

Mariana Ramírez

PRIVATE CITIZEN

2/25/2025

SB254

WRITTEN ONLY

Chair Thompson and Committee Members,

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts on SB 254. My name is Mariana Ramirez and I'm a registered voter in Johnson County, KS. As a resident and concerned member of this community, I believe that access to affordable education is not only a moral imperative but also an investment in our state's economic and social future. I'm writing to encourage the committee to vote no on SB254.

Undocumented students, like many Kansans, have grown up within our communities and attended our public schools. These students demonstrate academic promise, resilience, and a strong desire to contribute to society. By continuing to offer in-state tuition, Kansas will keep enabling these bright and dedicated students to pursue college degrees that equip them with the skills necessary to support our workforce. Lowering the financial barriers to higher education results in a better-prepared, competitive workforce that can drive local innovation and economic growth.

I've had the opportunity to meet several high school students through a college prep program in KC. Some of them were undocumented and the first in their families to attempt to pursue higher education. Despite multiple challenges, they worked hard to excel at school, held part-time jobs and volunteered to lead events for other students, actively contributing to the social fabric of our communities. Although undocumented students are not eligible for federal financial aid, most of the students I met were able to attain a higher education because it was affordable to them thanks to a visionary Kansan legislature who approved in-state tuition for undocumented students in 2004. Legislators then recognized college-educated individuals are more likely to become productive, tax-paying residents. Indeed, several of the students I met are now working in healthcare, social services and small businesses. They either acquired DACA or were able to find a path to some type of immigration status. They are not only filling critical gaps supporting a

white aging population but they are also contributing with higher taxes according to their job and education reinforcing the economic vitality of our communities.

Kansas prides itself on values of fairness, opportunity, and inclusiveness. Many undocumented students meet the same academic and residency requirements as their peers. Their immigration status does not reflect their ties to the state. Granting in-state tuition ensures that all students who have demonstrated a commitment to Kansas and its values have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Some may express concerns regarding the use of public funds to allow undocumented students to pay in-state tuition. However, research and experience demonstrate that investing in education yields long-term returns for the community. An educated populace contributes more to the economy, enhances civic participation, and fosters innovation. Denying these students affordable access to higher education risks wasting the potential of a generation that has already shown remarkable dedication despite facing significant obstacles.

In conclusion, providing in-state tuition to undocumented students is an investment in the future of Kansas—a future enriched by a diverse, well-educated, and economically empowered community. I respectfully urge you to vote no to the passage of SB 254, thereby affirming our commitment to fairness, opportunity, and the sustained prosperity of Kansas.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.