



Memo To: Senate Committee on Commerce

From: Inclusion Connections, a Kansas City based Non-profit

Date: February 16th, 2022

Re: HB2219

Sen. Renee Erickson, Sen. Brenda Dietrich, and Sen. Tom Holland,

My name is Sara Hart Weir and I am the Senior Advisor at Inclusion Connections, a Kansas-based nonprofit with the mission of strengthening the lives of individuals with disabilities by creating inclusive opportunities for community involvement, access to meaningful employment, and better options for supported living. We are pleased to express support for the proposed Kansas House Bill 2219 (HB 2219). This bill will provide tax credits for the employment of individuals with developmental disabilities throughout the state of Kansas.

Founded in 2013, Inclusion Connections' year-round program serves over 343 unique students with disabilities [throughout Johnson County] and offers an impressive array of educational programs designed for individuals with disabilities, including healthy living classes, CreateAbility classes, camps, and workshops for self-advocates, families, and caregivers. The cornerstone of our programming is *employability* which includes our PawsAbilities Program. PawsAbilities is an employment training center that offers career preparation and job placement into meaningful employment in the Kansas City community. Each day, we work to transition our students into competitive careers within our Kansas City community at workplaces like FedEx, Hyvee's Bakery Department, MidAmerica Nazarene University, Panera, and many others.

According to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is twice as high as those without a disability in the US. A majority of those who are left out of the labor market are those with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD). Specifically in Kansas, there are an estimated [20,000 people](#) living with a disability. **In the Kansas City area, [85%](#) of those individuals with IDD are unemployed and living in poverty.**

To meet the need, there are many nonprofit organizations, similar to Inclusion Connections, that facilitate employment opportunities for those with IDD, giving them guidance in pre-employment and job skills, however, that's usually where it stops.

This vital legislation provides employers a new incentive to not only hire - but also retain - skilled labor and talent from the disability community. We are pleased to offer our support for this bill to achieve the goal of offering incentives to employers and open the doors to more

opportunities for the individuals we serve at Inclusion Connections to seek competitive, integrated employment. ***These tax credits will create additional incentives for employers to hire and retain individuals with developmental disabilities, and in turn, employers will gain talented staff members who are ready, willing, and able to work.***

We thank you for your time and look forward to working with you to ensure the passage of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

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