

Statement on House Bill 2348

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On Friday a bill was filed in the Kansas House of Representatives that would effectively end the conferral of tenure for faculty members at state universities in Kansas. It would strip tenure protections and seriously undermine job security for all professors in the state. Notably, the bill was drafted by the General Counsel for Emporia State University, which did just that—stripped tenure protections and summarily fired dozens of tenured professors—a few years ago.

The award of tenure is the result of years of hard work and productive contributions to knowledge by our diligent faculty; it is not given out lightly. It is the cornerstone of academic freedom, allowing researchers in all disciplines to pursue promising research without fear that their investigations will be viewed as too esoteric, too abstract, or too controversial, and as such it is central to the creation of new knowledge. And it supports the research activity of scholars who, personally, are politically conservative, politically liberal, and politically radical, protecting that research from professional reprisals stemming from the shifting political winds of the day.

Those are some of the reasons why the faculty do and should care about tenure. But, from a practical perspective, the institution must care as well, because tenure is also a key component of any strategy to attract and retain talented faculty, and its absence will result in widespread departures of our state's best researchers and massive brain drain in Kansas. Initiatives like the WSU Biomedical Campus will be very difficult, if not impossible, to realize without top-flight faculty, who will not come, and will not stay, if they believe they can be dismissed on a whim.

Though it was just filed on Friday, the deadline to submit public testimony in the House Judiciary Committee has already passed. Nevertheless, I strongly recommend that the Faculty Senate consider issuing a formal statement in opposition to this proposed resolution, and I request that we seek immediate input from the university administration regarding the concrete steps that they are taking in Topeka to resist this legislation, which will severely threaten the mission of higher education in Kansas. Thank you.