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Chairwoman McGinn,

Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to express the Administration's support for SB 444, an important piece of legislation that will help to create work opportunities for Kansas with disabilities.

Throughout the Medicaid stakeholder process this summer, we heard repeatedly that persons with disabilities desperately want opportunities for work. Unfortunately, we also heard from stakeholders and learned through research about the barriers and disincentives for potential employers and persons with disabilities that keep them out of the workforce. Challenges include employer stigma, financial incentives that discourage people from giving up Medicaid benefits, lack of understanding of disabilities by employers, and a federal system that punishes people for going to work.

Study after study demonstrates that persons with disabilities who do work have improved outcomes and reduce costs to the Medicaid system. Both the state Working Health and WORK program have solid records of success for improving the outcomes and lives of Kansans with disabilities. In addition to financial reasons, we have met with many Kansans who have discussed the increased sense of dignity and respect inherent in work.

It is important to remember that there are a range of persons with disabilities, there is a range of services they need, and there is a range of work opportunities appropriate for those Kansans. SB 444 uses several strategies to create employment opportunities through leveraging purchasing dollars the state is already spending. By allowing anyone who has an interest in hiring persons with disabilities to engage in the contracting process and a targeted focus on increasing utilization of Use Law vendors, SB 444 will have positive impacts on employment for persons with disabilities across Kansas.

There are also many disincentives for persons with disabilities to go to work both at the federal and state level. One major disincentive this bill addresses is creating a path for quick return to services or reserving their "spot" on the waiver or waiting list if the work situation is not a good match for the consumer. This important component of the legislation will allow Kansans to make the transition into a job while knowing a safety net remains.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 444 today. I would be happy to stand for any questions.

Mark Dugan
Chief of Staff
Lt. Governor Jeff Colyer, MD

Senate Ways and Means
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