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KC CHAMBER, CIVIC COUNCIL VOTE TO SUPPORT APRIL PRE-K BALLOT MEASURE

The Boards of the Greater Kansas City Chamber of Commerce and the Civic Council of Greater Kansas City have separately voted to support the April ballot measure funding pre-Kindergarten services in Kansas City, Missouri. The Civic Council Board vote was held last Friday, December 14th; the KC Chamber vote was held at its Board meeting Monday, December 17th.

The ballot measure calls for a 3/8th cent sales tax to fund pre-K programs and services in the city. The proposal is modeled after Denver's successful pre-K program and funding.

"We saw firsthand the success of Denver's efforts when we took 146 business and civic leaders there on our most recent Leadership Exchange," says Joe Reardon, President & CEO of the KC Chamber. Denver's program is funded by a sales tax which provides early childcare education under a "mixed delivery system," including students in public, private, and charter schools as well as providers like KC's Operation Breakthrough and St. Mark's Childcare Center. The Denver School District receives the largest share of the funds.

"Our primary concern is the kids," Reardon says. "One in three children in Kansas City doesn't have the skills necessary to succeed when they begin kindergarten. They're behind before they even start and that's potential lost. This has been a Chamber Big 5 for the last five years, and we've known from the start that additional funding would be needed for early childhood education. We look at this as a long-term workforce development issue, as well as a moral imperative."

"We encourage the school superintendents, the mayor, and others to continue to work together to find a path to agreement. We know all parties believe in the cause of early childhood learning and we believe there is an opportunity for everyone to unite," Reardon continues. "But the bottom line is, our kids need quality early childhood education to succeed. If this measure doesn't pass, things don't get better and every year there's another new round of four-year-olds who will not get what they need."

"Research shows that 90 percent of brain development occurs by the age of five, and many of our peer regions are finding ways to invest in high-quality, early childhood education" says Marc Hill, Civic Council President. "The business community doesn't take a proposal to raise taxes lightly. At the same time, we see no viable alternatives to funding the expansion of early childhood education in Kansas City. After six months of study and discussion about the pros and cons, the Civic Council sees this proposal as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to prepare our city's youngest children for success."

"Like the Chamber, the Civic Council would like to thank Mayor James and the school superintendents for their commitment to children," Hill adds. "We hope that the Mayor and MARC will continue to coordinate with the city's school districts and early childhood providers to ensure children have a successful transition from PreK to Kindergarten. In addition, we appreciate Mayor James listening to the concerns of the business community. The plan has been strengthened by those efforts."