

## Written Testimony in Support of KS S.B. 308

Submitted by:

Shanna Groves

Board Member, Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Government has an opportunity to become more disability-inclusive.

SB 308 would require government agencies to provide employment preference to their state-funded employment positions, while giving access to reasonable accommodations essential to making the positions equitable.

Let my workplace experience be an example of why the passing of SB 308 is so necessary.

As a person with hearing loss and a former special education teacher for the state of Kansas, there was no such law to provide employment preference when I began applying for jobs. I was also not made aware of reasonable accommodations when I applied for various teaching positions. After being hired as a teacher, this put an enormous burden on my shoulders to prove that I was capable of performing all the responsibilities of the job, while advocating for access to appropriate workplace accommodations.

According to Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, regulations require that covered federal contractors and subcontractors take proactive steps to recruit and retain workers with disabilities. Since this is a requirement for businesses that work with the government, it is important that state government positions be disability-inclusive to set this example for other businesses.

One of the concerns may be the cost of providing accommodations to employees with disabilities. According to the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), employers participating in the annual JAN survey reported a high percentage (56%) of accommodations cost nothing to implement (\$0), while the rest of the accommodations made had a typical cost of \$500. The \$500 cost has been consistent across the many years of the JAN survey research findings.

Research shows that people with disabilities have higher levels of problem-solving skills, memory and dependability. Harvard Business Review conducted research that revealed adults with various disabilities, such as autism or other types of neurodiversity, may possess higher-than-average abilities in memory, mathematics and pattern recognition. Employees with intellectual disabilities, according to research from the Institute for Corporate Productivity, are rated high for their dependability (89%), engagement (88%), integration with co-workers (87%) and attendance (84%).

SB 308 would allow Kansans with disabilities applying for government positions to have

employment preference because of their disabilities as well as the guarantee that reasonable accommodations are provided to successfully do their jobs.

This is much needed in our state to help our disabled residents, which includes disabled veterans. Our Kansans and veterans deserve nothing less.