



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE February 24, 2015

Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2139

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MEMBER, KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS**

Chair Highland, Ranking Member Winn, and Members of the Committee, I am here on behalf of the Kansas Board of Regents to testify in opposition to House Bill 2139. This bill would amend K.S.A. 76-729 and repeal K.S.A. 76-731a – the law that allows undocumented immigrants’ children who have attended and graduated from Kansas high schools, and others meeting the same qualifications, to pay in-state tuition rates at our state’s public postsecondary institutions.

There are many public policy reasons to reject repeal. But maybe no reason for rejecting repeal is more compelling than this: The loss of in-state tuition rates would cause many of these students to abandon higher education. Kansas simply can’t afford to lose these students!

Why does the Board of Regents so strongly support in-state tuition for undocumented students?

By the end of this decade, more than 71% of the jobs in this state will require a higher education license, certificate or degree. That is why the Board of Regents has aggressive goals to increase the number of Kansans who obtain higher education credentials by 2020.

We know that those individuals who obtain a degree, certificate, or license are much more likely to be employed – and to remain employed – in even the toughest economic times.

Promoting quality job growth is an important public policy goal in Kansas. Who will be prepared to fill those jobs? Our state needs the highly motivated students who are making use of in-state tuition rates under the present law. We must not lose them.

So who are these students?

Well, they are innocent. It’s important to begin with that. Many of them find out they are undocumented only when they apply to college.

This academic year, there are 651 students making use of in-state tuition rates under the present law. I know you won’t be surprised when I tell you that many of them come from very modest circumstances. More than 480 of them are attending a community or technical college. Our

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current tracking of graduate employment in Kansas shows that 65% of community college students and 76% of technical college students are employed and residing in Kansas.

These students have been educated for years in our schools, some of them since they were in elementary school. A new national report looking at undocumented college students found that most of these students have been in the United States nearly all their lives, averaging 15 years or more.

To qualify for in-state tuition rates they must have (A) attended an accredited Kansas high school for three or more years; B) either graduated from an accredited Kansas high school or earned a high school equivalency credential in this state; and C) if they don't have lawful immigration status, they must file an affidavit stating under oath that they have started the process to obtain legal status.

These students don't get special treatment regarding academic admission standards – they must meet the same criteria as anyone else going to that college or university. They don't attend our public postsecondary institutions for free. They still pay tuition – the same tuition, I might add – that their high school classmates pay.

And here's the amazing thing: Undocumented students are NOT eligible for ANY state or federal student loans, grants or fellowships. They bear the entire burden of the cost of their higher education, no matter how poor they are.

These undocumented students, who are working so hard, in very difficult circumstances, to obtain higher education credentials are great Kansans. They are exactly what our state needs. We – all of us – really need these students to succeed.

The law granting these students in-state tuition rates promotes growth in Kansas

The Legislature is focusing considerable attention on policies that promote growth in our state.

It is important, then, to remember this: The law that gives these undocumented students an opportunity to attend a Kansas higher education institution at in-state tuition rates is an important pro-growth policy.

Repeal of this law, to be blunt, would represent anti-growth public policy.

Kansas needs more students – including those who are undocumented and qualify for in-state tuition – to obtain higher education degrees, licenses, or certificates to meet the job requirements of the future.

The present law, then, should be viewed as an opportunity – not just for the undocumented and other students who qualify for in-state tuition – but for the state as a whole.

We urge you to not pass House Bill 2139.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the opportunity to appear before your Committee today. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.