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KS Latino Community Network

2/25/2025

SB 254

ORAL IN-PERSON

My name is Audé Negrete, and I am here today on behalf of the Kansas Latino Community Network to strongly oppose Senate Bill 254. This bill is not just about tuition rates—it is about fairness, economic opportunity, access, and ensuring that Kansas continues to invest in its students and future workforce.

For over two decades, Kansas has upheld a simple but powerful principle: students who graduate from our high schools—regardless of their immigration status—deserve a fair chance to pursue higher education. These students live in our communities, study in our schools, and contribute to our economy. Denying them in-state tuition would unjustly slam the door on their future simply because of circumstances beyond their control.

I know firsthand how difficult it is to be a young immigrant in a new country. I was born in Mexico and moved to the United States in middle school. Learning a new language, adjusting to a new system, and trying to succeed in school was overwhelming. I remember sitting with my homework, convinced that becoming bilingual was impossible. Yet, I looked at my fellow Latino classmates—students who had already learned English, excelled in school, and had become part of their communities with ease—and I admired them deeply.

Quickly after moving and starting school in Kansas, I learned about our broken immigration system. The students who were my friends, my support system; they worked just as hard, if not harder, than everyone else in school—yet they faced a terrifying uncertainty about their future. They were American in every way except on paper. They loved this country, but because of a system they had no control over, their opportunities were limited.

I came to realize that immigration status is purely a matter of luck. It is not determined by a person's character, hard work, or contributions to their community. I was fortunate—though I was born in Mexico, I became a U.S. citizen as a child because I am the daughter of an American citizen. That stroke of luck gave me security every child deserves.

But what about my classmates who weren't as lucky? They did what every Kansas student is taught to do: work hard, persevere, and strive for success. And as soon as they were able, they applied for legal status and became U.S. citizens. Today, those same undocumented students I admired in high school are doctors, engineers, teachers, and business owners. They contribute to our communities every single day. Many of those undocumented students I went to school with and I—we are raising the next generation of Kansans. We are parents, educators, and community members, investing in the future of this state.

Fairness, Access, and Economic Impact

In-state tuition for undocumented students is not a special privilege—it simply allows them to pay full in-state tuition, just like their classmates. These students do not qualify for federal financial aid, grants, or most scholarships, which means their path to higher education is already much harder. For many immigrant families, out-of-state tuition without any financial aid is simply inaccessible. Access to education is a fundamental issue of fairness and economic opportunity. If these students are denied affordable education, their potential contributions to our communities are also denied.

Today, very few U.S. citizen students pay full in-state tuition at Kansas schools because we have so many scholarships and other supports to help students afford high tuition prices. Immigrant students are fairly unique, then, in paying the full in-state price. We even let a lot of out-of-state students get in-state tuition because we're trying to recruit more tuition-paying students.

Beyond fairness, the economic benefits of in-state tuition are undeniable. Higher education leads to higher earnings, a stronger workforce, and increased tax revenue, all of which benefit the entire state. Many of these students stay in Kansas after graduation, becoming leaders in their fields and driving economic growth.

At a time when Kansas should be investing in its future workforce, SB 254 would push these students away—weakening our communities and undermining our own economic growth.

A Step Backward for Kansas

Our state has long embraced the idea that every student should have the opportunity to reach their full potential. That's what makes Kansas strong. When students know they have a path to college, they stay engaged in school, work harder, and contribute more to their communities. Creating unnecessary barriers to their success only harms Kansas in the long run.

Kansas is our home, and we love this state. We believe in its values of hard work, perseverance, and fairness. It is because we love Kansas that we fight for policies that uplift all students and strengthen our communities.

SB 254 is a step backward. It punishes students for circumstances beyond their control and threatens the progress our state has made in building an educated, skilled workforce.

I urge this committee to reject SB 254 and stand for Kansas values: fairness, access, economic prosperity, and opportunity for all Kansas students.

Thank you for your time, and I welcome any questions.