

Testimony to Support SB 166 in Kansas

Submitted by: Stacey Guber, Visiting Fellow for Cicero Action
Kansas Senate Committee on Commerce
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Thank you for giving me an opportunity to support SB 166 in Kansas as it applies to removing degree requirements.

My name is Stacey Guber and I'm a Visiting Fellow for Cicero Action, a nonprofit that advocates for entrepreneurial solutions to public policy problems.

Employers across the nation face a shortage of qualified workers, and Kansas is no different. State and local governments want to hire and retain the best workers for each job. Hiring managers often use a college degree sorting mechanism to help weed out applicants and streamline the hiring process, but college degree requirements often have little, if any, relationship to the requirements to perform a particular job. Removing college degree requirements for specific roles will open public-sector employment to millions of qualified workers and will help states find more qualified workers to fill vital roles and help increase retention in public employment.

Nationally, more than [70 million](#) Americans have valuable work experience but lack a college degree. About [60%](#) of public jobs require a college degree, even though only about [35%](#) of workers have a college degree. Thus, even for an applicant with every skill the state needs to perform the job, that worker is too often blocked from the job.

As of February 6, 2025, the Kansas state job board had [500+](#) open roles posted. The nonprofit [Opportunity@Work](#) estimates that as of January 2024, [53%](#) of the workers in Kansas were skilled through alternative routes, meaning they are highly skilled individuals but lack a college degree. That means that [53%](#) of Kansans are barred from many state jobs not because they lack the skills to perform the work, but simply because they do not hold a college degree.

Skills-based hiring means that employers hire qualified individuals based on their skills rather than a degree. A general rule to consider is that the job posting cannot require a college degree unless the agency can justify the need for a degree in the posting itself.

We know that workers often gain important skills outside the traditional classroom, through military service, on-the-job training, apprenticeships, etc. Kansas can ensure these skills are reviewed and applied rather than merely hiring workers who make it through a generic "degree" program but lack any training applicable to the role.

More than [25](#) states, both Democratic and Republican, have now acted through either an Executive Order or permanent Legislation.

At the federal level, President Trump signed Executive Order [13932](#) to require the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to remove college degree requirements from federal job postings and work to implement competency-based hiring. [President Biden doubled down on this executive order](#) and in May of 2022 his OPM issued guidance to help other federal agencies use skills and assessments as the foundation of their hiring rather than college degrees.

Private sector employers are beginning to follow suit and are standing up their own commitments to remove unnecessary degree requirements.

It is time for states like Kansas to give more workers the opportunity to serve while also helping to address their own workforce challenges. By broadening the pool of workers who are qualified for public jobs, Kansas can expand employment opportunities for workers in their state, increase the number of skilled candidates working in the public sector, and mitigate talent acquisition and labor costs.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 166.