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Dear Members of the Committee on Education,

My name is Melanie Curtis, and I am writing to you in my capacity as the co-founder of Imaginarium, a 501(c)(3) STEM education center located in Emporia.

I am reaching out to express my support for Senate Bill 437, which pertains to the Kansas Educational Enrichment Program (KEEP).

At Imaginarium, our mission is to provide high-quality STEM learning opportunities for the children of our community. In response to the observed deficit of such resources in our rural setting, we established after-school programs encompassing a range of subjects, including coding, robotics, 3D printing, science classes, and video game design.

In addition to our regular programs, we organize eight weeks of STEM summer camps on the campus of Emporia State University. These camps, each focusing on a different theme, are meticulously planned by certified teachers and college professors. Beyond their educational value, these camps also serve as a practical solution for working parents, running from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Monday through Friday.

Since the introduction of the Kansas Educational Enrichment Program in 2023, Imaginarium has provided information to parents, guiding them through the application process. As a result, several families have successfully applied and qualified for KEEP funding. The impact on our community has been significant, with expressions of gratitude from hardworking parents who now have the means to afford unique learning opportunities for their children. To date, 160 claims have been filed and approved for KEEP funding for STEM classes and camps at Imaginarium. More families wanted to apply, but the funding had run out.

In addition to supporting KEEP funding, I also wish to advocate for the retention of the current financial requirements associated with KEEP. This approach ensures accessibility for families just above the threshold for free/reduced lunches, allowing them to benefit from educational services they might otherwise find financially challenging.

I respectfully urge the committee to consider supporting Senate Bill 437. Its positive influence on the children of Emporia is apparent, and we believe in the importance of sustaining educational opportunities for those who may otherwise face limitations. Investing in the education of our children is an investment in the future prosperity of Kansas.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Melanie Curtis  
Co-Founder, Imaginarium