

TESTIMONY

TO: SENATE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE

**FROM: JOSEPH DRIMMEL, PE
PRESIDENT, ACEC KANSAS**

RE: HB 2101

DATE: MARCH 23, 2021

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Joe Drimmel, and I'm a licensed professional engineer in the state of Kansas working for HDR Engineering Company. I'm acting in my capacity as President of the American Council of Engineering Companies of Kansas (ACEC KS). ACEC KS is the trade association representing private sector engineering companies in Kansas. We urge your support for HB 2101.

HB 2101 extends the University Engineering Initiative Act for an additional ten years. This act was originally passed in 2011, creating a ten-year funding program for the three engineering colleges in Kansas. \$10.5 million is provided annually from ELARF (Extended Lottery Act Revenue Funds) and split between the three universities.

Before we talk about the current needs of Kansas engineering businesses, let's look back at the current program. There is a lot to like in terms of what it has done for Kansas.

First of all, each university has had to match the funds provided through ELARF dollar-for-dollar with non-SGF funds. It's always a win-win when investments can be leveraged to raise more dollars from non-SGF sources. And the fact that they were able to raise those matching funds largely from donors shows how much the private sector needed and believed in this program. This dollar-for-dollar match requirement will continue in the renewed program.

Second, the Legislature had the wisdom ten years ago to create metrics that had to be met by this investment of taxpayer dollars and matching funds. This helped ensure that public policy goals envisioned for the program are met before any additional funds are considered. We are pleased to share that those goals were met ahead of the ten-year deadline. The program worked. And the Board of Regents has done a nice job with transparency. They have a page on their website tracking results year-by-year. Taxpayer dollars deserve this transparency and it has been provided under this program.

Looking forward, there is still a strong need for additional talented engineers in the Kansas workforce. In a recent survey of our membership, 76% of our member firms reported difficulties finding qualified engineers for positions they were looking to fill in the last two years. This is a wonderful problem to have in some ways, as it reflects that Kansas businesses have opportunities to pursue. But it is a problem all the same, and if we want to put Kansas engineering businesses in a position to continue to grow and maximize their contributions to the Kansas economy, we will need more talented engineers. HB 2101 is a critical component in meeting this business opportunity.

Our association represents an incredibly diverse set of firms. From two-person companies all the way up to firms with thousands of employees. These firms are located in Garden City, Kansas City, and virtually every part of the state in between. They work in every sector of our economy, including water/wastewater, transportation, energy, environmental work, private development, natural resources, and much more. The one thing our survey shows they have in common is a need for more talented engineers in the private sector to meet their potential and grow their businesses.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and ask for your support of HB 2101. I would be glad to stand for questions at the appropriate time