



Kansas State House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development

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Vice President, Human Resources,
Communications & Environment, Health and Safety

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Chairman Tarwater, Ranking Member Frownfelter, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to submit testimony before your committee about the critical importance of attracting and retaining highly-skilled workers for advanced manufacturing.

My name is Justin Welner. I am the Vice President for Human Resources, Communications & Environment, Health and Safety at Spirit AeroSystems. As many of you may know, Spirit's manufacturing operations span more than 15 million square feet. More than 12 million square feet of that manufacturing space is located in Wichita.

Spirit employs about 17,500 people worldwide designing and building complex aerostructures for both commercial and defense customers. More than 12,500 of those employees are located at our headquarters in Wichita. Additionally, we have U.S. manufacturing sites in Oklahoma and North Carolina with global operations in the U.K., France and Malaysia. The company's core products include fuselages, pylons, nacelles and wing components for the world's most recognizable airplanes.

At Spirit, we have demand for highly-skilled workers who will design and build complex aerostructures for the next generation of commercial and defense aircraft. Not only do we depend on our current workforce to achieve success competing in a fierce global economy, but we also depend on a robust pipeline of future employees who have the training and certification required to work in the aerospace industry.

While demand for skilled aerospace workers is increasing, cost barriers for potential candidates to enter into engineering and technical training programs can sometimes deter students from choosing a career path in aerospace manufacturing.

That is why we believe incentives created by HB 2118 would make entry into a high-paying aerospace career more accessible to Kansas students and out-of-state candidates considering relocating to Kansas to fill open positions. This bill would also support recruitment efforts by companies such as ours to bring more talent into the state.

Spirit already invests in scholarship programs for Kansas engineering and technical education students in addition to offering robust intern programs for college and high school students in a

variety of career fields that can lead to full-time jobs. We also partner with institutions of higher education to provide recommendations about the skills needed by our industry. I am privileged to serve on the Wichita State University Tech Industry Advisory Board, which helps the National Center for Aviation Training focus on the critical job skills needed in our highly-technical manufacturing environment.

If HB 2118 were signed into law, the state would be further helping the Kansas aviation industry be more competitive by creating financial incentives for students considering a career in aerospace to earn their engineering degree or technical certifications.

The bill would also incentivize employers to hire Kansas students for jobs based in our state after they graduate. With an increasingly global economy, this is especially important for aviation companies looking to expand their operations.

Over the past 14 months, Spirit made two announcements about plans to create an additional 2,400 new jobs, which we are well on our way to fulfilling. As we hire to fill these new positions and hire to fill for natural attrition rates, we believe the tools provided by HB 2118 will help us find the right talent.

Talent recruitment is not just a problem for Spirit – it is a challenge that our 500 Kansas suppliers face as well. Each year we spend about \$1 billion on our Kansas suppliers across the state, and we are often competing for employees from the same talent pool. With the unemployment rate near historic lows, being able to attract more talent from out-of-state would help all of us achieve our hiring targets.

Spirit's Wichita site depends on having access to highly-skilled engineers and mechanics. I respectfully ask you to support HB 2118 because of the positive effect it would have for students seeking engineering degrees and aerospace manufacturing certifications – and for companies needing to hire qualified employees.

Justin Welner
Vice President
Human Resources, Communications & Environment, Health and Safety