



Testimony to Senate Committee on Judiciary

Support of SB105

February 10, 2021

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (KC Chamber), representing approximately 2,000 members (40% of which are in Kansas) supports the concept of SB105 which prohibits denial of a petition of expungement expunges the records of individuals convicted of a crime or arrested after being accused of committing a crime. The KC Chamber supports policies that encourage returning citizens and other justice-involved individuals to gain meaningful employment after serving his or her sentence.

The KC Chamber believes that there is a large untapped pool of workers that are either returned citizens or individuals with a criminal record. This is why the KC Chamber started its Workforce Opportunities for Returning Citizens (WORC) Initiative. The WORC Initiative is aimed at getting returning citizens and other justice-involved individuals employed with stable, good paying jobs, with Chamber member employers. As a part of this initiative, the KC Chamber has partnered with state-wide partners and the Kansas Departments of Corrections and Commerce to start a Career Campus at Lansing Correctional Facility (LCF) which is aimed at expanding employment, educational and re-entry programming inside the prison to increase the likelihood of success after release. The Chamber believes these initiatives are one component to the workforce issues facing Kansas and the Kansas City area. According to the Mid America Regional Council (MARC), there are almost 69,000 available jobs in the Kansas City area. As we continue to grow out of the 2020 recession and as more baby boomers retire, it will be even more critical to grow the pipeline of qualified workers in the labor force.

These initiatives are a part of the solution to the workforce issue in Kansas and have begun to bear fruits of hard work; however, these initiatives will not realize their full potential if individuals with criminal records have a very hard time at getting jobs due to their criminal record. We consistently hear firsthand stories from individuals with a criminal record that they are denied employment or become under employed due to their criminal record showing up in background checks. Although the Chamber encourages employers, when able, to ban the box or consider circumstances of the crime with the type of employment being offered, this strategy is not a panacea and expungement can be another part of the solution. Oftentimes though, these folks do not have the financial resources to file their expungement application creating just one more barrier to getting back on his or her feet.

The Chamber recognizes that not all crimes should necessarily be eligible for expungement and recognizes that law enforcement should be able to "look back" at prior offenses; however, the Chamber supports the concept of expungement for certain offenses and reducing barriers to apply for expungement. The KC Chamber believes this is just a part of the overall workforce solution facing the state and region and an issue that is expected to only grow in importance. The KC Chamber supports the concepts of SB105 and looks forward to working with the various stakeholders on this important issue.

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