Kansas Council of Chapters
Military Officers Association of America

Chairman and Members of the Committee, I am John Becker, retired Colonel, U.S. Army National Guard. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about HB 2541. Today, I represent the Military Officers Association of America-Kansas Council of Chapters,

The Kansas Council of Chapters of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) actively advocates for legislation affecting the military career force, retired community, and veterans of the uniformed services and their families and survivors. Veterans and service members comprise nearly 9% of the Kansas population. These include active duty, Kansas Army and Air National Guard (KSNG), reserve organizations (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines), retirees and those who have served any length of time in the military.

Veterans, families and procurement contracts to Kansas companies have an economic impact of $7.7 billion. Military members and families have sacrificed to ensure the security and safety of our country and of those in other allied countries around the globe. The past decade has seen thousands of Kansans deployed worldwide to ensure peace and freedom in the world. In return, protecting pay, force levels, benefits, retirement, and health care for military service members and their families are top priorities for MOAA and should be top priorities for our Nation and our State.

The Kansas National Guard State Tuition Assistance program provides for tuition assistance to Kansas National Guard members to Kansas higher education institutions. Since its' inception in 2003, the program has been appropriated level funding through 2016 and again in 2018. However, the tuition rates of Kansas schools have increased, from an average of $2,057 per semester in 2005-6 to $5,295 in 2017.

Not only has the cost of tuition increased, so have the number of eligible Kansas National Guardsmen participating in the program as they attend our Kansas educational institutions.   Since the Spring Semester of 2011, there has been an annual increase in the number of students participating in the program. This number will only continue to increase as those Guard members who may be deployed now, return to Kansas, and enroll in colleges, universities and technical schools. Last year, only 51% of state tuition was reimbursed for Kansas Guard Members. This is due to increased student numbers and flat funding for the past several years.

It is key to keep these Guard members in Kansas, going to school, and remaining active members of the National Guard and their Kansas communities. The Tuition Assistance Program enables all of these positive events to happen. Kansas can only benefit from this program--not just the National Guard, but our higher education institutions, the communities where these Guard members live and serve, and the economy of our state. This is a worthy investment opportunity that returns dividends to our nation, our state, our communities and our citizens.

The Military Officers Association of America-Kansas Council of Chapters supports HB 2541. We believe that military service of National Guardsmen who remain in Kansas and attend higher education because of the Tuition Assistance program, will also remain in the military service of our country beyond their education time and will contribute positively to our communities and to the national defense.

The Military Officers Association of America-Kansas Council of Chapters supports full funding of the State Tuition Assistance Program for FY 2019 at $3 million , to ensure that all eligible Kansas National Guard members may attend a Kansas institution of higher education and remain in our Kansas communities.

MOAA Kansas asks your support of this program with full funding of $3million for FY 2019. Thank you for your time, I will gladly stand for questions.   Thank you for your support of our Kansas military members and families!

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