

Testimony in Support of House Bill 2550
Social Services Budget Committee

To: Will Carpenter, Chair and Members of the House Social Services Budget Committee

From: Kimberly Wright, Employment Associate, TARC Inc.

Date: February 12, 2020

Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to share with you about what it means to me to have chosen to work providing services to people with Intellectual Disabilities. My name is Kimberly Wright and I am an Employment Associate at TARC Industries/Employment Services in Topeka. I have chosen to work in service for nearly 20 years, most of my adult life. I started my career working as a school para and then began working with adults.

When people ask me why I do this work I find the answers come easy to me. I really like helping people achieve their goals. It's important that people feel like they are worthy and get all the same choices as me. They are part of this community and deserve to feel like they fit in. Helping people learn work skills and helping them at their community jobs is my way of making that happen.

My work is extremely rewarding, but it ISN'T EASY. I help people learn work skills at TARC Industries. I am also a job coach for people on work enclaves and for people who are hired in the community. I must juggle a lot of things during the day. I may spend the morning working with a group learning a new work skill and then spend the afternoon driving people to their community jobs. When I am there, I provide coaching for people while they are working, or help them as they talk with their fellow workers.

I focus on trying to help the people I support learn new skills and helping them with things they cannot do for themselves. Some of those things are really personal, like supporting them as they go to the bathroom or working as an "interpreter" if they have some speech difficulties. My goal is to try to make everything as natural as it can be.

What I am going to tell you now is deeply personal. This isn't easy for me. I love my job. I love making a difference, but it isn't a job that allows me to financially move myself forward. I am 53 years old and have never been able to afford to buy a new home. I must drive older cars so that I can afford the payments and the insurance. I haven't been able to set up retirement accounts to help me in retirement. These are all things that weigh on me every day. I work to help people become part of the community, to get jobs, be successful, but in a way, my choice to do this keeps ME from fully realizing financial stability.

I face a constant battle with myself about getting another job that pays more money or staying and doing what I love. It really shouldn't be a choice. Please support people like me to continue to do what we love and support House Bill 2550. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.