

**Testimony from
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Good morning Chairman Vickrey and members of the committee. I am Dr. Douglas Girod, executive vice chancellor of the University of Kansas Medical Center. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 110 and how it impacts employees who are J-1 visa holders at the University of Kansas Medical Center.

As you may be aware, the state of Kansas recently increased its health insurance deductible per employee to \$1,000. The U.S. State Department requires that all J-visa holders have employer-sponsored health insurance with a deductible of no more than \$500 per accident or illness. Other states that have implemented these new higher deductibles allow state institutions to purchase additional insurance on behalf of those employees affected. Currently, state statute prohibits Kansas state agencies from purchasing additional health insurance for employees.

I stand here today in support of SB 110, which would authorize Kansas Board of Regents institutions to purchase additional health insurance for employees for whom the State Employee Health Plan does not meet the requirements of federal law, and would allow these employees of the University of Kansas Medical Center to stay in good standing with both state and federal requirements.

The Kansas Board of Regents currently has approximately 215 J-visa holders among its Regents Institutions. The University of Kansas Medical Center is home to 89 of those individuals. The J-visa holders that KU Medical Center employs are highly educated clinical and non-clinical exchange visitors who are either physician residents and fellows or individuals engaged in research.

Our clinical J-visa holders who serve as residents and fellows fill much need clinical positions and match in specialties that might not otherwise be filled. Today, the state of Kansas health care system is supported by 38 of these medical residents in internal medicine, pediatrics, psychiatry, neurology, pathology and family medicine. These individuals provide much needed clinical care to Kansans and contribute to the total number of physicians in our state, helping close a tremendous gap in health care. Over the years, many of our KU Medical Center-trained physicians choose to stay at KU Medical Center after residency and continue to treat the underserved populations of Kansas.

Additionally, KU Medical Center draws the greatest minds from around the world to collaborate in research toward the advancement of medicine and the improvement of the delivery of health care to our state's population. This mission is currently supported by 51 J-visa post-doctoral fellows and research assistants at KU Medical Center, all of whom are benefits eligible and work in labs all over the institution. They work on a variety of research endeavors that make a significant impact on KU Medical Center's ability to pursue research excellence in areas such as oncology/cancer biology, biochemistry, biomedical sciences and microbiology.

These individuals work within the university's research centers and laboratories alongside renowned faculty members and scientists who are expanding the understanding of various disease states and making significant treatment discoveries.

Our J-visa researchers explore pancreatic and breast cancer treatments, polycystic kidney disease, anti-tumor drug treatments and adult stem cell therapy. These researchers represent the best and brightest health professionals from around the world. On our campus alone, we have J-visa holders from China, Japan, India, France, Germany, Italy and Mexico, among others. We bring them to Kansas, where they become the next generation of doctors, inventors and business owners.

Unfortunately, if a solution is not found, we risk losing these researchers and possibly ground-breaking research to other states, where they would not be in violation of their visas. It is my hope that we will be able to keep these individuals in Kansas, where they will be able to continue to contribute to the great work that is being done at the University of Kansas Medical Center. I would like to thank the committee for considering this bill. I would be happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.