

February 24, 2015

House Education Committee

Opposition to HB 2139

Dear Mr. Chair Highland and Members of the Committee:

El Centro is a non-profit organization serving Wyandotte and Johnson Counties. Our organization's mission is to strengthen communities and improve the lives of Latinos and others through educational, social, and economic opportunities. El Centro was founded in 1976 with a grant from the Archdiocese of Kansas City in Kansas. Through the years we have grown, and changed alongside the community we serve. Today, we are proud to be a fully bilingual, multicultural organization that advocates for and with the community we serve. Since its inception, we have actively supported in-state tuition for our undocumented high school graduates in Kansas.

Educating our youth and allowing them to contribute to the growth of our state is good policy. Today the bright young minds that shine despite one piece of paper have the ability to work towards getting an education and live the American Dream. We have students who have grown up in this state with impeccable grades, community service dedication, excellence in sports, and an endless number of other talents. Yet, their ability to attend school tomorrow is not dependent on their years of hard work, their love of this country and state or that they identify as American. Whether they are able to attend school tomorrow is a choice you make!

If you vote to repeal in-state tuition:

- You will tell young Kansans who have worked hard to be on the honor roll through high school that they don't have the choice to continue attending school so why bother.
- You are telling Kansas colleges universities that they will not get all the talented students they need to meet the academic standards they need to push the state forward
- And you will tell me – those Kansas students who have been doing everything they can to be good students, so they are able to go to college and continue their education will no longer have that choice. You will tell me that there will be young adults eager to continue their education after years excelling in our high schools that they cannot keep studying after their high school graduation.

At our organization we work with documented and undocumented individuals. Within our programs we bring services to families and have the opportunity to help them through many difficulties. Since undocumented immigrants are not eligible for any grants, public assistance and most scholarships ; we are able to help their family work on a budget so

they can pay out of pocket all the instate tuition they have to pay. We have seen families invest everything they have for years on their children's college education. Education for our families is important. This has been difficult, but it is an attainable goal our families have committed to.

Today I ask you to not vote for HB2139. It is already more difficult for undocumented students to go to college than it is for their non-immigrant peers. Please don't make it impossible for bright minds that could push our state forward to get a higher education.

Sincerely,

Irene Caudillo  
President