

TESTIMONY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FEDERAL & STATE AFFAIRS
Senate Bill 254
On behalf of the Kansas Hispanic & Latino American Affairs Commission
February 27, 2025

Opposition to Senate Bill 254

Chairman Thompson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Kansas Hispanic & Latino American Affairs Commission (KHLAAC) in opposition to Senate Bill 254. KHLAAC is charged with addressing public policy concerns related to education, health, and business for Hispanic and Latino Kansans. We work closely with the Kansas Hispanic & Latino American Legislative Caucus and other state agencies to improve the lives of all Kansans.

Threat to Economic and Workforce Stability

Senate Bill 254, which seeks to prohibit individuals who are unlawfully present in the United States from receiving any state or local public benefit, fails to account for the economic and workforce realities of Kansas. Immigrant and refugee labor is vital to our state's economy, particularly in Southwest Kansas, where industries such as agriculture, food production, and manufacturing rely heavily on immigrant workers. By imposing unnecessary and restrictive barriers, this bill would destabilize critical industries, leading to labor shortages, reduced economic output, and increased hardship for businesses that sustain Kansas communities.

It is important to note that individuals who are unlawfully present do not currently qualify for state local and benefits. Adding in additional verification requirements under this bill could introduced complexity to an already established system This may result in delays in service provision, potentially creating barriers for eligible individuals who are already navigating a complex system.

Impact on Health and Public Safety

Denying individuals access to essential services, including healthcare, undermines public health efforts across Kansas. The proposed legislation would create a dangerous environment where individuals, including mixed-status families and U.S.-born children, may forgo necessary medical treatment out of fear, resulting in preventable illnesses, higher emergency care costs, and increased public health risks. Medicaid expansion is a priority for KHLAAC, as it supports better healthcare access and improved health outcomes for all Kansans, including immigrant communities that contribute to our state's economy and society.

Harm to Kansas' Educational and Workforce Development Goals

KHLAAC strongly supports in-state tuition for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipients. Many of these young individuals have been raised in Kansas, attended our public schools, and seek higher education opportunities to contribute to our workforce. SB 254 includes

provisions that would bar DACA and undocumented students from accessing in-state tuition rates, directly contradicting KHLAAC's commitment to education equity and workforce development. Kansas benefits when all students, including DACA recipients, are given the opportunity to succeed.

Potential for Discrimination and Erosion of Trust in Public Institutions

This bill places undue burdens on local and state agencies to verify the immigration status of individuals applying for public benefits, fostering an environment with the potential for discrimination and racial profiling. It also discourages cooperation with local law enforcement, as immigrant communities may become hesitant to report crimes or engage with authorities for fear of exposure. This erosion of trust harms public safety and community cohesion.

Conclusion

Senate Bill 254 is a step backward for Kansas. Rather than fostering economic growth, public health, and education equity, it seeks to divide and disenfranchise hardworking individuals who contribute to our state's prosperity. KHLAAC urges the committee to reject SB 254 and instead pursue policies that uphold the dignity, economic stability, and well-being of all Kansans.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Kansas Hispanic & Latino American Affairs Commission (KHLAAC)
khlaac.ks.gov