

Subject: OPP.HB2348.Kendall-Morwick.02.11.25

February 10, 2025

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB2348, which would undermine tenure at Kansas colleges and universities, harming our state's postsecondary education system and, in turn, adversely impacting our workforce, employers, and economy. I am a Kansas resident and tenured faculty member at Washburn University, although I submit these comments as a private citizen and not as a representative of Washburn.

Tenure protections are vital to ensuring that Kansas colleges and universities can recruit and retain high-quality faculty. A Minnesota native, I relocated to Kansas in 2013 precisely because I was offered a tenure-track position at Washburn. I turned down a job in another state with higher starting pay and lived apart from my spouse for two years until he could join me in Kansas. I made these sacrifices because of the promise that my hard work and expertise would be rewarded with a secure, long-term position at an institution with a teaching-centered mission, strong ties to the community, and the ability to positively impact the future of our state. I have since earned tenure and promotion, first to Associate Professor and later to Professor, and am active in the Topeka and Lawrence communities, serving on the board of a Topeka nonprofit and volunteering for several local organizations that benefit from my expertise as an educator, writer, and researcher.

What I find most concerning about HB2348 is that it is unnecessary. Contrary to some mischaracterizations, tenure is not an unconditional guarantee of continued employment. Tenured faculty at Kansas institutions can already be terminated at any time, with cause. At Washburn, for example:

Cause for termination consists of demonstrated incompetence or dishonesty in teaching or research; substantial and manifest neglect of duty; personal conduct which substantially impairs the individual's fulfillment of his/her University responsibilities; engaging in or substantially contributing to actions materially disruptive to the effective operations of the University; substantial falsification of credentials; or violation of other faculty, staff, or student's civil rights. (Washburn University Faculty Handbook, sec. V[A])

The existence of these important safeguards ensures that institutions can terminate the employment of faculty who are professionally dishonest, incompetent, neglectful, or irresponsible regardless of their tenure status. This leads me to believe that the real purpose of the proposed legislation is to erode the property and due process rights of faculty, as well as to create a chilling effect on faculty speech and our freedom to research or teach about topics that have been (or may become) politicized. This threatens the very viewpoint diversity that many critics of higher education purport to value.

Whatever the underlying motives, the proposed legislation would have serious adverse consequences for our state. Schools of law, engineering, and medicine, and in some cases entire institutions, would stand to lose accreditation, forcing students pursuing careers in those fields to go out of state and decreasing the likelihood that they would remain in Kansas after earning their degrees. The national rankings and reputations of all Kansas higher ed institutions would suffer, making it difficult or impossible to recruit and retain high-quality educators. Current faculty members would seek jobs in other states or outside of higher education. The resulting decline in educational quality would harm not only Kansas students but also employers who rely on our postsecondary institutions to produce a highly skilled workforce.

In sum, HB2348 is unnecessary and would do lasting harm to Kansans. I strongly urge you to protect higher education in our state by opposing it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Karalyn Kendall-Morwick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Karalyn" being the most prominent.

Karalyn Kendall-Morwick, Ph.D.