

Chairwoman McGinn and members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, my name is Robert Hammer Jr. I want to thank you for your willingness to allow me to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 444.

I have been employed Business Technology Careers Opportunities (BTCO) in Wichita for the last eight years.

I want to start out by saying that I have worked all of my life with little support from the government (SRS), (VR). I will begin at a point in my life where this has the most relevance.

I moved back to Lyons Kansas from Texas in May of 2002 after being laid off. I started my job search by all the usual outlets. I knocked on doors, did the temp. Agency thing, scoured the newspapers and the internet. I know I sent 150 to 200 resumes out in hopes to find a job. I finally got a job working at the courthouse in Lyons as a maintenance man.

That job ended in October of 2003 because I sustained a knee injury and needed to get off of my feet. I utilized the services of the SRS (Vocational Rehabilitation) and was introduced to Cerebral Palsy Research Foundation's School of Adaptive Computer Training. I went through their computer school, got Microsoft certified, and I had a job with them by the time I finished my classes.

My job with Business Technology Careers Opportunities (BTCO) has been very helpful and fulfilling. As I mentioned earlier, I got my MS certifications in MS word, excel, and access. It also afforded me the flexibility and opportunity to get my Bachelors degree in computer technology. I also got tuition reimbursement from Business Technology Careers Opportunities. I feel as though I have good fringe benefits and competitive wage.

I am working in an office environment that is suited for me and I am off of my feet. Through some of the projects that I have worked on for the government and the military, I know that I have made a positive and lasting contribution for my country and my employer.

I think it is important for you to know that up until here recently, I was also driving 160 miles a day just to go to work. I have since shortened that drive to 100 miles a day. With the cost of gas, vehicles, and maintenance it almost seems counterproductive but I would rather work and there are not a lot of job options in the area in which I live.

To me, I think it makes sense to try and get some of the people with disabilities off of some of the government assisted programs and spend that money elsewhere. There has to be some things that are put in place to make it easier and much less of a challenge for people with disabilities to get a job. That is one of the reasons that I stay at a job as long as I do, I do not want to go through the struggle of looking for another job. The opportunities just are not out there from what I have experienced.

I think it would be good if our state could be a model for other states to follow.