KANSAS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

COPY

Mark Parkinson, Governor

www.governor.ks.gov

February 2, 2010

Secretary Don Jordan
Department of SRS

Secretary Jim Garner
Department of Labor

Secretary Bill Thornton
Department of Commerce

Secretary Debra Miller
Department of Transportation

Secretary Roderick Bremby
Department of Health and Environment

Director Andrew Allison
Kansas Health Policy Authority

Director Martha Gabehart
Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns

President Steve Weatherford
Kansas Housing Resource Corp.

Commissioner Diane DeBacker
Department of Education

President Reginald Robinson
Kansas Board of Regents

Re: Employment Opportunities for Kansans with Disabilities

Over this past year we have kept a very close watch on the unemployment rate for all Kansas citizens. Through economic development and recovery initiatives, we're working toward improving employment opportunities – and the prosperity that comes through work – for our State. I know that you, as I do, recognize the complexity and importance of these issues.

The unemployment rate for Kansans with disabilities presents an even more complex challenge. Generally accepted national estimates place the unemployment rate for people with disabilities of working age at 60 to 70%, the highest unemployment rate of all minority populations. This high unemployment rate is systemic and is too often accepted as an inevitable outcome of living with a physical, mental or emotional disability.

Both today and in the future as the economy begins to recover, people with disabilities represent a significant labor pool of potential workers who can contribute their talents and skills to the workforce needs and economic development of the State.

Therefore, I believe the time is right for the State of Kansas to begin studying our existing systems of service delivery for persons with disabilities. Among the topics for further exploration are: supporting a culture that emphasizes the value of employment as the critical path out of poverty for people with disabilities; creating an expectation of employment for people with disabilities, just as employment is an expectation for all working-age adults; and

Capitol Building, Room 212S, Topeka, KS 66612-1590 • (785) 296-3232 • Fax: (785) 296-7973
e-mail: governor@ks.gov

reviewing whether the goals and policies of various programs support a consistent focus on competitive, integrated employment as the optimal outcome of the services we provide.

We have an opportunity to begin this dialogue in conjunction with an Employment First Conference that is being planned for April 15 and 16 at the Capitol Plaza in Topeka. The conference will include people with disabilities and their families, education professionals, state agencies and community service providers.

This will be an opportune time to begin a dialogue with stakeholders on these issues. I have asked SRS Secretary Don Jordan and his staff to coordinate a Stakeholder Meeting at this conference to listen to the views and experiences of the participants. Secretary Jordan will be providing additional information as the plans are finalized. If you are not able to attend the Stakeholder Meeting, please appoint a high-level designee to represent your agency. Following the Stakeholder Meeting, there will also be an opportunity for you as Cabinet Secretaries, Directors and Education Commissioner to meet and begin planning a coordinated strategy for Kansas to increase integrated employment with competitive wages and benefits for Kansans with disabilities.

I appreciate your support to begin this dialogue and your commitment to improving employment opportunities for Kansans with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Mark Parkinson
Governor of the State of Kansas