

To Senate Commerce Committee Members

I am submitting my comments regarding SB 195 in favor of the DRC and Big Tent Coalition amendment to the substitute bill.

The original arguments made in support of Employment First legislation still hold true - integrated, competitive employment is a priority. Individuals with disabilities want to work, the business community needs qualified workers, and employment offers a cost efficient alternative to expensive day programs.

Eighteen months into legislation and while some positive change has occurred around the culture of employment, the necessary steps required to actually result in numbers of people working has not been realized. The problems inherent in the system that created unemployment to begin with are challenging and affect our present status.

The Oversight Committee is addressing these challenges with state agencies and stakeholder support in order to accomplish the intent of the law. The oversight and monitoring provided by this Commission is critical to avoid having the systemic challenges become the reason that change resulting in numbers of people working does not occur.

Kansas was the first state to pass Employment First legislation. Currently, 34 states have some policy initiatives in place. Governor Markell, chair of the National Governor's Association, has made employment his priority for the year. Several other federal initiatives are focused on employment for people with disabilities. Kansas is in a leadership role in regards to these efforts. Independent accountability by the Oversight Commission continues to be a prominently recognized component of our state's legislation that must be upheld.

Sincerely  
Wendy Parent, Ph.D.  
Lecompton, KS

Senate Commerce Committee  
Date: 3-13-13  
Attachment: 17