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## **Oklahoma Department of Commerce Announces New Statewide Aerospace Association**

**OKLAHOMA CITY** – The Oklahoma Department of Commerce recently announced the launch of the Oklahoma ACES (Aerospace Commerce Economic Services) Program, a membership organization. Created under House Bill 2578, the primary goal of ACES is to establish a common statewide strategy for the growth of the Oklahoma aerospace industry. Memberships are available to aerospace-related companies, local economic development organizations, government agencies, and academic institutions.

“As Oklahoma’s second largest industry, aerospace is critical to our state’s economy,” said Vince Howie, Director of Aerospace and Defense, Oklahoma Department of Commerce. “The ACES program will bring together Oklahoma’s aerospace leaders – industry, military, education and more – to support and foster growth of the aerospace industry.”

The program will acquire aerospace executive expertise and provide consulting services to the aviation, aerospace and defense industries, government agencies and organizations across the State of Oklahoma, in order to strengthen the policy framework, economic development initiatives and activities of the state.

ACES will focus the collective aerospace resources into an integrated, coordinated statewide effort that will:

- Increase contracts between companies in the aviation, aerospace and defense industries in Oklahoma and the Department of Defense and its prime contractors;
- Create and retain high-wage, high-skill jobs;
- Provide engineering and technical assistance;
- Reduce costs for the Department of Defense and Oklahoma military installations and increase the competitiveness of aviation, aerospace and defense businesses in Oklahoma.

A division of the Oklahoma Department of Commerce, the program will be led by Donald Wetekam as ACES Program Director. Mr. Wetekam has over 40 years of

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experience in the aerospace industry, serving in key leadership positions in both the government and commercial sectors. From 2007 to 2018, he served as an officer with AAR Corporation, a leading aerospace services company. Prior to that, he served 34 years in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a Lieutenant General after his final assignment as Deputy Chief of Staff for Installations and Logistics in Washington, DC.

Organizations or companies interested in membership should contact Leshia Pearson at [leshia.pearson@okcommerce.gov](mailto:leshia.pearson@okcommerce.gov). To learn more about Oklahoma ACES, visit [okaces.org](http://okaces.org).

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