

State of Kansas
House of Representatives

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Blake Carpenter
House Speaker Pro Tempore
Representative, 81st District

1/29/24

House Committee on Education,

I am honored to present testimony before you not only as an architect of the EMERGE legislation alongside Representative Turk but also as a dedicated servant of the Kansas National Guard. My testimony today is born out of a steadfast commitment to the Guard, a force to which I have dedicated parts of my life and career. The EMERGE legislation is pivotal in reinforcing the strength and capability of our National Guard, and I am here to strongly advocate for its adoption.

The Kansas National Guard, with a proud and storied history of service and sacrifice, faces evolving challenges in today's dynamic defense landscape. Chief among these is the need for continuous educational and professional growth for our service members, especially as they ascend the ranks. The pursuit of higher education, particularly a master's degree, is becoming increasingly essential for advanced leadership roles within the Guard. This requirement, while critical for developing well-equipped leaders, presents barriers that affect our recruitment and retention efforts. Moreover, the associated six-year service commitment upon undertaking this educational journey is a testament to the dedication required of our members – a commitment that they do not undertake lightly, given their concurrent civilian responsibilities.

The EMERGE legislation is a strategic initiative, developed to fortify the Kansas National Guard through educational empowerment and enhanced career pathways. This bill is a tactical response to the challenges we face, offering a robust support system for educational advancement, which is integral to career progression within the Guard. It's a strategic investment in our personnel, fostering a culture of intellectual growth and professional development, crucial for the modern military arena.

Collaborating with Representative Turk, I leveraged my on-ground experience and the collective wisdom of my airmen to craft a legislative framework that addresses both current and future needs of the Guard. This legislation is the culmination of a mission-focused approach, aiming to bolster the operational readiness and effectiveness of our service members through educational and professional development.

The EMERGE legislation is a strategic asset for the Kansas National Guard, offering substantial benefits that extend across the spectrum of military service. By enabling access to higher education, we are investing in the strategic intellectual development of our force, enhancing leadership capabilities, and decision-making skills vital for military and civil operations. This initiative positions the Guard as an attractive option for recruitment, offering a path for both service and personal growth.

The retention aspect of the EMERGE program is equally critical. The additional six-year service commitment, balanced against the educational and career benefits provided, strengthens the bond of our members to the Guard, fostering a more experienced, cohesive, and mission-ready unit.

The six-year service commitment integral to the EMERGE program reflects the dedication and sacrifice required in military service. This commitment represents a mutual pact: a solemn promise from our members to serve with honor and a commitment from the Guard to invest in their comprehensive development. It ensures that the Guard retains highly skilled and educated leaders, vital for operational continuity and effectiveness.

In closing, the EMERGE legislation is a strategic imperative for the Kansas National Guard. It directly addresses the challenges of recruitment and retention, while promoting a culture of continuous learning and leadership excellence. As a committed servant of the Guard, I firmly believe this legislation is a critical investment in our personnel and, by extension, in the security and prosperity of our state. I strongly advocate for the support and adoption of the EMERGE legislation, recognizing its capacity to fortify and enhance the Kansas National Guard.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Blake Carpenter', with a large, sweeping flourish extending from the end of the name.

Blake Carpenter
Speaker Pro Tempore
District 81