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Subject: 2388 support document (revised)

In Support of House Bill 2388

I can best explain my support for House Bill 2388 by sharing a personal story. I credit the ability I now have to share my knowledge and skills with persons who are faced with severe vision loss to a lifetime of contact with specialists in the field of blindness.

I was born healthy but near-blind because the vision system simply did not develop properly. For reasons I'll never know, my biological parents abandoned me at the hospital, where I lived until I was four years old because no one wanted to adopt a near-blind child.

The people I eventually called Mom and Dad adopted me knowing they had the support and help of the Kansas Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). An SRS social worker referred Dad and Mom to DSB. The Division included rehabilitation teachers, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind (RCB), the Business Enterprise Program (BEP), and Kansas Industries for the Blind (KIB).

Raising me was a team effort. The rehabilitation teacher (RT) came to our home at least annually (usually in the summer when I wasn't in residence at the Kansas State School for the Blind) and taught Mom to teach me things like how to peel potatoes, vacuum and sweep floors, apply lipstick - and more.

When I was in high school, a vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) with expertise in blindness began helping me focus on careers and, when it was time, followed me through college. Finally, VRC's helped me (three different times) to locate employment when life's circumstances demanded that I change jobs. I've worked in vending facilities, as a door-to-door sales person, as a day care provider, as a special education teacher, as a transcriptionist, and for the past 23 years as a rehabilitation specialist with persons who are blind and visually impaired. With a little help from RCB, I have developed the ability to use a computer with a screen reader to prepare professional paperwork and documents such as this one.

Upon graduation from college with a BA degree in speech therapy, I married a young man who was going blind because of a retinal degenerative condition which has led to total blindness. He attended the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind where he received independent living skills training including braille and cane travel, and eventually entered the BEP where he worked for 16 years.

When I took a position in Topeka at RCB, my husband took employment with KIB. When KIB was dissolved, he was, fortunately, placed as a receptionist in an SRS office. He held that position until he was to be laid off. Then he retired.

Because of the continuum of services offered through DSB and the expertise of individuals who understand blindness and the adaptations necessary for blind people to live and work independently, my husband and I have lived 40 years without in-home assistance and have reared two children who now support themselves and their families. Throughout this time, we have been tax payers - not tax receivers. As we needed it, help was available from people who understood our blindness and our needs and directed us in ways that helped us retain our independence and our self-respect.

I developed independent living blindness skills in childhood with the assistance of a rehabilitation teacher for the blind. My husband developed his blindness skills because the blindness specialists in vocational counseling realized he needed to learn to live and function as a person who is blind and directed him to the proper training. When individuals who don't have expertise in blindness (well-meaning as they may be) are asked to help, they may not realize the value of skills such as orientation and mobility, braille, screen readers, and adapted life skills. They may not be aware of a person's potentials for true independence and employment. When my husband entered the program, he had a great deal of useful vision and functioned almost completely as a person with normal eye sight. An untrained counselor might not have realized the importance of his learning the special skills he would need later.

During my career as a rehabilitation specialist, I have seen numerous individuals achieve employment. I have seen some struggle because misguided counselors believed their clients could function with inadequate residual vision. Three people with whom I have worked have moved out of care facilities into less restrictive (thus less expensive to taxpayers) environments. House Bill 2388 will restore the continuum of services and teamwork that brought high quality skills to Kansans who are severely visually impaired and blind and that have made it possible for families like mine to be the productive citizens we

choose to be. For these reasons, I sincerely request that you pass House Bill 2388.

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