

Yarid Pizarro Villarreal

Private Citizen

2/19/2025

SB 254

ORAL IN PERSON

Good morning, Chair Thompson and Members of the Committee. Thank you for giving us the time to share our thoughts on SB 254 with you all today. My name is Yarid Pizarro Villarreal, and I live in Sedgwick County. I am writing today to encourage the committee to vote no on SB 254 and protect educational opportunities for all Kansans.

Kansas is a state that values hard work and economic prosperity. This bill goes against those principles by limiting opportunities for students, like myself, who have already proven their commitment to Kansas through years of schooling and community engagement.

Four years ago, college was my only hope to build a better future for myself. I come from a community where opportunities like higher education are rare, not because of a lack of ambition or work ethic, but because we face obstacles that most Kansans do not. Yet, we have persevered. At my institution, the only student body population that has grown for the last few years is those who identify as Hispanic, the same goes for the largest public school district in Kansas, where almost 38% of students identify as Hispanic. This is a student body of future law enforcement officers, healthcare workers, business owners, and teachers. Beyond students, Hispanic Kansans contribute billions to the state's economy. According to the Wichita Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, we have a spending power of \$3.5 billion. We are homeowners, business owners, essential workers, and students. Kansas cannot afford to push away the very people who are shaping its future.

Being afforded in-state tuition has changed my life. It has given me the liberty to dream bigger, travel, and contribute to my community in ways that seemed impossible before. Four years ago, I would have never imagined myself before a legislative body, but today, I am here for you to listen to me and others in a similar situation who will be impacted.

Undocumented students who qualify for in-state tuition already need to meet strict requirements like graduating from a Kansas high school, filling out an affidavit, paying fees, tuition, and

textbooks, without federal aid, grants, or most scholarships. We are not criminals. We are not seeking special treatment. We are simply asking for the opportunity to work hard, earn a degree, and give back to the state that raised us.

I am a product of public schooling and Kansas continues to invest in undocumented students through the K-12 public school system, where graduation rates for the Hispanic body are nearing 90%. Denying us access to affordable higher education is a waste of that investment and a loss for the future workforce of Kansas where we're already facing labor shortages in important industries, like healthcare, law enforcement, and education. If this bill passes, Kansas loses future workers, taxpayers, and job creators. Instead of strengthening local industries, we are sending skilled graduates to other states that welcome their contributions.

I urge you to consider this bill as an economic and workforce issue. SB 254 does not protect Kansas, it ultimately weakens our workforce, economy, and business community. It punishes us who have done everything right. I ask you to vote no on SB 254, for the prosperous future of Kansas. Thank you.