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CHRISTOPHER D. CROFT
8TH DISTRICT

February 22, 2021

Senate Committee on Commerce
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Chairman Olson and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to present SB137 to you.

Last year, the Committee on Commerce heard testimony from Brookings Institution that “talent is the #1 things that drives growth.” Our workforce is shrinking. People are moving out of Kansas, according to Brookings, because of job opportunities elsewhere. Kansas is again in the top 5 of outbound migration according to an annual longitudinal study conducted by United Van Lines.

In talking with superintendents, business leaders, and individuals across the state, we have talent here in this state, it is just difficult to navigate the process of receiving a Kansas license especially for those working professionals that moved to our state. Six years ago, the Kansas legislative and executive branches attempted to start a process to grow the workforce in Kansas. In 2015, the legislature approved, and the Kansas Governor signed into law HB2154. The act provided for military spouses with out of state licenses to receive a Kansas occupational license when they were reassigned to Kansas. In these discussions, they identified several roadblocks, e.g., taking six-months or more to receive a license, an intentional disregard for the law passed in 2015, an attempt to stop people who do not resemble what someone else wants. At Fort Riley, we heard from the military employment agency that they had no idea the law was passed in 2015 and that the boards were giving them different advice than what was passed into law. This summer I heard from a military member who was getting the run around trying to help his wife get a Kansas license. His spouse was told that she could not get a license even though they had been in business for several years in Texas. She was told that she would need additional education, but the education was not being provided. The spouse decided to stay in Texas as a result and the military member was having to live away from his family for three years. We are losing our workforce, particularly those that live near the borders to our surrounding states. I have personally heard and have friends who choose to work in Oklahoma and Missouri because they are much more friendly to military, military spouses, and veterans as it relates to licensing.

During the 2020 legislative cycle, HB 2506 was introduced. In its original form it described an ideal situation where a working professional with a license could move to Kansas and receive their license in a

window of 10 days, maybe one day. Today that is not possible with the limitations we have but it is a vision to strive to achieve. HB 2506 was modified through more than 45 hours of negotiations into a bill that passed the House 123-2 and passed the Senate Commerce Committee. The bill was not heard on the Senate floor due to COVID. If we had passed HB 2506 last year, Kansas would have been the 2nd state in the nation to pass such a bill. As such, we took a more reserved approach in the language used in the Arizona bill.

Since that time, 17 other states have passed similar bills many with similar language and some with more progressive language. The Department of Defense, who strongly supported HB 2506 last year, conducted a study, as directed by Congress, on hiring practices for military, their spouses and veterans. In the study it was determined that the “substantially equivalent” language, which was more reserved, was in fact, detrimental to achieving the result of making the licensing process more efficient. The Department of Defense recommend using a more universal license focused. We did that by using “Scope of Practice.”

We left in the ability of the boards to decide if in the interest of health and safety. The boards can deny a license. This is the requested pressure relief valve. The boards also can issue a temporary license while the individual completes some critical items.

We removed the amendment added on the floor last year. The amendment stated that military members had to wait for orders. I checked with the U.S. Army’s Human Resources Command headquartered at Fort Knox, KY. The Army’s goal is to issue orders six months prior to arrival, however, there are times that soldiers know six to nine months in advance, but the orders arrive in less than four months. The Army is getting better at issuing the orders, but we should not penalize the individuals and make them wait. We want them to start working upon arrival.

We added in the language to cover the executive orders issued during an emergency declaration. Additionally, this bill increases access to health care by allowing all provider types that Kansas’ licenses, certifies, and registers to deliver telehealth from outside Kansas. During the pandemic, the benefit is undeniable. Increasing access to telemedicine and making those licensing paths permanently improved lowers costs, eases burdens on hospitals and increases safety. Interrupting that capability for both patients and providers in Kansas when the emergency powers bill expires would be a grave mistake.

We also kept the reporting requirements that passed out of the House. The Senate had added some additional items. That addition would have required funding, so we returned to the original reporting requirements.

In total, this bill as it is currently written represents over 65 hours of negotiations between parties. It is not a perfect bill. Each organization involved wants something, but we came to a common ground.

This bill will remove barriers and get new residents to work faster. By recognizing working licensees from other states with a few requirements, like being in good standing it acknowledges that these professionals don’t lose their skills and experience when they move to Kansas. Last year, the President of the Board of Regents proudly proclaimed in my office that Kansas is recognized by the Department of Defense as the “BEST” at recognizing what military professionals possess in knowledge, skills and experiences. We need to do the same for all professionals that want to move to Kansas, become Kansas residents, and work.

I respectfully request your support for SB137 with amendments we will submit on the House floor. Let's speed up the process and build an incredible workforce. Let's strengthen our talent base. Let's signal to the rest of the world that Kansas is open for business and that this state is setting the conditions to grow.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Croft", written over a faint, illegible background.

Rep. Chris Croft

District 8, Overland Park & Olathe