

On behalf of Envision, inc., we ask for your support of Envision's request for \$600,000 for FY25 In the Kansas Department of Aging and Disabilities Budget.

Envision's mission has primarily focused on two core outcomes a) providing BVI individuals with prosperous employment through our manufacturing and fulfillment contracts with the federal government and b) providing service and programs that help BVI individuals maintain independence with increased life skills and work skills and improve their quality of life.

Unemployment for Blind and Visually Impaired nationally is 70%... we are changing that number in Kansas!

- These funds would provide operations assistance in 2 programs focused on Rehabilitation, Workforce Preparation, Training and Placement Services offered by Envision serving the needs of the Blind and Visually Impaired (BVI)
- **In recent years, accumulating pressures from changes in federal purchasing, along with non-profit giving trends have impacted Envision's funding mechanisms... at the same time the demand for services are increasing.**
- Our current deficit for these 2 programs is \$1.2M. These funds will assist in continuing the services we currently provide, hoping to stretch the funds to serve/assist as many as possible without getting further behind.

The more non-working BVI adults we help to become working BVI adults, the better health for the individual and better health for the KS economy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Envision operates a Vision Rehabilitation Clinic and Workforce Innovation Center across Kansas, providing crucial support for individuals who are blind or visually impaired (BVI), regardless of their ability to pay. With over 300 people waiting 2-3 months for services and demand increasing by approximately 20% since 2021, Envision is committed to collaborating with KDADS and DCF to meet the rising needs of BVI citizens of Kansas.

- The Envision Vision Rehabilitation Services Center (EVRC) offers Assistive Technology Devices and Training, Orientation & Mobility Training, Rehabilitation Training, and Job Preparation, Placement, and Coaching.
- The Envision Workforce Innovation Center (WIC) focuses on helping BVI individuals pursue careers, including in emerging fields like cybersecurity and previously inaccessible sectors such as culinary arts.

Envision is proud that, despite fiscal challenges, they have maintained their commitment to their BVI workforce with no layoffs, including continuous 401K contributions of 12% and covering increases in healthcare premiums for 5 years in a row. Envision is not a 14c employer, prioritizing fair wages and equitable treatment for all employees. Envision is committed to another 90+ years of prosperity for their workforce, who devote their careers to supporting Envision's mission. A workforce that reflects those they help with over 52% of their 500+ employees thriving with blindness or visual impairments.

Please contact Julie Hein, 785-845-3869 or Holli Schletzbaum 316-461-2698 with any questions.



Public Comments of **Envision, Inc.** to the House Social Service Budget Committee
Kansas Department for Aging and Disability Services | February 15, 2024

Chairman Mason and esteemed members of the House Social Service Budget Committee:

On behalf of Envision Inc., a dedicated non-profit with a 90-year legacy in Kansas, I am honored to present our testimony. Our organization proudly operates a Vision Rehabilitation Clinic and a Workforce Innovation Center. These initiatives, among other programs we operate, are crucial, offering a lifeline of support, skills development, and workforce readiness for individuals who are blind or visually impaired (BVI). Our mission is clear: to empower BVI individuals towards independence and enhance their quality of life through meaningful employment and targeted support services.

Our mission has primarily focused on two core outcomes a) providing BVI individuals with prosperous employment through our manufacturing and fulfillment contracts with the federal government and b) providing service and programs that help BVI individuals maintain independence and improve their quality of life.

Envision's success is built on a foundation of altruistic business principles, strong management, and robust financial health. We are proud that, despite fiscal challenges, we have maintained our commitment to our BVI workforce with no layoffs, including continuous 401K contributions of 12% and covering increases in healthcare premiums for 5 years in a row. We are committed to another 90+ years of prosperity for our workforce who devote their careers to supporting our mission. A workforce that reflects those we help with over 52% of our 500+ employees thriving with blindness or visual impairments.

It is a point of pride for the Envision board that for 87 of those years, our efforts were self-funded through contract performance and community support. However, in recent years, accumulating pressures from federal budget discourse along with non-profit giving trends have impacted Envision's funding mechanisms. We seek the state's partnership to further our mission-critical rehabilitation services and workforce innovation center.

This partnership will allow us to address the growing demand for our rehabilitation services—currently facing a three-month backlog impacting approximately 300 lives across the entire state—and to sustain our workforce innovation programs that close the digital skills gap and provide integrated competitive employment training for BVI individuals. We encourage the committee to consider an annual allocation of \$600,000 (1/2 of our annual deficit) over the next three years.

