



**KANSAS
TRIAL LAWYERS
ASSOCIATION**

To: Sen. Renee Erickson, Chair
Rep. Sean Tarwater, Chair
Members of the Senate Commerce Committee
Members of the House Commerce, Labor, and Economic Development
Committee

From: Phillip Slape, Slape & Howard Law Offices, Wichita, Kansas

Date: February 1, 2024

Re: Stakeholders' Agreement - Workers Compensation Reform Bill (SUPPORT)

Thank you, on behalf of the Kansas Trial Lawyers Association, for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of legislation making needed changes to workers compensation law. Additionally, we wish to recognize and thank Chair Erickson and Chair Tarwater for their attention to the issue and for encouraging the parties to collaborate on a solution.

The agreement bill is the result of our collaborative efforts. Eight practicing workers compensation attorneys, four advocating for business interests and four representing the interests of labor, met multiple times over six months to discuss our perspectives and how to improve the law. The agreement bill represents a significant step forward in our shared goal of creating a fairer and more efficient workers' compensation system for Kansans.

For too long, our state has grappled with outdated caps and cumbersome administrative procedures that have not only hindered the effectiveness of our workers' compensation system but have also unfairly limited the support available to our workforce.

One of the most crucial aspects of the bill is the long-overdue adjustment in compensation caps. Increasing the caps is recognition of the evolving economic landscape and the need to ensure that workers have adequate support in times of injury or illness. Increased caps will not only provide immediate relief to affected workers. It will also align our system with today's cost of living and assure compensation to injured Kansans is fair.

Equally important are the administrative changes included in the bill. The current system, burdened by outdated practices, often leads to unnecessary delays and increased costs. The proposed administrative reforms aim to streamline processes, reduce bureaucracy, and enhance efficiency. Workers will benefit with quicker resolution of their claims and employers and insurers will also benefit from reduced administrative overheads and costs.

Passage of the work comp agreement bill will have far-reaching economic benefits for our state. By providing better support to workers, we are not only aiding those in immediate need but also contributing to a more stable and productive workforce. This, in turn, fosters a more robust economic environment, benefiting businesses and the state's economy. Furthermore, the proposed changes will help in attracting and retaining talent within our state, as workers will have the assurance of a fair and responsive compensation system should they ever need it.

The journey to reach a consensus on a comprehensive workers' compensation bill has been a hard-fought effort by the stakeholders from both sides. Representatives engaged in rigorous negotiations, each demonstrating a commitment to finding a middle ground that serves the greater good. The stakeholder agreement reflects a delicate balance that supports the needs and concerns of all parties involved. As part of our negotiations to reach the proposed law before you today, we advocate for this bill to be passed in its current form, without additional amendments. Any alterations risk disrupting the balance achieved.

In conclusion, I urge the members of the committees to support the stakeholder agreement bill. It represents balanced, thoughtful, and needed reforms that will benefit not just the workers of our state but will reduce unnecessary costs that burden our workers' compensation system.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today.