

Testimony for Public Hearing
House Appropriations Committee
H.B. 2403
March 9, 2015

This packet contains written testimony in opposition of H.B. 2403

The following individuals are included and are representing Project
Encore High School Diploma Completion Program, A Service of South
Central Education Service Center:

Joani Purdy, Program Director
Monty Ratley, Student
Shadonna Reedy, Student
Cathy Martinez, Student
Melissa Wright, Student
Veronica Lee, Student

Appropriations Committee
Date 3-9-15
Attachment 13

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Joani Purdy, 1006 N. Preserve Ct., Wichita, KS 67206

My name is Joani Purdy and I have been actively involved in education for 22 years, the past 15 of those years as a Program Director for Project Encore, a high school diploma completion program under the direction of SCKESC in Clearwater, Kansas. I am also an opponent to H.B. 2403, specifically the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years of age or older. My experience with adult learners through Project Encore has provided me additional insight into the benefits of virtual learning options for students 18 years of age and older. I would like to bring some of those benefits to your attention.

Some of the most common obstacles faced by our adult learners are lack of reliable transportation, inability to afford child-care, sporadic work hours, and health issues. Our blended learning approach allows students the flexibility to access their courses virtually, thus eliminating these barriers. Students that are required to travel for their job can access their courses from their hotel room at night. Students who work during the day, and have family obligations in the evening, can work at night when their kids are in bed. Students that have health issues can work from the comfort and convenience of their own home or hospital room. Virtual education options provide students the flexibility to work when it fits their schedule.

Kansas is faced with a shortage of skilled workers. For this reason, it is critical that we continue to fund programs that will enable adults to complete high school and obtain the credentials necessary to fill this shortage. A majority of post-secondary institutions in Kansas offer online learning options. In order to ensure a successful transition from high school to post-secondary school, it is imperative we expose students to online learning experiences.

According to the Kansas DropINs website (<http://community.ksde.org>), "During the 2012-2013 school year, 3,257 Kansas students dropped out of school. Each high school dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 in lost earnings, taxes and productivity over the course of his or her lifetime. For the 3,257 dropouts that equals approximately \$846 million. Those dropouts are also more likely than their graduating peers to be in prison, get divorced, live in poverty, be unemployed, have poor health and utilize public assistance." According to the Kansas State data on adult learners, 2600 students, over the age of 18, earned their high school diploma in 2013. As you can see, high school diploma completion programs that offer flexible learning options are helping to offset these staggering financial and societal costs to Kansas.

For the adult learner seeking to obtain a high school education, flexibility is necessary in order for them to be successful. Without the benefit of virtual education and the flexibility it provides, many potential graduates will not succeed. When limited to time and attendance constraints, adult students will not pursue their diploma, but instead see these limits as another obstacle they cannot overcome to improve their living situation. Their employment opportunities will be limited and they will continue to rely on unemployment benefits, welfare and even criminal activity as a means of survival.

I encourage you to consider these points before making your decision on HB 2403.

Respectfully,

Joani Purdy

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Monty Ratley
10040 S. Christine
Wichita, KS 67217

Hello, my name is Monty Ratley. I am a former virtual student with Project Encore of South Central Kansas Education Center and am proud to announce, I graduated from the program in 2014.

I am writing to express my opposition to H.B. 2403. I am opposing the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years and older. Being a recent high school graduate, I would like to say how disappointed it is for me to learn of such cuts to virtual education.

If it wasn't for virtual programs, I don't think I would have been able to go back and earn my diploma. I had a full-time job and the flexibility this program provided allowed me to work my job and to work on my education. There are many older folks, who need the virtual programs in order to get a better education. For whatever reason people don't finish school, virtual education like Project Encore, give some the opportunity to better themselves. I'm very grateful for what Project Encore was able to do for me and my future. For this I will always be in debt to them. I can only hope other students of all ages; will have that chance I received to better their education. As citizens, it is important to receive the education we can to better our lives which will then better our society. .

Please consider funding virtual education and the opportunity it provides to help others so they too can benefit from having a diploma. Our state will surly come out on top, and be rewarded with better generations of working people, helping each other make a far more unique world with the education programs like Project Encore can provide.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for your time. Thank you.

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Shadonna Reedy
1545 S. Gordan
Wichita, KS 67213

Hello, my name is Shadonna Reedy. I am a virtual student with Project Encore of South Central Kansas Education Center.

I am writing to express my opposition to H.B. 2403. I am opposing the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years and older. I will be completing my high school education this spring. Without a virtual program like Project Encore, I would not be considering attending college to further my education as a computer programmer. Project Encore has been an opportunity for me to gain knowledge, have faith in myself, better myself as a person and most importantly to let my children be proud of me.

