

Irene Olivares, PhD

Private citizen

ireneo.knea@gmail.com

HB 2428 An Act concerning postsecondary educational institutions

Opponent

Oral testimony - in person

Hearing: Tuesday, February 3, 2026, 1:30 PM Room 218-N

Chair and members of the committee,

February 1, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to House Bill 2428. My name is Irene Olivares, and I have worked in Kansas higher education institutions since 2011 in a variety of roles, including as a graduate teaching assistant, academic advisor, and as full-time faculty for the last 6 years. I oppose this Bill because it creates unsound academic and workforce development goals, and it silences ideas instead of promoting inquiry and debate.

This Bill proposes that academic programs cannot require a course related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion or Critical Race Theory (DEI-CRT). A DEI-CRT-related course means any course with a description, course overview, objectives, student learning outcomes, or assignments that relate contemporary American society to DEI-CRT topics. As someone who works on curriculum revision, I can tell you that reviewing academic programs and courses to remove these topics will take many months of work. Instructor and staff time is better served supporting our students. Removing these topics is also unsound.

For example, one of the topics listed as relating to DEI-CRT is “cultural competence.” I’m confused as to why we would not want our students to relate contemporary American society to cultural competence. If we cannot relate contemporary American society to the topic of cultural competence, is this Bill implying that American society should be culturally incompetent?

The idea of preventing an academic program from requiring a class that discusses cultural competence really stands out to me for its incongruence with our workforce development needs.

[A 2025 national survey](#), conducted by the American Association of Colleges and Universities, revealed that 89% “employers agree that all topics should be open for discussion on college campuses. [And] [m]ore than four in five say they would view a degree more favorably if it came from an institution free from government restrictions on learning and known for respecting diverse perspectives in the curriculum.”

In another 2025 survey conducted by [Hult International Business School](#), 57% of companies surveyed said that companies find that recent graduates “lack a global mindset” and 55% said recent graduates “don’t know how to work well on a team.”

How do you build a global mindset and work well on a team? You develop cultural competence by learning topics, like "microaggressions, systemic bias, implicit bias, unconscious bias, intersectionality, gender identity, social justice, and cultural competence.” These are topics that this Bill seeks to curtail in academic programs.

Did Kansas not spend great time and effort on the Attracting Powerful Economic Expansion Program (APEX) to attract Panasonic, a Japanese company, to this state? Do legislators want our students to be ignorant of behaviors that could be construed as microaggressions to a different culture? We must also remember that different countries have different views of gender identity. For example the Bissu priests of Indonesia are viewed as encompassing all genders. This Bill could lead to complete erasure or severe curtailing of these topics in courses if institutions fear that they will not be able to easily navigate the rules of this Bill. Erasure or severe curtailing of these topics will likely render our students ill-equipped to participate in a global economy, in which interaction with people of different backgrounds and beliefs is essential.

Additionally, I am troubled by the idea that a college class cannot relate contemporary American society to the topic of social justice. Social justice is the view that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities. Does this first section of the Bill not contradict Section 2, 1A.vi of this Bill, which would require a new General Education course that teaches students about American institutions, including the concept of equal protection under the law? How is it possible to work toward an understanding of equal protection under the law, while simultaneously curtailing an idea that proclaims that everyone deserves equal rights and opportunities?

Additionally, are religion courses or sociology courses not allowed to discuss Catholic Social Teaching as it relates to learning about religion in the United States? The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops lists Catholic Social Teaching under its concept of Justice and Peace, thereby connecting Catholic Social Teaching to Social Justice.

This Bill could prevent a religion course from being able to provide a comprehensive study of religion in the USA.

If academic programs require content related to microaggressions, unconscious bias, intersectionality, gender identity, social justice, and cultural competence, it is because they have determined that this content is important for their students' success after college. And these academic programs have determined this need based on consultation with advisory boards and workforce partners.

By preventing academic programs from requiring DEI-CRT topics, this Bill engages in a form of silencing, and it robs students of the opportunity to engage in discussion, which is a critical method for learning about ourselves and others. I share with you words from the 19th-century thinker, John Stuart Mill, "But the peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race, posterity as well as the existing generation If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."

Silencing these topics is contrary to the Free Speech ideals you are trying to inspire in our students in this Bill and others this session.

Please reject HB2428. We need to expose our students to more diversity of thought to empower them and foster innovation. We should not limit their access to knowledge with the hope of instilling in them a greater appreciation for American institutions.

Thank you for your time. I stand for questions.

Irene Olivares, PhD
Overland Park, KS