

Testimony in Opposition to SB 254
Senate Federal and State Affairs
Sister Therese Bangert
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
February 27, 2025

Chairman Thompson and Committee Members,

I count my advancing age and my longevity in this Capitol a “home court advantage”. I was here and participated in the development that brought the policy of instate tuition. Kansas was a front-runner on this issue and at national meetings people would ask, “How did you accomplish this?”

I would delight in telling them that young people who would benefit from higher education came to the Capitol and told legislators their stories. They sat in offices and legislators listened to them. Legislators were moved by the students commitment to education, to their communities and to this state. After nearly three years of work, legislation was passed.

This policy has seen multiple attempts to repeal. I have watched that process, too. And I continue to ask myself “What would motivate some to want to throw up more barriers to these hard-working students pursuit of education?”

- Is it that legislators don’t understand that these students must meet the same qualifications as anyone admitted to a Regents institution?
- Is it that they don’t know that this policy does not make them eligible for any federal or state grants or aid?
- Is there honestly a fear that the 310 students out of 122,735 (March 24) in the Regent institutions will overrun the system?
- Why are we revisiting arguments settled when the instate law was litigated in the Courts in 2005? A lawsuit challenging the Kansas In-State tuition law was dismissed by a federal court. The 10th Circuit then affirmed the lower court’s ruling finding that citizen students were not harmed in any way by this policy.

In the past 20 years, I have often been present in the Gallery for the discussion of the repeal of instate. Much of the discussion is insightful and compassionate. I, also, was in the Senate Gallery when this legislation passed in 2004. Derek Schmidt, who is now my Congressman, voted for

this policy. Susan Wagle who went on to be President of the Senate, voted for this policy. Legislators from different parties and often opposing political perspectives demonstrated tremendous courage and foresight in defending this policy that has benefited young people and our state for two decades. However, some of the comments made about these young people bruise my spirit.

So, as I honestly work to understand the hearts and minds of legislators who want to repeal this policy, I share where my heart and mind is as I speak for my community, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. I stand on the shoulders of women who for 167 years have educated Kansans – many of them immigrants.

I approach this issue as a Catholic grateful to belong to a Church whose leadership is at the tables in Congress, the State Department and the White House to address and support policies that will stop the suffering of parents and children in this country's broken immigration system.

I could have filled all my time today with quotes from our Pope Francis about our Faith calling us to the care of the children of the world and to the care of immigrants.

In the name of my community, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, I ask you to vote NO on SB254 and reject the effort to repeal a good education policy. The wise words of one of your peers over a decade ago sums it up for me: **“These are the children that the ways of the world brought to us and they are now ours.” (Rep. Ward Loyd – Garden City)**

Thank you and you have my prayers as you continue your work to develop education policy that is good for all the children in Kansas.

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