

To: Senator Rob Olson and Members of the Committee
From: Jake Miller, Executive Director for the Working Kansas Alliance
Re: Testimony in Opposition to SB 177
Date: February 17, 2021

Chairman Olson and Members of the Committee,

The Working Kansas Alliance ("WKA") writes to you today to testify in opposition to SB 177 as it is currently written. While WKA currently opposes SB 177, there are aspects of the bill we support. We support SB 177's efforts to resolve fraud our unemployment system has experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the changes to unemployment benefits within SB 177 will not alleviate unemployment fraud but instead harm Kansans.

SB 177 changes the rate triggers (Percentages that determine how long a claimant may receive benefits) and the maximum duration for how long a claimant can receive unemployment benefits. WKA does not understand how changing the amount of time a claimant can receive benefits will alleviate our system's current issues. WKA believes no changes should be made to the benefits unemployed Kansans may receive.

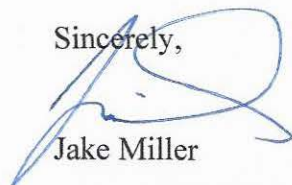
Additionally, SB 177 seeks to protect and make whole employers who have been victims of unemployment fraud through reimbursement for fraudulent claims. While WKA supports this effort, why does SB 177 only protect employers? Currently, if an individual is deemed to have committed unemployment fraud, they are barred from receiving unemployment benefits for five (5) years, one of the strictest penalties in the nation. However, there is nothing in SB 177 that ensures individuals who were the victim of these fraudulent claims will not be barred from receiving unemployment benefits for five (5) years, now or in the future.

More than 40 states have penalties for unemployment fraud barring individuals from receiving unemployment benefits for one (1) year or less. While WKA understands efforts to penalize individuals that have committed unemployment fraud, we support an amendment removing or reducing the five (5) year ban to align with penalties across the country.

WKA also urges the Committee to consider amending changes made to the Shared Work program. In SB 177, the Secretary of Labor must work with specific entities, including area chambers of commerce, to promote the program. WKA would like to see an amendment that would include labor unions. Labor unions are present in almost every industry and would aid in the promotion of the program.

Thank you for your time today. Should the Committee have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out to me (jdm235@gmail.com) or any of our member organizations.

Sincerely,



Jake Miller



SMART Transportation Division

Teamsters Local 696

International Association of Fire Fighters

Kansas National Education Association

Kansas Coalition of Public Retirees

Kansas Organization of State Employees

Kansas AFL-CIO

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 304

Kansas AFT

Wichita Hutchinson Labor Federation

Kansas Chiropractic Association

Plumbers & Pipefitters Local 441

Laborers 1290

Service Employees International Union Local 513

Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Teamsters

Greater Kansas City Building & Construction Trades Council

Boilermakers Local 83

Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers & Grain Millers Local 218

Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way Employees Division

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers 304

Carpenters Regional Council St. Louis – Kansas City