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Testimony in Support of HB 2701

By Martha K. Gabehart

Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns

Thank you Chairperson Tarwater and members of the committee. I am Martha Gabehart, Executive Director of the Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns (KCDC). I am here providing testimony in support of HB 2701. The Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns makes recommendations for changes to laws, regulations and programs that help Kansans with disabilities be active citizens in their communities.

HB 2701 establishes the Disability Preference in hiring for State of Kansas civil service positions and promotions. If a person with a disability meets the qualifications for both the position they want to apply for and the Disability Preference, they would be given the opportunity to interview for the position. It is patterned off the Veterans Preference, K.S.A. 73-201.

This legislation would make the State of Kansas a model employer for hiring people with disabilities. We would be the 7th state in the nation who has demonstrated its support for hiring people with disabilities for civil service jobs. The other states are Louisiana, Missouri, Utah, Maine, California and Oregon. There are other states working on becoming model employers.

The National Governors Association 2012 Chair's Initiative was employment of people with disabilities. +Governor Jack Markell's report A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities answers the question Why?

- **The Right Thing to Do**—Individuals with disabilities have demonstrated ability and are an untapped resource.
- **The Smart Thing for Government to Do**—Individuals with disabilities are heavily reliant on government benefits. When people with disabilities are employed and living more independently, they are less reliant on government payments and contribute to the economy.
- **Makes Good Business Sense**—Individuals with disabilities are a valuable asset for business. There are business models throughout the United States with proven results.

Additionally, the Disability Preference would support the State of Kansas' Employment First policy which was passed in 2011, K.S.A. 44-1136 et seq. Employment First requires state programs that help people with disabilities find jobs set finding work in competitive integrated settings the first priority. As we work toward total implementation of Employment First, the State of Kansas can demonstrate its commitment to helping people with disabilities find competitive integrated employment by giving them opportunities to interview of positions they are qualified for.

We are asking for a technical amendment to remove a sentence that the Revisor of Statutes inserted that was not in the original draft. On page 1 starting on line 32 and running through to line 1 on page 2,

“In the event that a disabled person meeting the requirements of this act and a veteran meeting the requirements of the veteran's preference established by K.S.A. 73-201, and amendments thereto, apply for the same position, the person having the highest qualifications meeting the performance standards of the position shall receive the primary preference.”

The intention for the Disability Preference is that any person with a disability who meets the qualifications for the job and produces the documentation required to verify their disability would be given an interview just like veterans using the Veterans Preference which allows all veterans meeting the qualifications of the job and veterans preferences to get an interview.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of passage of HB 2701. I am happy to stand for questions.