

Senate Ways and Means Committee
Testimony in Favor of HB 2353
April 5, 2017

Chair McGinn and Honorable Committee Members,

I am Natalie Bright appearing on behalf of the Coalition for Opportunity in favor of HB 2353, which proposes to bring clarity to the Kansas State Use Law (SUL). The Coalition for Opportunity is comprised of organizations that participate as vendors in the Kansas SUL program. Kansas has a long history of supporting persons with disabilities through the policy that state agencies, universities and unified school districts purchase products manufactured by blind and disabled Kansas citizens. Through this program, employment opportunities are created for these Kansans that otherwise may not exist. This Kansas State Use Law is set out in K.S.A. 75-3317 et seq.

Currently, our Coalition membership is as follows:

- Business Technology Career Opportunities (BTCO), subsidiary of Center Industries, Inc. www.btcoinc.com
- Envision, www.envisionus.com
- Goodwill Industries Easter Seals of Kansas, Inc., goodwillkansas.easterseals.com
- Kansas Elks Training Center for the Handicapped (KETCH), www.KETCH.org
- OCCK Inc., www.occk.com
- TARC, www.tarcinc.org

Collectively, the SUL vendors employ 100's of blind and disabled Kansans, many who were afforded opportunities to earn a competitive wage, obtain access to health benefits and sustain viable employment because of the opportunities created by the SUL program. In addition, even more blind and disabled persons are helped by the dollars reinvested in the missions of the SUL not-for-profit employers. Nationally, and in Kansas, there is a strong desire to provide competitive employment for all who are blind and disabled.

HB 2353 is the product of suggestions made by the SUL Oversight Committee, a group comprised of stakeholders interested and participating in the SUL program, including House Commerce Committee member Rep. Erin Davis. HB 2353 proposed to insert a definition into the law of what it means to be a person with a disability as well as makes it clear that the SUL employee resides in Kansas. In addition, the bill sets out that SUL vendors must have a mission to serve the blind and disabled.

Some disability advocates expressed concerns with initial language in HB 2353. As such, the House made the following amendments:

- Page 1, Lines 14-17 clarifies the language requiring vendors must have a mission to serve the blind and disabled;
- Page 1, Lines 26-28 referring to 14 (c) certificates are removed as the language is not necessary; and
- Page 2, Lines 3-6 inserts a revised definition of "person with disability" which is used by voc. rehab and commonly accepted as a standard in Kansas.

With adoption of these amendments, HB 2353 will assure the integrity of the Kansas SUL is upheld. Without the Kansas SUL program and the accommodated work environments established by the SUL vendors, limited employment opportunities exist for these blind and disabled Kansan citizens. While we continue to work with our partners to address the high unemployment of the blind and disabled, they are still the population with the highest unemployment rate in Kansas. I urge you join our efforts and support the passage of HB 2353.