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State Bills Aim to Limit Scholarships for International Students

Legislators sponsoring the bills in Idaho and Ohio argue that the majority of taxpayer-funded athletic aid should be set aside for local students.

By Johanna Alonso



International student athletes make up over 35 percent of Division I men's tennis players as of 2025.

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Republican legislators in three states are proposing laws that would limit how much financial aid public colleges and universities can give international students. In Idaho and Ohio, the legislation, if passed, would cap the percentage of athletic scholarships that can go to international students. The [Oklahoma bill](#) would prevent public institutions from giving any scholarships to noncitizens.

The sponsors of the bills in [Ohio](#) and [Idaho](#) say they aim to ensure scholarship opportunities funded by state taxpayers go to local students who, they say, are more likely to stay in the U.S. and contribute to their universities' local economies after they graduate.

“These are state schools; they’re subdivisions of state government. They’re funded in large part by U.S. citizens,” State Senator Doug Okuniewicz, the sponsor of the Idaho bill, said in an interview. “I think our education system is largely designed to create an educated and skilled workforce to become productive citizens in our state and our country ... It seems it would be better if we had U.S. residents, and if at all possible, Idahoans, have more of these scholarship opportunities so we can train and create more teachers and police officers and people who can work in the medical field.”

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He said he was inspired to author the legislation after finding out the entire men's tennis team at the University of Idaho was comprised of international students while researching the university's athletics programs with his son.

The sponsor of the wider-reaching Oklahoma bill, State Senator Michael Bergstrom, did not respond to a request for comment.

The legislation comes as the Trump administration has taken several steps to limit international students' abilities to study and work in the United States, such as proposing to end a policy that lets F-1 visa holders stay in the U.S. until they finish their degree. The Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education, which the administration proposed last fall, included a 15 percent cap on international enrollment.

It also comes in the wake of the Trump administration's massive deportation campaign, which has impacted a significant number of international students.

The bills also aren't the first of their kind: Similar bills were proposed last year in [Louisiana](#) and [Texas](#), though neither was successful. (The Texas bill was co-sponsored by Brandon Creighton, the orchestrator of Texas's anti-diversity, equity and inclusion legislation and the new chancellor of the Texas Tech University system.)

But John Haupt, director of operations for Gateway International Group, an international education consultancy, said the bills points to an increasingly common viewpoint among conservatives that taxpayer money should be put primarily toward U.S. interests.

“What I've seen is this increasing scrutiny around how public funds are used and, really, who benefits from them. We've seen that through research scrutiny debates, foreign funding disclosures and just broad conversations about public spending,” he said.

Okuniewicz and Brian Lorenz, the lead sponsor of the Ohio bill, both emphasized that they aren't interested in limiting international enrollment altogether.

“My concern with this bill is very specific—it's about athletic scholarships at public universities, not about broader international student enrollment. Ohio has always benefited from international talent in our classrooms and research programs, and our economy thrives on global engagement,” Lorenz wrote in an email to *Inside Higher Ed*. “That said, publicly funded athletic scholarships are a limited resource, and it's reasonable to ensure that Ohio's own students have

priority for those opportunities supported by Ohio taxpayers.”

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International student athletes are a small but significant population; as of 2024–25, about 22,600 international students play Division I or II sports, representing about 4 percent of those divisions’ athletes. They make up larger portions of some sports, such as tennis, with international students comprising about 36.2 percent of all men’s DI tennis players.

Inside Higher Ed reached out to the flagship institutions in Idaho, Ohio and Oklahoma to ask how much aid they currently allocate to international students. Ohio State

University said that, currently, it spends only 9.5 percent of its total athletic financial aid on international student athletes. Fifteen OSU teams exceed the 25 percent limit in Lorenz's bill, including fencing, ice hockey and both men's and women's golf.

"While we have not taken a position on the bill, we will continue to work with elected officials to ensure our student-athletes have the resources and support needed to succeed," Chris Booker, director of media and public relations at OSU, wrote in an email.

The University of Oklahoma did not provide details about how much money it gives to international student athletes and said it does not comment on pending legislation. The University of Idaho did not respond to a request for comment.

Sudhanshu Kaushik, founder of the North American Association of Indian Students, stressed that most international students do not receive huge scholarships; they often receive small sums that encourage them to attend the university that awarded them the scholarships, ultimately resulting in tuition gains for the institutions.

"You're effectively harming the bottom line of these ... educational institutions and you're making a mess out of it. It's evident and it's a fact that international students pay two to three times higher tuition than a domestic student," he said. "If you take away the scholarships, take away the incentive ... you're effectively throwing away free money

you would've gotten. It's crazy that people think this is a smart idea. I think what they're believing [is a problem] is a very small minority.”

Haupt added that he is more concerned about the impact of the Oklahoma bill that would prevent any international students from receiving scholarships.

“That’s a bit concerning to me because that could really, really hurt state institutions and their capacities to attract international students,” he said.

Okuniewicz said college and university athletic programs in Idaho have raised concerns about how successful their teams can be without recruiting talented international athletes; one athletic director, he said, had noted it would be hard to hire strong coaches with this policy in place.

But he said that the priority of producing graduates that will contribute to Idaho’s economy should supersede the need to win games. He also argued that college sports teams should be more willing to recruit and train local athletes.

Lorenz has also heard concerns from Ohio universities that his bill could hinder the recruitment process, which, he said, is why the bill will be further refined through committee hearings. He hopes institutions and other relevant organizations, like the NCAA, will weigh in sooner rather than later.

“If institutions wait until the 11th hour to comment, it undermines transparency and prevents thoughtful

collaboration,” he wrote. “This bill is a priority, particularly with the end of the academic year approaching, because Ohio families and student-athletes deserve clarity and fairness. Delayed engagement only disadvantages the very people this legislation is designed to protect—Ohio taxpayers and Ohio student-athletes.”

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