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

February 27th, 2025

Chair Thompson and members of the Committee,

I am writing to you today on behalf of Advocates for Immigrant Rights and Reconciliation (AIRR) as well as a concerned Kansas resident. AIRR is a nonprofit organization dedicated to organizing and mobilizing our community in support of immigrant rights and social justice. We urge you to oppose SB 254.

I urge this committee to consider the moral and ethical responsibilities we have as a society. Kansas has a long tradition of welcoming people from all walks of life, including immigrants. SB 254 may unintentionally break the bonds of compassion that define our state's values. While we must address immigration law at the federal level, our state policies should reflect the values of empathy, fairness, and justice, ensuring that those who need help most can receive the support they deserve, regardless of their immigration status.

I strongly urge this committee to reconsider the provisions of SB 254, particularly with regard to in-state tuition for undocumented students. This bill, if passed, would have profound consequences for both the educational prospects of thousands of talented students and the future prosperity of Kansas.

Senators, I understand the concern about ensuring that public resources are available to citizens. However, we must also consider the economic reality of many immigrants' contributions to our state. Kansas relies heavily on immigrant labor, particularly in agriculture, construction, and service sectors. Immigrants play an essential role in maintaining our local economies. By denying access to public benefits, like in-state tuition, we risk destabilizing these industries, causing even more harm to our economy in the long run. Repealing in-state tuition for immigrant students would significantly hinder their educational attainment and, in turn, harm the Kansas economy. When talented students can attend college in Kansas, they are more likely to stay in our state, contributing their knowledge, skills, and talents to our local communities. College graduations and the professional opportunities that come with these degrees facilitate upward economic mobility—not just for the individual, but for Kansas as a whole.

While the path to citizenship for these students may be slow and winding, it is important to recognize that many have been waiting since childhood for their green cards. Kansas has a long history of providing in-state tuition to immigrant students, many of whom have ultimately gained U.S. citizenship after years of hard work and dedication. For these students, the ability to

continue their education while waiting for citizenship not only benefits them personally but benefits Kansas as well. These students are invested in our state's future, and allowing them to pursue higher education here ensures that Kansas can tap into their full potential as citizens, professionals, and contributors to our economy.

Kansas' colleges and universities rely on tuition dollars to support their missions, and immigrant students paying in-state tuition are an integral part of this. Increasing the number of college-bound students from all backgrounds is not only good for colleges' financial stability but also strengthens our K-12 education system. When more students attend college, it demonstrates the success of our K-12 districts in preparing students for higher education, which, in turn, benefits Kansas communities as a whole. By removing access to in-state tuition for undocumented students, we undermine these educational opportunities, hurting our schools, students, and state.

It is important to clarify that undocumented students do not receive public benefits or financial assistance beyond what is available through in-state tuition. They are not eligible for public grants, scholarships, or subsidized student loans. The notion that these students are benefiting from extensive public resources is simply false and not supported by existing law. These students are paying full tuition rates, contributing to the funding of our public institutions, and are not taking financial resources from the state.

In conclusion, SB 254's provisions would have a negative impact on Kansas students, the Kansas economy, and Kansas communities. Instead of limiting opportunities for hardworking students, we should be embracing policies that allow them to achieve their educational goals and contribute to the prosperity of our state. I respectfully urge you to reject this bill and continue supporting access to higher education for all students, regardless of immigration status.