

**Written Testimony of:**

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Kansas Department for Children and Families

**Testimony on:**

House Bill 2443 – Disability Preference  
March 23, 2021

**Chair Tarwater and Members of the House Commerce Committee, Labor and Economic Development:**

My name is Robert Cooper and I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH). KCDHH is governed by a 17-member Commission, comprised of five ex-officio members representing key state agencies and twelve at-large members appointed by the Governor.

Based in Topeka, KCDHH works with agencies and organizations throughout Kansas to assure availability and coordination of services for people who are deaf and hard of hearing, including communication access. The positions taken and expressed by the Commission do not necessarily represent the views or positions of DCF.

The Commission of KCDHH supports the efforts to create Disability Preference in hiring for State of Kansas state employment positions and promotions. KCDHH believes that all individual job candidates with a disability, who meet the qualifications, should have the same/equal opportunity to be considered for a position or promotion. Disability Preference would give the individual the opportunity to receive an interview for the position.

The ability to receive an interview, is the key ingredient in achieving an equal opportunity for employment. Many qualified job candidates who are deaf or hard of hearing often do not receive an interview because of several possible factors, including 1) personnel office may not be aware of a barrier involved with a simple phone contact, 2) deaf and hard of hearing individuals, as well as many individuals with a disability, are already marginalized from having the ability to land or achieve better and competitive employment on their resume or application, as they often are already limited to opportunities that are available to them, and/or 3) upfront disclosure of a job applicant's disability may be sometimes hampered by unrealized bias. The Disability Preference application would allow these job applicants to bypass those potential barriers and be given an opportunity for an interview, and most important, many hiring supervisors would have the increased chances to recognize and consider these individuals' potentials and competence for available positions.

For many years, KCDHH has observed many deaf and hard of hearing individuals who were able to obtain competitive positions successfully, by receiving the opportunity to interview, yet many of them are not given enough opportunity to interview for other positions they really want and are clearly qualified for. We simply need to broaden these interview opportunities.

The U.S. Federal Government has such mechanisms in place to bring many individuals with disabilities, into Federal positions they are qualified for, which has been the main reason why you are seeing a large Federal workforce of individuals with disabilities. This has not trickled down to the state level across the country, unfortunately. KCDHH believes that this bill, HB 2443, will bring the State of Kansas to the foreground and become a model State employer and open up more opportunities for many individuals with disabilities, including deaf and hard of hearing, enabling these individuals to live more independently and contribute even more to the society as a whole. We are certain that many businesses and organizations would follow our State of Kansas' example and make a difference for many people who struggle to be more productive citizens of our great State.

KCDHH asks you to support this important piece of legislation. Thank you.