



**PROPONENT Testimony on HB 2375
Higher Education Budget Committee
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**Matt Lindsey
President, Kansas Independent College Association**

Chair Howe and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide PROPONENT testimony in favor of House Bill 2375. HB 2375 seeks to remedy a frustrating statutory and regulatory barrier to students pursuing a college degree in social work at certain institutions in Kansas.

KICA represents the twenty accredited undergraduate degree-granting private non-profit colleges of Kansas. The KICA institutions are, by statute and by historical precedent, outside the governance, coordination, or regulatory oversight of the Kansas Board of Regents. However, many of our degree programs – nursing, teacher education, chiropractic care, etc. – are subject to oversight and regulation related to licensure by other state agencies.

In addition to my testimony, I encourage you to review the written-only proponent testimony from Dr. Joseph Squillace, the program director for the Social Work program at the University of Saint Mary in Leavenworth.

The “In Candidacy” Catch-22:

K.S.A. 65-6306, which provides BSRB with the statutory authority to regulate social work programs, does not distinguish between “accredited” and “in candidacy” programs in social work.

“In candidacy” means that the program has applied for candidacy from the CSWE and has met the initial tests required. However, it can take an average of three years between when an institution starts the accreditation process and when that institution is granted full accreditation. In that time period, the college needs to hire full-time qualified faculty and build curriculum. Furthermore, an “in candidacy” program must demonstrate viability by having students and reporting assessment data on the quality of that student learning. Without students, there is no assessment to report, putting accreditation at risk.

However, K.S.A. 65-6306 does not allow for the BSRB to grant a license to students who graduate from a social work program that is only “in candidacy.” Thus, why would any student choose to enroll in a program that is “in candidacy?” They cannot be licensed under BSRB rules, therefore, there is no economic return to the student for investing their dollars and time in such a program, regardless of that program’s emerging quality or fit for that student.

The online Master of Social Work (MSW) program at the University of Saint Mary falls into this catch-22 right now. They will be considered “in candidacy” next month, but their students will not be eligible to sit for a social work licensure exam and be licensed by the BSRB. Passage of HB 2375 would fix this issue.

Outdated Attitudes Toward Online Programs:

Even if the Legislature were to address the “in candidacy” loophole, there is another challenge to programs like USM’s.

K.A.R. 102-2-6 is one of the regulations under the BSRB that deals with social work licensure. In it, the BSRB states that only degree programs where at least 50% of the curriculum is delivered “in residence” will be considered as suitable. “In residence” is defined specifically as face-to-face instruction.

There is certainly value in face-to-face instruction. KICA institutions have demonstrated that it is attractive and we have committed loudly and consistently to that approach throughout the pandemic.

However, there is also a place and need for online instruction. For instance, there is an extreme need for social workers in many parts of Kansas without local access to an institution of higher education. Offering an online program is intentional for USM. It is their approach to extend the values and virtues of their work to people in this state who may not have the opportunity or resources to pack up and move to Leavenworth for months at a time. They may have other employment responsibilities. They may have a family to care for. Or they may just have deep roots and a love for their hometown. None of these are reasons they should be denied access to a program like the one offered by USM. And if these prospective students want to pursue a social work career in those locations, that is just what this state needs to make possible.

Unfortunately, K.A.R. 102-2-6 prohibits such online programs. Thus, USM graduates would be denied a license by the BSRB even if the Legislature addressed the “in candidacy” issue alone. Passage of HB 2375 would fix this issue as well.

HB 2375 Solves Both Issues:

Because of these two limitations, the University of Saint Mary faces a difficult choice. They cannot in good conscience recruit and education Kansas students to their social work master’s program, because those students would be unable to earn a living in the social work profession under current law. Thus, USM can either abandon its program, or educate students from other states. Currently, 21 other states and one territory (Guam) allow for students to achieve at least a provisional license if they graduate from an online or “in candidacy” social work program. These represent a mix of red states and blue states, rural and urban, large and small.

Yet, Kansas needs social workers. It feels like a dereliction of mission for USM to only educate those from other states, especially when the reasons why Kansans cannot pursue the same path is easily remedied by the Legislature. HB 2375 creates a fair pathway for temporary, provisional license for graduates from programs that are “in candidacy” status, and it explicitly authorizes online degree programs as allowable as a modality for delivery of high-quality post-secondary education in social work. Kansas needs both of these changes, and Kansas students at the University of Saint Mary and many other institutions would benefit. That is why, KICA strongly encourages this committee to recommend HB 2375 be passed out favorably, and as expeditiously as possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you. I am happy to answer any questions you may have or provide additional data as you request, and I again urge you to review the written-only testimony of Dr. Squillace for details on the program at the University of Saint Mary.