



**OPPONENT Testimony on HB 2519
For the House Education Committee
February 12, 2020**

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Chair Huebert and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide opponent testimony related to House Bill 2519.

Kansas' Independent Colleges:

KICA represents the twenty independent colleges of Kansas, all of which are not-for-profit institutions of higher education, all of which offer undergraduate degrees, all of which have their principal campus in Kansas, all of whom are regionally accredited by the Higher Learning Commission, and all of whom maintain an open enrollment policy consistent with Kansas statutes.

The state of Kansas, via the Kansas Board of Regents, has specific obligations governing "private and out-of-state" educational institutions, per the Private and Out-of-State Post-Secondary Educational Institutions Act. All twenty KICA institutions are exempt from that statute. Thus, for the independent members of KICA, KBOR has no governing role (as it does for the six 4-year Regents universities), coordinating role (as it does for the community colleges, technical colleges, and Washburn University) nor regulatory role (as it does for any for-profit college or college based outside of Kansas that wishes to operate here). Furthermore, KICA institutions do not receive any direct institution funding from the state of Kansas, as befits our independent status.

Response to HB 2519:

KICA objects to HB 2519 for several critical reasons.

Diverting Resources from Teaching to Regulatory Compliance:

Our primary objection is to increase in regulatory burden for our institutions. Most KICA institutions are quite small. HB 2519 asks our colleges to navigate a technical conundrum. In most cases, our colleges do not have full-time institutional research "staff." In most cases, the role of institutional research is held by someone who has multiple other duties.

With no additional capacity, we would be challenged to collect and provide all of the data that HB 2519 would require us to provide to the Dept. of Education. Given the stated desire of the Kansas Legislature that education spending at all levels should be invested primarily in the education of students, it is surprising then that HB 2519 would ask us to divert spending to additional regulatory and data.

Increasing, Redundant Regulatory Burden:

As noted above, KICA institutions are not funded by the state of Kansas or any local taxing authority. Thus, as any private entity would note, the government's interest in requiring us to provide and then report data on our activities runs counter to our treasured status as "independent." While we acknowledge the state's power to collect and publicize data on all entities within the state, we also note that the state should surmount a higher burden to demonstrate that the purpose of such data cannot be met through other means.



And that other means exists already. The U.S. Department of Education already requires significant reporting from our institutions to provide data to the College Scorecard (www.collegescorecard.ed.gov). However, the questions asked there vary somewhat from what HB 2519 would require, thus duplicating our reporting burden without improving the ability of students to choose a college that fits their needs and budget. Given the existence of the College Scorecard, HB 2519 looks more like an effort to increase regulatory reporting for its own sake rather than to achieve a desirable public policy end.

Competitive Disadvantage

KICA institutions are engaged in a concerted effort to attract students for outside of Kansas to attend college here and then stay here upon completion of their degree. By our analysis, about 40% of our students come from somewhere else and about a third stay here after graduation. We are a “brain gain” driver for Kansas, especially in many rural communities and small towns.

However, the competition for enrollment is fierce and Kansas’ institutions do not have the resources of the Harvards of the world, nor the physical geographic appeal of the Pepperdines of the world, nor the sports cache of the Notre Dames of the world. Thus, any effort similar to HB 2519 that would require of KICA schools something that our competitors in other states do not face is concerning. We operate on the margins – a change in enrollment of 5-10 students can make an enormous difference in each institution’s ability to provide an affordable education. HB 2519 would place a burden on us that our competitors do not face and undercut our efforts to grow Kansas.

Major-by-Major and 1st Year Earnings

Finally, HB 2519 focuses its attention on income and earnings for the wrong population and on the wrong timescale. Most of the KICA colleges were founded as what were once called “liberal arts” colleges. The liberal arts includes a comprehensive study of the human existence and culture. Even our STEM students in fields like cyber-security and engineering and even our students in classic automotive restoration and occupational therapy are required to undertake a full liberal arts core. And that matters not just to the student, but to employers. These other courses focus our students on their ability to read critically, communicate clearly, work on teams, and most importantly, be lifelong learners. These skills in the liberal arts are, essentially, bulwarks against degree perishability in a rapidly changing world.

Countless research has shown that students who pursue a degree in the liberal arts may have a lower starting salary but they have better long-term earnings power. Nationally, STEM majors’ incomes are 37% higher than liberal arts degree graduates at graduation (\$61,000 for STEM, \$45,000 for liberal arts), but by age 40, liberal arts degree graduates earn more (\$124,000 for STEM, \$131,000 for liberal arts).

HB 2519’s emphasis in Section 1(c)(2) on “courses of study leading to a bachelor’s degree whose graduates earn the highest average salary upon graduation” is misguided at best and more likely deleterious to the economic and educational well-being of Kansans.

Conclusion:

KICA opposes HB 2519 and encourages the committee not to move it forward. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you on this issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have or provide additional data as you request.