



ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES of NORTHWEST KANSAS, INC.

A private, non-profit organization serving individuals with differing abilities since 1967.

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February 12, 2020

TO: Representative Will Carpenter Chair, and Members of the House Social Service Budget Committee

FROM: Jerry Michaud, President/CEO,
Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas, Inc. (DSNWK)

RE: Hearing on HB 2550

Chairman Carpenter and members of the House Social Service Budget Committee,

My name is Jerry Michaud and I am the President of Developmental Services of Northwest Kansas (DSNWK), a non-profit organization serving 550 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) for 50 plus years. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my support of HB 2550, a bill which calls for continuing critical funding adjustments for community services for people with IDD. Services like these are long term services and support (LTSS) for these citizens in Kansas with disabilities. It is vitally important to share the current status of our system. DSNWK and others across our state have been working together for decades in partnership with the state of Kansas to serve people with IDD. Following nearly a decade with static rates, the legislature finally appropriated several rate adjustments which helped our system. We are extremely grateful for these vital first steps of support which started the necessary course correction.

This bill lays out a responsive, stepped approach to further strengthen our community service system which time and circumstances have weakened. In the community service system for people with IDD, workforce is a critically valuable component that requires a closer look.

Community Services Workforce Challenges:

Open Positions: The first aspect of our workforce challenge relates to vacant, or unfilled positions. As we rounded out 2019, this difficult reality meant DSNWK had **25 open positions across the five communities** of Hays, Hill City, Russell, Norton and Hoxie. In this troubling reality there are too few applicants for open positions. This is a constant moving target for organizations like ours all across Kansas.

Turnover: Another critical aspect of our workforce challenge is staff turnover. In the third quarter of 2019, 26 staff left employment where the average tenure of these employees was 3.98 years. The average tenure of the workforce is 9.33 years. **DSNWK's annual turnover**



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rate is **42.57%**, slightly below the troubling 45% national average. In human services, the **cost of turnover is in both human and financial terms**. The loss of a trusted staff member represents a difficult change. Change is hard enough, however, for individuals with disabilities, many do not do well with change like this. **When someone provides support to another person, in the most personal of circumstances, like assisting with toileting and other forms of personal care, the revolving door of turnover takes on much greater gravity**. The financial cost of each position that turns over is in the thousands of dollars for each departing employee. In the years 2008--2017 little could be done to improve wages for our staff and attracting employees into low wage positions made recruitment and retention very difficult. The rate adjustments over the last several sessions have helped, however, we've been behind so much for so long that although thankful to be in the black, we continue recovery from the erosion caused by the extended period without rate adjustments.

Labor Force Supply and Demand: Providing Community IDD services, whether in northwest Kansas or elsewhere, requires qualified staff. The skills required of these staff are in demand today and that demand will only grow. In Kansas, it is estimated by 2026 that 74,000 more direct support professional positions will be needed to meet the demand of serving not only those with IDD/LTSS, but those among us aging who will require similar types of support. At DSNWK, our starting base wage is \$9 per/hour, far from a living wage. The recent rate adjustments have been helpful to us in getting to this new base.

Professionalizing this career path is among the valuable actions needed. Concurrently, **providing a living wage merits not only our attention but also our action. The rates afforded our services are legislatively driven and the basis for our support of HB 2550.**

In Summary:

- ❖ The recent rate adjustments have started the recovery from the damage caused by near decade of erosion. **HB 2550 continues the course-correction efforts to address the critical needs through a common sense, multi-year action plan.** HB 2550 is a practical and stepped approach building upon the positive action started by the Legislature.
- ❖ The annual stepped rate adjustments could each be viewed containing two sub-elements, (Erosion response %) + (COLA response %). The first, shoring up damage from the decade of underfunded rates and 2) the second, stopping the repeating cycle by keeping pace from one year to the next.
- ❖ The community **IDD service system is and has been an economical model for serving our citizens with IDD**, doing so at a fraction of the cost. Legislative action, HB 2550, is needed to continue shoring up that community system so it remains a strong and viable model to make Kansas proud again.