



PROPONENT Testimony on HB 2414
House Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Committee
March 1, 2023
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Chairman Tarwater and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for HB 2414, which would amend the state University Engineering Initiative such that it would include engineering programs at private non-profit colleges and universities in Kansas.

Before I progress, I want to make sure to draw attention to one technical amendment we would like to see included and which has been provided at the end of my testimony.

Kansas' Independent Colleges:

KICA represents the twenty accredited undergraduate degree-granting private non-profit colleges of Kansas. Among KICA's members are the state's oldest institution – Baker University in Baldwin City, founded in 1858 – and the state's youngest non-proprietary institution – MidAmerica Nazarene University in Olathe, founded in 1966.

A note on vocabulary: At KICA, we often use the word “independent” to describe our colleges and universities. It emphasizes the essential nature of our institutions relative to the government and to each other. However, in casual language, “private” or “nonprofit” often mean much the same thing. The critical distinction is that KICA speaks for the non-profit colleges and universities that have their main physical campus Kansas. We do not speak for for-profit or proprietary institutions, such as Rasmussen College or the University of Phoenix.

KICA institutions serve more than 24,000 students and employ more than 5,000 Kansans in 20 separate Kansas communities.

Engineering at KICA Institutions:

Of the 20 KICA institutions, two currently offer bachelor's degrees in engineering: Benedictine College, in Atchison, and Friends University, in Wichita. Today you will hear from representatives of those two institutions. In addition to those two, a program is in the preliminary phase at McPherson College.

The University Engineering Initiative

In 2012, Kansas created the University Engineering Initiative (K.S.A. 76-7,137) a \$10.5 million per year program to increase the number of engineering graduates in Kansas. The funds were provided to Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University and used for hiring engineering faculty, increasing scholarships and internships, and improving engineering facilities. That program was then renewed for another ten years during the 2021 legislative session.

The text of the University Engineering Initiative states clearly the purpose for the program. It says the needs to “ensure engineering industry partners find the new talent, designs and techniques needed to fuel economic growth and business success in Kansas” because “the needs of the citizens of the state of Kansas will be best served” by doing so.

Yet, if the purpose is to increase the number of engineers being educated in Kansas AND to keep them here, in Kansas, as productive contributors to Kansas’ social and economic growth, then Kansas’ private non-profit colleges should be included in that effort. Unfortunately, we are not.

The University Engineering Initiative’s stated goal is to increase the number of engineers in Kansas. KICA institutions can help meet that goal. Excluding KICA institutions from the funding support, despite our high-quality outcomes, impedes our ability to contribute to the effort.

Thus, KICA is hopeful that this Legislature will take steps to remedy this imbalance and request you pass HB 2414 which would create a fourth component to the University Engineering Initiative to support non-profit college engineering programs. We have also made a request to the House Higher Education Budget committee that specific funds be added to the FY2024 budget for this purpose.

Adding private colleges to the University Initiative should not, we believe, come at the expense of the programs at the public Regents universities. Such is not our argument or intent. The intent of the University Engineering Initiative is to grow engineering programs statewide. It should not be a zero-sum approach. Thus, KICA requests that private colleges be included, and additional funding be provided to support our equally valuable work in this sphere proportional to our contributions.

This brings me to KICA’s suggested improvement to HB 2414. When we worked with the sponsors and the revisors as they drafted the bill, our intent was to have the private-college funding provided from SGF, rather than ELARF. Our reasons are two-fold. First, by funding the private college portion of the Engineering Initiative from a separate pool of money, it would send a clear message that we do not seek to have the existing Regents’ university pool diluted. Second, among some KICA institutions, gambling and the lottery – from which ELARF funds come – are viewed with serious concern about the impact of those activities on society. While some institutions in KICA have no qualms with gambling and lottery revenues, some Christian colleges would have concerns.

To that effect, we request that HB 2414 be amended slightly to direct that the KICA funds come from SGF. We hope the committee – with assistance from the experts in the Revisors’ Office – make a change that may look like the following two changes:

<p>Page 1, Line 23-24: “engineering initiative act is financed with annual transfers from the expanded lottery act revenues fund <u>for activities at state educational institutions, or annual transfers from the state general fund for activities at private postsecondary educational institutions.</u>”</p> <p>Page 5, Line 35: “expanded lottery act revenues fund <u>state general fund</u> moneys”</p>

Closing:

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you. I hope these remarks demonstrate to you that private non-profit colleges can and should be a component of the state’s workforce development strategies, in this case, in educating engineers.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have or provide additional data as you request.