



House Committee on Commerce, Labor & Economic Development Testimony in Opposition to HB 2356

March 14, 2017

Presented by:

Rick Cagan

Executive Director

NAMI Kansas is the state organization of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, a grassroots organization whose members are individuals living with mental illnesses and their family members who provide care and support. NAMI Kansas provides programs of peer support and education by and for our members through a statewide network of 13 local affiliates. We advocate for individuals who are living with mental illness to ensure their access to treatment and supportive services.

As written, NAMI Kansas opposes HB 2356. HB 2356 perpetuates the language in the previously established bidder's preference program which limits the benefit of the program to a couple of "certified businesses" which employ certain individuals with disabilities. In particular, the language is unnecessarily restricted to individuals only with a severe and persistent mental illness (SPMI). This language must be changed to make the program applicable to individuals who face a significant barrier to employment based on criteria for having any mental illness or disability which qualifies one for social security disability. We believe that the existing language in the bill discriminates unfairly against this broader population of individuals who are affected by mental illness. Moreover, because adults over the age of 21 with mental illness are not covered by any HCBS waiver program, the current language excludes an important target population of adults with a serious mental illness who face employment challenges. Because this bill is tied directly to a tax credit bill having a hearing in Senate Tax this week (SB 211), we believe it is vital that you make changes to this program ensuring that all people with disabilities benefit. If not, at the end of the session, we could very well have a system where people with disabilities are discriminated against in this bill, and this discriminatory program would be used as the basis to provide taxpayer funded tax credits. Language should also be added to clarify competitive employment regarding use law vendors. Our understanding is that the Disability Rights Center of Kansas is proposing such amendments.

We are also concerned about the ineffective design of the bidder's preference program contained in HB 2356 as a solution to unemployment of individuals with serious mental illness. This program has not had the desired impact based on our belief that only a couple of businesses have signed up

PO Box 675 • Topeka, KS 66601
785-233-0755 • 785-233-4804 (FAX) • 800-539-2660
info@namikansas.org • www.namikansas.org

for this “certified business” program. We might suggest that State resources could be more effectively invested in expanding the implementation of evidence-based supported employment programs through our Community Mental Health Centers.

If this Committee wishes to advance this bill, we ask you do so only with the two amendments referenced in this testimony. We believe the Disability Rights Center is proposing amendments to do these two things.

Thank you for your consideration.