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25RS0630, Longitudinal Data Act

Kansas State's House Committee on K-12 Education Budget

Proponent

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Good day. My name is Scott Cheney, CEO of Credential Engine, and I am pleased to provide testimony supporting 25RS0630 – a bill that will strengthen Kansas's workforce and economy by expanding and enhancing credential transparency. Credential Engine is a non-profit whose mission is to ensure that essential information about credentials of all types and levels, including quality indicators, outcomes, competencies, pathways, and links to job skills, is open, transparent, and available to students, employer, and the public

Credential Engine's most recent report on the number of credentials – diplomas, certificates, apprenticeships, certifications, licenses, degrees of all types and levels – available in the United States found over 1,000,000 credentials available across the country. In Kansas there are nearly 6,000 credentials offered by state-based institutions, *including almost 3,000 degrees, 1,500 certificates, 150 apprenticeships, 100 occupational licenses, and several hundred types of high school diplomas*. On top of these options, state residents access hundreds of thousands of industry-recognized certifications, online certificate and degree programs, microcredentials, courses, badges, and more.

With so many credentials in the market, it's difficult for students and employers to assess which ones hold real value in the job market, and the path for obtaining them. Without widespread adoption of consistent ways to describe and evaluate credentials people miss opportunities, employers struggle to find people with the right skills, educators too often offer programs that are misaligned with workplace needs, and policymakers are unsure which credentials offer value to businesses and thus which programs should be funded and expanded.

Credential transparency ensures that essential credential information is available as linked, open, interoperable data on the web that allows students, employers, and policymakers to compare and evaluate credentials. Importantly, this model does not involve any personally identifiable information (PII) about a student, which the bill clearly and appropriately addresses. What should be available as open, searchable, comparable and navigable data is information about the owners and providers of credentials, the skills and competencies included in those credentials, any and all indicators of quality, outcome information, costs, assessments, transfer value, pathways, and links to actual skills needed for in-demand jobs in the economy. This bill, as introduced, addresses all of these needs, and will ensure that all Kansans will have access to more timely and trusted information to help them make better educational and workforce decisions.

Equipping students, employers, and decision makers with this rich information will fuel a new generation of vital educational and workforce services and tools. And it will provide better insights into the entire education and training landscape both within the state and across state lines, including demonstrating the value of a credential, credential alignment with jobs, and other dimensions of credential quality.

With this legislation the State builds on, formalizes, and solidifies initial work already underway. The Kansas Board of Regents has been working to establish a foundation for credential transparency. The Regent's work has been vital because oversight and delivery of credentials is so highly decentralized in every state, touching on K-12, career and technical education, higher education, apprenticeships, state occupational licenses, the workforce system, non-profits, private employers, and more.

Achieving credential transparency requires the support, coordination, and leadership of public and private entities, both to collect and make public these essential aggregate data. A strong public-private effort will ensure that a range of improved screening, assessment, and navigation and guidance tools and services are developed using modern data formats to best serve students, workers, employers, educators, and policymakers. Effective public-private approaches are already underway in many states, including Texas, Indiana, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Illinois, Colorado, and Alabama.

Currently over 30 states and regions have committed to credential transparency goals and are working collaboratively across state agencies to ensure that all essential aggregate data about credential providers, credentials and their competencies are made available as linked, open, interoperable data. And more states are joining; we anticipate that over 35 states and regions will be committed by the end of 2025.

Credential transparency is an essential element of a wide range of education and workforce goals. States are pursuing credential transparency for many reasons, including:

- to improve insights into the credential marketplace,
- to improve students', employers', and other stakeholders' abilities to determine quality, value, and eligibility across all credentials,
- to provide students and job seekers with better tools to identify valuable training opportunities to support next-generation navigation and pathway tools and services,
- to ensure more equitable access to information about credentials, quality, pathways and outcomes for all users,
- to help employers better understand the competencies embedded in credentials and how they align with skill requirements, and
- to support the development of secure, self-sovereign, interoperable learning and employment records, among other uses.

Credential Engine is a non-profit organization established by the Lumina Foundation and others to lead the work of credential transparency and democratizing data about educational and occupational credentials to support a more effective, efficient, equitable market, and to ensure open, de-identified information is available to everyone, any time, and anywhere.

We work closely with the National Governors Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, Education Commission of the States, Council of Chief State School Officers, the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, and the Data Quality Campaign to support states' incorporation of credential transparency practices.

In addition, the U.S. Department of Labor has taken critical steps by requiring credential transparency as part of discretionary grant opportunities. And credential transparency is incorporated into several pending bills in Congress, including the recently proposed reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the expansion of Pell Grants to short-term training programs.

Kansas residents deserve to have full, accurate, and beneficial information about the credentials available to them, especially at a time when so many people and employers are trying to make the right decisions about upskilling, reskilling, and rehiring. Enacting credential transparency-related policy not only signals the state's priorities but also helps ensure that the work endures. We applaud Kansas for taking this important step in service to its constituents and look forward to working with you to make the vision for the future set forth in 25RS0630 a reality.

Respectfully,
Scott Cheney
CEO, Credential Engine, Inc.

Mission

Credential Engine is a non-profit whose mission is to map the credential landscape with clear and consistent information, fueling the creation of resources that empower people to find the pathways that are best for them.

Vision

We envision a future where millions of people worldwide have access to information about credentials that opens their eyes to the full range of opportunities for learning, advancement, and meaningful careers.