



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

Proponent Testimony on HB 2185 For the House Education Committee

February 6, 2025

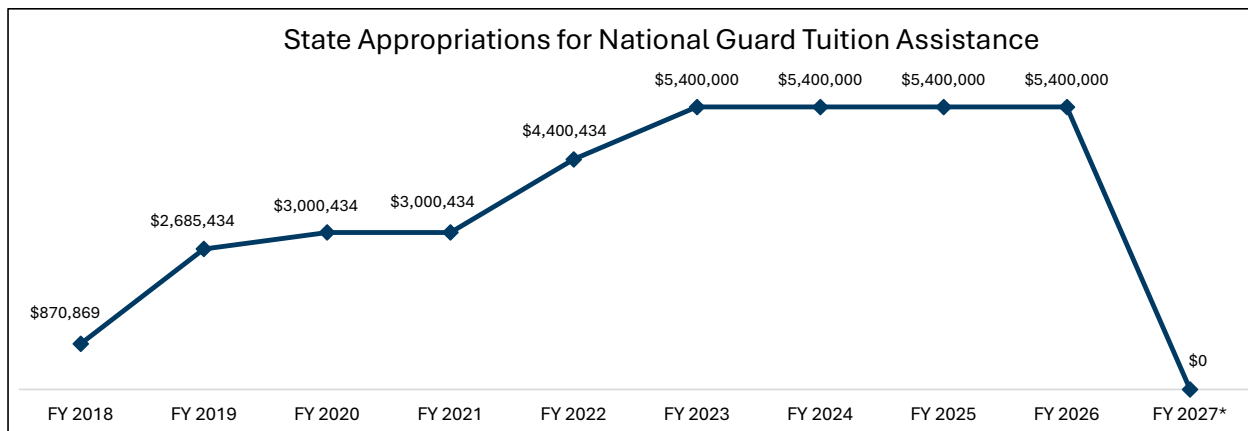
**Elaine Frisbie, Vice President for Finance & Administration
Kansas Board of Regents**

Good afternoon, Chair Estes, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss HB 2185.

The Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR) administers two programs for members of the Kansas National Guard: the tuition assistance program established in 1996, and the EMERGE program enacted last session for certain graduate programs.

Kansas National Guard Educational Assistance Act

The Kansas National Guard Educational Assistance Act provides payment of tuition and fees for undergraduate enrollment up to 15 credit hours per semester. The state benefit is offset by any federal financial assistance received by the member from their active National Guard service. KBOR sends payment to the institutions from a specific State General Fund appropriation for this program, which has been increased by the Legislature in the past few years:



**The House Appropriations Committee has not yet agreed to appropriate \$5.4 million for FY 2027, as requested by KBOR.*

★ LEADING HIGHER EDUCATION ★

HB 2185 would allow a member of the Kansas National Guard to delegate their tuition benefit to one dependent by a sponsorship. This delegation can occur only during the member's service and not be delayed to a future date. The bill provides that if the member were to fail to satisfy the service requirement, only the Guard member would be responsible for repayment of the assistance.

HB 2185 provides that the assistance would be available to dependents only after Guard members' tuition assistance is covered. The timing for when Guard members apply for and enroll in eligible courses, the National Guard approves Guard members for assistance, and then KBOR is advised of the students' status to coordinate with the institutions for payment of tuition and fees takes place over several months – extending into the semester. For KBOR to be able to identify funding for sponsored dependents, it seems dependents could not enroll and begin receiving assistance until the spring semester. Another option would be to appropriate state monies for sponsored dependents separate from current Guard members.

Kansas National Guard Educational Master's for Enhanced Readiness and Global Excellence (EMERGE) Program

The EMERGE program provides financial assistance for National Guard members seeking a master's degree, covering tuition and fees up to 15 credit hours per semester. On or before July 1 of each academic year, the Adjutant General selects up to 100 eligible National Guard members who have applied to the EMERGE Program to receive assistance. The number of eligible National Guard members in the program is capped at 200 members in any one academic year. In Fall 2024, 21 students received \$77,919 in assistance, at nine different institutions.

HB 2185 would expand the eligible degree programs beyond master's degrees to include professional and doctorate degrees. The service requirement would be lengthened from four to six years in exchange for the doctorate or professional degree tuition assistance. The bill also sets the required grade point average for professional and doctorate degrees at 3.0 rather than 2.75.

Administrative Impact

For the costs attributable to the administration of the program by the Board of Regents, enactment of HB 2185 by itself would not require the addition of staff, although the bill would add new complexities to the two programs serving National Guard members.

Presumably, the Board of Regents would need to establish a waiting list for dependents or some mechanism for identifying the costs for two groups from within the one appropriation for the National Guard Tuition Assistance Program.

This bill, in combination with the new financial aid programs created by the 2023 and 2024 Legislatures, will build on the cumulative administrative effect on our financial aid and IT staff's ability to administer the programs effectively. Last April, the Board presented a request for \$196,798 to the House Appropriations and Senate Ways & Means Committees which was not appropriated for our agency's operations.

The Board of Regents notes that the Legislature has created or added funding to several new service scholarship programs in recent years (the Promise Scholarship, the Hero's Scholarship, the Adult Learner Grant, the Osteopathic Service Scholarship and the new Education Opportunity Scholarship). In the 2023 KLRD Omnibus memo, it was noted the Board estimated the need for \$187,427 for staff salaries to implement 2023 SB 123, which created the new Adult Learner Grant Act, in addition to amending the large and complex Promise Scholarship program created two years prior to that. The 2023 Legislature did not add funding for KBOR's financial aid and IT developer staff, which slowed the launch of the Adult Learner Program application by one year.

With the cumulative effect of the programs, the Board again requests state support of the financial aid and information technology staff who work on these public-facing programs. The amount requested for FY 2025 totaled \$196,798.

When the Legislature appropriates state monies to the Board of Regents for a financial aid program, those monies are used only for scholarship awards, not for the administration of the programs which includes service agreements that require years of staff time for each individual student. One way to ease the administrative requirements would be to eliminate the service requirement, however, this may limit the intended effect of the program.

The Board of Regents again voices concern that we do not have adequate staff to support these important public-facing programs. Our current staffing levels for the Student Financial Aid unit cannot absorb additional workload, particularly for a service scholarship that requires years of monitoring after completion of the program for every individual, each of whom can have unique personal circumstances.

Technical Amendments

To provide greater clarity for administration of this program, we recommend several amendments that are of a technical nature and would not change the substance of the changes proposed in HB 2185:

Page 1, Line 25 – strike “accredited” and all of line 26 before the period and insert in its place the more current definition taken from K.S.A. 74-32,271 (Promise Scholarship Act) and K.S.A. 74-32,281 (Adult Learner Grant Act):

“a not-for-profit independent institution of higher education which is accredited by an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the United States department of education, is operated independently and not controlled or administered by the state or any agency or subdivision thereof, maintains open enrollment, offers online education and offers exclusively competency-based education programs”

Page 2, Line 11 – substitute “may” for “shall” regarding the adoption of regulations by KBOR. We would prefer the statute contain the Legislature’s intentions for administration of the program.

Page 2, Lines 41-43 – revise to read “Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (a), ~~eligible guard members shall not be paid the educational assistance program will not pay~~ for the amount of tuition and required fees charged for any course repeated or taken in excess of the requirements for...”

Page 3, Line 27 – insert “as defined in K.S.A. 74-32,146” before the semi-colon.

Page 3, Line 36 – insert “as defined in K.S.A. 74-32,146” before the semi-colon.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.