

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

House Committee on Higher Education Budget

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2290

Presented by Eric Stafford, Vice President of Government Affairs

Mister Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Eric Stafford, Vice President of Government Affairs for the Kansas Chamber. The Kansas Chamber represents small, medium and large businesses of all industry segments across the state. We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2290, a bill that would formalize the affiliation between Fort Hays State University and Northwest and North central Technical Colleges.

We've seen other affiliation programs like this successful. Wichita State and Washburn are two institutions that have merged with technical colleges in their communities. A press release announcing this merger listed the goal of developing solutions in three key areas:

- Developing academic programs and integrated student services that meet the educational and professional needs of today's and tomorrow's students
- Aligning and optimizing inter-institutional operations to remove unnecessary bureaucratic barriers to student success
- Creating a coalition with regional businesses, industries, and communities focused on increasing opportunities for students, expanding entrepreneurship, and meeting workforce development needs in rural Kansas

Our recent workforce study of Kansas policies to improve our state's workforce development system highlighted opportunities for developing more student-centric partnerships between institutions, and employers. This affiliation goes straight to the heart of offering more educational opportunities and benefits for students to consider as they weight career paths.

In closing, we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of House Bill 2290 and I'm happy to answer questions at the appropriate time.