



THE CIVIC COUNCIL OF GREATER KANSAS CITY

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**Testimony to Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Supporting Extension of the University Engineering Initiative
March 22, 2021**

The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City

The Civic Council of Greater Kansas City urges the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to favorably pass legislation extending transfers from the expanded lottery act revenues fund to the university engineering initiative. The Civic Council and its members recognize the vital importance education plays for talent attraction and retention to Kansas. Quality workforce development programs are a significant driver in economic development and by extending the University Engineering Initiative, the Legislature can signal to the business community not only in Kansas, but across the country, that Kansas is open for business.

The Kansas City region is home to one of the largest concentrations of leading architecture and engineering firms in the nation. Engineering is a key industry sector for economic strength and growth identified by KC Rising, a regional, long-term initiative to build collaborative scale, create system alignment, promote public-private partnerships, and leverage existing initiatives in support of realizing Kansas City's potential. Area jobs in engineering industries have increased by 21 percent since 2001, double the national growth rate, and the region has doubled its exports of design services to the rest of the world in the last 10 years. Shaping our region's economic identity in the decades to come means boosting our current sectors of excellence. Successful specialization, such as engineering, relies on recognizing and nurturing those areas of differentiation in which Kansas can lead and then advance those strengths nationwide.

Since 2021, when the Kansas Legislature enacted this program, the University of Kansas, Kansas State University and Wichita State University have matched, dollar for dollar, the investment from the state resulting in over \$200 million in directed dollars towards the education of engineers in Kansas. The program has not only met but exceeded its graduation targets at all three universities. Additionally, area employers have rated high satisfaction with these graduates when hiring -- highlighting what an asset these funds are for the State of Kansas.

A more cohesive strategy around STEM attainment and attraction of STEM graduates is necessary to grow the region's talent pipeline. Through increasing enrollment, scholarships, internship opportunities, and developing more robust relationships with businesses in Kansas, the University Engineering Initiative Act will not only increase the number of engineering degrees awarded at Kansas universities, but also increase the pipeline of engineers in the workforce for Kansas companies to utilize. As Kansas looks to rebound from the economic downturn caused by the pandemic a pipeline of qualified workers, especially in fields such as engineering, critical programs such as this will be even more important.

The Civic Council strongly supports HB2101 and urges this committee to favorably pass this legislation to ensure Kansas remains competitive both in talent attraction and retention. Should you have any



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questions please do not hesitate to contact Tashayla Person, Director of Public Policy, at tperson@kcciviccouncil.org or 816-308-0544.