

**Testimony on House Bill 2766 to the Committee on Education Budget
Representative Lana Gordon, Chair
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Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 2766. I am Jeanine McKenna, President and CEO of the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce. I am a native Kansan and have been the CEO of the Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce since 2000, and in this field of work for over twenty-one years. The Emporia Area Chamber of Commerce is leading the way for a better, stronger Emporia for over 115 years, and we are the leading voice for business in our area.

It is no secret that there is a great deal of evidence to support the arts as a driver of economic development, and that many states have benefitted from affiliation with the state office of economic development. We too believe that this is a good way to move the arts forward in Kansas, and encourage you to support this legislation. In addition, we ask you to support funding in an amount at least equal to the proposed FY12 funding.

You have heard all the national statistics about the economic impact the arts make on our local communities, but I am not here today to repeat those numbers. Instead I would like to tell you about my experience, and how the arts and theatre flourish in Emporia. Throughout the year, I give community tours to prospective new families to our community. These are people who are being recruited by our local business and industry such as the university, medical community and industry. They may also be a new prospective business that is looking for a quality community in which to locate their business. It is an honor and a source of pride to show off our restored Granada Theatre and newly built Emporia Arts Council. They are impressed to learn about the wonderful production and high-quality educational programs that we are able to offer.

The brand new 15,000 square foot Arts Center offers a gallery with exhibits from local, regional and national artists. Exhibits change regularly. The Arts Center has wireless internet for visitor convenience. The Emporia Arts Center was recognized as the 2010 Kansas Governor's Arts Award recipient for community arts organizations. Art classes are offered to all age groups year round in clay, painting, stained glass and a variety of other genres. The performing arts series brings many nationally known performers to Emporia. All of these offerings are selling points for "selling" and growing our community.

What I have talked about today supports how the arts have a significant economic benefit to Emporia. I am sure if you travel to other Kansas communities, you would hear other stories that verify the importance of the arts in Kansas.