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TESTIMONY
On Senate Bill 295
Senate Commerce & Economic Development Committee
By Andy Sanchez, Executive Secretary-Treasurer
Kansas AFL-CIO
February 8, 2012

Thank you Madam Chair and members of the committee. I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony and offer our support for SB 295. Looking for work can be a frustrating ordeal, especially in this economy. Adding a stigma of being unemployed through no fault of their own, and it can test a person's sanity and sense of self worth.

We are talking about a population that still finds themselves in the midst of the worst economic downturn in over 70 years, the Great Recession. So why not help and try to minimize the barriers to people getting back to work. SB 295 doesn't guarantee anyone a job, it doesn't give a preference. It simply gives the unemployed a fair shot free of discrimination, free of prejudice. SB 295 would insure the unemployed have a fair shot to job opportunities and nothing more.

Denying opportunities otherwise available to other groups is wrong, when in fact the denial has nothing to do with the skills or real work ethic of an individual. There are many reasons for people finding themselves in the situation of being unemployed. In this economy when companies are closing without notice, downsizing and when cutbacks in the workforce are commonplace, we should remember that loss of a job such as this is through no fault of the worker. There can be numerous other reasons for being unemployed including caring for an elderly parent, a sick child, relocation, spousal relocation or their own personal health problems.

Trying to return to the workforce even when the economy was not the cause of job loss leaves many caught up in the same funk as those finding that there are not enough jobs for those seeking a job. In fact the numbers have been staggering over the past few years. Nationally, the economy was devastating amounting to 5 jobseekers for every job opening. In December 2011, the unemployment rate in Kansas for young people 20 to 24 years old was 13.1%, for African Americans it was 13.2% and Latinos 13%. The country is still mired in a recession where jobless workers cannot pay for groceries, transportation, utilities and housing. Also in December, 1 in 1,031 homes in Kansas faced foreclosure, likely caused by job loss. So why not target this sector of Kansans; Not with a handout, but with fair treatment. Simply put, making a judgment against an applicant and job screening them out before proper consideration is wrong when it is based on being unemployed. Respectfully, we urge this committee to seek the removal of barriers to stronger communities, and be an enabler to legislation that puts people back to work. Please pass SB 295 out of committee favorable. Thank you.

Senate Commerce Committee
Note February 8, 2012

Attachment 2