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Testimony Before the
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By:

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Representative Kelley, Senator Abrams, and members of the Committees:

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Committees this afternoon. By way of introduction, I am Cody Robertson, Vice Chair of Internal Operations for Communities in Schools of Kansas.

I am also a partner with the law firm of Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds & Palmer, LLP, which has been in downtown Topeka for over 130 years. Some of you may know us as Governor Brownback's firm prior to his election to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1994. Kansas Supreme Court Justice Marla Luckert also practiced with our firm, as have a number of former Kansas Attorneys General. Since 1881, we have been providing legal services to state and local government agencies, private businesses and individuals throughout this city and across the State of Kansas.

I mention all of this not as an advertisement for our firm (although we are quite proud of our history), but rather to make the point that, for well over a century, our interests have been aligned with the interests of this state and its businesses, and our success intertwined with, and in fact largely dependent upon, the strength of the Kansas economy.

It is no coincidence then, that our firm has consistently supported Communities in Schools of Kansas since its establishment in 1995. My law partner, Larry Bork, was one of the founding Directors of Communities in Schools of Kansas, and our firm has

maintained a presence on the organization's Board since that time. The reasons for our continued commitment to Communities in Schools of Kansas are simple: first, we believe that the most powerful tool a child can receive is a good education; and second, we recognize that the most powerful and lasting economic stimulus to our community and to this state is a well-educated, highly motivated and self-sufficient workforce. Supporting Communities in Schools of Kansas provides us a unique opportunity to help in making a truly meaningful difference in the lives of Kansas children, while at the same time investing in the continued growth and development of this state's economy.

When you look at the facts, the effect dropout prevention and college preparation can have on the Kansas economy is undeniable. According to US Census data, the average college graduate earns around \$54,000 annually, while the average high school dropout earns less than half that amount, around \$23,000 a year. At that earning level, dropouts account for a disproportionate amount of spending on government programs, such as welfare and public health care services. Students who drop out of high school experience unwanted pregnancies, struggle with substance abuse and spend time in prison at demonstrably higher rates than their graduating peers. In fact, a large majority of the Kansas prison population did not graduate from high school. I don't need to explain to any of you the strain these kind of outcomes place on an already overburdened state budget.

Further, it is no secret that the low-skill, low wage jobs that so many of our nation's high school dropouts depended on in the past have left these shores for foreign lands, with no prospect of return. According to U.S. Department of Labor statistics, 90% of the new high-growth, high-wage jobs currently being created to fill that vacuum will require at least some post-secondary education. This places today's high school dropout at an even greater disadvantage than his predecessors, as the opportunities to eke out an honest living without a diploma have now largely vanished from the U.S. landscape. Not only is this bad news for the individual who finds himself looking for a job sans diploma, it is also bad news for the state economy, which requires an educated, highly-trained

workforce to attract and retain businesses, and the attendant jobs and dollars they bring, to Kansas.

The most recent national election cycle reintroduced us all to a set of terms that, although in most cases polarizing and grossly oversimplified, actually provide a useful dichotomy through which to view the work that Communities in Schools does. By identifying at-risk students at the earliest opportunity and coordinating the services necessary to eliminate the risks to those students' success in school and in life, Communities in Schools is turning tomorrow's takers into tomorrow's makers. It is identifying that segment of the population that statistics show is most likely to require the expenditure of some form of public money, and giving them the tools, the support and the confidence they need to instead become productive, contributing members of society.

Communities in Schools' ability to achieve this outcome is remarkable and demonstrable. Nationwide, 97 percent of students who Communities in Schools identified as being at sufficient risk to warrant targeted and sustained intervention during the 2010-2011 school year remained in school at the end of the academic year. Of that same group, 88 percent of eligible seniors graduated. Eighty-one percent of those graduates went on to some form of post-secondary education. Eighty-four percent of non-seniors were promoted to the next grade.

At the state level, the figures are even more impressive. Communities in Schools of Kansas currently provides services to more than 22,700 students in 50 schools throughout the state. Of those Kansas students who received individualized support from Communities in Schools of Kansas during the 2011-2012 school year, 99 percent of potential dropouts stayed in school. Ninety-eight percent were promoted to the next grade level. Seventy-nine percent showed measurable improvements in their behavior, 81 percent improved in academics and 80 percent improved in attendance.

Results like these speak for themselves, and give testament to the efforts of amazing staff members like the individuals you heard from earlier today. With that level of talent and

commitment at its disposal, Communities in Schools of Kansas' ability to replicate these results throughout our state is really only limited by the amount of financial support it receives.

Communities in Schools' service model is built on the idea of collaboration and synergy, so that every resource available is leveraged to produce a sum that is greater than its parts. For instance, nationwide, approximately 50,000 CIS volunteers contribute more than 1.7 million hours of their time annually – a \$37 million value – to the CIS network. Not only is this good stewardship of resources, it is also good business.

Our firm and dozens of other private businesses throughout the state have committed to providing financial support to Communities in Schools of Kansas because we recognize the value of investing in our state's future. And make no mistake, it is an investment. Although Communities in Schools of Kansas is a not-for-profit organization, we do not see ourselves as a charity, and I am not here to ask you for a handout. Rather, Communities in Schools of Kansas is a catalyst for economic growth, and I am here to ask you to join our firm in making an investment that will provide handsome returns in the form of lower dropout rates, higher graduation rates, and an educated work force that is equipped to meet the demands of an ever-changing economic landscape.

Goodell, Stratton, Edmonds & Palmer is invested in Communities in Schools of Kansas because it is good for business and good for Kansas. We invite the State to join us in that investment. I thank you for your time, and I would be happy to address any questions.