

Testimony of Dee Birch in Support of Senate Bill 173

Direct Support Professional with TARC, Inc.

Committee Members, my name is Dee Birch and I am a Direct Support Professional at TARC in Topeka. I have worked with people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for the past 14 years. I do this work to help people develop a normal, healthy lifestyle. I try to help them become as independent as possible and be accepted into the community.

I love my job, the people I support and the staff who share my passion for this work. My work is extremely rewarding but it ISN'T EASY. In the course of my typical day, I focus on trying to help the person I support learn new skills. I assist people with their personal toileting, feeding and mobility. That means supporting them as they go to the bathroom or changing adult diapers for people who cannot use a toilet. Some of the people I support can only eat pureed food and cannot feed it to themselves. I try to help them do as much as they can for themselves.

Three days a week I work one-on-one with a young man with severe autism who has extremely unpredictable behavior. I keep him safe and feeling secure. When he feels secure with me, he doesn't try to injure himself or others. While he can be extremely violent and has hurt several staff members and others in the past, I am very proud that while he has been with me he has not felt the need to go after me or anyone else in the community.

Even though I love my job, to be able to afford to do this work and provide for my family, I work two full time jobs – one at TARC and another one every evening at Sheltered Living when I get off from my job at TARC. I spend nearly eighty hours each week providing direct support to individuals with disabilities. As much as I love what I do, I would like the ability to also spend time with my own family in the evening. After fourteen years in this field, I would hate to give it up just because I can't afford to keep doing it. Please support Senate Bill 173. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.