

## Written-Only Testimony Opposing HB 2353

Before: House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development  
Representative Les Mason, Chair

Provided by: Susan Crain Lewis, President/CEO  
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Hearing Date: Tuesday, March 14, 2017

Good afternoon, Chairman Mason and members of the Committee. My name is Susan Crain Lewis, and I am the President/CEO of Mental Health America of the Heartland, an advocacy organization based in Kansas City that serves the Eastern portion of the state of Kansas with advocacy, education and support services for persons with mental illness, and the persons who work with and care for and about them, whether in a professional or personal role.

As you will hear from other conferees, federal and state policies have been moving us towards competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities.

MHA of the Heartland has never been a state use law vendor and has no plans to become one, but we do care very much about competitive employment for people with mental illness. We employ a large number of persons with mental illness on our staff and have placed peer support workers in other social service agencies. As a result, we are acutely aware of the role work plays in recovery from mental illness. Work is very often a key force in the process of a person's recovery, rather than an end point as people have long believed.

The language in line 26 to 28 allows for an entire category of persons to be paid less than what their work is worth for no other reason than they have an illness. This is a large step backwards.

For these reasons, I urge you not to pass this bill unless you remove lines 33-43 on page 3 of the bill.

Thank you for your attention and your consideration of this request.