

Elissa Jones
Written Testimony in **Opposition**
Senate Committee on Federal and State Affairs
SB 254
Hearing Date: February 27, 2025

Chairperson Thompson and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition of Senate Bill 254.

My name is Elissa Jones, and I am the ESOL teacher at Topeka West High School. This marks my twentieth year as an educator. I always knew I was going to be a teacher: it's been a calling in my life for as long as I can remember. The chance to work every day with young people to help enrich and empower their lives is a gift I don't take for granted.

In my two decades of teaching, I've had the chance to work with kids from rural and urban communities, from the United States and abroad, from all kinds of families with all kinds of legal status. Every single one of those students deserves to have hope and a future. Every one of them is a neighbor in our midst, a part of our community, an adolescent in need of purpose and belonging.

This bill aims to take that away from them. It's a cruel way to try to punish these kids for something they have no control over, dressed up in the guise of fairness. There is nothing fair or just about telling a teenager that they are less than, underving, not the right kind of person to get to study to be a teacher, or a vet tech, or a welder, or phlebotomist, or computer programmer, or anything requiring skills and training. We don't know where these students' futures will take them, but we know they need to be prepared to support themselves and their families and to contribute to the communities where they live. It's uncaring and ultimately self-defeating for Kansas to shut these young people out of any real chance at further education.

Others will make the case that the kids themselves aren't to blame for their parents' decisions, that their families are taxpayers who support the university system, and that Kansas stands to benefit, not lose, by having a better educated workforce. I agree with all these points and hope you have ears to listen. But for me, the most compelling thing is the life of the young person this bill would impact. What happens to them if we hang a big "NO" sign at the end of high school? No work, no college, no technical program, no chance to set goals and work hard to meet them. What does that do to these kids, to their development, self concept, and well being? My students are just 14 when they enter high school: imagine seeing your future cut off at that age. I've seen that impending dropoff lead to depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and more – all the things we work so hard to protect our kids from.

As you consider this bill, I am urging you to think about these neighbors in need. They are kids like other kids, like my own son, a freshman at Topeka High School, just starting to think about his career options. Just like my son, they had no say about where they were born or what status

they have. Just like my son, they need to know that they matter, that their lives have worth and purpose. Just like my son, they need to see themselves with a positive future to pursue. That's the kind of community I want to build for young people in Kansas, and that's why I oppose Senate Bill 254 and ask you to oppose it as well.

Respectfully,

Elissa Jones
Topeka, Kansas