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Dear Representative Highland and Members of the House Standing Committee on Education of the State of Kansas Legislature:

It is my pleasure and honor to speak before you in support of House Bill 2207, which would bring ethnic studies curriculum into Kansas school grades 7-12. As an ethnic studies university professor of over 30 years, and now a professor at Kansas State University, I want to outline some of the major benefits that we can expect from an expanded curriculum that includes a consideration of America's major ethnic groups: Native American, African American, Mexican American/Latino and Asian American. For too long now our nation has systematically excluded the contributions of plural and diverse populations from the schoolbooks. That exclusion has grown increasingly unsustainable in this rapidly changing nation whose so-called minority groups have come to constitute a majority since 2011. This is a nation that prides itself in unity through plurality, as expressed in the motto *e pluribus unum*. In that spirit of unity, it is incumbent upon schools to teach the union of difference and the mutual acceptance of ethnic difference. African American writer Audre Lorde once wisely stated: "It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

Institutionalization of those ethnic differences through an ethnic studies curriculum will foster whole new generations of children who recognize, accept, and celebrate the multiple ethnicities and races of the American nation. Those children will lay to rest the pervasive racial stereotyping. Those children of tomorrow will move us past the pejorative images of varied ethnic groups and past the racial strife that is in the news every day. This new generation of Kansas children will eliminate racial profiling and discrimination, for they will have attained what we call cultural competence. Ethnic Studies teaches cultural competence. Cultural competence means your ability to understand both your own and other people's cultural assumptions and historical experiences; cultural competence also refers to an acquired ability and willingness to grow your knowledge of other cultures and to interact harmoniously with cultures other than your own. The outcomes of an ethnic studies school curriculum have to do with expanding our cultural/social comfort zone, increasing or multi-cultural awareness, and our ability to function in various cultures, with empathy and understanding. That in turn fosters the mental flexibility and critical capacity to see the world from multiple points of view.

Teaching the heritage and history of diverse populations not only increases the self-esteem and self-understanding of children of color who are invisible in most schoolbooks. It also benefits society as a whole. In this era of global migrations, the ever-increasing coming together of peoples from varied ethnicities; you need cultural

competence in order to function productively in the new America. Thus ethnic studies benefits white children as well as children of color. For example, I share here the words of a white graduate student named Meghan McDowell concerning the impact Ethnic Studies had upon her own education: “I grew up in a rural, predominately white agricultural community in northwestern Vermont. This meant that I was not taught about Cesar Chavez, Ella Baker, W.E.B Du Bois, or the American Indian Movement. Instead, I learned about these individuals and the movements they were a part of in ethnic studies classes. These classes did not teach me to hate myself for being white. These classes taught me to advocate for a society that treats all people with dignity, mutual respect, and openness to personal and institutional transformation.” *

It is important to note furthermore that researchers have established that there are long-term benefits for high schoolers that take ethnic studies courses. A recent long-term study by Dr. Nolan Cabrera published in the December issue of the American Educational Research Journal established that students who took Mexican American Studies courses are more likely to graduate from high school, pass standardized tests, and go on to college. The more ethnic studies classes students took, the greater their likelihood of academic success.

Finally, we anticipate heightened demand for an ethnic studies curriculum as we continue to witness dramatic changes in United States population demographics. American so-called minority ethnic groups are the fastest growing sectors of the United States and are expected to become two-thirds of the states’ populations by 2025. America’s Heartland has also seen a dramatic increase in diverse populations. For example, Kansas saw its Hispanic population rise by 60% in the last decade. A *New York Times* report on Kansas was entitled “Hispanics Reviving Faded Towns on the Plains” (11/13/2011).¹ Nielsen reports indicate, “Latino populations are growing fastest where we aren’t looking.”² The state of Oklahoma, for example, has seen a 119% growth in Hispanic population since 2000; for Kansas City it’s 96%; for Seattle it’s 108%; and so on and so forth for all major cities and rural areas.

The changing world that students inhabit today includes not only factors such as a radically changed and changing American demographics. American Ethnic Studies also responds to related changes brought on by economic globalization. Ultimately, only the ability to navigate across cultures will keep Americans competitive in this world. In this regard as well, an Ethnic studies curriculum in grades 7-12 is indispensable and overdue.

I thank you for your attention!

*From the article “**Why Ethnic Studies Matters**,” March 15, 2012

¹ “The face of small towns is changing dramatically as a result,” said Robert Wuthnow, a Kansas-born Princeton professor who studied the Hispanic influx for his book *Remaking the Heartland: Middle America since the 1950s*. Princeton University Press, 2011.

² <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2013/latino-populations-are-growing-fastest-where-we-arent-looking.html>

<http://thefeministwire.com/2012/03/why-ethnic-studies-matters/>

** <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/can-ethnic-studies-improve-student-achievement-researcher-says-yes-n255131>