



February 8, 2022

TO: Chair Rep. Fred Patton and House Committee on Judiciary

FR: Nick Wood, Associate Director, InterHab

RE: HB 2507

Chair Patton and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2507, which will add “disability” to the crime of denial of civil rights.

When the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law in July 1990, it was envisioned as comprehensive civil rights legislation that would prohibit discrimination and guarantee that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as anyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life.

However, the history of disability rights can unfortunately be characterized as a long sequence of successes and setbacks. Despite some tremendous advances, limitations of laws and regulations, lack of enforcement of the laws, limited funding of programs, and societal prejudices keep many people with disabilities from being fully included in our society. There is still a lot of work to do to make true community integration and recognition of civil rights a reality for all, including those with the most significant disabilities.

Even with strong federal legislation, many individuals with disabilities still face their own lifelong struggles to be included in our communities. The values upheld in the ADA do not always match up with what they face in their daily lives. For them, figuring out how to navigate structural and administrative barriers to full inclusion is a continual source of stress. It can be easy for them to feel unsupported and forgotten about. One important thing this bill will do is assure them that, in Kansas, we support their full and equal participation in society. We want them to know we value them equally.

### **Employment of Workers with Disabilities**

Nationally, the employment rates of people with disabilities are persistently less than half that of their nondisabled peers, and their unemployment rate is more than twice as high. In the spring of 2020, workers with disabilities lost nearly one million jobs nationally, which was a 20-percent decline compared with the 14-percent decline experienced by workers without disabilities. Individuals with disabilities are therefore among those disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

New opportunities for telework and changing work environments can have a huge impact on increasing employment opportunities for workers with disabilities, but it is important that employers understand the rights of workers. This bill will help employers and employees with clearer direction that can serve as a base of understanding for how disability rights should be respected and to inform employment policies and best practices.