

Yeni Silva Renteria

Private Citizen

2/25/2025

SB254

Oral in person

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 254. I have dedicated my life to serving the Kansas community, working with vulnerable populations through the Department of Children and Families, Sedgwick County, and various nonprofit organizations. Over the past 25 years, I have supported thousands of individuals and families as they navigated complex systems in pursuit of better opportunities.

My name is Yeni Silva Renteria, a resident of Wichita and registered voter in Sedgwick County. As an immigrant, my personal experience has helped me build deep connections in the community. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunities I have received since arriving in the United States—graduating from high school, becoming the first in my family to attend college, earning a master's degree in social work, and receiving an Honorary Doctorate in Ministry from West Coast Bible College for my service to our community. The gratitude I feel for this country and the state of Kansas drives my commitment to giving back, and it is with that same commitment that I urge you to oppose SB 254.

The Harmful Impact of SB 254

SB 254 imposes strict eligibility requirements for state or local public benefits, specifically targeting undocumented individuals. However, I would like to clarify that the students who currently benefit from in-state tuition are not eligible for Pell Grants or state financial aid. These students are paying for their education out of pocket or relying on private scholarships. By taking away their access to in-state tuition, you are stripping them of the opportunity to achieve their dreams and contribute meaningfully to our state.

Ensuring that undocumented youth who graduate from Kansas high schools continue to receive in-state tuition is not just a moral obligation—it is an economic necessity. Many of these

students have spent most of their lives in the United States, attending our schools and contributing to our communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, frontline workers who benefited from in-state tuition played a critical role in keeping our communities running. According to the American Immigration Council, DACA-eligible individuals contribute billions of dollars to the U.S. economy. Removing their access to education and opportunity would not only disrupt their lives but also negatively impact local economies, schools, businesses, and employers who rely on their skills and labor.

Economic Contributions of Undocumented Immigrants

Kansas is home to approximately 9,500 DACA-eligible residents, who collectively generate \$357 million in household income and hold \$268.9 million in total spending power. These individuals contribute significantly to state and federal tax revenue, paying a total of \$88.2 million in taxes each year. More broadly, the 77,300 undocumented immigrants in Kansas generate \$2.7 billion in household income and contribute \$614.9 million in total taxes annually. These figures make it clear: undocumented immigrants are not a drain on public resources—they are vital contributors to our economy.

A Vote for Opportunity and Economic Growth

Denying in-state tuition to undocumented youth would not only limit their potential but would also weaken our state's future workforce. Immigration policies may remain a topic of national debate, but the reality is that undocumented individuals have lived, worked, and contributed to Kansas for years. Investing in their education ensures a stronger, more skilled workforce that benefits all Kansans.

As a social worker, I have seen firsthand how in-state tuition has changed lives, allowing students to build careers and contribute to our local economy. These young people are not strangers—they are our neighbors, our children's classmates, and members of our communities. They share the same American dream that so many of us have pursued.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote against SB 254 and preserve access to in-state tuition for undocumented students. This is not just about policy—it is about ensuring a brighter, more prosperous future for all Kansans.

Thank you for your time and your continued support for our immigrant youth in Kansas.