

Testimony in Opposition to SB 254 - Written Only
Kansas Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
February 20, 2025

Dear Chairman and Members of the Committee,

My name is Itzel Vargas and I am a long-time Kansas resident. I urge you to please oppose SB 254, which would repeal in-state tuition for students without current legal status and cause devastating consequences for higher education institutions and our state economy.

Since 2004, state policy only gives immigrant students without a current status, DACA or an ineligible status, a chance to pay full price by offering in-state tuition. Immigrant students do not receive public (federal or state) grants and scholarships—or even subsidized student loans.

I am an immigrant and a DACA recipient, and someone who benefited from this policy. In my senior year of high school I learned about this policy and it was a blessing to our family because I wanted to stay in Kansas - my home. I attended Johnson County Community College and then transferred to Emporia State University, where I finished my **two** degrees, Bachelor's degree in Art Therapy preparation, and Bachelor's of Fine Arts. I could not have done this if it were not for the ability to pay the same amount as my peers, the ones I had grown up with. I also want to make it clear - I did not receive any state or federal aid. As a matter of fact, I graduated **debt-free paying out of pocket**. My mom and I worked tirelessly to make sure we could continue paying over three thousand dollars per semester plus my living expenses. In my last undergraduate year - I was taking up to and over 18 credit hours and working three jobs to make ends meet and pay my tuition. I did not, for once, ask for assistance from the state or federal government, I could not dream of it because I was well aware that it was not an option. I paid it all myself with **my hard work, sweat, tears, and countless sleepless nights**.

The majority of Kansas universities are experiencing enrollment growth. Restricting enrollment opportunities for students who are eager to grow and receive higher education, will harm the progress made in enrollment numbers. We are seeing this happen to our neighbors over in Missouri, where immigrant students are leaving the state and going to other states, including Kansas, who are accepting them with open arms, and can you guess? No, they are not returning to Missouri. Additionally, Kansas stands as one of the forty two states that give immigrant students access to higher education. Are we wanting to regress any progress our state has made?

My story is the story of many other students in Kansas, youth and some of us now adults, who love our state, and want to stay here, in our community where we have grown up. We are productive members of our society and communities, we own our homes, cars, and are even business owners - much of this because we had the access to education, and achieved the American Dream. The fact of the matter is, our immigrant communities and the opportunity to achieve more through higher education are vital to the continued success of Kansas. From rural communities in western Kansas to the Missouri River, our state thrives when we welcome new faces.

Please, I urge you to consider the future of our beloved state and prevent the repeal of in-state tuition for undocumented students by opposing SB 254

Sincerely,

Itzel Vargas-Valenzuela
Wyandotte County, KS