

HEARING HMS--GM 735

My name is Deborah Kobayakawa and I am submitting my testimony for consideration and confirmation to the State Rehabilitation Council representing the Parent Training Information Center for Hawaii. I feel I am qualified because of my broad range of both professional and personal experiences working with children and adults with disabilities.

I deeply desire to become a member of the council because I see the disability population as having so much to offer employers. They're a valuable yet underutilized work force that most employers never consider and many do not even know their potential exists.

If appointed to the State Rehabilitation Council I will collaborate with other agencies that support the disability community such as the Department of Health, Developmental Disabilities Division, Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Education to identify some of the obstacles and challenges that are preventing employment outcomes from improving in our state.

I have extensive experience working with the professionals in the field of disabilities to include state run and non-profit agencies. I possess effective communication skills and am very passionate about removing the barriers that are impacting employment outcomes in the disability community statewide here in Hawaii.

In addition, I am the proud mother of a young man with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, (ID/DD), who was job ready upon exiting public high school. He received DVR services and job training while he was in high school. He was hired in 2010 and is still an employed, productive, taxpaying member of our community.

I believe this is a huge accomplishment, as this is not typical for the ID/DD population. He is in fact the exception and not the rule. The numbers for employment in this population are so low that it breaks my heart.

Because of this very personal experience, I understand that it takes a carefully laid out plan often with multiple agency involvement. I truly understand the parent perspective of how overwhelming navigating the various systems of care can be for families.

Given the opportunity, I will bring to the council my professional experience, my own personal journey and that of the many parents of whom I've worked with. I want to assist the State Rehabilitation Council in developing and reviewing state goals and priorities to the VR Program. I'm committed to being part of improving the VR agency's performance and overall employment outcomes to the disability community statewide.

I strongly believe that everyone deserves the right to be a productive, contributory, taxpaying member of their community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

PERSONAL TESTIMONY HEARING HMS--GM 735

I'm from a hard working blue-collar family where you work for everything you have and you don't expect anything to be given to you. We were raised with the work ethic that there is no job that you are too good for. I worked hard to pass these same values and ethics on to my own two sons, both of whom have disabilities. They both got their first jobs at the age of 15 years old, through supports they received from the public school system. I am proud to say they have both always worked since those very first jobs. It is because of those strong work values and the work ethics that I was raised with that I have a deep desire to serve on the State Rehabilitation Council.

My younger son will be 27 years old on the 12th of this month. Having some type of paid job, even though it started out being on a very part-time basis, for the past twelve (12) years is something he is very proud of. He thinks he is **the** best courtesy clerk that works his Safeway store. Whether he is or not doesn't matter, it's that he **thinks** he is that does. He often likes to say to me when talking on the phone, "I gotta go Mom, I'm a hard working man I have to get to work". There was a time I never dreamed I'd hear those words.

I will never forget the day I watched him out my kitchen window as walked down our street in his Safeway uniform to his first day of work. He walked taller and prouder that day and still does whenever he puts on that uniform. At work he is just like everyone else in that store, no more, no less. He feels important, valued and smart because he works. And of course every payday he is also "rich"!

Up until a few weeks ago my son needed what is called a Direct Support Worker (DSW) to assist him in the work place. Then a few Sundays ago he called me and said "Mom, I don't need my DSW anymore, I can do it by myself now." I knew then we'd finally made it. After a year and a half of job training with DVR and DOE supports, then another seven (7) years of actual employment with a DSW he has finally been able to reach the goal of working independently. It doesn't matter how long it took him to here, what matters is that he made it. All the hard work from all of the agencies and support services has finally paid off.

He is where he needs to be and it's sustainable. He should be able to maintain this level of independence for the rest of his working career.

Over my many years of work experience both in public education and in non-profit, I have seen that many people with disabilities who have the ability and desire to be employed in fact never end up so. Many of the participants that I see at my son's Adult Day Health Program approach me to express their desire to become employed because they know I'm "Ian's Mom" and their friend Ian has a job. Some have even asked me, "Aunty can you help me get a job like Ian?"

I see many of these individuals in settings such as Toastmasters, Developmental Disability Day at the Capitol, and Special Olympics to name a few. Many of them demonstrate a skill set that indicates they are employable, but for them the barriers and/or challenges appear too great.

These individuals just want a chance to do what most of us take for granted; they want a job so they can earn their own money. They want to be independent and feel valued. They just want a chance to show they too can contribute.

In closing, whether I am appointed to the State Rehabilitation Council or not I hope that you will remember some of my personal story that I've shared with you today in the weeks and months ahead in the work that you do. Anything that you can do to help this part of our local community to be productive and contributory citizens would truly make a positive difference for all of us in Hawaii.

Mahalo for your time today.