



February 13, 2024

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

The Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce stands in strong support of HB 2539, an act removing the Kansas residency requirement for eligibility for a Kansas promise scholarship and modifying the definition of part-time student under such program.

One of the top issues brought forth by our members is the need for a skilled workforce to meet the job growth demands in the region and across the state. We know we don't have enough skilled employees and have long invested in solutions to address the problem. The Kansas Promise Scholarship Act has been a key tool in building out our talent pipeline, but it does have limitations.

These limitations were illuminated for the Wichita Chamber as the Level Up Kansas program developed in the past six months. Level Up Kansas seeks to inform underskilled adult workers about the job training opportunities available in Kansas. As folks make inquiries, we're continually outreaching with potential students who can't get training even though they're willing and able because the Kansas Promise Scholarship Act requires they've been a Kansan for three years.

Its hard to turn down someone who wants to get their training simply because they haven't lived in the state for 3 years. Some have been residents for 4 months, others at least 2 years, but not long enough to qualify. A further limitation is that our schools with employers along the border cannot tap into border talent who would like to train in Kansas and give two years to live and work here in exchange for the opportunity.

The final component of this legislation is permitting 5-hour credentialed courses as qualifiers. This was also raised as a problem in our work with Level Up Kansas. If we need CNAs and can train them in 5-hours, we should do that; while the 6-hour requirement makes sense for most circumstances, we need the legislation to match training standards. We support the option to include 5-hour certifications.

While this bill is in education committee, it makes sense in Commerce as well. This is not just an education issue but rather a workforce bill. The investments we make in the Promise Scholarship Act are low-cost, high return exchanges because of the two-year requirement.

Finally, Kansas not only needs talented individuals to enter our workforce, but we also need more people to come and reside in Kansas and then enter our workforce. The Promise Act



could be a key recruitment tool to attract ambitious people to our state who would then receiver training and join our wonderful Kansas companies.  
Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jason P. Watkins'.

Jason P. Watkins