

Testimony on SB16-077 to Colorado's Senate Finance Committee

February 16, 2016

by Bob Lawhead, CEO, Community Link

Thank you for this opportunity to testify Chairman Neville and Senate Finance Committee members. My name is Bob Lawhead. I can speak to the positive aspects of SB16-077 both as a professional in the field as well as a father of a nineteen year old who has Down syndrome. My son Jess wants to make money and make connections through work. He plans to get an apartment and be on his own with support from his family, but needs existing state services to focus on employment if he is to be successful. He will need assistance with finding a job, learning job duties and keeping a job. He will rely on a number of state agencies to have employment success including CDE, CDLE, and HCPF, all of which play a role in him becoming a successful employee.

As a professional I know Colorado can do this because we were very successful in providing employment opportunities for people like my son in the 1990's. In those days Colorado was among the leading states in the nation when more than 50% of all people served were served in community employment settings¹. Unfortunately, Colorado lost its way while our state system tackled other issues related to disability services. Presently community employment is available to somewhere around 25% of Coloradoans with intellectual and developmental disabilities². Over a twenty year period we went from *50% down to 25% of people served in community employment settings*. Had we continued to build on our accomplishments of the 90's Colorado should now be closer to 80% as presently experienced by Washington State³.

The Employment First bill will have the involved state departments coordinate and collaborate in their efforts to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities through expansion of the Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program Core State Advisory Group⁴. They will work to reduce present barriers to employment for people with disabilities by using common definitions, research-based, best-practice employment techniques, employer outreach and targeted funding reallocation on community employment services, instead of "day-wasting programs" that do not provide people with marketable skills.

When public policy makers decide to focus on community employment, their disability-related tax dollar goes further and has a higher return on investment than non-employment services according to recent

¹ Winsor, J., Butterworth, J. & Hall, A. (2005). Innovations in employment supports: Colorado's Division of Developmental Services. Accessed February 15, 2016 at: https://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=160

² Craig, M. (2016). Report to Colorado DIDD Employment Work Session, January 14, 2016.

³ Braddock, D., Hemp, R., Rizzolo, M., Tanis, E., Haffer, L. & Wu, J. (2015). The State of the states in intellectual and developmental disabilities: Emerging from the great recession. Boulder: University of Colorado.

⁴ U. S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (2015). ODEP's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program: Executive summary. Accessed February 15, 2016 at: <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/EFSLMPOverview.pdf>

research⁵. Not only is getting people working cost-beneficial, it also gets people out of potentially illegal segregation, which presently characterizes the majority of services provided to Coloradans with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This action is also *financially* beneficial in the context of recent embarrassing and costly Department of Justice settlement agreements in states identified as having an over-reliance on segregated settings^{6,7}. Presently over 50% of Coloradans served in our two adult Medicaid Waiver programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are served in segregated settings⁸.

Just like other Coloradan families, my wife Anastasia and I want our children to be happy, healthy and as self-sufficient as possible. We want Jess to have a job resulting in expanded economic opportunity and new friendships. We hope Jess will contribute back to society by becoming a taxpayer instead of only a tax user. Please support the dream of thousands of Coloradans with disabilities: *a real job for real pay*, by having our state systems focus on employment opportunity for people with disabilities.

Respectfully submitted,

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⁵ Cimera, R. (2014). Is supported employment a good investment for taxpayers? Accessed February 15, 2016 at: <http://thecpsd.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Is-Supported-Employment-a-Good-Investment-for-Taxpayers.pdf>

⁶ U.S. Department of Justice (2014). Department of Justice reaches landmark Americans with Disabilities Act settlement agreement with Rhode Island. Accessed February 15, 2016 at: <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/departments-justice-reaches-landmark-americans-disabilities-act-settlement-agreement-rhode>

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice (2015). Justice Department reaches proposed ADA settlement agreement on Oregon's developmental disabilities system. Accessed February 15, 2016 at: <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-reaches-proposed-ada-settlement-agreement-oregons-developmental>

⁸ Colorado Department of Human Services, Division for Developmental Disabilities (2014). HCBS Waiver Enrollment and Expenditures for Day and Employment Services. Attachment to email communication between Michele Craig and Bob Lawhead, June 10, 2014 in response to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy's Employment Resource Rebalancing Initiative.