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TUITION WAIVER FOR N.A. INDIANS

House Bill 4174 as enrolled
Second Analysis (8-16-93)

Sponsor: Rep. Pat Gagliardi
First House Committee:
Higher Education
Second House Committee:
Appropriations
Senate Committee: Education

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Bay Mills Community College in Brimley is one of 23 colleges nationwide that are controlled by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the only federal tribally controlled community college in Michigan. Bay Mills operates on an open enrollment basis, and offers a small, nurturing environment, small classes, an emphasis on family and community, and a focus on the success of the student -- attributes that are especially significant in providing support for Native American students, whose dropout rates in high school reportedly reach 80 percent in some parts of Michigan. Bay Mills Community College also offers off-campus classes on all of Michigan's federal reservations, although 30 percent of the college's students are non-Native Americans. The college has a 95 percent employment placement rate; a 75 percent retention rate; and a transfer rate of 25 percent of its students who go on to other post-secondary institutions. It is proposed that the benefits of the Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver program be extended to include this college, since it could offer important advantages to Native American students, among whom only 6.2 percent attend college for four or more years.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

Public Act 174 of 1976 requires that state colleges and universities provide free tuition for any student who is a North American Indian, provided that the student is a legal resident of the state for at least 12 consecutive months and that he or she qualifies for admission as a full-time, part-time, or summer school student. Institutions are reimbursed annually by the Michigan Commission on Indian Affairs for tuition waived during the prior fiscal year. House Bill 4174 would amend the act to include a federal tribally controlled community college under this provision. Under the bill, a federal tribally

controlled community college could participate in the tuition waiver program and be eligible for reimbursement provided that it was recognized under the federal Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act, and that it met recognized regional accreditation requirements, as determined by the Department of Education.

MCL 390.1251

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to Department of Education estimates, the provisions of the bill would result in a cost of approximately \$97,000 to the state. Full-time tuition at Bay Mills is \$1,500 annually, or \$50 per semester credit hour. During fiscal year 1992-93, there were 80 full-time, and 110 part-time, quarter blood Indian students whose tuition totalled \$97,000. The Senate-passed Higher Education appropriations bill for fiscal 1993-94 (House Bill 4540) includes an additional \$97,000 for tuition waivers at Bay Mills Community College. (8-16-93)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Most Native American students are not able to attend college without extensive financial aid. The bill would make it possible for the state to directly assist its tribal communities in their efforts to increase graduation rates in higher education by providing more of these students with free tuition at a federal tribally controlled community college in the state, as well as at state colleges and universities, and thus encourage more Native Americans to attain a higher education.

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Against:

Since the costs of providing free college tuition -- which are estimated to be almost \$100,000 -- will be borne by the state, the bill should specify eligibility requirements for who may qualify for free tuition at federal tribally controlled community colleges.

Response:

It isn't necessary to add restrictive language to House Bill 4174, since Public Act 174 of 1976 already restricts free tuition at post-secondary institutions to students who meet certain qualifications. To qualify, a student must be at least 1/4 quantum blood Indian and a legal resident of the state for not less than 12 consecutive months.