



LAURA KELLY, Governor • KATHY KECK, Chairperson • SARA HART WEIR, Executive Director

*“To ensure the opportunity to make choices regarding participation in society and quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities”*

## **Kansas House Committee on Commerce, Labor and Economic Development**

**February 9, 2023**

Chairman Tarwater and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities (KCDD), thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of the *Establishing a State Employment Preference for Persons with Disabilities (HB 2253)*, otherwise known as “Kathy’s Bill”. My name is Sara Hart Weir, and I am honored to serve as the Executive Director of KCDD.

KCDD’s mission is to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families to lead systems change, build capacity, and advocate for inclusive, integrated, accessible communities where everyone belongs and thrives. KCDD serves and represents people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families through advocacy, public policy, and education.

Solving the unemployment crisis for our disability community is a key and critical priority of the Council. Kansas has been a recognized leader in crafting legislation with the intention to create more competitive, integrated employment (CIE) for people with disabilities. Under the Brownback Administration, Kansas was the first state in the nation to adopt Employment First legislation through the Employment First Initiative Act in 2011 and amended in 2013 (K.S.A. 44-1136 et seq., as amended). This law established *Employment First* as the official policy of the great State of Kansas with the intent to increase the number of Kansas residents with disabilities who are employed in competitive and integrated settings.

In the spirit of the Employment First law and bipartisanship, former Governor Brownback issued an Executive Order establishing a state employment preference for persons with disabilities. This Executive Order has been reauthorized under both the Governor Colyer and Governor Kelly Administrations.

We must continue to be leaders in Kansas when it comes to opening more doors to employment, in the private and public sector, so that people with disabilities have increased access to CIE.

The key goals of this proposed legislation are simple:

**One**, to codify, or make permanent, the executive order that has been supported by all three of our last Administrations - Governors Brownback, Colyer and Kelly, to continue a state employment preference for persons with disabilities.

**Two**, for the State of Kansas, to not just talk the talk but walk the walk when it comes to doing its part to solve the disability unemployment crisis in our great state. The Council, along with other disability stakeholders believe that the state should serve as a model employer of persons with disabilities and codify the state employment preference for persons with disabilities so adherence to the state’s Employment First legislation can be continued in perpetuity.



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Nationally, and statewide, employment data consistently shows that people with disabilities engaged in CIE at far lower rates than their non-disabled peers. The State of the States in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, currently housed at the University of Kansas, was initiated in 1982 to investigate the determinants of public spending for I/DD services in the United States. Kansas, unfortunately, lags behind the rest of the nation in supporting people with I/DD in supported employment opportunities. In 2019, 123,648 persons with I/DD were participating in supported employment nationally, yet Kansas only accounted for 271 of those participants.

The bottomline, only by earning a real wage can a person truly become self-sufficient and independent. People with disabilities want every opportunity to succeed in the workforce, earn a real and fair wage and be treated like everyone else. This bill is one step in the right direction to ensuring our state maintains an employment hiring preference for people with disabilities. Ultimately with legislative efforts like this, we open up a largely untapped pool of well qualified employees to fill vacant state positions.

The Council is grateful for the opportunity to be part of today’s hearing on the critical legislation which will establish a state employment hiring preference for persons with disabilities.

In short, all Kansans win through the passage of Kathy’s Bill.

Thank you for your consideration of this important bill.

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