



Kathy Mendenhall
Testimony, HB 2531
House Education Committee
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My name is Kathy Mendenhall, and I am a professor at Hutchinson Community College (HCC) where I have taught public speaking for the last 19 years. Thank you for your strong support for the Kansas community college system. We know it's the best investment of education dollars, and I'm proud to help my students, who come from all over the world, realize their instructors and professors have high degrees of education, experience, and are dedicated to their success. I stand here today in strong opposition to HB 2531.

Thank you for the opportunity to represent my colleagues in expressing our concerns about HB 2531's purpose to repeal due process for community college instructors. Let's start with what I assume is your biggest concern about due process – it keeps and protects bad teachers. And I assure you, as a good teacher and speaking for good teachers, we do not want to protect bad teachers. Due process never keeps an administrator from following the steps of discipline spelled out in community college contracts or the law.

I want to share my views about how repealing due process may impact the day-to-day workings in our community colleges. As a public speaking professor, I see how fear impacts my students. Many of my students agree with Seinfeld who said, "Most people would rather be in the casket than give the eulogy." This fear can range from debilitating, which means students drop the class and may end up never completing their degrees, to inhibiting their ability to take on challenging or controversial topics. Students, who are fearful, "live small," are afraid to be innovative, want to go unnoticed and choose to play it safe.

If HB 2531 passes community college instructors will live with the fear of losing their jobs with no process in place to defend them. That fear could lead to "living small" in campus governance, in the classroom and in the community.

Hutchinson Community College has a strong committee system of governance, a robust Faculty Senate and an atmosphere of respect and trust. I've witnessed the sharing of ideas for improvements in our learning management system, opening up student study areas, faculty-led improvements in our developmental education offerings, just to name a few. I've also witnessed times of stagnation, discontent and "flying under the radar" when there was an atmosphere that did

not encourage the safe exchange of ideas. Safety and respect makes institutions stronger. Fear makes them mediocre.

I teach free speech, First Amendment Rights, civil discourse in a marketplace of ideas. That can get messy and awkward at times. Our nation is facing an era of caution and fear. If I'm afraid the daughter of one of our board members might be offended by a topic a student chooses, and I am in danger of losing my job over that "offense," I will be tempted to censor topics. I might be afraid to challenge my students. I might play it safe and "live small" in the classroom.

"Living safe and small" restricts community involvement by our faculty members. If we are afraid of getting "cross-ways" with an administrator or board member over our political, religious or civic activities, we might limit our contributions. What a loss that could be!

I love my job because the students who stick with me and accept my caring support, learn to overcome their fears. They gain a confidence and courage that impacts every part of their lives and educational experience. They evaluate their beliefs, they speak their truths and leave HCC to live large and make a positive imprint on their sphere of influence.

Let's give our community college instructors and professors the respect and honor they have earned. Let's give them the safe and supportive environment I give my speech students, so they can grow, flourish and live large.

VOTE AGAINST HB 2531 AND CONTINUE TO SUPPORT QUALITY COMMUNITY COLLEGE EDUCATION.