THE KANSAS CHAMBER
UNITED FOR BUSINESS

835 SW Topeka Blvd.
Topeka, KS 66612
785.357.6321

Before House Commerce Committee
Testimony in support of H. Sub. HB 2200 – County option retailers act
Presented by Mike O'Neal, Kansas Chamber CEO

May 4, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee

On behalf of The Kansas Chamber and its business and industry members from all across Kansas, I am pleased to appear in support of a H. Sub. HB 2200, enacting the county option retailer's act.

Our annual Kansas Chamber Legislative Agenda is member-driven and was adopted by a unanimous vote at our Dec. meeting for the 2015 Session. Our agenda supports free enterprise and encourages competition. Included in our Regulatory Affairs section is support to: **"Lift outdated restrictions on the retail sale of legal products to create a level playing field and a consumer-centric environment where all businesses large and small play by the same rules."**

Proposed H. Sub. HB 2200 takes a balanced approach toward advancing that policy, an approach that addresses the free enterprise, consumer-oriented need to modernize our laws relating to the retail sale of alcohol products, while providing reasonable protection and incentives for those retailers who have benefitted from a regulatory environment that has existed as a virtual monopoly. The Kansas Chamber strives to support policies that avoid, to the extent possible, government picking winners and losers in the free market. While our proposed H. Sub. HB 2200 does not propose to eliminate all regulatory barriers to a pure free enterprise system, it does take a significant and measured step toward leveling the playing field in a way that protects the interests of all businesses and consumers in this stream of commerce.

Very similar legislation passed out of this Committee earlier in the session in original HB 2200. Unlike the earlier version, this current proposal includes a county option provision that many legislators have expressed a preference for. We have heard arguments in favor of continuing to protect an extremely small class of retailers in an economic climate where other small retailers do not enjoy the same anti-competitive protections. We have heard from some that this is an urban vs. rural issue. Rather than having government continuing to play a role in perpetuating this monopoly, we believe voters – your constituents- should have a say. Why? Because it's the consumers who have asked for this change and the consumers should have a voice. Government has not asked for the current restrictions on the free market. It simply enforces them. Government works for the people and the people should have a voice in determining market choice and market access.