

Opponent Testimony on HB 2428
Kansas House Committee on Education
Tuesday, February 3, 2026 | 1:30 PM | Room 218-N

Name of Conferee: Jade Ramsdell, MBA, LSSGB

Organization/Agency Representing: I submit this testimony in my individual capacity as a private citizen. I bring more than ten years of experience as a health educator and currently serve as a Commissioner of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission representing the Second District

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Bill: HB 2428 – Postsecondary educational institutions; curriculum and DEI-CRT-related requirements

Position: Opponent

Format: Written testimony

Chair Estes, Vice Chair McNorton, Ranking Member Stogsdill, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony on HB 2428.

I submit this testimony in my individual capacity as a private citizen, a health educator with more than ten years of experience, and a Commissioner of the Kansas African American Affairs Commission representing the Second District.

I also offer this perspective informed by the breadth of the communities that make up much of Kansas, including those across Congressional District 2, which stretches from Cherokee County in the south to Brown County in the north, and from Wyandotte County in the east to Chase County in the west, encompassing more than 25 counties. Through my work in health education and administration, I have had the privilege of listening to voices across nearly all of these communities and understanding how policy decisions made here translate into real-world conditions.

I also come from generations of farmers, with family roots in rural Mississippi. I was raised hearing stories of row-crop agriculture, including corn, soybeans, peas, and watermelon, alongside cattle operations and the use of horses for farm work and land stewardship. That background instilled in me a deep respect for rural life, the discipline of farming, and the way knowledge, values, and responsibility are passed down steadily over time. Farming teaches patience, resilience, and the importance of tending carefully to what is planted, knowing that growth depends on strong roots and honest attention to the conditions of the soil. I write to you today to discuss the condition of our shared soil here in the Sunflower State.

That lived experience informs my concern that our educational standards remain grounded, steady, and strength-based, even when those strengths grew from histories that include hardship

and discomfort. Kansas' resilience has always come from acknowledging where we have been while continuing to grow forward.

HB 2428 does not prohibit postsecondary institutions from offering coursework related to diversity, cultural competence, or related subject matter. Instead, it changes a long-standing approach by restricting the ability of institutions and the Kansas Board of Regents to require such coursework as a condition of completing most academic programs. That distinction matters, as degree requirements have traditionally been determined through academic review and governance processes designed to ensure consistency, rigor, and professional preparedness.

By limiting that discretion through statute, particularly in areas that rely on broadly framed and interpretive categories, the bill alters how academic judgment is exercised and introduces uncertainty about how preparation standards will be applied across institutions and programs.

In practical terms, HB 2428 allows students in education, healthcare, social work, public administration, and other public-facing professions to complete degree programs without ever being required to engage with perspectives, histories, or lived realities beyond their own. This is not a neutral policy choice. It shapes who is prepared to serve Kansans and how well they are equipped to do so.

Kansas has a rich and principled history rooted in freedom, opportunity, and shared responsibility. Here in Topeka, where foundational documents of Kansas governance were adopted, Kansans articulated an early vision of freedom and prosperity for all, grounded in education, civic participation, and informed leadership. Kansas' legacy has been built by investing in strong institutions and high expectations, not by narrowing preparation.

In the spirit of that history, decisions made today should strengthen academic preparation rather than diminish it. HB 2428 moves Kansas in the opposite direction. By limiting what institutions may require, it places Kansas students and Kansas academics at a clear and unsatisfactory disadvantage. It risks creating generations of degree holders who meet minimized standards rather than standards of excellence, interrupting the transfer of knowledge, context, and civic understanding that allows a state to sustain its values and leadership over time.

Removing educational supports or narrowing access to higher education in Kansas worsens this picture. Individuals with post-secondary education are more likely to secure stable employment with health benefits, and communities anchored by strong local institutions such as colleges, technical schools, and outreach programs are better positioned to retain young people rather than lose them to opportunities elsewhere. When those supports are weakened, rural flight accelerates, community capacity shrinks, and local systems are placed under additional strain.

Maintaining strong educational standards is also essential to Kansas' economic health. Jobs requiring post-secondary education continue to grow nationally, and employers increasingly seek workers with broad skills who can collaborate and problem-solve across difference. Higher education institutions serve as significant economic drivers for the state. When Kansas signals

that it is narrowing educational preparation or lowering expectations, it becomes less attractive to students, faculty, employers, and investors.

These impacts are especially concerning rural Kansas. Rural communities are often mischaracterized as uniform, when they are made up of multigenerational farm families, Black Kansans, residents of sovereign Native lands, migrant and seasonal workers, veterans, aging populations, and increasingly diverse young families. They are mothers and fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles, siblings, and neighbors whose lives are deeply interconnected.

In rural Kansas, where services are limited and trust matters, preparation is not theoretical. It is the difference between engagement and disengagement, between early support and crisis. Across the nation, suicide rates have risen over the past two decades, particularly in rural areas, and Kansas is not immune to this trend. Within the state, rural counties consistently experience higher suicide risk than urban areas. Farmers and agricultural workers face especially elevated risk due to isolation, economic volatility, and limited access to culturally responsive care.

Education that prepares professionals to build trust, recognize risk factors, and engage communities effectively is one component of prevention. When preparation in these areas is weakened or made optional, it works against public health and safety rather than strengthening it.

Kansas' constitutional framework provides important guidance as this body considers HB 2428. Section 11 of the Kansas Constitution affirms the liberty of press and speech, stating that the liberty of the press shall be inviolate and that all persons may freely speak, write, or publish their sentiments on all subjects, while being responsible for the use of those rights. This provision reflects a foundational Kansas value: freedom of expression paired with responsibility, context, and accountability.

HB 2428 also carries disproportionate implications for many of our Kansas communities. When professionals are not adequately prepared to understand cultural context, historical experience, and community trust, the consequences are not distributed evenly. They are felt most strongly by communities that already experience disparate impact.

Higher education plays a critical role in cultivating that balance. Institutions prepare individuals to engage thoughtfully and responsibly with complex subjects, including those central to our constitutional history. The Constitution and Bill of Rights cannot be fully understood without engaging in the realities that shaped them, including the institution of slavery and the Thirteenth Amendment that abolished it. Omitting or constraining that context risks producing an incomplete understanding of American governance and civic responsibility.

Kansas' educational tradition supports this approach. The state's historic one-room schoolhouses were, by necessity, equitable in nature. Students of different ages, backgrounds, and abilities learned together, engaging shared material through discussion, debate, and mutual respect. Those environments fostered civic responsibility and critical thinking. They did not avoid complexity. They worked through it.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to reconsider the approach taken in HB 2428 and allow postsecondary institutions to continue exercising academic judgment in determining what preparation is necessary for degree completion. Preserving that discretion supports rigorous education, healthy and respectful debate, and an informed understanding of constitutional rights and responsibilities.

As a health educator, I have seen firsthand how understanding culture, history, and lived experience directly affects outcomes, trust, and safety. As a lifelong Kansan, I view this bill through the lens of stewardship. Maintaining rigorous preparation standards does not dilute academic rigor but instead reinforces it.

Kansas' history, particularly here in Topeka, calls us to protect standards of excellence rather than lower them.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to oppose HB 2428.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available for questions.

Submitted with the utmost respect,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jade Ramsdell', written in a cursive style.

Jade Ramsdell, MBA, LSSGB