

Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas

Promoting Empowerment
and Independence

2518 Ridge Court #236
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Madam Chair,

My name is Craig Knutson and I work for the Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about an issue that is important to thousands of Kansans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. I urge you to adopt SB 397.

As a state, we've prided ourselves on our forward thinking towards people with all kinds of disabilities; we are widely recognized as having one of the best service and support systems in the country. We have been leaders and innovators with landmark initiatives such as the DD Reform Act. Those things which serve as the foundation of our pride in our disability service and support systems start with one simple idea: each and every one of us is a person of worth, a person of value, a person of merit, and a person of respect.

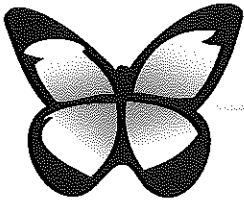
Unfortunately, these values are not always reflected in the wording of our laws and statutes.

For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities- no, for all of us, the words "mentally retarded" and "mental retardation" are words that connote the dehumanization of friends, family, neighbors, co-workers—ourselves.

There is no need for this type of language, not in this day and age. I urge you to be especially vigilant in how we talk about each other as we prepare to hand the management of our vast statewide Medicaid and Medicare system over to faceless, out of state, for profit corporations. I urge you to help preserve our humanity, our unique humanness, and stop using the words "mental retardation" and "mentally retarded" when we talk about our friends, family and co-workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We must remember that we are all "people first" and so I urge you that when we adopt SB 397 and implement Rosa's Law in Kansas, we use language that reflect that fact. We must use language that demonstrates that though we may have a disability, the disability does not define us. Rather than "intellectually disabled," the language would preferably say, "a person with an intellectual or developmental disability."

Also, we should remember to be consistent with landmark legislature and the definitions of intellectual and developmental disabilities set therein. I believe that a definition of intellectual and developmental disability set forth in the DD Reform Act can, and should, serve as a guiding light in this matter.



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A change in our statutes that dehumanize our fellow Kansans is long overdue. Adopting SB 397 with "people first" language and definitions consistent with the DD Reform Act can undo this wrong.

Recognizing the value of our friends, families, neighbors and co-workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities is the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Craig Knutson

Director of Advocacy Services

Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas