

# WISCONSIN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

TUESDAY, December 11, 2007

## WISCONSIN RESIDENTS STRONGLY OPPOSE STATE BENEFITS FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

As the issue of illegal immigration is discussed throughout Wisconsin, a new survey finds little support for allowing illegal immigrants to receive a number of Wisconsin benefits. Wisconsin residents overwhelmingly oppose allowing illegal immigrants to apply for Wisconsin driver's licenses by a margin of 76% to 19%. On the question of allowing illegal immigrants to receive discounted tuition at the University of Wisconsin, 86% oppose the idea while only 10% support it. It is only in the area of allowing illegal immigrant children to attend local public schools that there is some serious movement. On this issue 46% of Wisconsin residents favor it, while 46% oppose it.

These are among the key findings about statewide policy issues from the most recent survey of 600 Wisconsin residents conducted by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. and Diversified Research between December 2 and 3, 2007.

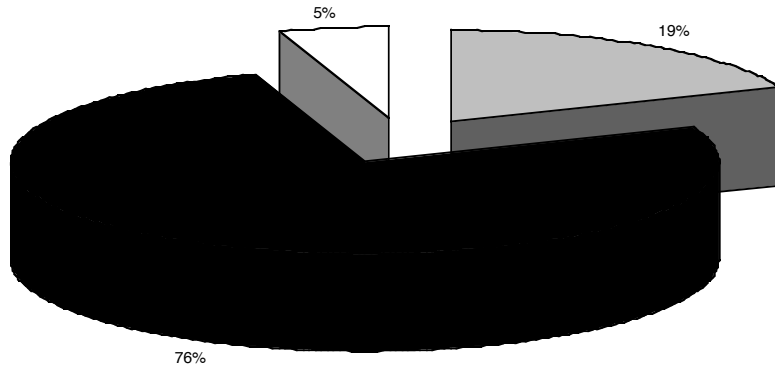
### *Driver's Licenses*

Seventy-six percent of Wisconsin residents oppose allowing illegal immigrants to apply for state driver's licenses. Only 19% supported the idea. The most support for this issue came from Madison, where it was only opposed by 49% to 48%, and La Crosse and Eau Claire where the opposition was 65% to 32%. In Green Bay, however, 87% of the population opposed allowing illegal immigrants to apply for driver's licenses and only 6% supported the idea. Politically the support was reasonably constant: 12% of Republicans supported the idea, 19% of the Democrats did and 24% of the Independents supported the idea of allowing illegal immigrants to apply for driver's licenses. Among Liberals the support was dead even – 48% supporting it and 48% opposing it. However, among Conservatives those numbers change radically. Only 8% of Conservatives supported the idea, while 88% opposed it. The only real support in the state for allowing illegal immigrants to apply for driver's licenses came from young people between the ages of 18 and 24, where 64% favored the idea while only 36% opposed it. In every other major age group there was uniform opposition to the idea of allowing illegal immigrants to apply for Wisconsin driver's licenses. There were also different views among racial groups: 16% of Whites supported the idea while 37% of Blacks supported it. Among men, 16% supported it and among women, 20% supported it.

### *University of Wisconsin Tuition*

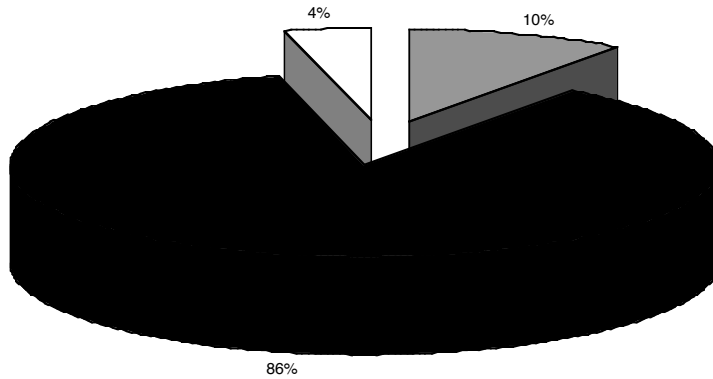
Wisconsin residents were asked whether illegal immigrants should be able to receive discounted in-state tuition at the University of Wisconsin. Eighty-six percent of respondents opposed this idea while only 10% approved it. The most support for this idea was in Madison, where 27% supported it, and La Crosse/Eau Claire where 25% supported it. The most opposition came from outstate, rural areas where only 3% of the people supported it while 93% opposed it. There was very little difference in support for this idea politically. Democrats supported it with only 13%, while 83% disagreed. Among Republicans,

