Testimony in support of House Bill 2108

House K-12 Education Budget Committee

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Chuck Knapp, President and CEO
Jobs for America's Graduates-Kansas

Jobs for America's Graduates-Kansas (JAG-K) supports House Bill 2108 and the goal of funding programs that work.

House Bill 2108 is a simple bill that makes it clear "at-risk' funding may be used to support evidence-based programs with measurable successful outcomes that help students facing various barriers to success, graduate from high school. JAG-K is certainly one of those programs. With a 98% graduation rate over the last two years and never below 91% since our inception in 2013, JAG-K has demonstrated consistent positive outcomes working with students who are generally in the bottom 50% of class rank.

It is important to clarify that "at-risk" funds may be used, because the generally accepted default definition for the "at-risk" population is eligibility for free lunch. As a national organization for nearly 40 years, it was determined long ago that students can be "at-risk" of not graduating or reaching their full potential for many other reasons, including poor academic skills, broken homes, etc. Regardless of what barriers exist, any student who has them, is at-risk of going into poverty if they do not graduate from high school.

The evidence-based and highly researched JAG model that was developed in 1979 identifies multiple barriers to success, and each student must have a minimum of five of these barriers to qualify for the program. Most students who qualify for free lunch would probably qualify for the JAG-K program, but 28 percent of our students who do not qualify for free and reduced lunch are also "at-risk."

House Bill 2108 does not appropriate any funds and has no current fiscal impact. It is an important tool for the Legislature to have in order to ensure public schools and Kansas students have the best resources available to them with an appropriate funding source. It has inclusionary language that includes any program that meets the best practices established by the Kansas State Board of Education.

The discussion about state funding for evidence-based programs like JAG-K is timely. JAG-K was recently informed by Acting Secretary of the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) Laura Howard that DCF is reviewing all programs funded by TANF and cannot guarantee JAG-K's grant will be continued. I appreciate the Secretary's transparency and review of how tax dollars are spent. TANF funding represents 93 percent of JAG-K's revenue and a loss of that funding would force us to cease operations if not given ample notice in securing other funding sources.

As a reminder, this is only the sixth year of existence for JAG-K, and just a few years ago, TANF was 100% of JAG-K's revenue. We have made progress in diversifying our funding. In the past, DCF encouraged JAG-K to seek increased TANF funding because we have such strong outcomes and have positively impacted the lives of thousands of Kansas students considered "at-risk." The return on investment in helping prevent poverty has been a wise use of federal funds. We believe that is also one of the reasons we have had such strong bipartisan support in the Legislature.

Using TANF to fund a JAG program is not unique to Kansas. Governors of both political parties use TANF funds, including two of our largest state affiliates Louisiana and Indiana. It should also be noted that a majority of JAG affiliates also receive state funding.

A mix of federal, state, local and private funds is JAG-K's best long-term funding solution. We are hopeful DCF will continue to offer TANF as a federal funding source and that the Legislature will support House Bill 2108 as a way to use state funding for JAG-K and other evidence-based programs with a history of proven outcomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to stand in support of House Bill 2108. I will be glad to stand for questions.