



**TESTIMONY OF
Sarah LaFrenz, President, AFT Kansas
May 3, 2021**

NEUTRAL TESTIMONY RE:SB 286 AND PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

I appreciate the opportunity to provide neutral testimony with respect to SB 286. Provided that certain amendments are made to the bill, AFT Kansas would be able to strongly support SB 286.

AFT Kansas is a federation of fourteen public employee organizations, including the Kansas Organization of State Employees (KOSE) and the United Teachers of Wichita (UTW). The federation represents workers on the frontlines of the pandemic response, including but not limited to corrections officers, health care workers, teachers, snowplow drivers.

SB 286 authorizes important but incomplete compensation for Kansans who have reckoned with the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Kansas businesses sustained immense financial losses because of factors outside of their control, including by complying with public health measures. Through all the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic, Kansans continued to be able to access fresh food, medicine, household goods, and all the comforts of our modern economy with no significant interruption, thanks in significant part to the perseverance of business leaders. AFT Kansas supports the efforts of legislators and members of this committee to make these businesses whole with financial support from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

However, frontline essential workers are no less deserving of this committee's gratitude and have no less earned the financial support that the committee is considering today. AFT Kansas would support SB 286 provided the bill were amended to include premium pay for essential workers as outlined in the Frontline Service Pay Act, SB 289. The program would provide a modest \$3.00 per hour bonus to workers making under \$25.00 per hour for the remainder of the pandemic to compensate workers carrying out their duties under extraordinary conditions. Workers have risked their health, and even that of their families, to keep our state open. I represent corrections officers who quarantined from their families for months to ensure they did not infect their loved-ones who were at high risk.

Because the program is administered as grants to employers, who pass the premium pay to employees via their paychecks, the program can help prevent harmful labor shortages in essential businesses. Attracting new workers to these jobs is difficult, and some experts have warned of potential shortages so long as pay does not correspond with heightened risks. The Frontline Service Pay Act will help businesses recognize the hard work of their employees, improve workplace morale, and retain valued employees at no cost to employers or the state.

The Frontline Service Pay program is based in part on promising premium pay models enacted in seven other states including Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Michigan, and Virginia. With authorization from ARPA, and models in other states, Kansas does not need to put itself out on a limb with untested ideas. We can improve SB 286 with policies proven to help workers and businesses both. I urge the committee not to neglect workers as they rightfully consider support for Kansas businesses. A small bit of help will make a world of difference to your hard-working constituents.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.