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ORAL PROPONENT TESTIMONY FOR HB 2136/Web-X Testimony

Thank you, Chairwoman Estes and members of the Kansas House Education Committee, for allowing me to testify in favor of HB 2136, the bill addressing changes to the low-income tax credit scholarship program.

I know this may be a bit unusual, but I am also offering testimony on behalf of my father, Nobert, who does not speak or write English very well. His story is also my story as we discuss educational opportunities.

Here is our story. My parents migrated from Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, to Thailand when they were teens. My father migrated in 1988 and my mother in 1992. My father left his family and home at a very young age to continue his education at a refugee camp in Thailand, as most kids his age did, since education was only available up until 5th grade in the small mountain village where he came from. Education in the refugee camp mainly focused on teaching reading and writing and only went up to 10th grade. My parents were registered as temporary inhabitants in Thailand and weren't able to continue their education post 10th grade. Around 2005-2006, my parents were given the opportunity to register with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which made us eligible for resettlement.

My parents saw America as a beacon of hope and dreamed of my siblings and me getting the education they never had the chance to pursue. They gave up so much, leaving their homeland and the only life they knew. Their willingness to endure any hardship to ensure we had the opportunities only America could offer is a testament to their incredible love and sacrifice.

We moved to El Cajon, California, in September 2007. My dad worked as a housekeeper at a hotel for two years while my mom took care of us. In August 2009, my dad heard about the Tyson meat plant and relocated our family to Garden City, KS. He has been working there since September 2009. My dad became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 2013,

which automatically made my siblings and me citizens too. My mom became a naturalized citizen in 2021.

What does this all have to do with the low-income tax credit scholarship program? Quite a lot, actually.

Thanks to the generosity of private donors to a Scholarship Granting Organization, funds were available for my youngest sibling to attend St. Dominic Catholic School in Garden City. While my parents were not opposed to public school, as my sister and I attended public school, they believed St. Dominic's was a better fit for my siblings academically, socially, and spiritually, which was very important to them.

My younger brother Say-Ray and sister Veronica were primary school-aged students when they were fortunate enough to attend St. Dominic's. Our youngest sibling, Nereus, has been receiving the tax credit scholarship for three years and is now in 2nd grade. Say-Ray, is currently taking college classes at the community college here and will be graduating high school this coming May and Veronica, now a 7th grader are only two of the products of success that St Dominic's helped to shape. St Dominic's helped my siblings excel in their academic and further encouraged their love for learning. Nereus is also doing well academically and has just won spelling bee at St. Dominic.

The changes proposed in HB 2136 will allow children like my little brother to continue to attend St. Dominic's.

I just want to wrap up by saying that being an American is an incredible privilege and honor, and it comes with great responsibility. My father and mother deeply understand this responsibility, and they strive to provide the best education for our family. The low-income tax credit scholarship program helps them fulfill this dream and is a crucial part of the American dream they wish for their children, just like many other families in our country.

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