

March 18th, 2024

Senate Committee on Education
State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Health Forward Foundation opposition to SB 544 – elimination of the Kansas ethnic minority scholarship program to create the academic excellence program.

Chair Baumgartner and Members of the Committee:

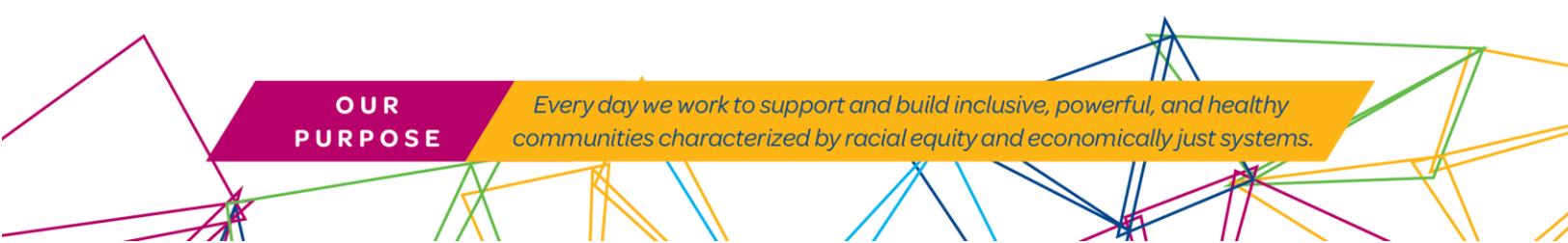
On behalf of Health Forward Foundation (Health Forward), I submit this letter of testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 544. Health Forward works to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems. We oppose this legislation for several reasons – it will reduce the availability of scholarships to people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds in the health sciences field, these sorts of scholarships help to keep students of color in college, and finally because of the lack of definition of academic excellence.

SB 544 would have a negative impact on the health sciences professional pipeline in Kansas. Across Kansas, nearly 16% of hospital positions are vacant, according to the [Kansas Hospital Association](#). By eliminating scholarships available to students of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, Kansas will not be able to meet the needs of its diversifying population with a culturally competent health care workforce. A diverse and culturally competent healthcare workforce reduces health disparities by building trusted relationships or even communicating diagnoses and treatment plans in a way that resonates with patients, according to the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#). This bill would give fewer opportunities to people underrepresented in medicine seeking to be trained and practice in the health sciences in Kansas.

Additionally, we know from research in the *Journal of College Student Development* that targeted scholarships to students of color increased their likelihood to pursue a four-year college education, as well as increasing student engagement while in college. Eliminating this scholarship program would be detrimental to the overall recruitment and retainment of students of color in Kansas, with implications for all professions, in addition to the health sciences as mentioned above.

Last, we are concerned that the bill has no definitions or guidance about what “academic excellence” entails. Without clear definitions, especially targeting academically high achieving students who are in households earning a low income, these scholarships may not go to the individuals most in need and for whom the benefits would be greatest.

Health Forward asks legislators on this committee to vote **no** on SB 544. This legislation will not achieve the outcomes needed to fill our gaps in the overall and health sciences workforce, and could potentially be directed towards individuals who are not in need of this sort of directed support. Please feel free to



**OUR
PURPOSE**

Every day we work to support and build inclusive, powerful, and healthy communities characterized by racial equity and economically just systems.

reach out to me at nmadden@healthforward.org if you have any questions or requests for additional information.

Respectfully,

Nathan J. Madden, Ph.D.
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Health Forward Foundation

