



March 20, 2019

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of S.B. 199, AN ACT concerning education; relating to Kansas high school equivalency credentials; establishing the AO-K to work program.

The Chamber's 2019 legislative agenda contains many important public policy proposals related to workforce development. While the Chamber is working in several areas of policy this session, workforce development and filling the workforce pipeline is at the top of our agenda and for good reason. Our advanced manufacturing industries, including aviation manufacturing, have thousands of unfilled open positions. While having thousands of high paying jobs that remain unfilled is better than having no jobs at all, it remains a significant problem nonetheless.

I testified recently in a House Committee regarding our aviation manufacturing sector. In that testimony I highlighted the fact that our aviation companies, while located in Kansas, also have locations throughout the United States globally. The great news is that these companies are growing and expanding right here in Kansas. They are hiring in Kansas. The bad news is that they are struggling to find qualified, trained and educated workers. The bottom line is rather simple. These companies that offer jobs in the \$70K range will grow programs in the states where they can find employees. Textron recently signed an order that is the largest in general aviation history. In the last 16 months Spirit has announced work that will add 2,400 new high paying jobs. As a state we must take an out-of-the-box approach to helping these wealth and job creators who are also significant tax payers to find workers.

Mr. Chairman, S.B. 199 not only helps our advanced manufacturing firms and others seeking a trained workforce, it also makes great strides in helping to lift some of our fellow Kansans out of poverty. That's a wonderful thing! For those reasons, we ask that the Committee report S.B. 199 favorable for passage.

Very truly yours,

Jason P. Watkins
Wichita Regional Chamber of Commerce