



Johnson County Community College Testimony in Support of HB 2515: The Kansas Promise Scholarship Act

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 2515, The Kansas Promise Scholarship Act. My name is Kate Allen and I oversee Advancement and Government Affairs at Johnson County Community College. As the socio-economic levels continue to diversify throughout our service area, college leadership explored the Promise concept over the last few years to determine what might be a possible fit for our students.

We've learned Promise programs operate today in more than 300 communities across the country including statewide programs in at least 16 other states. The concept waives costs for students who meet certain criteria and are accountable to program goals. Generally speaking, the program's purpose is clear: strengthen the college-going culture to build an educated population that can meet the changing needs of America's workforce. Specifically, there are three components of the program that we believe are important to highlight.

First, our research supports the bill's "last-dollar" concept. This is important because it will help Kansas students leverage federal dollars, such as Pell Grants, that might otherwise be left on the table. We've run many cost scenarios at JCCC, including analysis of what a Promise program would have looked like with our student population in 2016. We learned that more than 50% of eligible participants in 2016 would have had their tuition fully covered with federal grants or other scholarships. In short, the last-dollar format best protects the fiscal note for the Promise program while still benefitting a significant number of Kansas students.

Next, a common question from our community had to do with our Foundation. Would our Community College Foundation become obsolete if a Promise program was initiated? We learned that in reality, there is less than a 10% overlap between Promise students and JCCC Foundation scholarship winners. The Foundation certainly does support students right out of high school, but donors direct 90% of that aid to different populations like single-parents, Veterans, and second-chance scholarships for students learning a new trade. This means at JCCC, a Promise program would significantly compliment the work of our Foundation, not compete.

Finally, we heard valuable feedback as to how a Promise program could demystify the often confusing jargon that surrounds financial aid for higher education. For high school students and their families, the verbiage around paying for college can become intimidating. Things like the FAFSA, Pell Grants and Subsidized Loans are complex and difficult to understand – especially for many first-generation college students. When we tell a student they might be eligible for a full

Pell Grant, they rarely know what that actually means. But everyone understands the concept of a PROMISE.

When a state has a Promise program, a family no longer bears the burden of trying to understand the unique features that make up all the ins and outs their child's college financial aid package - the family can rely on that simple promise. As one of our local K-12 Superintendents put it, a Promise program changes the conversation around the dinner table about college and whether it's possible for that family.

In closing, Johnson County Community College commends state officials for coming forward with a Promise plan to help students access higher education and meet our workforce needs. We stand ready to provide any all information we've gathered in our exploration of this concept to help make this the best possible program for Kansas. Thank you again for this opportunity.