



## KANSAS BOARD OF REGENTS

### Senate Committee on Education Proponent Testimony on SB 438

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**Blake Flanders, Ph.D.**  
**President & CEO, Kansas Board of Regents**

Good afternoon, Chair Baumgardner, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear today to testify in favor of SB 438.

This legislation was proposed by the Board of Regents to update language enacted last year.

K.S.A. 74-32,267, enacted in 2019, established the Accelerating Opportunity: Kansas (AO-K) to Work program to assist students in obtaining a high school equivalency and becoming ready for transferable college-level courses while earning an industry credential.

The 2023 Legislature passed Senate Substitute for HB 2060 to amend the AO-K to Work program to permit state funds to be used for books and related materials, up to \$500 per student per institution over their lifetime. However, the 2023 legislation limits the \$500 to only those students pursuing the specific High School Equivalency (HSE) program created by the statute, which precludes AO-K GED students from benefitting from the financial assistance.

SB 438 would:

- Ensure all AO-K students are made eligible for the AO-K program stipend, as originally intended;
- Seek to remove language requiring the subtraction of other aid from the amount awarded for this benefit.

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With the current provisions from 2023, there have been no students eligible for the benefit. Revising the statute will make more students eligible for the \$500 benefit. The extent of the increased expense to pay for books, tools or required materials as originally envisioned is not known, but Goodwill Industries of Kansas estimates up to 350 students could take advantage of the stipend at an estimated cost of \$175,000. Any expense would be paid to eligible institutions from the state appropriation to the Board of Regents for the Excel in CTE program.

In furtherance of the goal of ensuring the benefit is available to all AO-K students, we suggest amending the bill at page 2, lines 19-20, to add the word “all,” as follows:

“(d) (1) “~~While participating in the~~ *enrolled in an AO-K to work* program, ~~qualified~~ **all** students shall be provided reasonable access to all...”

SB 438 also removes the requirement of subtracting other financial aid for this \$500 benefit to make it easier for the students to benefit from the assistance and make it easier for institutions to make the awards. AOK is a difference maker for those seeking to improve their career opportunities, which will ultimately benefit our state’s economy.

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