

Thank you, Chairman Johnson and members of the House Taxation Committee. Your time today is deeply appreciated.

A few years ago, in 2017, I made a decision not unlike one made by every person in this room. I was 20 years old—a sophomore in community college in El Dorado, Kansas. Though I'm not a Kansas native, Wichita was, and is, my home. I was drawn to places like the Keeper of the Plains and other landmarks of my city most. I still am: we've all seen firsthand the beauty of our communities throughout Kansas. We've all experienced and basked in the incomprehensible scene of a Kansas sunset.

Unfortunately (or thankfully, depending on your perspective) we've all seen the issues that plague our cities and towns, too. That's why everyone here has become who we are, and have chosen the paths we're now taking.

We all know that public service isn't a thankful task. It's something you accept the responsibility of the moment you recognize that the problems we see in our neighborhoods are solvable, and that we ourselves can solve them. When I understood these things for myself, I made the decision to put a pause on college, quit my job, and join an organization called AmeriCorps Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). And, for the first time, I became a public servant in Wichita.

In making this choice, just like everyone with me in this room today, I accepted the good with the bad. When you're joining the AmeriCorps VISTA program, you make an agreement to serve poverty as well as to live it. While I was serving my state full-time, I was making just a little over \$12,000 per service year before taxes. I was, and am, so thankful for that aspect of my experience. Without it, my fight wouldn't have continued past the final date of my second term of national service.

Instead, like you, I work every day to alleviate the issues faced by my community. Without the experience I gained in the AmeriCorps, I wouldn't have the tools or knowledge to continue this fight. And thankfully, with the help of my education stipends, gained at the finish line of each service year, I'm able to continue this education in an academic setting. But there's a flip side: the reason we're here today is because AmeriCorps alum are taxed every time we utilize our education grants. In fact, just a month or so ago, I received my first 10-99 for using around \$1,000 of my education award. Our government sees the use of our service awards as superfluous, I guess: this year, and every time I use my awards for college classes in the future, I will be taxed for additional income that was never really income in the first place, and even potentially move up in an income bracket for other tax purposes.

The reality, though, is that my time the AmeriCorps, while invaluable, was extremely difficult. Making ends meet when you're earning less than the minimum wage is extremely, disparagingly challenging. I wasn't able to save money to offset the cost of spending the education award my country gave me for my service. Now, each time I utilize my award, I'll run into the same

problems. It's why myself and other VISTA alum specifically calculate and allocate how and when we pay our loans or enroll in one or two classes.

House Taxation Committee, thank you for your time today and for your service to our precious state. With the information you've hopefully gained today, I ask that you join me in support of House Bill 2427. Thank you.