The urgency for our programs is underscored by the growing number of Americans, particularly Kansans, experiencing significant vision loss leading to unemployment. This trend is aggravated by the challenges of rural healthcare and economic barriers, which our state uniquely faces. Envision Inc. has been at the forefront, providing prosperous employment through federal contracts and delivering essential services that foster independence among the BVI population. These programs help BVI individuals keep, find, and gain independence and employment.

Three years ago, the state's support enabled the remodeling of our Adult Day Support facility, significantly enhancing the lives of 36 BVI adults with intellectual disabilities by providing them with



employment, confidence, and valuable work experience. Additionally, last year's partnership bolstered our early childhood development center, assisting 53 children in taking their first inclusive steps alongside peers with similar visual impairments. These initiatives are prime examples of the impactful return on investment Envision and the state can achieve together.

As Kansas strides towards a sustainable future that embraces all its citizens, including those with visual impairments, the partnership between Envision Inc. and the state is uniquely aligned and together, we can continue to transform lives, providing the BVI community with the tools and opportunities they need to thrive independently and prosperously.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing commitment to the health and well-being of all Kansans.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Monteferrante
President & CEO
Envision Inc.
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About Envision: Envision promotes advocacy and independence for those who are blind or have low vision. Founded in 1933, Envision is one of the largest employers of individuals with vision loss in the nation. Headquartered in Wichita, Kan., Envision's mission is to improve the quality of life and provide inspiration and opportunity for people who are blind or visually impaired through employment, outreach, rehabilitation, education and research. **For more information, visit www.envisionus.com.**

Background:

In 2010, Kansas closed the Kansas Vocational Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired, which previously operated with an annual budget of approximately \$1 million in taxpayer dollars. Envision Vision Rehabilitation Clinic now fills the void left by the closure, providing vital vocational rehabilitation services to Kansans.

Services Provided:

Envision Vision Rehabilitation Clinic: Offers comprehensive vocational rehabilitation services previously provided by the state-run center, ensuring individuals receive the support needed to enter or re-enter the workforce.

Envision Workforce Innovation Center: Delivers workforce training programs and services aimed at fostering integrated competitive employment for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. This includes innovative programs targeting emerging fields like cybersecurity and previously inaccessible job sectors such as culinary arts.

Financial Challenges:

Despite the critical nature of its services, both the clinic and the center operate at a deficit of \$1.2 million. This is driven by federal budget discourse affecting our manufacturing and fulfillment funding mechanisms.

Impact (Image 1):

Envision serves the entire state of Kansas, ensuring that individuals with blindness or visual impairment have access to essential resources and support.

