

## Written testimony regarding SB 195

I come before this committee as a member of the Employment First Oversight Commission and a disability advocate. The promise of the Employment First law is to increase opportunities for competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities.

The original bill was signed into law in July 2011. As I stand before this committee I am perplexed by the perceived need to amend the law. I agree with the idea that the focus should be on competitive and integrated employment but it is unclear how the proposed substitute bill seeks to achieve this end.

In the course of my 18 months as a member of the Commission we have sought to engage relevant state agencies in their efforts to implement this law. Our efforts are reflected in the two annual reports that we have issued. I think the state is making some progress but it is very little in my eyes as a disability advocate. Unfortunately because the state agencies have not effectively implemented Employment First across all programs and services, I do not believe that as I stand here today a single person has achieved employment due to this bill. The problem is not the underlying Employment First law or the Commission. The problem is that systems change is hard and the law has not been consistently implemented. If I am in error, as I might well be, I request the state agency or agencies that have fully implemented this to tell the story of their success in using the bill to nurture the competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities. As you will see in our report, although important progress has been made, Employment First is not the standard operating procedure across all systems or programs. This is the intent of the law I believe and standing here before you this is not the reality in the state of Kansas on March 13, 2013.

I do want you to know that I support the proposed amendment to the Substitute bill from the disability community.

There are statistics that prove that people with disabilities are capable and remain on the job longer than their able bodied counterparts.

This law is about real opportunity or it is meaningless. When I say real opportunity I mean that people are given the opportunity for employment with assistance if needed to obtain and retain their employment. The measurement of success will be found in the numbers of people who achieve employment through this law with the assistance of state agencies that have embraced, engaged and fully implemented this law into their daily operations.

Having an effective Oversight Commission is a key to having an effective Employment First law. If the proposed amendment from the disability community is amended into the Substitute bill, then this bill has the potential to continue to allow for an effective and independent Oversight Commission, and thus an effective law.