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Hello Chairperson Representative Tarwater and committee members.

My name is James Quillen, Vice President of I/DD services for OCCK Inc. OCCK is approaching their 49th year of providing services to persons with disabilities throughout North Central Kansas, serving 4,000 people annually.

House Bill 2044 keeps available, through incentives an employment option for people with disabilities. This bill incentivizes private business to contract with qualified not for profit agencies in providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities. This bill incentivizes qualified vendors and not for profit agencies to have an integrated workforce, as defined by the Employment First Initiatives Act, pay employees at or above minimum wage and encourage participation in the health insurance market, as other employees in the organization do. This bill incentivizes one of many employment options that should be available to people with disabilities.

OCCK Inc. supports this bill as we believe it could provide organizations with resources needed to begin a transition of employment services for people with disabilities from a workforce in a segregated sheltered setting to a workforce that is integrated working at competitive wages.

The Interhab Employment Resource Network, is a network of nearly 30 agencies across Kansas that is working to change employment systems and to make available a variety of employment options for people with disabilities, also supports House Bill 2044.

As we know, employment is an important part of our lives, it increases self-esteem, encourages independence, provides people a sense of belonging, and builds a connection with their communities.

I would respectfully ask this committee to support making this as one of many employment options available to people with disabilities and support House Bill 2044.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Quillen', written in a cursive style.

James Quillen
Vice President/IDD