



KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

House Committee on Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Opponent Testimony on HB 2414

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Good afternoon Chair Tarwater, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today in opposition to HB 2414.

The University Engineering Initiative Act (UEIA) was originally enacted in 2011 and extended in 2021 for an additional ten years to generate more graduates for the Kansas workforce. The goal of the original legislation was to achieve 1,365 engineering graduates by 2021 from a baseline of 875 graduates. The three participating state universities consistently grew student enrollments, leveraging the investment of state and their own non-state funds. The number of graduates grew over time and exceeded the Initiative's goal in 2018 with our most recent number for 2022 at 1,498 graduates. I have attached our most recent Engineering Scorecard of key metrics for the three universities.

With a yearly investment of \$10.5 million from the Expanded Lottery Act Revenues Fund split equally between each of the three universities, with at least a \$1:\$1 match from those institutions with non-state dollars, this program has proved to be instrumental in meeting the needs of the engineering industry.

HB 2414 would take the UEIA and expand it to include private non-profit institutions with a physical presence in Kansas. The Board of Regents supports state investment in postsecondary programs that generate the talent pipeline our state needs for economic growth. We would point out to the Committee several concerns:

1. The bill does not clearly expand the state funding to accompany the additional number of potential eligible institutions. The Board would be concerned with diluting state support to the three state universities and eroding the momentum of a highly successful initiative.
2. The relationship of the Department of Commerce and Board of Regents is quite different with the private institutions of higher education than that with the state

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universities. The accountability for the state universities with reporting standards on statutory programs is naturally greater than those typically imposed on private institutions. The extent to which the private institutions would be able to certify their \$1:\$1 match and comply with reporting standards is not clear.

3. It appears the number of programs could continue to increase as additional engineering programs are created at the private institutions, potentially resulting in further dilution of the funding.
4. HB 2414 could potentially be interpreted to designate institutions beyond the members of the Kansas Independent College Association (KICA), although the bill references KICA. The only requirements in the bill for meeting the definition of “private postsecondary educational institution” are a non-profit designation and a physical presence in Kansas.

HB 2414 does not designate an annual amount for the private institutions; however, in separate testimony to the 2023 Legislature, KICA has requested \$500,000 in annual funding for Benedictine, Friends University and McPherson College, which are striving for program accreditation. The amount cited was noted as 1/7th that of the state universities. We would note that with the \$10.5 million annual state investment, our universities enrolled a four-year average of 8,003 students (\$1,312 per student) and graduated a four-year average of 1,575 (\$6,669 per student).

Benedictine’s engineering program has a reported 260 students enrolled as of Fall 2022, and they have stated they average 30 baccalaureate graduates over the past four years. We do not have program enrollments for the other two KICA institutions in progress toward accreditation, but from federal IPEDS data, one can see that Friends had 12 baccalaureate graduates and 28 at McPherson College.

Given the smaller scale of the academic programs, and the apparent preference for the state funding to come from a different source, the Board would recommend creating a separate statute for the private institutions and carefully defining which institutions are eligible for the engineering money to ensure the policy you adopt is what is intended.

Our state universities have accomplished a great deal with the University Engineering Initiative Act, and we look forward to continued success in our partnerships with the Legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on this legislation.