Wisconsin Residents' Opinions on Allowing Illegal Immigrants to Apply for Driver's Licenses



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Wisconsin Residents' Opinions on Allowing Illegal Immigrants to Receive Discounted In-State Tuition at the University of Wisconsin

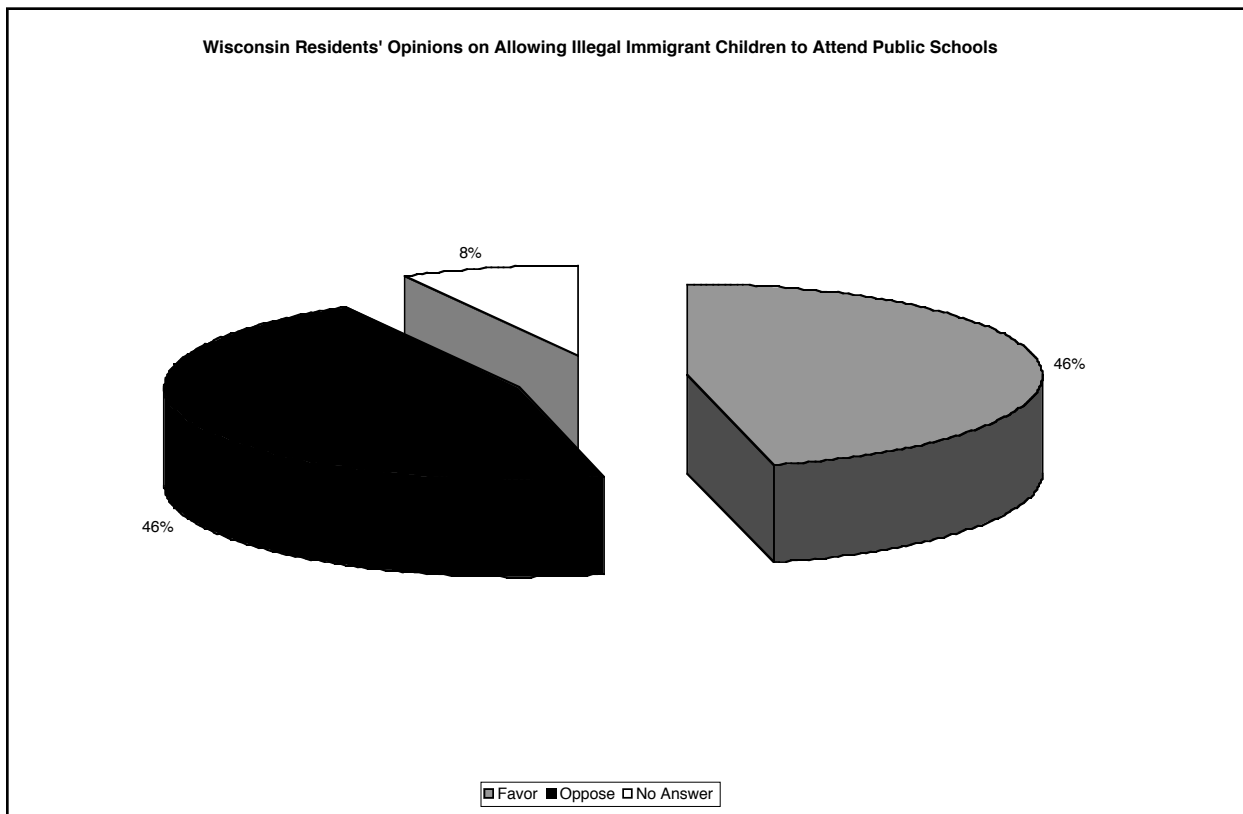


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it was 7% favoring it and 93% opposing it. Among Independents, only 10% favored it while 84% opposed it. Even ideologically there was very little support. Among Liberals, 30% supported it while 64% opposed it. Among Conservatives, 97% opposed it while only 1% supported it. There were some definite splits based on race: only 7% of Whites favored the idea of discounted in-state tuition for illegal immigrants at UW, while 40% of Black respondents supported the idea. Among young people 18-24, 46% supported it while 55% opposed it. At the same time, only 4% of Wisconsin senior citizens supported the idea while 92% opposed it. Among women, 12% favored it, while 8% of men supported the idea. Except for a few key demographic groups, there was very little support for this idea throughout the state.

