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SB174: AFFILIATION OF WICHITA AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE WITH WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Chair Aurand and Members of the House Education Committee:

Thank you for including this testimony on behalf of Wichita Area Technical College in support of the affiliation of Wichita Area Technical College (WATC) and Wichita State University (WSU) through SB174.

This formal affiliation will bring about many beneficial changes for students, business and industry, workforce development and economic growth in the state of Kansas.

The Campus of Applied Sciences and Technology will maintain WATC's open access admission policy, affordability and two-year accreditation that allows authority to confer industry credentials, technical certificates and Applied Science degrees. It also allows for continued action to be responsive to business and industry needs through innovation, flexibility and nimbleness by providing short-term programming, non-credit and customized training.

At its foundation is an already powerful partnership between both institutions—forged by a joint commitment to creating opportunities for Kansans through education, innovation and economic growth. In partnership with WATC, WSU NIAR and Sedgwick County the National Center for Aviation Training was created to meet local aviation industry demand for highly skilled workers. Together, we've also bridged the gap between WATC and WSU curriculum through the creation of Shocker Pathway and the use of shared faculty in programs like Robotics, Non-Destructive Testing and Aerospace Coatings and Paint Technology.

This affiliation will allow WATC and WSU to continue to expand on what the two institutions are already doing together and create a new, relevant model for higher education focused on applied learning not only at the two-year level but also at the four-year level. It will continue to create and nurture a pipeline for the Kansas workforce with new 2 and 2 year degrees and broaden the perception and image of career and technical education by leveraging the Wichita State University brand.

On behalf of WATC administration, faculty and staff and the Sedgwick County Technical Education and Training Authority, we are in full support of this affiliation, because it is good for the public good and economic growth of Kansas. We have a responsibility to create the future workforce of south central Kansas and to ensure future business development and economic vitality. Together, as an affiliated body of WSU we will work to eliminate the brain-drain of our young talent in the state of Kansas. For all of the reasons above we ask for your legislative support prior to a final step of accreditation approval by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission.

Sheree Utash, President, Wichita Area Technical College