

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers



Local Union 304

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Chartered

Nov. 2, 1933

To: Chairman Rob Olson and Members of the Committee

From: John Garretson II, Business Manager / Financial Secretary, IBEW Local 304

Re: Testimony in Opposition to House Sub for HB 2196

Date: March 16, 2021

Chairman Olson and Members of the Committee,

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 304 (“Local 304”) submits this testimony in opposition to House Sub for HB 2196 in its current form. Although there are aspects of this bill that we support, such as resolving the fraud issues our unemployment system has experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe that the changes to unemployment benefits outlined in the bill will harm the working people of Kansas.

House Sub for HB 2196 includes provisions that will protect and make whole employers who have been victimized by unemployment fraud with reimbursement for fraudulent claims. We support the House amendment that reduces the fraud penalty from 5 years to 2 years. Several members of my staff, including myself, have had fraudulent claims filed in their names, so we support efforts to eliminate these occurrences. It is unfortunate that in times when people suffer there will always be those who seek to take advantage and enrich themselves illegally. However, we are concerned with protecting employees as well, and see nothing in the bill that ensures that those who are victims of fraud will not be barred from receiving unemployment benefits for two (2) years.

More than 40 states have penalties for unemployment fraud that bar individuals from receiving benefits for one (1) year or less. Local 304 is in full support of penalizing those individuals that commit fraud, but we support further reducing the two (2) year ban to bring Kansas more into line with the penalties in other states.

Local 304 does not support changing the length of time that a person can receive benefits. House Sub for HB 2196 changes the percentages that determine how long a claimant may receive benefits. We do not believe this will alleviate any of the current issues facing the system

that is in place. We do not support changing the benefits that unemployed Kansans may receive. We feel that it should remain at the 26 weeks, especially now during this pandemic. Reducing benefits at this time will only hurt Kansans that have already been negatively affected by this pandemic. We do not agree with businesses receiving extensions and not hard working men and women.

Local 304 also urges the inclusion of labor unions to the Shared Work program. If the Secretary of Labor must work with specific entities, including area chambers of commerce, we would encourage the Committee to include labor unions, as we are present in almost every industry across the state and would be helpful in the implementation and promotion of the program.

I thank you for your time today and welcome any questions you or the Committee may have. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at johng@ibew304.org.

Sincerely,

John Garretson II

Business Manager / Financial Secretary