**Public Education**

It was on the issue of favoring allowing illegal immigrant children to attend local public schools that the numbers dramatically changed. On this issue, 46% of the state favored the idea of sending these children to local public schools while an equal amount of residents (46%) opposed it. There were some dramatic differences depending of where you lived in the state. In the Milwaukee area there was more opposition than support for the idea. In the City of Milwaukee, 47% opposed it while 44% favored it. In the Milwaukee suburbs support dropped to 36%, while 56% opposed it. In Green Bay, 53% of residents opposed this idea, while 32% supported it. The major support for the idea of allowing illegal immigrant children to attend local public schools came in La Crosse/Eau Claire where 72% favored it while 28% opposed it and in Madison, where 61% favored it while 33% opposed it.



Not surprisingly there were some key differences among political and ideological groupings. Among Republicans, 33% supported this while 62% opposed it. However, among Democrats the numbers shifted to 55% favoring idea while 35% opposed it. Among Independents it was almost split with 48% favoring it while 45% opposed it. Ideologically, not surprisingly, there was a huge fault line: 77% among Wisconsin residents who said they were liberal supported this idea, while only 30% of Conservative respondents supported it. Once again, among younger people there was overwhelming support for this idea with 91% of residents between 18 and 24 supporting it and only 9% opposing it. There was also

some support for this idea among senior citizens with 49% of people over 65 supporting it with 42% opposing it. The major group that opposed it was residents between the ages 35 and 44, with 64% opposing it while only 31% favored it. Among Black respondents 55% supported the idea while only 46% of Whites did likewise. Among men, 41% supported the idea of allowing illegal immigrant children to attend local public schools while 51% opposed it. These numbers were almost inverted among women where 51% of female respondents favored the idea while only 41% opposed it.

### **Summary**

The issue of illegal immigration, which is being discussed at the state level policy wise throughout the country, offers some interesting contrasts in Wisconsin. There is very little support for allowing illegal immigrants to apply for state driver's licenses or become eligible for in-state tuition at the University of Wisconsin. However, there is a dramatic shift on the question of allowing illegal immigrant children to attend our local public schools. What is important in the wording of this question is that we very specifically asked about illegal immigrant children. What should be understood about this issue is that many children of illegal immigrants are in fact American citizens and are entitled to local public education. Wisconsin residents apparently understand the difference. We believe that what makes this education issue different from the other two is that we are talking about children and not adults. Adults are the ones most likely to apply for driver's licenses or attend the University of Wisconsin. It is younger children who many Wisconsin residents believe ought to be given similar opportunities to legal residents. This sharp fault line may become very important as this issue is debated in Wisconsin, but for the time being there is no doubt that there is very little support for allowing major benefits for illegal immigrants among Wisconsin residents.

### **ABOUT THE STUDY**

This study of 600 Wisconsin residents was conducted by telephone between December 2 and December 3, 2007. A total of 600 Wisconsin residents were interviewed. The survey has a margin of error of plus or minus 4% for percentages of the whole sample. For a percentage near 50%, for example, this means that repeated samples would produce results between 47% and 53%, 95 times out of 100.

This study was commissioned by the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, Inc. The Institute was founded in 1987, and its mandate is to examine issues of public policy facing Wisconsin, using a non-partisan approach.

Dr. Michael LaVelle, President of Diversified Research, a nationally known survey research company supervised the project. Dr. LaVelle has a Ph.D. and has taught statistics and social research methods at the university level. He has been President of Diversified Research since 1982 and has over thirty years experience in survey research.

**Should the state of Wisconsin allow illegal immigrants to apply for Wisconsin driver's licenses?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Yes</b>	19%	17%	14%	22%	7%	32%	48%	11%	14%
<b>No</b>	76%	80%	81%	73%	87%	65%	49%	87%	77%
<b>No Answer</b>	5%	4%	5%	5%	7%	3%	3%	2%	9%

**Should the state of Wisconsin allow illegal immigrants to receive discounted in-state tuition at the University of Wisconsin?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Yes</b>	10%	11%	5%	7%	7%	25%	27%	7%	3%
<b>No</b>	86%	88%	90%	93%	88%	73%	64%	91%	93%
<b>No Answer</b>	4%	1%	6%	0%	5%	2%	10%	2%	5%

**Would you favor or oppose allowing illegal immigrant children to attend your local public schools?**

	Total	City of Milwaukee	Milwaukee Suburb	Waukesha County	Green Bay Area	La Crosse Eau Claire	Madison	South East	Rest of State
<b>Favor</b>	46%	44%	36%	42%	32%	72%	61%	50%	49%
<b>Oppose</b>	46%	47%	56%	50%	53%	28%	33%	46%	46%
<b>No Answer</b>	8%	9%	8%	9%	15%	0%	6%	5%	6%