

Report of the Special Committee on Workforce Development to the 2023 Kansas Legislature

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Sean Tarwater

VICE-CHAIRPERSON: Senator Renee Erickson

OTHER MEMBERS: Senators Brenda Dietrich, Virgil Peck, Jeff Pittman, and Kellie Warren; and Representatives Avery Anderson, Tory Marie Arnberger, Jesse Borjon, Stephanie Clayton, and Pam Curtis

STUDY TOPIC

The Committee is directed to study workforce development and laws or regulations that may act as barriers to entry into the workforce.

Special Committee on Workforce Development

REPORT

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Special Committee on Workforce Development recommends the 2023 Legislature:

- Assist adult learners who are seeking an online education to achieve college degrees in fields that are critical to the economic growth of the Kansas. This may include supporting actions that foster competency-based education so that students can finish their degrees in an effective and efficient manner, and promoting programs that expand the skills of existing staff utilizing micro-credentials and short-term training;
- Examine ways to provide financial assistance to more students, including those who decide to complete degrees through an online-based model;
- Ensure an increasing amount of scholarship funding provided by the State is tied to requirements to live and work in Kansas;
- Encourage the Kansas Department of Commerce to create a statewide marketing campaign about technical careers that encourages enrollment in short-term credential and degree programs to meet the needs of Kansas businesses for skilled workers. This campaign should highlight the well-paying jobs that can be obtained without four years of postsecondary education, without student debt, in Kansas, and encourage parents to urge their students to consider training for these careers;
- Develop and support innovative approaches and programs to address critical workforce shortages and attract new people to Kansas through means such as tax incentives, tuition forgiveness, a review of the state tax structure, and other creative means to grow the Kansas population to meet the workforce needs of Kansas businesses;
- Continue and increase support for workforce development programs that are effective, including the Excel in Career Technical Education initiative, the National Center for Aviation Training, Promise Act scholarships, work-based learning, and apprenticeships. The Legislature should also eliminate and cease support for any program that is funding careers that are no longer needed or that consist of low-income jobs;
- Advocate for enhanced re-entry programs that encourage ex-offenders to re-enter the workforce. The Legislature should also support programs that encourage work and help recipients of government assistance with obtaining employment. Additionally, the Legislature should examine all benefits that may be keeping able-bodied individuals from returning to work, and consider an automated process to streamline expungement;
- Support growing the Kansas and local economies through applied research and private-public partnerships, like the National Institute of Aviation Research; partnerships between universities and business to create innovation programs (like Wichita State University's Innovation Campus); and career pathways for high school students;

- Support and increase focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics learning initiatives, including support for computer science classes in school, as well as initiatives to explore leadership and business skills such as the Distributive Education Clubs of America, Future Business Leaders of America, and the Business Professionals of America;
- Support accountability measures for increased funding for need-based aid for postsecondary credentials;
- Support policies that expand access to affordable child care options, including a comprehensive review of regulations;
- Support changes that enable teachers from other states to obtain licensure more quickly and easily in Kansas and develop a Para-to-Teacher program;
- Have Kansas Legislative Research Department staff present answers to the workforce indicator questions from small businesses presented in testimony to the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Commerce;
- Request a representative of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce present and review its Work Force Study and its recommendations to both the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Commerce;
- Investigate the disability pay caps to understand how they affect workforce and benefits;
- Consider amending statutes to allow the Kansas State Department of Education to provide outside access to the State Longitudinal Data System compiled by the agency for the purposes of research and study;
- Proceed cautiously regarding the legalization of marijuana;
- Consider the creation or expansion of individual child care tax credits; and
- Have the appropriate House and Senate committees study and make recommendations regarding the child care shortage.

Proposed Legislation: None.

BACKGROUND

The Special Committee on Workforce Development (Committee) was created by the Legislative Coordinating Council (LCC) to study workforce development.

The Committee was directed to study laws and regulations that may act as barriers of entry into the Kansas workforce.

The Committee was authorized by the LCC to meet for two days and met at the Statehouse on September 29 and November 21, 2022.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

September 29, 2022

The Committee met to hear an informational presentation from legislative staff and stakeholder testimony regarding the labor economy in Kansas.

Overview of the Kansas Labor Economy

The Senior Economist with the Kansas Legislative Research Department provided an overview of the state of the labor economy in Kansas. He discussed the two primary job surveys done by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, how these surveys differ from each other, and what information and trends one can ascertain from each survey. He also discussed the workforce participation rate within the state and how that participation is broken down by age categories. He noted that from 2011 to 2021, the civilian noninstitutional populations in the 16 – 24-year-old and 25 – 54-year-old cohorts decreased by 3.0 and 4.0 percent, respectively, while the number in the 55-year-old and above cohort increased by 18.0 percent.

