



**Testimony to House Committee on Commerce
Supporting HB 2515
January 30, 2020
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 2515 to create the Kansas Promise Scholarship which will expand post-secondary education opportunities to working Kansans who otherwise may not be able to afford community college or technical college education. This will remove a critical barrier individuals face when deciding to continue to work to make ends meet or return to school and face mounting debt. The KC Chamber, representing nearly 2,000 businesses and 300,000 employees, and its Board of Directors, has identified workforce development and education as a critical and immediate need to fill the nearly 76,000 open jobs in the greater Kansas City area with qualified workers. Expanding opportunities for Kansans to earn post-secondary education while working is a win-win for the business community and the state's future workforce. Increasing the number of educated and skilled workers in the state will also make Kansas an attractive state to relocate or grow a business.

According to Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, at least 65 percent of the jobs in the United States this year will require some sort of post-secondary education. This number is expected to continue to rise as our 21st Century economy becomes more complex and technologically oriented. The demand for workers is only expected to increase as well. This year there are expected to be 55 million job openings in the United States: 24 million openings from newly created jobs and 31 million openings due to baby boomer retirements with STEM and healthcare the fastest growing fields. Kansas and the greater Kansas City region is no different. The creation of the Kansas Promise Scholarship is a critical component to bring more qualified workers into the labor force and contribute to Kansas' economy.

As the economy continues to hold at record unemployment numbers, the KC Chamber believes it is imperative we find solutions 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 in greater Kansas City, educators and workforce intermediaries from throughout the region. The committee believes growing opportunities for individuals to gain post-secondary education, as proposed in HB 2515, is an important way to grow the talent pipeline of our future workforce.

The KC Chamber supports the creation of the Kansas Promise Scholarship program and other programs to increase access to post-secondary education. The Chamber believes that that through programs like this, Kansas can create a more robust and educated pipeline of workers to make the state an attractive place to grow or relocate a business. The KC Chamber encourages this committee to pass HB 2515 with a favorable recommendation.

John Jenks
Director, Public Policy
The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
816.374.5461