



**Testimony to House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice  
Supporting HB 2547  
February 11, 2020  
The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce**

The Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce (KC Chamber) urges the House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice to favorably pass HB 2547 to reduce barriers for individuals to reclaim legal driving status. The KC Chamber, representing nearly 2,000 businesses (40% of which in Kansas), and its Board of Directors has identified workforce development and increasing employment opportunities for justice-involved individuals as a top priority. The greater Kansas City region currently has over 73,000 open jobs and the KC Chamber encourages multiple strategies to break down barriers for people entering the workforce. By streamlining the process for individuals to obtain restricted driving status while working to comply with the courts, HB 2547 will remove some barriers for individuals, especially returning citizens from our correctional institutions, to regain some level of driving status.

According to Kansas Applesseed, over 137,000 driver's licenses in Kansas are suspended due to unpaid fees and fines as of June 2019 and Kansas, as of 2018, had the fifth highest suspension rate in the country. With limited public transportation in the Kansas City region and across the state, a driver's license is critical to gaining employment. At a time of record unemployment, the KC Chamber believes we should work to grow the available talent pool from which employers can hire. Furthermore, suspending driver's licenses for unpaid fines and legal fees can begin a cycle of incarceration, joblessness and poverty. By breaking the cycle of poverty and intermittent incarceration, individuals can enjoy economic and career mobility to improve their situation and have the resources to pay off fines and fees.

The KC Chamber also supports HB 2547 as it removes one more barrier that returning citizens from our correctional institutions may face upon reentering society. Oftentimes while an individual is incarcerated, a license may become suspended or revoked. By removing the fee for reinstatement, Kansas is removing an obstacle for returning citizens who are seeking a meaningful job, attending court-mandated appointments, or merely complying with their terms of probation or parole. The KC Chamber's Workforce Opportunities for Returning Citizens (WORC) Initiative has recruited seven member employers that will begin hiring our returning citizens in a pilot workforce development project. These employers consistently tell us that lack of access to transportation is a major barrier to hiring and the Chamber believes this bill will help mitigate this obstacle.

The KC Chamber believes that by removing this barrier for returning citizens and justice-involved individuals, Kansas can get more people back into the workforce while making our communities stronger and safer. The Chamber believes that meaningful employment is a critical tool to reduce recidivism and reoffending and stands behind efforts to reduce the cycle of crime and poverty that unfortunately entraps many in our communities. The KC Chamber and its Board of Directors encourage this committee to pass HB 2547 with a favorable recommendation.

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