

BOB BETHELL JOINT COMMITTEE

ON

HCBS & KANCARE OVERSIGHT

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Lou Ann Kibbee, Systems Advocacy Manager

Thank you Chairperson Landwehr and committee members for allowing me to present my testimony to you today. My name is Lou Ann Kibbee and I am the Systems Advocacy Manager for Southeast KS Independent Living (SKIL) Resource Center. SKIL is a Center for Independent Living that advocates for the rights of, and provides services to, thousands of people of all ages with all types of disabilities annually across the State of Kansas. We fight for justice and equality with and for them, to have the same opportunities as other people do. Opportunities to live in our homes, receive the supports and services needed, receive an equal education leading to a productive and fulfilling vocation, develop relationships and families as desired, get involved in our communities, and partake in recreation and hobbies as we choose. We are driven by a philosophy of consumer choice, in that we have the freedom to make decisions and choices about our lives, as well as having the dignity of risk.

The pandemic has negatively affected Kansans with disabilities in so many ways. The lack of technology devices and access to internet service impacts their lives more than we ever thought possible. Because most have compromised health conditions, leaving their homes for any reason is exceptionally fearful and dangerous. Since COVID-19 began bearing down on our communities, telehealth has continuously been promoted as the healthcare solution. Telehealth is very useful during this time, but only if individuals have access to the tools needed to connect through telehealth. Given that many individuals with disabilities and seniors have ongoing health issues that need monitoring, they are prime candidates for using telehealth. Unfortunately, most of them do not have the resources to obtain the technology devices and internet necessary to use telehealth. Other ways that we have heard these devices would be important for individuals is to:

- Order groceries, paper goods, cleaning supplies, etc. online
- Attend religious services and communities
- Classes—formal and informal
- Socialization with family and friends
- Exercise and healthy eating videos
- Peer support groups and services
- COVID education and updates

SKIL has been surveying our customers whether they have devices and/or internet and if they currently do not but could have them, would you use it toward telehealth and other activities to prevent social isolation. **After surveying 389 customers thus far, 178 would use telehealth or other activities to prevent social isolation if they had a device and/or internet service.** SKIL asks that you find a way to fill this critical void for Kansans with disabilities and seniors who are interested.

The COVID pandemic has emphasized the need for individuals with disabilities and seniors to live in the community rather than a congregate setting. **As of the data reported by KDHE on September 23rd, forty-nine percent (304) of total deaths (620) resulting from COVID occurred in Kansas long term care facilities.** According to KDADS data, there are more individuals in these facilities being referred to transition out and back to their own home in the community. Yet not all of the individuals referred are being transitioned out by the MCOS. Action needs to be taken for these individuals to be able to transition quicker, especially given the occurrence of COVID positives and deaths occurring in these facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our recommendations to this committee which are critical to Kansans with disabilities during this pandemic.



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