



*Serving Employers and Job Seekers in
Butler, Cowley, Harper, Kingman, Sedgwick & Sumner Counties*

Testimony to Senate Ways and Means Committee

HB2401

March 25, 2021

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The Workforce Alliance is one of five Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) in Kansas that are charged with implementing the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and operating the network of KansasWorks job centers in partnership with the Kansas Department of Commerce. The Workforce Alliance Board is led by a majority of private sector business executives and includes education officials, labor leaders and representatives from community-based organizations. This Board views WIOA as the floor of its operations and looks to leverage resources and align services to have community impact beyond the annual WIOA allocations. An example of this philosophy is the long-standing commitment by the Workforce Alliance to serve individuals with criminal backgrounds. I am pleased to share some of the outcomes from what we call the Fair Chance partnership as this Committee considers HB2401.

The Workforce Alliance recognized in 2007 that Sedgwick County had a large population of individuals released from incarceration and there was little to no focused effort at connecting these people to the Workforce Centers and other employment services. The Board decided to get the right people to the table to identify resources and implement action steps to develop an effective strategy. The early results were promising and included three classes at the Winfield Correctional Facility awarding Manufacturing Skills Certificates in 2007 and 2008.

Conversations and activity about using employment as a tool for reintegration and to reduce recidivism continued, and in 2016 the Workforce Alliance, the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC) and Sedgwick County Community Corrections (SCCC) formally partnered to fund a position at the Wichita Workforce Center to work directly with individuals housed at Wichita Work Release and those under intensive supervision at the Wichita Parole Office and Sedgwick County Community Corrections. This staff person also coordinates with officials from the El Dorado and Winfield facilities to identify persons in pre-release and make them aware of available services to help them connect to employment opportunities and limit the time between leaving incarceration and landing a job.

One of the advantages to this partnership is the Workforce Center works directly with a large number of employers to post jobs and assess job applicants, and we are aware of the companies that are willing to hire persons with criminal backgrounds and those employers that are not able to or will not consider these job seekers. This helps a person focus a job search and leads to better outcomes. There are also many employers willing to hire from this population, but do not want to advertise it in job postings.

The results of the Fair Chance partnership are impressive and consistently over 50 percent of the people that received one on one job search assistance found employment. Below are outcomes of job placements tracked by wages.

- 2016 Average Wage After 6 Months of Employment: \$9.90
- 2017 Average Wage After 6 Months of Employment: \$10.05
- 2018 Average Wage After 6 Months of Employment: \$10.52
- 2019 Average Wage After 6 Months of Employment: \$10.61
- 2020 Average Wage After 6 Months of Employment: \$11.23

My hope is these results will assist the Committee in its deliberation of HB2401 and understand that a focused and intentional strategy to use employment as a tool to help reintegrate persons leaving incarceration can work. I applaud the leadership at the Kansas Department of Corrections and Sedgwick County for their commitment to the Fair Chance strategy.

In closing, I want to recognize and thank the Wichita and Kansas City Chambers of Commerce for their leadership on this issue. I am happy to respond to questions and can provide the Committee additional information on the Fair Chance partnership.