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Written Oral Opponent Testimony of SB 254
For the Senate Federal and State Affairs Committee

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Chair Thompson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Alejandro Rangel-Lopez from Dodge City, and I am speaking to you today as the Campaign Manager of New Frontiers. We're a southwest Kansas based project of the nonpartisan, nonprofit organization Loud Light Civic Action. New Frontiers' mission is to empower young southwest Kansans through the values of dignity, belonging, and freedom. I'm here representing over 500 Kansans who have signed on to this project. As a born and raised southwest Kansan and proud son of immigrants, I have been privileged to witness firsthand the contributions of undocumented Kansans to our rural communities. SB 254 is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of public benefits and lies pushed forth by proponents meant to villainize people who are simply seeking an equal chance to move Kansas forward. Today I ask this body to pick on someone their own size and oppose SB 254 to protect educational opportunity for *all* Kansans.

Undocumented students don't receive public benefits/grants to go to school

Current state policy only gives them a chance to pay *full price* by offering in-state tuition for undocumented students (including DACA recipients); these students do not receive public (federal or state) grants and scholarships—or even subsidized student loans. Benefits such as SNAP and Medicaid require a social security number to even apply; something that undocumented individuals DO NOT have. The notion that undocumented students receive extensive public resources is false and not based in existing law/statutes.

Our students and schools thrive because of in-state tuition

Kansas colleges and universities rely on student tuition dollars—including the in-state tuition dollars paid by immigrant students—to advance their educational mission. Increasing college-going among Kansas kids is good for colleges' bottom line, good for K-12 districts trying to demonstrate successful outcomes, and good for Kansas communities.

An educated workforce is good for Kansas' future

Repealing in-state tuition for undocumented students would negatively impact educational attainment and harm the Kansas economy. When talented students can achieve their college goals in Kansas, they stay in Kansas, bringing their knowledge and skills to our communities. Southwest Kansas is the only region in the state without a four-year university. This means our students must leave our region for educational opportunities post-community college in other areas of the state. We know that in rural areas like ours we have to “grow our own” since we can't “import” folks from more urban communities, SB 254 is a direct attack on our ability to grow an educated workforce for rural Kansas. Their college graduations and the jobs they qualify for with those degrees facilitate economic mobility. They also contribute to overall prosperity in Kansas.

Strict eligibility requirements already limit access to in-state tuition to undocumented Kansans

As of last year, there were only 310 undocumented students who utilized the in-state tuition program to attend Kansas' universities, community colleges, or technical colleges. These are individuals who do not get access to public grants and scholarships afforded to U.S. citizens and residents and *pay full in-state tuition prices*.

As previously mentioned, I come from southwest Kansas which has one of the highest foreign-born populations in the state. These are folks who want nothing more than to provide a better life for their families where their rights are respected and they have the opportunity to thrive. Kansas thrives because we lead with compassion and a welcoming spirit. When we lead with these values and support policies towards this end, all Kansans win and we can move forward together to create the communities we know we deserve. SB 254 is not one of those bills, its foundation of lies and falsehoods about the intentions and actions of undocumented Kansans seeks to legislate based on a *feeling of fear* rather than truth and what's best for our state.

In summary, SB 254 is a bill based on *feelings* rather than facts targeting quite literally .01% of Kansans seeking a chance at the economic mobility afforded by higher education. The fact of the matter is, the vast majority of these folks aren't hurting anyone and bring much more value to our state than the "public benefits" they allegedly utilize. I urge this body to reject SB 254 and any other policy pushed forth by an Attorney General who it seems didn't pay enough attention in his court-mandated remedial law classes. Thank you for your time and I hope you take my testimony into consideration. I am available for questions during the appropriate time.