



TO: Caryn Tyson, Chair, and Members of the Assessment and Taxation Committee
FROM: Colin McKenney, CEO, Starkey, Inc.
RE: SB 211 and Jobs for People with Disabilities

Good morning, Madam Chair, and Members of the Committee:

I am Colin McKenney, CEO of Starkey, Inc., which is an organization in Wichita that has assisted people with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1930. **I am speaking to you this morning in support of Senate Bill 211**, which offers one more good reason for Kansas businesses to partner with organizations that assist people with disabilities to achieve higher levels of employment.

Like numerous other providers of disability-support services in Kansas, Starkey provides direct support to individuals who may need a little or a lot of assistance to live successfully in their home communities. Many of the individuals we serve require assistance in their pursuit of employment, and we provide a number of different approaches along those lines. An entry point to employment for many people is our work activity program, which both teaches skills of successful employment, and provides an opportunity to earn a paycheck for those who may not have the ability to work in a competitive and integrated work setting. **We also assist people to seek and maintain competitive employment, and lend assistance as needed to people who may have been working at their jobs for as many as 20 years.**

As the demand and expectations for integrated employment opportunities continue to increase, one way that we believe we can assist more people to experience competitive employment is to begin a new business model that would be particularly supportive of people with disabilities, but also hire other individuals who may also be more successful with more intensive supervision and support. If there are additional financial incentives available to Kansas businesses that work with companies that emphasize employment for people with disabilities, **the challenges we face in creating and sustaining a successful business concept would be lessened.**

At a time when there is so much discussion about the need for revenues in our state and the potential that we may have to increase taxes to fund important programs for Kansans, you may have some hesitancy to provide an opportunity for businesses to offset a portion of their tax liability. If so, that is certainly a fair consideration. As written, **this incentive is tied directly to efforts to introduce gainful employment with benefits in place of programs and services that are funded with state and federal dollars.** It is anticipated that there would be cost savings in those programs, and also increased economic activity as more people enter the workforce and have more dollars to spend in communities across the state.

SB 211 will not resolve all the challenges related to helping people with severe disabilities find and maintain competitive employment, but it will provide incentives to help make that process even more enticing for employers in Kansas. Please give it your full support.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.