



## **SB174: AFFILIATION OF WICHITA AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGE WITH WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY**

### **TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Chairman Aurand and Members of the House Committee on Education:

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

The Partnership promotes the region and its economic growth through a variety of initiatives including, and especially in, workforce development. Led by more than 150 businesses and organizations, the Partnership sees this affiliation as an opportunity to further economic growth of our region and state.

The key to creating an environment that makes us competitive for job growth is maximizing our state's best asset- its people. When regional companies look to expand or new prospective employers and site selection consultants analyze their options, one of the most important criteria is our skilled and educated workforce.

Every day employers tell us how important the right workforce training programs are to their current employer needs and future growth. For instance, through the Blueprint for Regional Economic Growth (BREG), business leadership across all eight of our region's driving industry sectors identified workforce training and availability as significant factors for the region to address. WSU was one of the partners that launched the BREG initiative, and WATC has been instrumental in responding to identified business needs.

We support and encourage WATC's flexibility and responsiveness to regional needs. Their priority to partner with business and provide the region's critical workforce has been illustrated by innovative programs like the Wichita Promise, which aims to remove barriers that keep individuals from getting trained. For the longer-term growth of such programs, we support an affiliation that expands the capabilities of the two-year technical school and helps WSU broaden its applied education initiatives.

A well-trained and educated workforce is and must continue to be our competitive advantage. We face a worker shortage for some open positions and our workforce is aging. We believe the affiliation of WSU and WATC is an important step in assuring long-term employee training and education.

Jeff Fluhr, President