



**Testimony to House Committee on Commerce  
Supporting HB 2351  
February 22, 2021  
The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce**

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (KC Chamber) urges the House Committee on Commerce to favorably pass HB 2351 which will expand work-based learning programs for all Kansas high school students by protecting employers and business from liability when hosting students for work-based learning programs. This will remove one of the biggest barriers employers state when deciding to offer work-based learning opportunities. The KC Chamber, representing nearly 2,000 businesses and 300,000 employees, and its Board of Directors, has identified workforce development as a critical and immediate need to fill the nearly 69,000 open jobs in the greater Kansas City area with qualified workers. Protecting employers from civil liability will grow the number of employers offering these work-based learning programs because of the protections afforded to the employers. This is especially true in the skilled trades sector which is facing a severe labor deficit in the KC region.

Work-based learning programs are a critical component for workforce development. In a recent survey conducted on behalf of Cengage, a US based education and technology company, 73 percent of employers indicated that it was either "very" or "somewhat" difficult to find qualified candidates and just over one-third of employers said schools have not properly prepared students for jobs. To fill the skills gap void, learning needs to adapt; consequently, one of the ways education is evolving is through the expansion of work-based learning programs offered by employers through schools. Students' exposure to "on-the-job" training through either apprenticeships, internships, client-based projects, or even job-shadowing, will allow students to fully grasp the jobs' tasks and duties while also learning essential skills to become employable in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century economy.

As the economy continues to hold at record unemployment numbers, the KC Chamber believes it is imperative we find a solution to get more people participating in the workforce and train skilled workers to perform these jobs. Accordingly, the KC Chamber instituted its Workforce Development Initiative in January 2018. The KC Chamber's Initiative is led by 60 of the top employers from greater Kansas City, educators and workforce intermediaries from throughout the region. The committee has had a special focus in expanding real world, or work-based, learning programs for its students and identified protecting businesses from civil liability, as proposed in HB 2507, as a key tool to expanding these opportunities.

The KC Chamber supports employers who offer work-based learning programs and believes HB 2351 will allow for businesses across the state to host student learners to engage in "on-the-job" training. In turn, students will learn necessary skills to be competitive in a fast-paced and ever-changing economy. The Chamber believes that by removing this barrier for businesses, Kansas can foster a more robust relationship between schools and private industry to help fill a skills gap for our future workforce. The KC Chamber encourages this committee to pass HB 2351 with a favorable recommendation.

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