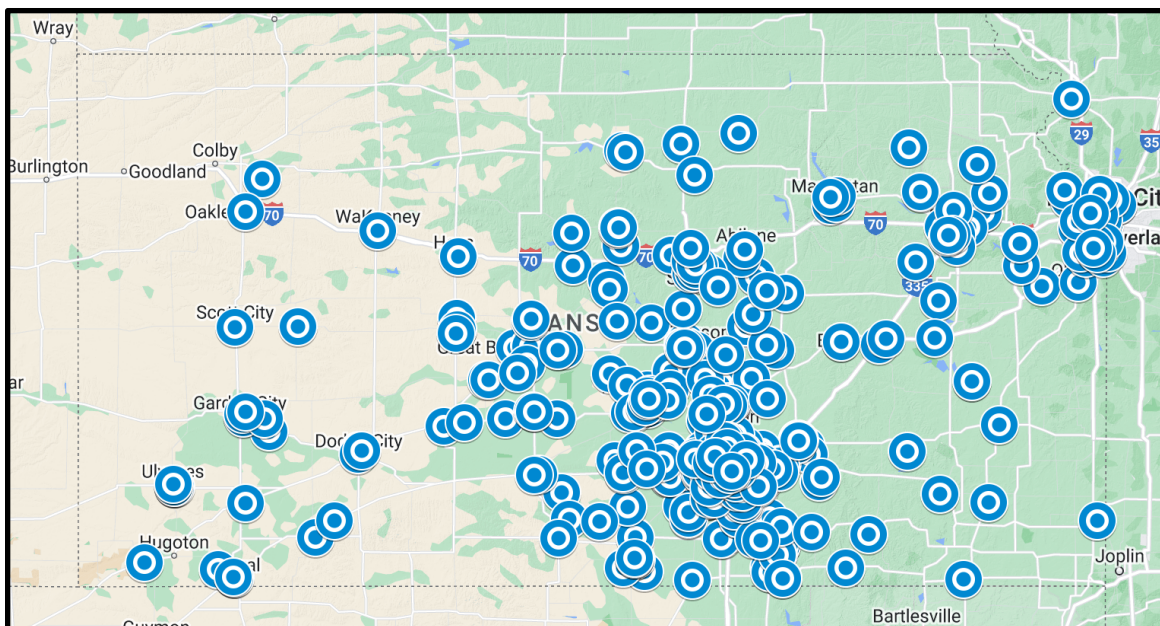


Image 1

Relevant Statistics (Chart 1):

The CDC reports a growing increase in the number of adults with blindness or visual impairment participating in the workforce.

Alarming, 70% of blind or visually impaired individuals are unemployed, highlighting the urgent need for organizations like Envision.

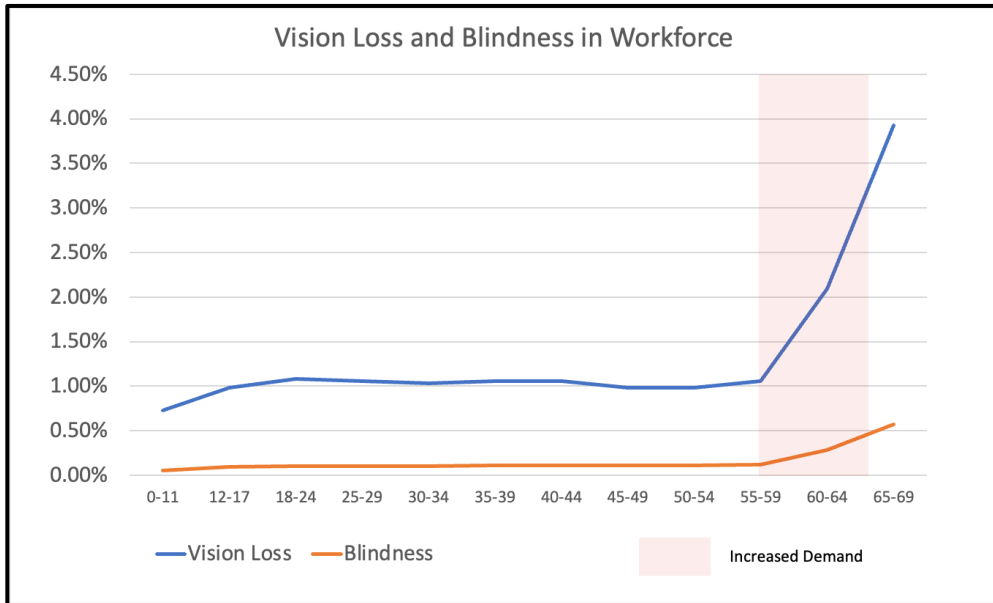


Chart 1

Dedicated Workforce (Chart 2):

52% of Envision's employees are blind or visually impaired, reflecting the organization's commitment to inclusivity and providing meaningful employment opportunities.

Commitment to Fair Employment Practices:

Envision is not a 14c employer, prioritizing fair wages and equitable treatment for all employees.

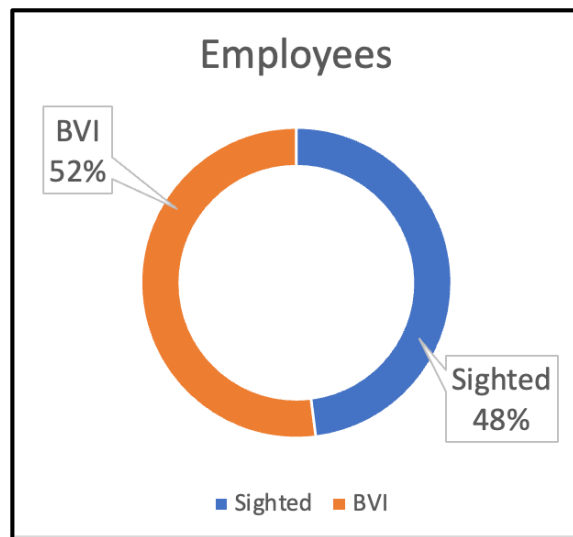


Chart 2

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