Stakeholder Testimony

The Committee heard testimony from a variety of stakeholders who discussed a combination of workforce challenges, what each conferee is doing to increase the workforce, or ideas of each conferee to lower the barrier of entry to the workforce.

Western Governors University

A representative of Western Governors University discussed the concepts of competency-based education, upskilling, reskilling, and micro-credentialing as means by which individuals who have no or some postsecondary experience but no traditional degree could obtain the education and skills necessary to increase their participation in the workforce.

Wichita State University

A representative of Wichita State University (WSU) discussed the university's focus on integrating industry experience into degree pathways through student internships. The conferee also provided an overview of various initiatives WSU is utilizing to help bring new students to Kansas and expand the Kansas workforce, such as targeted in-state tuition programs and the National Institute for Aviation Research (NIAR) WERX Program. The conferee noted that 49.0 percent of the first graduating class utilizing the I-35 and I-70 in-state tuition programs have taken jobs and chosen to stay in Kansas after graduation.

Overland Park Chamber

A representative for the Overland Park Chamber provided an overview of a recent business roundtable that the organization held with local business leaders about the challenges they are facing. While noting some of the challenges addressed required federal action or internal action within the business, the representative provided a list of suggestions of actions the Legislature could take to help address the concerns voiced at the roundtable.

Kansas Association of Community College Trustees

A representative of the Kansas Association of Community College Trustees provided information about how Kansas community colleges were helping address workforce issues. She primarily focused on the Kansas Promise Scholarship Act, enacted in 2021 and amended in 2022, which provides last-dollar scholarships to students seeking degrees in specific fields.

She also described the extensive work community colleges do in providing non-credit courses such as commercial driver licensing and other training required by business and industry.

Kansas Information Security Office

The Chief Information Security Officer with the Kansas Information Security Office provided an overview of workforce recommendations made by the Governor's Cybersecurity Taskforce.

Zephyr Products, Inc.

A representative of Zephyr Products, Inc. (Zephyr) provided background information on Zephyr and how its programs work; the programs utilize inmates within the Lansing Correctional Institution to fabricate products for Zephyr's clients.

The conferee extensively discussed the training and supports given to Zephyr employees and the historically low recidivism rate of individuals who are employed by Zephyr at the end of their sentences.

Spirit AeroSystems

A representative of Spirit AeroSystems (Spirit) provided testimony regarding the workforce challenges faced by Spirit and the Wichita aerospace industry at large. She discussed the steps Spirit has taken to attract new employees as well as establishing a robust in-house training program to allow Spirit to train individuals in the required skills.

A representative of Textron Aviation was present for questions but did not provide oral or written testimony.

November 21, 2022

The Committee met to hear information from the Kansas Board of Regents regarding postsecondary participation with regard to workforce development. The Committee also heard from additional stakeholders on workforce development in general and on issues of child care that were raised by the Committee at its prior meeting.

Overview of Postsecondary Participation

The President and Chief Executive Officer of the Kansas Board of Regents presented an overview of long- and short-term trends in postsecondary education in general and with regard to the talent pipeline of the state's future workforce. He provided statistics regarding the quantity and types of degrees awarded in the previous academic year as well as a breakdown of what economic sectors those degrees were in. He also noted that, since 2013, the state's postsecondary institutions have seen an average decline in enrollment of 1.0 percent year over year, with the community and technical colleges seeing a larger decline than the four-year Regents universities. He also discussed college readiness, economic impacts of postsecondary education, and what could be done to increase postsecondary education participation at all levels.

Stakeholder Testimony

Goodwill

Representatives of Goodwill of Western Missouri and Eastern Kansas and Goodwill Industries of Kansas provided a joint presentation to the Committee. Both conferees provided

information on what programs their organizations provide to aid individuals seeking greater participation in the workforce.

Aligned

A representative for Aligned spoke about her organization's request of the State to establish a State Longitudinal Data System that would allow for large-scale longitudinal research by connecting K-12, postsecondary, and labor data to answer a myriad of questions, examples of which were provided in testimony.

The Golden Scoop

Representatives of The Golden Scoop provided testimony to the Committee on The Golden Scoop and its mission to help employ individuals with disabilities. The conferees also discussed with the Committee the various challenges the organization faces in helping their employees navigate current regulations that limit the income individuals with disabilities can make before they begin losing governmental benefits. During discussion, it was acknowledged that these issues have a significant federal component.

