



**The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
Support for SB199: Establishing the AO-K to Work Program
House Education Committee
Wednesday, March 20, 2019**

The KC Chamber, representing over 2,000 businesses in the greater Kansas City area, is pleased to provide this testimony in support of Senate Bill 199 to establish the AO-K to Work Program. The KC Chamber recognizes that growing the workforce development pipeline is critical for the economic vibrancy of the state and believes this bill will help assist in allowing students gain necessary experiential learning and industry recognized certifications.

We hear from our members, large and small, every day that they are in critical need of workers. At a time of record unemployment and a tight labor market, it is of utmost importance to support workforce development programs that streamline job training and career readiness for our state's future workforce. KC Degrees, which helps adult learners earn a college degree or high-quality certificate, estimates that 35 percent of Kansas City adults have just a high school degree or less. The latest data from the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) show that there are over 61,000 jobs unfilled in the Kansas City region. Over the next five years, MARC estimates that nearly 136,000 skilled trade workers will be needed to fill jobs in the greater Kansas City region. Cerner, one of the largest and fastest-growing employers in the Kansas City region, is expected to add 16,000 jobs by the end of 2020. Honeywell's Federal Manufacturing and Technology Facility added 800 jobs in 2018 alone but still has a critical need to hire more people for their manufacturing floor.

Citing this timely need, the KC Chamber instituted our Workforce Development Initiative in early 2018. This Initiative is led by Honeywell and has the support of dozens of businesses and workforce development intermediaries from the region. The KC Chamber believes this AO-K to Work Program, working in conjunction with programs like KC Degrees, is a step the Kansas Legislature can take to address workforce issues in the 21st Century. By establishing a model to streamline the ability of adult students to obtain a high school equivalency, to earn transferrable college credentials, and to achieve industry-recognized credentials, SB199 will not only expand the options of career pathways for thousands of students, but it will also be a component to help ensure that Kansas will have the necessary workforce capacity to thrive in a 21st Century economy.

On behalf of the KC Chamber Board of Directors, we urge the committee and Kansas Legislature to look favorably upon this legislation and are pleased to offer KC Chamber resources through our Workforce Development Initiative to assist the state in workforce development efforts in Kansas.

**John Jenks, Public Policy Director
Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
30 W. Pershing Rd., #301
Kansas City, MO 64108
jjenks@kcchamber.com**