At an early age, I was put into state custody and was shuffled from foster home to foster home. This meant I was enrolled with many different schools. For me, education was always a struggle. Moving from school to school meant making new friends, learning different things in different schools, even having to adapt to new teachers each time. At sixteen, I was finally adopted and my adopted mother decided to change my first name. Well needless to say, I struggled with my own identity, which turned out to be too much to handle and caused me to give up on school and eventually drop out. A few years passed and I started having a family of my own. I always wondered how I would be able to show my kids their education was important. But how was I to do that without having mine. Well I started getting depressed and giving up on life. I couldn't find work because of the lack of my diploma, and so I felt I was going nowhere. Then I was introduced to Project Encore, a virtual school for adults. I was a single mother at the time and times were tough. When I learned there was no cost, I got excited and immediately filled out my enrollment form. I have worked hard ever since and as I stated before, I will be receiving my diploma at Project Encore's graduation ceremony in May. Without this virtual program, my life would have gone in a completely opposite direction. Project Encore has saved my life and my children's. It has given my family the blessing of knowing anything is possible.

Please support funding virtual programs to help others like me, who may have not had an ideal childhood. Project Encore has been a miracle. Without it I would not be the woman or mother I am today.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Cathy Martinez
3104 S. Gordan Ave.
Wichita, KS 67217

Hello, my name is Cathy Martinez. I am a virtual student with Project Encore of South Central Kansas Education Center.

I am writing to express my opposition to H.B. 2403. I am opposing the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years and older. I want to share my story and explain how much having a virtual program like Project Encore has meant to me.

I come from a very broken home. My father was an alcoholic. After the first semester of my freshman year, my father made the decision for me to drop out of school to participate in an out-of-state homeschool program. After completing their curriculum, I thought I had a high school diploma. Fast forwarding seven years later, God placed a call in my life to work with youth and families-especially youth and families struggling with addiction and its effects. I saw firsthand what an addiction to alcohol can do to a family. It's been my heart's desire to strengthen and impact families for Christ. To accomplish this, I recognized my need for additional education and training. After many failed attempts to enroll in college, I learned my high school education was from a school that wasn't accredited with the state of Kansas. None of the colleges in Kansas would accept my education. As you can imagine I was devastated. Many responded to my situation with "Well go get your GED". In my mind at the time I felt getting a GED was taking the easy way out for me and my situation. Also, I thought I had a high school diploma and that is what I wanted. This is where Encore came into the picture. I learned about Encore through a friend and immediately enrolled. I'm happy to say, I completed my high school education and will walk across the stage to accept my diploma in May. My plans are to enroll in college either in the fall 2015 or spring 2016.

I feel in part that I'm living out my calling because currently I'm a Family Life Pastor. I work with families and many of them struggle with addiction and they come seeking Biblical counsel. As stated before, I feel I lack some education experience and training. I'm so grateful the opportunity Encore provides was around. I was able to obtain a high school diploma that satisfies the state's requirements and now in turn I will be able to attend college and live out my dream. This will not only better me and my family but also the families that I work with now and will work with in the future.

Virtual programs like Encore are important by helping students like me to achieve their dreams which will also better our communities and our state. Please consider to continue funding virtual programs for people 18 and older.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Melissa Wright
2030 S. Madison
Wichita, KS 67211

Hello, my name Melissa Wright. I am a virtual student with Project Encore of South Central Kansas Education Center

I am writing to express my opposition to H.B. 2403. I am opposing the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years and older.

Without a virtual program like Project Encore I wouldn't have had the privilege to write this testimony. This program has given me the ability to complete my high school education and at the same time keep my job and raise my son, two very important things in my life. Other onsite education programs had an attendance requirement. This was very difficult for me to meet considering my other important responsibilities. Because of virtual learning and the flexibility it provides, I am proud to say I will be finished this spring and receive my high school diploma in May. I am very grateful that I had the chance to be a part of a virtual program that will allow me to pursue my dreams and create a life for my son that I can be proud of.

Thank you for your time and consideration of virtual funding for people who are 18 and older.

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Veronica Lee
3227 S. Wichita St.
Wichita, KS 67217

Hello, my name Veronica Lee. I am a virtual student with Project Encore of South Central Kansas Education Center. I have been involved with Project Encore for almost a year.

I am writing to express my opposition to H.B. 2403. I am opposing the elimination of virtual funding for anyone who is 18 years and older.

Working online is what I like best about being a part of Project Encore. I never used to enjoy school. I dropped out of high school when I was 16. I never really thought about going back to school until I heard of Project Encore. I figured I would hate it too. But I came in for the first time and I was impressed with what Project Encore could do for me. So far I have finished five courses and earned 2 1/2 credits towards my diploma. I have never had this much self-respect for myself. Project Encore has given me a chance to both earn my diploma and build my self-worth. Without this virtual program I would still be sitting around thinking and wishing I had stayed in school. It was obvious my life wasn't going to change because I didn't finish school when I should have. I am now able to look forward to following my dreams of becoming a case manager. I want to go to college and make something of myself. I don't want to have to work fast food restaurants the rest of my life.

I used to say to myself that I don't care what happens to my life but now because of Project Encore, I can see a better future for my life knowing I have accomplished something and making myself and others proud.

Thank you for your time and please don't take away the funding for virtual learning and the hope it provides for me and others.