



**To:** House Commerce, Labor and Economic Development  
**From:** Tom Roberts, P.E., F.NSPE, F.ASEE  
Kansas Society of Professional Engineers  
**Date:** March 1, 2023  
**Re:** Opposition of HB 2414

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our opposition to HB 2414. I am Tom Roberts, P.E, F.NSPE, a past president of both the Kansas Society of Professional Engineers and the National Society of Professional Engineers. Today, I am honored to represent the Kansas Society of Professional Engineers (KSPE).

KSPE represents individual licensed engineers across the State of Kansas. For over 110 years, KSPE has worked to promote engineering by delivering professional development services, encouraging licensure, and advocating legislation and public policy for the betterment of human welfare and the industry.

Our comments today applaud the work and purpose of the University Engineering Initiative Act (UEIA) while acknowledging several problems with HB 2414.

The UEIA, created in 2011, is a program put in place to address the shortage of engineers in the Kansas workforce. Administered by the Kansas Department of Commerce and Board of the Regents, the program provides \$10.5M each year from ELARF (Extended Lottery Act Revenue Fund). The funds are evenly split by Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University to invest in Kansas's publicly funded engineering programs. In turn, the three universities were tasked to increase the number of engineering graduates each year to a specific target by the tenth year.

In 2021, we were pleased to say all three engineering programs surpassed their targets to increase the number of engineering graduates. However, since both the private and public sector told us there were still not enough engineers to meet employer demands in the state, KSPE led the effort renew the program for another ten years through 2032. This was by act of the 2021 Legislature. As we review HB 2414's proposed changes, our concerns are multifold.

**HB 2414 does not appropriate new funds to the UEIA.** This bill opens the door to one or more private colleges receiving UEIA funds from the same \$10.5M currently split by Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University ABET accredited engineering programs. This means the three universities would receive less funds. HB2414 would also set a precedent for state funding of private colleges and will add complexity and cost to program administration.

**HB 2414 does not increase the UEIA's engineer graduate output.** The purpose of the UEIA is to ambitiously increase the number of engineering graduates. Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University each worked hard to obtain a one-to-one match from non-state sources and to reach their goals. Since 2011, UEIA funds have been successfully used to improve engineering facilities, hire / increase the number of engineering faculty, and to improve retention / increase the number of engineering graduates. If one or more private colleges propose to receive UEIA funds, these colleges should be challenged to obtain matching funds and to increase the targeted engineering graduate output. Moreover, the UEIA's per-student investment should be consistent with the current program.

**HB 2414 uses a broad private college definition.** When the 2021 Legislature renewed the UEIA through 2032, the House Committee on Appropriations was very careful about opening the door to more groups. During the 2021 hearings, many groups requested inclusion in the UEIA. As we understand HB 2414, a program such as Benedictine College could be added to the UEIA. The definition is also clear, however, similar colleges could also be added. Thus, HB 2414 could over time add several colleges to the UEIA without corresponding funding or increasing the total engineering graduate output.

**HB 2414 may change UEIA program's accountability.** In addition to expanding the UEIA without increasing the engineering graduate output, the inclusion of colleges outside the Board of Regents system adds complexity to the program's administration. The UEIA is co-administered by the Board of Regents and Department of Commerce. There is a high degree of accountability and transparency in the UEIA program. As an example, the Board of Regents has a section on their website that tracks UEIA program data year by year. Moreover, assurances exist to show that dollars spent for the engineering programs are approved in concert by the Board of Regents and Department of Commerce. We are unclear how one or more private colleges added to the program may respond to being overseen by the Board of Regents and the Department of Commerce.

**Current UEIA programs prepare graduates to meet Kansas workforce needs.** The engineering programs at Kansas State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University are ABET accredited. This means they have clearly demonstrated their programs meet criteria that include defined program educational outcomes, student outcomes, assessment, and evaluation. As an example of this success, the University of Kansas and Kansas State University won 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the 2022 National Society of Professional Engineers Milton F. Lunch Ethics Competition.

Given the many concerns with this specific proposal, we respectfully urge the committee to not approve HB 2414. As always, KSPE is pleased to serve as a resource about how to build the engineering workforce but wants to be careful not to comprise the proven program in place since 2011.

Respectfully,



Tom Roberts, P.E., F.NSPE, F.ASEE