

STATE OF NEW YORK

8498

IN SENATE

March 7, 2022

Introduced by Sen. GOUNARDES -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Higher Education

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to prohibiting legacy preference and early decision admission policies at higher education institutions in this state

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Short title. This act may be known and shall be cited as
2 the "fair college admissions act".

3 § 2. Legislative intent. a. The legislature hereby finds that there
4 are significant income gains associated with postsecondary education
5 degree attainment, with New York state residents with a bachelor's
6 degree three times less likely to live in poverty than those with a high
7 school diploma.

8 b. The legislature further finds that students who attend and graduate
9 from a highly selective higher education institution in the state of New
10 York are much more likely to earn salaries in the top income quintile
11 than those who graduate from less selective institutions, furthering
12 economic and social inequality.

13 c. The legislature further finds that within most highly selective
14 higher education institutions in New York state, degree completion rates
15 for students from low-income and working class family backgrounds are
16 comparable to students from upper-income family backgrounds.

17 d. The legislature further finds that many four-year higher education
18 institutions in New York state consider whether a prospective student is
19 related to alumni as part of the admissions process.

20 e. The legislature further finds that providing preferential treatment
21 to students related to alumni of a higher education institution is
22 discriminatory in nature and disproportionately hurts students who come
23 from working class and low-income families, have parents who did not
24 earn a bachelor's degree, are undocumented, are immigrants, and are
25 members of historically underrepresented minority groups formerly denied
26 entry into specific higher education institutions either as a matter of

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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1 institution policy or the effect of historic underlying law and govern-
2 ment practices.

3 f. The legislature further finds that 30 percent of bachelor degree
4 granting institutions in the state of New York currently employ an early
5 decision admissions policy that allows students to apply in the fall of
6 their senior year and receive an application decision by December in
7 exchange for committing to attend that institution and foregoing an
8 opportunity to compare financial aid packages offered by competing
9 institutions of higher education.

10 g. The legislature further finds that at a number of higher education
11 institutions, particularly highly selective institutions with low admit
12 rates, between 40 and 50 percent of enrolled students are admitted early
13 decision, and early decision applicants are more than twice as likely to
14 be admitted.

15 h. The legislature further finds that early decision admission poli-
16 cies are discriminatory in nature, as they favor students with strong
17 college advising and the ability to commit to a college or university
18 without considering a financial aid package. They put first-generation
19 students, students at under-resourced high schools, and students from
20 working class and low-income backgrounds at a disadvantage because they
21 lack awareness of the strategic benefit of applying early decision and
22 do not have the luxury of committing to an institution without knowing
23 the post-financial aid cost of attendance.

24 i. The legislature further finds that inequitable, unfair admissions
25 policies and practices such as legacy preference and early decision are
26 a significant factor behind disparities in college enrollment among
27 students from historically underserved racial and economic subgroups
28 compared to their more advantaged peers at selective higher education
29 institutions.

30 j. The legislature hereby declares that a prohibition on legacy pref-
31 erence and early decision admissions policies at degree-granting
32 colleges and universities in the state shall further the goals of educa-
33 tional, economic, and social equity, helping to diversify highly selec-
34 tive institutions while closing achievement gaps between historically
35 advantaged and disadvantaged groups, and shall commit to achieving the
36 same with the following provisions of this act.

37 § 3. The education law is amended by adding a new section 239-d to
38 read as follows:

39 § 239-d. Prohibition on legacy preference and early decision admission
40 policies. 1. Definitions. As used in this section, the following terms
41 shall have the following meanings:

42 (a) "Consider alumni/ae relation as a factor in admissions" shall
43 refer to when an admissions application asks applicants to indicate
44 where their relatives attended college and that such information is
45 included among the documents that the higher education institution uses
46 to consider an applicant for admission.

47 (b) "Early action" shall mean an admissions plan that allows a student
48 to apply at an earlier stage of the admissions process and receive an
49 expedited admissions decision but does not require such student to
50 commit to attend such institution upon receiving a decision of admit-
51 tance.

52 (c) "Early decision" shall mean an admissions plan that allows a
53 student to apply at an earlier stage of the admissions process and
54 receive an expedited admissions decision that requires such student,
55 absent unique circumstances stipulated in the early decision application
56 or otherwise agreed to by the institution, to commit to attend a higher

1 education institution should such student be admitted and to withdraw
2 all other applications to other higher education institutions.

3 (d) "Higher education institution" shall mean the state university of
4 New York, as defined in subdivision one of section three hundred fifty-
5 two of this chapter, the city university of New York, as established in
6 section sixty-two hundred three of this chapter, or any institution
7 given the power to confer degrees in this state by the board of regents
8 as provided in section two hundred eighteen of this article.

9 (e) "Legacy preference" shall mean a preference in admissions given by
10 a higher education institution to applicants related by consanguinity or
11 affinity to alumni of such institution.

12 2. Prohibition. No higher education institution in this state shall:

13 (a) consider alumni/ae relation as a factor in admissions; or

14 (b) execute an early decision policy for undergraduate admissions.
15 Such prohibition shall not apply, however, to a higher education insti-
16 tution that asks applicants about relations to alumni of such institu-
17 tion after an offer of admission and financial aid has been accepted for
18 the purposes of data collection and reporting. Furthermore, the prohi-
19 bition herein described shall not be construed to apply to an early
20 action policy as defined in paragraph (b) of subdivision one of this
21 section.

22 3. Penalty. A violation of subdivision two of this section shall
23 result in a civil penalty of a sum equivalent to ten percent of the
24 number of full-time equivalent first year students enrolled at the high-
25 er educational institution the year previous to the violation multiplied
26 by such institution's published tuition and fees.

27 4. Dedication of penalty funds. All penalties paid pursuant to subdi-
28 vision three of this section shall be assessed by the commissioner and
29 deposited into the general fund of the state. Such monies shall then be
30 used for the disbursement of tuition assistance awards by the higher
31 education services corporation to eligible undergraduate students pursu-
32 ant to the provisions of sections six hundred sixty-six, six hundred
33 sixty-seven, six hundred sixty-seven-a, and six hundred sixty seven-c of
34 this chapter.

35 § 4. This act shall take effect on the first of July next succeeding
36 the date on which it shall have become a law. Effective immediately the
37 addition, amendment, and/or repeal of any rules or regulations necessary
38 for the implementation of this act on its effective date are authorized
39 to be made on or before such effective date.