

Feb 11, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. I am testifying on bill HB 2348 to address its impact on academic institutions in Kansas.

My name is Hans Dalton, and I am an Assistant Professor at the University of Kansas. I started just six months ago. My lab researches new drugs for rare diseases. While individually rare, these rare diseases affect 30 million+ Americans. Unfortunately, pharmaceutical companies are not interested in funding this type of research, as the financial incentives are too low. Since rare diseases affect 10% of Americans, you likely know someone in your life that suffers from one. Someone who has spent years struggling with a diagnosis that even their doctor hasn't fully studied. There is a great need for new drugs and treatments for these patients, so who will pursue it? Research into rare disease, and more, thrives in state-funded institutions - but not in industry.

But there are few incentives to entering academia. After achieving a PhD, and spending years making middling wages despite being highly educated, the option to move into Pharma or biotech is tempting. My colleague left to biotech years before I started as an Assistant Professor, and he instantly had better salary, working hours, stock options, and benefits. Meanwhile, two years later, I still have less than that as an Assistant Professor. So why did I make this choice? There are two things that academia brings to the table: independence and job security (by way of tenure). Independence allows me to study rare diseases and try to help those who no one else will. However, that independence only goes so far - it doesn't reduce anxiety, put bread on the table, or lead to stability needed for starting a family. Only the tenure process truly distinguishes academia from biotech. Tenure incentivizes scientists to come to academia to perform important research that improves and saves lives, not just produce a "quick buck".

All Kansan Universities will suffer from this bill, including those needing tenure for their accreditation. Frankly, this is a wild time to support such a bill. The University of Kansas in particular has seen two years of their highest undergraduate class sizes ever. Yet, there is little funding for new faculty, leading to more and more packed classes and worse educational outcomes. This bill will exacerbate this process further, leading to an exodus of professors and compounding the existing problems with classes. This is to say nothing of its impact on Kansan research, which will almost certainly break down with so many displaced professors. If anything, given the increased undergraduate rates, now is the time to lend more support to Kansan education, not less.

Thank you for taking the time to listen. Please allow tenure, that little incentive that exists for academic research, to continue. I want to continue doing the research to better the lives of Kansan people and beyond.