Build Up Kansas

A representative of Build Up Kansas provided an overview of the program and the impacts it has had and hopes to continue to have on the construction industry in the state. The conferee also provided an update on how the organization had utilized funds appropriated to it by the 2022 Legislature.

Kansas Chamber of Commerce

A representative of the Kansas Chamber of Commerce (Kansas Chamber) provided an overview of a report the Kansas Chamber had commissioned in 2020 regarding challenges in the Kansas workforce.

City of Lindsborg

A representative of the City of Lindsborg presented an overview of a city-led effort to construct and establish a new, nonprofit child care facility in that community. The conferee discussed the public-private partnership that was established and how the center is structured to provide affordable, high quality, sustainable child care.

SugarCreek Food Solutions

A representative of SugarCreek Food Solutions described how his company has worked to address child care issues faced by company employees. The representative discussed several examples in other states where the company established or helped repurpose a facility and partnered with a child care provider to provide services for the company's employees and the community at large. Plans were also shared for the current effort at the company's plant in Frontenac, Kansas, to build and furnish a facility.

Kansas Policy Institute

A representative of the Kansas Policy Institute (KPI) presented a report published by KPI regarding student achievement in the state's K-12 education system and its impact on the future workforce.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Following stakeholder testimony during the November 21, 2022, meeting, the Committee recommended the 2023 Legislature:

- Assist adult learners who are seeking an online education to achieve college degrees in fields that are critical to growth of Kansas. This may include supporting actions that foster competency-based education so that students can finish their degrees in an effective and efficient manner and promoting programs that upskill and reskill existing staff utilizing micro-credentials and short-term training;
- Examine ways to provide financial assistance to more students, including those who decide to achieve their degrees through an online-based model;
- Ensure an increasing amount of scholarship funding provided by the State is tied to requirements to live and work in Kansas;
- Encourage the Kansas Department of Commerce to create a statewide marketing campaign about technical careers that encourages enrollment in short-term credential and degree programs to meet the needs of Kansas businesses for skilled workers. This campaign should highlight the well-paying jobs that can be obtained without four years of education, without student debt, in Kansas, and encourage parents to urge their students to consider training for these careers;
- Develop and support innovative approaches and programs to address critical workforce shortages and attract new people to Kansas through means such as tax incentives, tuition forgiveness, a review of the state tax structure, and other creative means to grow the Kansas population to meet the workforce needs of Kansas businesses;
- Continue and increase support for workforce development programs that are effective, including the Excel in Career Technical Education initiative, the National Center for Aviation Training, Promise Act scholarships, work-based learning, and apprenticeships. The Legislature should also eliminate and cease support for any program that is funding careers that are no longer needed or consist of low-income jobs;
- Advocate for enhanced re-entry programs that encourage ex-offenders to re-enter the workforce and support programs that encourage work and help recipients of government assistance with obtaining employment. The Legislature should also examine all benefits that may be keeping able-bodied individuals from coming back to work, and consider an automated process to streamline expungement;
- Support growing the Kansas and local economies through applied research and private-public partnerships, like the NIAR; partnerships between universities and business to create innovation programs (like WSU's Innovation Campus); and career pathways for high school students;

- Support and increase focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning initiatives, including support for computer science classes in school, as well as initiatives to explore leadership and business skills such as the Distributive Education Clubs of America, Future Business Leaders of America, and the Business Professionals of America ;
- Support accountability measures for increased funding for need-based aid for postsecondary credentials;
- Support policies that expand access to affordable child care options, including examining regulations;
- Support changes that enable teachers from other states to obtain licensure more quickly and easily in Kansas and develop a Para-to-Teacher program;
- Submit the workforce indicator questions from small businesses (P3 Aligned presentation) to the Kansas Legislative Research Department and have staff present answers to the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Commerce;
- Request the Kansas Chamber present and review its Work Force Study and its recommendations to both the House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development and the Senate Committee on Commerce;
- Investigate the disability pay caps to understand how they affect workforce and benefits;
- Consider amending statutes to allow the Kansas State Department of Education to provide outside access to the State Longitudinal Data System compiled by the agency for the purposes of research and study;
- Proceed cautiously regarding the legalization of marijuana;
- Consider the creation or expansion of individual child care tax credits; and
- Have the appropriate House and Senate committees study and make recommendations regarding the child care shortage.