

**Kansas Department of Commerce
Proponent Testimony on HB 2101
David Soffer, Legislative & Policy Director
Prepared for House Appropriations
February 2, 2021, 9:00 a.m.**

The Department of Commerce stands in support of HB 2101. The bill would extend the University Engineering Initiative.

Engineers are in high demand across our nation. They're largely responsible for the building of machinery, aircraft, bridges, tunnels, roads, vehicles and various structures. They play a critical role in our economy by connecting research with innovation and being a major solution for many of the challenges faced by the economy's top sectors. Since the start of this program, we have been able to graduate far more engineering students, as a direct result of the dollars we have committed to the initiative. In the Framework for Growth, our economic development blueprint to be released later this week, the focus on producing an increased amount of engineering graduates and providing those opportunities here in Kansas is critical for the future of our State's economy.

There is a caveat to this. Currently, a large percentage of engineering graduates leave Kansas after graduation. We believe there ARE opportunities available in our State for these graduates, but we aren't doing a good enough job connecting our students with opportunities, especially in the period before they graduate. If we are going to invest taxpayer dollars into programs designed to produce more engineers in Kansas, we must make sure we are doing everything we can to ensure these graduates STAY in Kansas. While there is certainly more to be done from the Department's end of marketing our State, we also believe there is a shared responsibility by the Universities in that effort.

We are asking the legislature to amend the current proposal to not only set guidelines for the number of graduates, but also for a percentage of engineering graduates that must remain in the State, post-graduation. This can best be accomplished by either amending the current statute to require specific baselines be met, or having the Universities provide annual updates on the number of engineering graduates that are remaining each year, post-graduation. This is a partnership and we expect the universities, KBOR and the Department of Commerce to agree upon annual targets for the percentage of engineers be retained post-graduation. Retention of engineering graduates in Kansas is just as important as the total number of engineering graduates produced by our universities. By making sure that the university engineering programs focus on

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retention, while continuing their graduate success, the full intent and potential of the University Engineering Initiative can be realized.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to testify on behalf of HB 2101 and urge the committee to make the necessary adjustments and report HB 2101 favorably for passage.