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**For Immediate Release: May 23, 2024**  
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## **Portantino Bill to Assist Student Refugees Passes Senate**

**Sacramento, CA** – Senate Bill 971, authored by Senator Anthony J. Portantino (D – Burbank), passed the Senate Floor today. The measure would make higher education more affordable for low income refugees by exempting them from paying the nonresident tuition fee. The Senator was inspired to author the bill by students at Glendale Community College who raised tuition money to help students who were displaced from Artsakh by the Azerbaijan.

**“Far too many young people have been forcibly uprooted from their homeland and reside in California, where they contribute in positive ways to our communities and our economy,”** stated Senator Portantino.

**“California and the 25<sup>th</sup> State Senate District has a strong, recent history of supporting and welcoming immigrants. Helping young people attain a higher education degree is the sensible and nurturing thing to do and I am grateful to my friends at GCC for bringing this bill idea to me.”**

Due to a growing number of regional conflicts throughout the world, many individuals seek safe haven through immigration to the United States and establish residency in California. These individuals often turn to education to improve their lives and become full participants in our communities. Ineligibility for financial aid can make the cost of college disproportionately higher and unaffordable.

**“Glendale Community College is proud to sponsor this bill that will bring much needed support to our community. As a Board, we have a responsibility to meet the needs of those who are facing financial hardship. Seeing an influx of those impacted by regional conflicts, this bill supports the full integration of refugee students into our community as well as our local economy,”** stated Dr. Sevan Benlian, Board President of Glendale Community College.

SB 971 would exempt from the nonresident tuition fee a nonresident, low-income student who is a resident of a region impacted by war or other regional conflict and registers for lower division courses at Glendale Community College or two other community colleges selected by the Chancellor of the California Community Colleges. The measure requires the governing boards of community colleges that choose to use this exemption to adopt one uniform policy to determine a student's residence classification, establish procedures for an appeal and review of the residence classification, and determine whether a student is low income.

**“Part of our mission is to build a sense of belonging within our community and serve all students by creating an educational environment where they can take the next steps toward the future,” said Dr. Ryan Cornner, Superintendent/President of Glendale Community College. “Glendale has a history supporting recent immigrant communities. In turn, these populations have become cornerstones in our community. This bill will allow us to more effectively meet the needs of our community and ensure that we fulfill our mission.”**

A large number of Armenians were displaced from Artsakh, which totaled more than 100,000 individuals, even prior to the escalations in the conflict in 2023. California is home to a large diaspora of Armenian people and will continue to see the immigration of individuals seeking safety. Similar displacements have been seen in Ukraine. The United Nations indicates that over 6 million individuals have sought refugee status.

**“The Armenian Students Association of Glendale Community College wholeheartedly supports SB 971, a crucial step in providing equitable educational opportunities for refugee students impacted by world conflicts,” stated Amaras Issagholian, President of the Armenian Students Association of Glendale Community College. “This bill demonstrates our commitment to inclusivity, recognizing refugees' hardships when escaping from violence, and holding open arms to those in pursuit of a promised land where opportunity and happiness exist for them too. Together, we can and must build a brighter future for those who seek refuge while paving the path to greater prosperity.”**

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