



Kansas Community College Testimony. in Support of SB 336 the Kansas RISE Act

Thank you for the opportunity today to testify in support of SB 336, the Kansas Reinvest In Post-Secondary Education Act (RISE Act). The RISE Act is not just another scholarship program but will be a new innovative economic development tool addressing the most pressing challenge facing Kansas businesses, a skilled workforce shortage.

The Kansas RISE Act will be a “last dollar” program which means it only kicks in after all federal financial aid (Pell grants) and other scholarships are applied to the cost of attendance. The Rise Act targets three distinct groups of students.

1. Kansas resident high school students immediately upon graduation or GED completion to provide them an opportunity to receive these scholarship funds starting in the fall after their graduation.
2. Kansas resident adult students who have graduated or completed their GED at least five years ago from a Kansas high school and may need finish or start education to obtain a better job to support their family.
3. Kansas residents who were in the custody of the State of Kansas in the Kansas foster care system anytime between their 6th and 12th grade year. The foster care population covered by the Act could apply for the scholarship either immediately, or any time thereafter, when they are ready to pursue higher education.

In addition to these eligibility requirements, students must also be seeking to complete a technical education program or participate in a technical education “bridge” program leading to a bachelor’s degree. We often refer to these “bridge” programs as pathway programs which allow students the ability to earn layered credentials which build on each other leading to associates and bachelor’s degrees resulting in very good paying jobs.

This Act is a targeted economic development tool focusing scholarship dollars on the technical jobs within the Kansas economy which the business community has indicated are in the highest demand. This program requires participants to maintain a 2.0 GPA, participate in mentoring/guidance sessions at the colleges which will be approved by the Kansas Board of Regents, and be continuously enrolled. The RISE Act will also provide a great opportunity for students who may have begun technical education programs under SB 155 during their high school career, but did not have enough time to completely finish the credential, certificate, or associate’s degree program. The Act will allow students who may have started education but not completed it because of finances or life circumstances the opportunity to complete their education to obtain better employment. It will allow adult students who thought higher education was out of their reach to obtain technical education to improve their life. Promotion of this opportunity will encourage Kansas citizens of all ages who believed higher education was unattainable to have the financial assistance needed to help them attain a credential or degree.

As a last dollar program this Act may not be as expensive as one may think. This program would only kick-in after all other scholarship and Pell grant dollars are applied to the student’s tuition, fees, and \$250 per semester for textbook/material obligations for up to two years. For example, the average Pell award for Kansas Community College students per semester is \$3,500. The average Kansas Community College resident tuition and fees per semester is

\$1,700. Even if you add another \$500 per semester for books/materials that would be \$2,200 per semester in student costs. Therefore, tuition, fees, books/materials would be paid by the Pell grant and they would have funds remaining to be applied to housing. In this example, the student would not utilize the Kansas RISE Act because their other financial aid covered all their tuition, fee, book/material costs. Over, 44% of Kansas Community College students receive Pell grants of that 44%, 61% had zero family contribution meaning they are the neediest students possible. The Kansas Promise Act will help the lower middle-class students whose parents make a little too much to qualify for Pell but are unable to pay for their child's education requiring them to take on student loans.

While this great idea may be new to Kansas it is not a new concept across the United States. At least 16 other states have programs with some similar components (Tennessee, Florida, Maryland, New York, Hawaii, Oregon, Rhode Island, Montana, Minnesota, Kentucky, Arkansas, Nevada, West Virginia, Indiana, and Washington.) Kansas Community Colleges stand ready to assist in any way possible in implementing this bill and delivering the workforce training/education needed to ensure Kansas businesses have the talent they need to be successful. Other states with similar programs have an advantage in terms of workforce development over the state of Kansas. This act will ensure that the talent pool we are producing will allow Kansas companies to expand and companies outside of Kansas to be attracted to the state to begin operations.

There are many details to be worked out to successfully implement this program. One question I have specifically been asked is what about this foster care provision when they already have a tuition waiver. I would like to try to help the committee understand how this bill would differ from current law. It is important to note that KSA 74-32,16 prohibits Kansas colleges from charging tuition or fees to foster children who qualify for the tuition waiver. However, the definition of a foster child eligible for the tuition waiver is much more limited than what is proposed in this bill. In current law, an eligible foster care child would have had to be in custody of the Kansas department for children and families on the date such applicant reached 18 years of age, have graduated from a high school or obtained a GED while in foster care, was released from DCF custody before they turned 18 but having graduated from high school or obtaining a GED, or was adopted from a foster care placement on or after their 16th birthday and becomes a high school graduate and enrolls in post-secondary education within two years of their high school graduation or GED completion. Under current law these students are eligible to participate in post-secondary education through the semester they turn 21 or for no more than eight semesters. This bill would provide foster children, who don't qualify under the tuition waiver, another path. MANY foster children don't obtain a high school diploma or GED while in custody. This would allow them to take their time, recover from the trauma they have experienced, deal with the typical system resistance that occurs when they are no longer in foster care, and come back to higher education with this scholarship opportunity when they are ready. Foster kids are some of the most at-risk for all sorts of negative and costly social behaviors later in life. Higher education can help change their path and trajectory. Kansas Community Colleges understand the trauma, educational history/difficulty, and the support that former Kansas foster children may need. We welcome the opportunity to serve these students and for those students to have a last dollar payor source for their education.

Finally, we would encourage that the word "promise" be added to the bill name in some way. Many people don't understand the complex system of financial aid, what a technical education scholarship might be, or what even that they would be worthy of a scholarship. However, people do understand the word promise. A promise of the opportunity for free technical education is something that will transform families, lives, the fabric of Kansas communities, and be a large benefit to the Kansas economy. We stand ready to work with you on any needed amendments as the bill is worked, are committed to making this successful, and will work with all stakeholders to address any challenges which arise along the way.

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