



August 30, 2024

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Request for Signature – SB 971 (Portantino)

POSITION: Support Dear Senator Newman,

On behalf of Glendale Community College, I am respectfully requesting your signature on Senate Bill Senate Bill 971 (Portantino), which will exempt students who are residents impacted by war or other regional conflict, seeking California residency, and attending a community college in California from the nonresident tuition fee.

There are a growing number of regional conflicts throughout the world causing large scale displacements. This includes a large number of Armenians displaced from Artsakh, which totaled more than 91,000 individuals even prior to the escalations in the conflict in 2023. Similar displacements have been seen in Ukraine, with the United Nations indicating that over 6 million individuals have sought refugee status.

At Glendale Community College, we have seen an enormous influx in recent immigrants from these regions seeking higher education as a way to better their lives and the lives of their families. These increases include a large number of Ukrainian immigrants seeking a new life in California. Many of these new immigrants have been completing classes in our noncredit programs and are ready to engage in further education in credit programs leading to degree and career certificate. It has been these changes in conditions that led to our sponsorship of SB 971, as a way of creating an educational pathway for students from conflict and war-torn regions and making a statement that we support them and their belonging here in our community.

Many individuals have sought safe haven in California, where they have turned to education to improve their lives and become full participants in our communities. While here in Glendale those displaced by conflict tend to be from Europe, many colleagues have expressed that they see similarly displaced communities from Africa and the Middle East. These individuals travel across continents and often through multiple countries to find peace, safety, and opportunity. Just this week a young student described how she had to flee Ukraine to Sweden, because the embassies in Ukraine are not open, preventing her from attaining travel documents in her home country. The process just to get to California took over six months.

While there are some supports for those with refugee status, many may be unable to attain this status.

Superintendent/President Dr. Ryan Cornner

Board of Trustees Dr. Sevan Benlian • Yvette Vartanian Davis • Dr. Armine Hacopian • Desirée Portillo Rabinov • Ann H. Ransford

The United Nations has noted this in their designation of “refugee like” or displaced individuals. This a recognition that many seeking safety from conflict may not fit within the specific asylum or refugee requirements. The immigration process and difficulty of obtaining California residency for educational purposes has kept these individuals out of accessing higher education. Individuals in this position face ineligibility for financial aid, such as Pell Grants and student loans, and pay higher out-of-state tuition costs compared to in-state students. These rates, which differ by upward of tens of thousands of dollars, make the cost of college disproportionately higher and unaffordable.

SB 971 will help provide educational assistance to these individuals by removing such a significant financial barrier and make higher education more accessible. Lastly, recent changes to this legislation have resulted in this bill being cost neutral to the state. Glendale Community College is eager and willing to better serve this population and demonstrate a commitment to California’s values and support for recent immigrants. With the signing of this bill, we will be able to do so and look forward to being able to share the results with the Chancellor’s Office as an example of how we can effectively support changing communities.

If you may have any inquiries regarding our stance, feel free to contact me at (818)551-5105 or via email at rcornner@glendale.edu. In addition, we have attached a Board Resolution supporting SB 971.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ryan Cornner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ryan Cornner
Superintendent/President