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Chairwoman McGinn and Committee Members:

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 444.

This bill encourages the hiring of individuals with disabilities by companies who contract with the state of Kansas through the director of purchasing as well as the hiring of more individuals with disabilities by “Use Law” vendors.

The incentive mechanism works in two ways:

1. A “certified business” is one that employs 20% disabled employees and provides at least 70% of the cost of the employees’ health insurance. A “certified business” will receive a 10% advantage in the bidding process.
2. Not every business will have the desire or know-how to employ disabled workers. Therefore a second provision allows any business to deduct the cost of purchases made from a “Use Law” vendor or a “certified business” in the previous calendar year from the original bid. This deduction may not exceed 10% of the original bid price.

At the present time there is no incentive for private companies to purchase products from "Use Law" vendors. Only state agencies and school districts are involved. This bill provides that incentive and has the potential to result in workforce expansion by "Use Law" vendors.

The beauty of the bill is that any business can improve their position in the bidding process by either hiring disabled employees or simply doing business with companies who do hire the disabled.

Although our state has provided an effective support structure for the disabled through the home and community based services Medicaid Waiver, we have fallen short in providing opportunities for competitive employment. Relative employment for people with disabilities has been decreasing since 1980.

It has been demonstrated that individuals with disabilities exhibit a strong work ethic and become productive workers. Passage of SB 444 would allow disabled individuals to enjoy the satisfaction of contributing to society that comes with competitive employment. At the same time the individual would not be dependent on Medicaid, saving the state Medicaid dollars and helping to move people off of the Medicaid Waiver waiting list.