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HB 2103 – Excused Absences for Students in 4-H/FFA Activities

Proponent

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Good afternoon. My name is Mary McCurry and I am here today in SUPPORT of HB 2103. I am representing:

- **Generations of 4-H kids (myself included), my kids & now grandchildren**
- **Agriculture based activities through our now 5th generation operation .**
- **KS Fairgrounds Foundation which I currently chair**
- **As a past employer /employee of 41 years in Corporate America**
 - **Director of R&D: Cargill & Tyson Foods**
 - **As an employee: 2 pharma companies with headquarters in Paris, France and Copenhagen, Denmark**

The reason for this broad approach is to codify WHY this bill is important to the youth of Kansas and their future.

Plus my “personal vested interest” is in 5 grandchildren that are “walking this walk” Ages 8-14. The oldest, at age 14, has been the recipient of “one of those letters” with 7 absences last semester as an 8th grader. An “A” student, she like her siblings/cousins exhibits cattle at the:

- **KS State Fair**
- **KS Jr Livestock Show**
- **American Royal**
- **National Western Stock Show**
- **North American International Stock Show**
- **Livestock Judging Contests (& at that age, they are not “associated” with a formal FFA group so participate as “individuals”)**
- **Other ag related seminars/workshops/conferences both in-state and out-of-state....often during school days!**

In other words, they are now entering the era of the EDUCATION that occurs outside the 4 walls of a classroom. I call them “executional skills” that are developing by the doing/participating/experiencing . What you achieve in life is NOT just thru local participation/activities. We have always encouraged our kids to believe BEYOND the boundaries/limitations of local

We want well rounded citizens/adults who can form thoughts/questions/ see and experience hands on, be it:

- Conferences
- Tours of embryo transfer facilities/vet clinics/pharma companies
- Universities/labs/production facilities
- Quiz bowls/skil-a-thons/meats & livestock judging/horse judging
- Prepared & extemporaneous speech

All this to prepare them for the future/the world and to NOT be satisfied with status quo or those 4-walls and the limitations of others.

We talk about ALL the activities associated with the above events...the “doing” part. But I don’t want us to lose sight of perhaps the biggest learning curve they experience and that is the PEOPLE part. In a world where the iphone/computers have pulled us into being dependent on them for our comfort zone, we CANNOT ignore the human element. A big part of the “learning” is working/communicating and understanding PEOPLE. You probably live it each day in your work and especially here at the Capitol where everyone wants to pull you in THEIR direction. It requires a learned skill set.

It’s the collaboration/problem-solving/listening/thinking and acting part being conducted in REAL LIFE TIME in various situations outside the confines of the rules and structures of a school. And its MORE....more people from different parts of the country OR other countries. Its people who are NOT like-minded, who have experienced more OR less and who have opinions or are learned in many professions outside of educators.

I lived this scenario in my HS in TN. I attended a “city school”. There were 3 families involved in agriculture in my HS class of 425. Every activity I was engaged in through 4-H was counted as a “0”. I graduated in the Top 20 of my class so grades were not an issue. I was a State 4-H Winner and thanks to numerous national scholarships my college education at the University of TN was paid for entirely. I was a member of the meats & livestock judging teams, active and leadership roles in many campus organizations and graduated 1st in my class in the College of Agriculture.

KSU beckoned next and thanks to my resume I was accepted into graduate school at KSU, Animal Science/Food Science program. Again, I believe my acceptance was “powered” by all that I had been involved with up to this point ...thanks to executional and experiential learning.

Fast forward to my kids:

Once again, absences from schools were NOT approved for my kids. We had to “pick & choose” their participation in certain events. I credit their EXPERIENTIAL learning with helping them achieve all their accomplishments and awards.

Both obtained scholarships to Butler CC and HCC then one to KSU and one to KU for degrees. Both are now business owners of their own: pharmacies/real estate/purebred Angus ranching operation. They both have hosted internships for KU/KSU in their businesses and are engaged in developing youth as well. Both have families in 4-H and hopefully FFA (but not every school has an FFA program).

And finally, I want to address why I support this bill from the viewpoint of:

- **Employer**
- **Employee**

For 20 years I was in R&D and was fortunate to head up R&D activities for two very large and forward thinking companies: one privately owned and one publically owned.

I hired/trained/fired/mentored staff for these companies and understood their cultures and what they valued in an employee. More importantly, how they retained employees and where were some of the initial “sorts” they made when plowing through applicants worldwide. Some findings were interesting....remember both agriculturally oriented companies, often located in “non-prime real estate” locations. Hiring is the 1st step/ step #2 is retention of excellent employees . One of the initial sorts for hiring into the management training portal was students that had been on judging teams, primarily land grant university systems. They keenly understand the value of dedication of the 20-40 hours/week outside of a classroom that it took to become part of highly competitive judging teams that went toe-to-toe with other like minded individuals from across the country. That was a “box” they looked for. And you don’t get in that “box” at the university level without having participated in competitions prior to college....they even recruit you based on Jr/Sr HS competitions.

Thus the “excused absences” from school!

And finally, as an employee. I ventured into pharma sales on the human side and landed there for 20 years. Worked for 2 companies...one based in Paris, France and

one in Copenhagen, Denmark. I was blessed to work for companies with leading edge technologies and excellent portfolios of products that revolutionized key disease states: mainly diabetes.

So first step was getting employed ...which starts with a resume and a “cattle call” where over 250 folks show up HOPING to get an interview. I was pretty ignorant of all this, but went ahead anyway. I was told after being hired that my RESUME and all its interesting components differentiated me from the CROWD. Those components were 4-H/livestock/judging teams/ myriad of activities OUTSIDE of school that elevated my resume and the skill set I brought to the position. Yes, grades were important BUT we all get grades of some sort. It was ALL the OTHER....everything I have already laid before you.

So in closing, I urge you to consider thoughtfully what has been presented to you and consider the positive impact this bill can have on MANY youth in KS....just like the folks did in Oklahoma and Illinois and other states who have embraced this philosophy and ENLARGE the classroom for students by allowing them to participate in experiential classrooms for a better life.

I stand for questions.