

Dear Chairman Brown and members of the Commerce and Economic Development Committee,

Thank you for taking the time and attention to hear HB2211, an act concerning state agencies; relating to purchases; giving preference to disabled veteran businesses.

As you know, the unemployment rate for veterans returning home from deployment is higher than it is for non-veterans in the United States. The latest figure I have seen is 13.1%. Approximately 25% of today's veterans also have a service connected disability.

Veterans retire or finish their enlistments having gained organizational skills and leadership skills but sometimes their specialties do not translate easily into civilian occupations. For example, a multi-channel radio operator or artilleryman may have a hard time finding similar jobs back in their home town. They may have experience fixing airplanes but they do not have a degree, and in today's world, one must normally have a degree or technical certificate to even have their resume considered in most jobs.

Often veterans who are unable to go back to school for many reasons, look to starting their own businesses. In my hometown of Leavenworth, we have many veteran owned businesses ranging from book shops, computer services, catering, and restaurants to even a leather working business.

Last year the Governor held a Military Summit in Leavenworth to incubate ideas for not only supporting our military bases in Kansas, but for how to entice veterans and military retirees to choose Kansas to settle in and to start a business. Not only are there skilled soldiers completing their enlistments, but there are senior non-commissioned and commissioned officers who do hold advanced degrees and could go anywhere in the world.

Just last Friday, the Governor visited Leavenworth and the Chamber Military Advisory Council again to continue this discussion. He stressed the importance of encouraging entrepreneurship to the retiring military there and his idea to create a small business incubator to provide training and resources so that the retirees can take advantage of his proposed tax exemptions for LLCs and S Corporations.

HB2211 would create a goal for state entities to contract with such service connected disabled veteran owned businesses. Currently, there is no data to determine the number of such businesses that exist in Kansas so the bill is designed not to establish a mandate but encourage consideration of disabled veteran owned businesses. This would strengthen the reason to choose Kansas when the service member starts their retirement process and looks to future careers.

This bill is supported by the Governor's Military Council, the Kansas Commission on Veteran Affairs, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The federal government has mandated preference at its level and many states have enacted similar legislation. I have attached a list of a few of the states that I easily found on an internet search.

Thank you again for your consideration of HB2211.

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