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TO: Rep. Brenda Landwehr, Chair, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Colin McKenney, CEO, Starkey, Inc.

RE: Support for HB 2373

Good morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.

I am Colin McKenney, and I serve as the CEO of Starkey, Inc. in Wichita. I am speaking in favor of HB 2373 today, as I believe it would improve the lives of all individuals we serve and our amazing employees as well.

Many members of this committee may remember the testimony that I and other stakeholders of services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities shared during a special hearing last year. Much of what I shared focused on instances when individuals with complex support needs had harmed people around them or caused substantial damage to property. The stories and photos are shocking, and speak to the insufficient resources organizations like ours have available to try and keep people safe and minimize property damage. I am going to assume that others will provide testimony with similar examples today, so I will instead focus on the wider effect that serving individuals who can be violent and destructive has on our entire organization, and how I think HB 2373 would help reduce that impact.

I cannot point to any other service system that is held accountable for serving any and every eligible individual the way our service system is. Whether we are talking about state hospitals, criminal justice, law enforcement, mental health, healthcare or public education, there always seems to be an exception or preference that allows those systems to avoid serving individuals who are particularly challenging, violent, or just not a good fit for available programs. Representatives of those other systems might respond that they do work with individuals who qualify for the services we provide, but when we find ourselves out of answers and resources, all of those other systems get to shrug and walk away. That isn't an option for us. We can request consultation from the state hospital and hope that we will get some help within a few months, but in the meantime we are on our own. The Secretary of KDADS can make the

determination that someone is unsafe to serve in the community, and that has happened a few times through the years, but individual providers like Starkey cannot simply decide to discontinue services when the challenge gets too big or the risks too great.

Because we cannot discontinue services when we feel someone's support needs are beyond our capability means that a small number of individuals consume a disproportionately large amount of the resources we have to offer. We are constantly trying to find new ways to overcome a staffing crisis as we try to find people who have the right personality and skills to be great direct support professionals. Individuals we serve who could benefit from HB 2373 are not good candidates to make due with fewer staff members. If their behavior support plans are not followed to the letter by people who know them well, violence or destruction may very well follow. So, individuals who do not have such critical support needs are more likely to receive less staff support, and pursuit of the goals that are important to them may be the first thing to get put on hold until we can recruit and train additional employees. That reality is not fair in any way, but we constantly find ourselves having to prioritize based on health and safety before personal growth and achievement.

If you only read the first few lines of HB 2373, it may cause you to think that we are talking about a new program to buy a van and hire some experts who will respond to crisis situations as they come up. A "mobile crisis services program" could look like that, but as you make your way through the bill, you start to see some key goals and expectations that go way beyond having a few people respond when things get really bad. Avoiding unnecessary institutionalization and preventing injury to these individuals or others are key goals, but how we get there is so very important. This bill speaks to proactive measures, including assessment, consultation, planning, training and support. Those steps can be implemented before a crisis occurs, which makes much more sense than dispatching a response team only after a bad situation has occurred. It also seeks to close gaps I previously addressed, where other service systems and professionals have backed away in the past. Access to mental health supports **when they are needed** is key to this bill, as well as other professional services that may be vital to helping these individuals succeed.

I have worked in the I/DD service system for more than 20 years, and can no longer count the number of times we have tried to generate interest to improve our system so that we can better meet the needs of individuals who pose a serious risk of harm to themselves or others. The discussion is always enlightening, and the final reports are insightful, but no resources or meaningful next steps ever follow. HB 2373 is a good first step in the right direction to finally break that cycle. It requires specific action steps, and sets the stage to learn more about these individuals so that we can better serve them. If we can do that, it will also benefit everyone else who relies upon community-based services to live successful and inclusive lives.

Thank you once again for your interest in this topic, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at the appropriate time.