



HB 2348 Opposition Testimony

House Judiciary Committee

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Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

American Federation of Teachers Kansas opposes HB 2348 regarding ending tenure for higher education faculty. This bill would exacerbate a “brain drain” in our state, make our students less competitive in the workforce, and harm the long-accepted standards of academic freedom in the state.

In other states that have weakened tenure, Florida for example, there has been an increase of faculty resignations. When asked why, faculty there cited the growing tenure attacks and bans on discussions of gender and race for their decision.ⁱ In one survey of faculty about political interference in higher education, respondents noted a decrease in the number of faculty application in the state and 67% reported not recommending their state as a place for their colleagues to work.ⁱⁱ This bill is more extreme than what was done in Florida, and if it were to pass, we should expect more extreme results. Institutions like KU and KSU would have a harder time recruiting top-tier faculty to teach their students, and our current faculty would flee to a state with better academic protections.

Without the best faculty to teach our students, they would be at a lower starting point compared to students from pro-tenure states. Even if excellent faculty stay in Kansas, the removal of their job security could bias what they teach and research for fear of dismissal. This creates an environment ripe for abuse from political ideologues. Removing tenure protections would make our students less competitive in a global society and hurt our state’s economic future.

Finally, academic freedom and tenure are long-standing principles of American higher education. These principles are found in the 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure created by the American Association of University Professors and have been recognized by many institutions of higher education for decades. In its foundational statement on academic freedom, the AAUP points out,

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“The common good depends upon the free search for truth and its free exposition.” Coupled with academic freedom, tenure is a historical right for faculty in higher education as it ensures that faculty are provided with due process, so they won’t be removed with shifts in the political winds, institutional favoritism, or for crossing the ‘wrong’ student, trustee, colleague or supervisor.

Furthermore, the rigorous, multi-year process of achieving tenure promotes accountability and quality in higher education as it ensures that trained faculty have an invested commitment in the institution through their contributions in curriculum, research, training and development of academic programs without fear of dismissal or retribution. This does not mean tenure provides faculty with a guarantee of lifetime employment as faculty can be dismissed for incompetence or misconduct.ⁱⁱⁱ

Any attack on tenure is simply an attack on knowledge, as it undermines the common good and politicizes Kansas’ world-class higher education system. If this bill were to pass, I fear our faculty, students, and entire Kansas community and economy would be at a detriment. I urge legislators to vote no on this bill.

ⁱ <https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-faculty-members-are-fleeing-florida>

ⁱⁱ <https://newrepublic.com/article/176854/republican-red-states-brain-drain#:~:text=A%20survey%20of%20college%20faculty,colleagues%20as%20a%20place%20to>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.aaup.org/report/1940-statement-principles-academic-freedom-and-tenure>

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