



**Testimony to House Committee on Judiciary
Support of HB2575
February 07, 2022
The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce**

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (KC Chamber), representing approximately 2,000 members (40% of which are in Kansas) supports HB2575 which automatically expunges the records of individuals whose charges have been dismissed, or they have entered into a diversion agreement, or they were found not guilty. The KC Chamber supports policies that encourage returning citizens and other justice-involved individuals to gain meaningful employment after serving his or her sentence.

The KC Chamber believes that there is a large untapped pool of workers that are either returned citizens or individuals with a criminal record. This is why the KC Chamber started its Workforce Opportunities for Returning Citizens (WORC) Initiative. The WORC Initiative is aimed at getting returning citizens and other justice-involved individuals employed with stable, good paying jobs, with Chamber member employers. As a part of this initiative, the KC Chamber has partnered with state-wide partners and the Kansas Departments of Corrections and Commerce to start a Career Campus at Lansing Correctional Facility (LCF) which is aimed at expanding employment, educational and re-entry programming inside the prison to increase the likelihood of success after release. The Chamber believes these initiatives are one component to the workforce issues facing Kansas and the Kansas City area. According to the Mid America Regional Council (MARC), there are almost 92,000 available jobs in the Kansas City area. As we continue to face chronic labor shortages with no end in sight, it will be even more critical to grow the pipeline of qualified workers in the labor force.

Criminal justice reform initiatives like this bill are a part of the solution to the workforce issue in Kansas and have begun to bear fruits of hard work; however, these initiatives will not realize their full potential if individuals continue to have a hard time at getting jobs due to a record. We consistently hear firsthand stories from individuals with a criminal record that they are denied employment or become under employed due to their record showing up in background checks. Although the Chamber encourages employers, when able, to ban the box or consider circumstances of the crime with the type of employment being offered, this strategy is not a panacea and expungement can be another part of the solution. States including Utah and Pennsylvania have enacted similar legislation to this with success. And, in fact, other states including Mississippi have even taken expungement further with great success.

The Chamber recognizes that not all crimes should necessarily be eligible for expungement and recognizes that law enforcement should be able to “look back” at prior offenses; however, the Chamber supports the concept of automated expungement. The KC Chamber believes this is just a part of the overall workforce solution facing the state and region and an issue that is expected to only grow in importance. The KC Chamber supports the HB2575 and looks forward to working with the various stakeholders on this important issue.

**John Jenks
Director, Public Policy
The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce
jjenks@kcchamber.com
913.515.1958**