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TO: Julia Lynn, Chair, and Members of the Senate Commerce Committee

FROM: Colin McKenney, CEO, Starkey, Inc. 

RE: SB 26 and Jobs for Persons with Disabilities

Good morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

On behalf of Starkey, Inc., an organization in Wichita that has assisted people with intellectual and developmental disabilities since 1930, **I am providing this testimony in support of Senate Bill 26.**

Like many other providers of disability-support services in Kansas, Starkey provides direct support to individuals who may need a little or a lot of assistance to live successfully in their home communities. Many of the individuals we serve require assistance in their pursuit of employment, and we provide a number of different approaches along those lines. An entry point to employment for many people is our work activity program, which both teaches skills of successful employment, and provides an opportunity to earn a paycheck for those who may not have the ability to work in a competitive and integrated work setting. **We also assist people to seek and maintain competitive employment, and lend assistance as needed to people who may have been working at their jobs for more than 20 years.**

Although you might assume that the most difficult part of helping people with disabilities to succeed in employment is to identify tasks they are able to do well, **sometimes the biggest challenge is getting prospective employers to open up to the idea.** There may be perceptions that hiring someone with a disability will create a burden for the employer or supervisor, or whether it is even worth the time to learn more about this workforce and the support system that helps them be successful. Sometimes we simply cannot overcome those perceptions to open the door to discussion, and so great employment partnerships may never happen.

SB 26 would create one more good reason for employers to learn about the advantages of hiring Kansans with disabilities. With the addition of the tax advantages this bill would create for qualifying job placements, we can clearly demonstrate that working with us to create

employment success stories for individuals with disabilities is a win/win/win for the individual, the employer, and the State of Kansas.

Thank you for your time in consideration of this important legislation. Although I could not attend today's hearing, please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have about Starkey's role in assisting individuals with disabilities to find successful employment.