

Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas

Promoting Empowerment  
and Independence

2518 Ridge Court #236  
Lawrence, KS 66046  
1-888-354-7225  
785-749-5588  
fax 785-843-3728  
www.sackonline.org

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Madam Chair and Members of the Senate Commerce Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Hal Schultz, and I work for the Self Advocate Coalition of Kansas. I have a disability.

Before I begin, I would also like to thank Senator Kerschen for his participation on the Kansas Employment First Commission, and I appreciate his motivation in authoring this bill. However, I am very concerned about this and any legislation that would weaken the Kansas Employment First Initiative.

The Kansas Employment First Initiative is a promise for a better tomorrow for all people with disabilities. It is a promise of a future where a person with a disability can be more independent, have a greater quality of life, and have a job with a competitive wage in an integrated setting. Unfortunately, that promise is not yet a reality for far too many people with disabilities.

The Kansas Employment First Initiative is a promise for a better tomorrow for the people of Kansas. By making sure that people with disabilities have competitive, integrated jobs, we have the opportunity to turn tax consumers into tax payers. Unfortunately, that promise is not yet a reality for the people of Kansas.

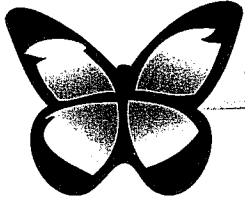
I know that some promises take time to fulfill. I've experienced this all my life, and the Employment First Initiative is no different. This didn't happen overnight. People with developmental disabilities worked for years to get this Initiative in Kansas. Don't give up on it after a single year. We didn't.

I understand Sen. Kershner's frustration with how few jobs- if any- were created for people with disabilities. I share that frustration as well. But that doesn't mean we need to weaken the law. And that is what will happen if we change the language in the original bill.

Let's face it: if a report about the state of Kansas Employment First doesn't *have* to be made, it won't be made. As the report shows, too few State Agencies really made the effort to comply with the spirit of the law, even if they followed the letter of the law.

The original law gives you, the legislature, the authority to make sure that the spirit of the law is upheld by arming you with knowledge- knowledge that *must* be given to you by the language in the original law. I think we can all agree on this: change isn't happening as fast as any of us would like.

That is all the more reason to make sure that the law is followed by all state agencies.



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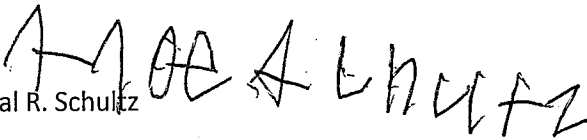
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I understand this is a difficult process. I am used to difficult processes. People with disabilities are used to difficult processes. We deal and live with difficult processes every day of our lives.

We will make this promise to you: we will work with you to make sure that this difficult process is no longer a promise, but a reality. We just need you to make this promise to us, keep the language in the original bill—and hold the State Agencies who only comply with the letter of the law, and not the spirit of the law accountable.

We can still make employment for people with disabilities a reality in Kansas. Please reject this bill and continue to support the language in the original Kansas Employment First Initiative legislation.

Thank you for your time.

  
Hal R. Schultz