

To: House Select Committee on Government Oversight

From: Tom Page, Chairperson, Kansas Advisory Committee on Services for the Blind

RE: Kansas Business Enterprise Program

Greetings Chairperson Williams and committee members,

I write today in my capacity as chairperson of the Kansas Advisory Committee on Services for the Blind. I understand that the select committee on government oversight is spending some time reviewing the Kansas business enterprise program. I am pleased that you are turning your attention to this important program.

Since 1936, Randolph Shepherd programs such as our business enterprise program have generated thousands of jobs for blind entrepreneurs. It is perhaps the greatest jobs program our federal government has ever created as it is done nothing except create jobs for blind citizens. Here in Kansas, DCF and KRS have not been able to adequately manage this program and have done many things to discourage participation in it. At least the last three administrators of the program have been ineffective in growing the program (creating new sites, identifying new vendors, and providing effective training for those vendors).

This lack of attention mirrors problems within services for the blind overall. Some of these problems are perhaps philosophical such as the mistaken notion that a person's amount of residual vision correlates with a person's capability. Some of the problems are structural such as a profound lack of capacity for basic blindness rehabilitation training in our state. Other problems are managerial such as providing real opportunities for meaningful participation by the elected committee of vendors in policy creation and program administration.

Before and during my tenure as chairperson of the advisory committee, the committee has worked diligently to breakdown communication barriers between our committee and the elected vendors committee. This has taken many years of pushing and lately has yielded some small result. Here is a list of goals that I think are appropriate for KRS to consider regarding the business enterprise program.

- Increase active communication and partnership with the elected vendors board.
- Implement steps to increase communication between the various advisory boards.
- Commit to double the number of vending sites in the next two years.
- Create and implement policy phasing "outsourced" or "contracted" vending.
- Consider hiring a blind administrator.
- Educate vocational rehabilitation counselors on the business enterprise program so they can present it as an option to blind clients who are interested in pursuing this sort of entrepreneurship.
- Educate high-end mid-level KRS staff on the regulations surrounding Randolph Shepherd.

These are a few things that I think could grow this viable program. The many years of neglect that the Business Enterprise Program and services for the Blind in general have suffered also suggest that perhaps a separate agency such as a commission for the blind might do a better job of administering and delivering these services to blind Kansans.

Thank you for your attention to this matter please reach out if I can be of service, Tom Page  
Chairperson, Kansas Advisory Committee on Services to the Blind

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