foundation, WLF Files Civil Rights Complaint Against State of Texas Regarding Benefits for Illegal Aliens (Aug. 9, 2005) (copies on file with the author).

¹¹⁵ Letter from Jim Pendergraph, Executive Director, Office of State and Local Coordination, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to Thomas J. Ziko, Special Deputy Attorney General, N.C. Dep't of Justice, July 9, 2008 (copy on file with the author).

¹¹⁶ *Lone Star College Sys. v. Immigration Reform Coalition of Texas*, No. 14-12-00819-CV, 2013 Tex. App. LEXIS 14411 (Tex. Ct. App., Nov. 26, 2013). As a general matter, Texas recognizes taxpayer standing to sue to enjoin allegedly illegal expenditures of public funds without demonstrating a distinct injury. *See, e.g., Andrade v. Venable*, 372 S.W.3d 134, 137 (Tex. 2012).

¹¹⁷ *Cf. Arlene Russell, State Policies Regarding Undocumented College Students: A Narrative of Unresolved Issues, Ongoing Debate, and Missed Opportunities, A Higher Education Policy Brief*, Mar. 2011, at 4 (copy on file with the author) (noting that, as of the date of the brief, only two states provided unlawfully present aliens with in-state tuition and state financial aid, while 8 states provided in-state tuition, but not state financial aid).

¹¹⁸ *See supra* notes 99-105 and accompanying text.

¹¹⁹ *See supra* notes 106-113 and accompanying text.

Conclusions

Further developments in this area seem likely, particularly in terms of federal and state legislative proposals and enactments. Indeed, the enactment of laws permitting unlawfully present aliens to receive in-state tuition has recently been cited as a “trend” in state immigration legislation.¹²⁰ The courts, in contrast, may be unlikely to reconsider existing precedents as to the right to higher education, or whether in-state tuition and financial aid constitute public benefits for purposes of PRWORA and IIRIRA. There could, however, potentially be developments in the state courts based on litigation asserting state taxpayer standing to challenge alleged violations of IIRIRA,¹²¹ or challenging state measures’ conformity with provisions of state law.¹²²

Author Contact Information

Kate M. Manuel
Legislative Attorney
kmanuel@crs.loc.gov, 7-4477

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¹²⁰ See, e.g., Laura D. Francis, *Legislative Overhaul, Employer-Friendly Immigration Policies in Spotlight in 2014*, 8 WORKPLACE IMMIGRATION REP. 110 (Feb. 3, 2014).

¹²¹ See *supra* note 65 and accompanying text.

¹²² See *supra* note 116 and accompanying text.