

Student Regent Testimony

Among a broad range of benefits, the principal function of higher education in this state is to serve Kansans from Fort Scott to Scott City through economic development. In this respect, students are encouraged to become engineers, nurses, and entrepreneurs while contributing to the advancement of our state. However, we have fallaciously created a system which overlooks the representation of those participating in the advancement of our multifaceted economy. For this reason, I submit my testimony as a proponent of House Bill No. 2425.

I write not as a representative of any single institution, although I am currently a Jayhawk, but instead as the originator of the newest iteration of the Kansas Student Regent concept which dates back at least 45 years. It is impossible to know where the idea initially sprouted, although a strong case to be made for 1970s K-State Student Body President Bernard Franklin who later served as a regent at the age of 24. Regardless, we can be certain this is the farthest the conversation has ever gotten for the representation of well over 100,000 students statewide. For that I am appreciative of the members of this committee, Speaker Ron Ryckman, and most of all Chair Susan Humphries who has taken far too many calls and meetings asked for by caring, driven students who only seek to serve their peers.

Pleasantries aside, after reviewing with regents, representatives, and students there are some areas of concerns I hope to fully address. I apologize for my lack of attendance; I had a personal matter arise I could not avoid. If for some reason members of the committee continue to have questions or apprehensions, I have left my contact information with all your secretaries and encourage you to reach out to myself for questions relating to the legislation/concept or to any other individual providing testimony for insight to the representation of a particular school's perspective. First and foremost, it is important to note that Kansas would not be the first state in the Union to enshrine a Student Regent into state statute. As far as regent systems goes, Iowa and Alaska among others already have a system which encompasses a student regent who possesses the full responsibilities as any other regent including voting power. Iowa even has the same number of regents as Kansas making them a sufficient model. As for states and schools that utilized models with slight variances, Oklahoma, Texas, Indiana, and others all allow for student representation on their highest levels of governance whereas Kansas does not. Moreover, a current Kansas Regent, Jon Rolph, sat on his institution's highest board as a student while attending the Baylor University therefore proving the capacity of students who seek out this form of service.

Another important stipulation to highlight is the bill would not aggressively hinder the oversight of the executive nor legislative branches. The bill prescribes that the Student Advisory Committee (SAC), which operates within the Board of Regents under state statute, would nominate a student to the Governor for approval after which the Senate would be responsible for confirmation as the current process outlines for any other regent nomination. This process simply helps the current and future governors select an appropriate candidate to directly represent the thousands of students operating within the system itself. Moreover, SAC would be required to

meet the same geographical and political prerequisites that any other regent nomination therefore leveling the playing field. Additionally, after discussing it with students and some regents, a term limitation of two years on the board would suffice to allow an individual to learn the system and to have an impactful voice. Furthermore, it is critical to note that since terms for at least three regents end in June of 2021, no individual regent would lose their seat who wasn't already term limited.

Lastly, I would like to address what is likely the primary thought on everyone's mind – why do we need a Student Regent. The future of higher education in our state, and across the country, is evolving but appears bleak. Financial projections look unwelcoming and the cost of attendance is already too high for many Kansans. Across the state, there are examples of extreme administrative costs, staffing concerns, and a shifting nature of the value in having a degree at all. Through the difficult decisions that face this committee and the Board of Regents in the years to come there must be at least a single voice that can exhibit the concerns of students caught in the middle of landscape created not by our design but instead through decades of bureaucracy often dating to before we were born. We need an individual who can speak from their experience in the classroom, who is on the cusp of seeking out employment potentially for the first time, and to the hardships facing their peers. We aspire to be a part of the solutions that will impact our lives and a collaborative force to help Kansas lead. It was President Eisenhower who said, “The true purpose of education is to prepare young men and women for effective citizenship in a free form of government.” Please help us begin to practice that effective form of citizenship through the passage of this bill.