

Good Afternoon Members of the House Higher Education Budget Committee,

Thank you to Chair Humphries for holding a hearing on this historic legislation, HB 2425, a bill that would give Kansas college students a seat at the table on the Kansas Board of Regents. My name is Logan Stenseng, I currently serve as the Government Relations Director of the Student Senate at KU and will be speaking on behalf of our Student Senate today.

On my first trip to the statehouse in Middle-School, I remember vividly enjoying the Kansas museum in the entrance area. Specifically, I remember the exhibit detailing the vote of whether or not Kansas would become a Free State, or a Slave State. I looked at each of those little scraps of papers with scribbling on them, indicating their vote, and thinking about how important and consequential it was that each of those Free State voters were there. Their seat at the table, and their representation of their values and perspective were pivotal in leading the state, and the country, towards the path of our better angels. Without their voice, without that seat at the table, our great state of Kansas may not have been a symbol of freedom & struggle for equality that it was.

This brings me to the importance of representation today, and what benefits it could bring for generations of Kansas college students in KBOR. The Student Advisory Committee, made up of all of the KBOR SGA Presidents, is a body that can only provide input to the Board. The current budgetary crisis our system of higher education is facing highlights the need for students to have representation on KBOR in the form of a Student Regent with full voting rights to ensure our perspective is weighed seriously - and recorded, on matters directly impacting our experiences and investments in higher education.

Including different perspectives is vital in democratic decision-making, and most of our college students today were born after the current Kansas Board of Regent members attended college. Higher education is meant to serve students in their journey towards professional development and academic success, and a Student Regent member would be an advocate for students, which would center conversations with KBOR regarding programs, policies, and actions from the college student perspective. Understanding the challenges and decisions that KBOR members are faced with, and how consequential those actions are for thousands of college students across the state of Kansas, the representation of a college student member would only aid KBOR in their mission to serve and enhance the educational experiences of students.

We also believe this is warranted because Kansas college students and their families have been gradually becoming one of the primary funders of our higher education in Kansas, in tandem with the state legislature. In 2021, many Kansas colleges are facing cuts to the quality and scope of education provided to students because of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could worsen

depending on a potential decrease in FY 2022 funding from the state government. Our state government is currently in control of determining the entire representation on the Kansas Board of Regents, and HB 2425 is only asking that Kansas student governments have a voice in selecting one student nominee for the Governor and State Senate to approve. Our local governments here on campus know the needs and obstacles college students face better than anyone, because they may experience it themselves or personally know fellow student peers who do. It is also important to note that the Student Regent would be a significant minority of the Board, but we believe this is a meaningful step in the right direction for the representation and inclusion of students' perspectives on this important government body.

Outside of the benefits to decision-making, this proposal would create an opportunity for college students to take on a role in KBOR that could foster a life-long commitment to public service. Current KBOR member, John Rolfe, served in a similar capacity on Baylor's Board during his time in college and one can see how that has shaped his impact in public affairs. HB 2425 has been supported by Democratic and Republican legislators, which is inspiring to me that the representation of college students and their voice is a bipartisan issue in the Kansas legislature. We have collaborated with all of our fellow KBOR institutions in developing this idea since last summer, and every KBOR SGA has passed a resolution in support of this bill- which signals a clear request from the college students of Kansas: pass HB 2425.

Thank you for your time today, and I would love to answer any questions the Committee Members might have now or over email.

Best,
Logan Stenseng
KU Student Senate Government Relations Director