

BROWNWOOD AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE EDUCATION/WORK
FORCE SOLUTIONS COMMITTEE OF BROWN COUNTY

Testimony to the Senate Education Committee
Austin, TX – March 19, 2009

Good morning Chair Shapiro and honorable committee members. My name is Gregg Rice, the Human Resources Manager for 3M Brownwood. I am here today to represent the Brownwood Area Chamber of Commerce Education/Work Force Solutions Committee of Brown County and speak in support of Senate Bill 1313.

Other committee members here this morning are Dr. Reece Blincoe-Superintendent of Brownwood ISD, Bill Foster – Superintendent of Bangs ISD, Brian Kight – Associate V.P. of TSTC Brownwood, Ann Jones – Chair of the Brownwood Area Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors and Chair of our committee.

First, let me express to you appreciation for the Senate Education committee's progress and forward thinking regarding education work readiness. Also, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today to share with you the work force readiness challenges the Brownwood area businesses face. Dr. Blincoe will address how S.B. 1313 will help solve these issues.

When you think of the Brownwood area, you probably think of Lake Brownwood, Underwood's Barbeque, HPU, football and Coach Woods. What you may not know is that reportedly, the Brownwood area has more industrial jobs than Abilene and San Angelo combined. The industrial employment of Brown County is estimated at 4,000. The Brownwood Industrial Park is home to 3M, Kohler, and Superior Essex employing approximately 2,300 employees. Brownwood Regional Medical Center is the largest rural hospital in Texas with approximately 550 employees.

It is increasingly difficult to find local qualified workforce. In response to that need, in Oct. 2008 the Brownwood Chamber of Commerce formed the Education/Workforce Solutions Committee,

which is comprised of all seven county school districts, industry, Brownwood EDC, TSTC, Howard Payne University, Brownwood Regional Hospital and West Central Texas Workforce Solution. We are pleased to say that our committee's goals and strategies closely align with S.B. 1313.

Speaking on behalf of industry and particularly 3M, we are facing a shortage of applicants that have the educational and technical background to fill our production and maintenance needs. At 3M at any given time a third of my workforce (approx. 200 employees) could retire and that would be devastating to an operation like 3M's.

No longer having a background in agriculture will be enough as it did when the plant opened in the mid-60's and today with process equipment costing at a minimum of 10 million dollars, no longer will just having prior manufacturing experience be enough either. We need individuals that can understand complex processes, a strong background in computers, understand statistics, and who can see where an opportunity exists for improvement and be able to drive a project to seize that opportunity. 3M's workforce of the future will be less about physical activity, but more about critical thinking.

This committee came together as a result of a conversation with Ann Jones, Chair of Brownwood Area Chamber of Commerce and Laura Trehune, Executive Director of Brownwood Chamber of Commerce, I mentioned that I would like to host representatives of the local school districts at the plant so they could get an opportunity to see our technology and witness first-hand the skills required by our workforce. This fit right in with a conversation that Ann Jones had with Dr. Blincoe about finding out what the needs are for Brownwood's major employers, and the Education/Workforce Committee was established. From there, with considerable amount of discussion and input from industry, the schools began to put a plan together to meet our future needs and a plan that I am very excited and pleased with.

Chair Shapiro and honorable members of this committee, thank-you for allowing me to speak in support of Senate bill 1313 and now I will turn it over to Dr. Reece Blincoe, Superintendent of Brownwood ISD.