

Black Hills Works



September 21, 2012

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to support the continuation of Rapid City's Disability Consideration Policy. I commend the Council for their support of this initiative a year ago. It is not only good policy for people in our community who have disabilities, but it is good policy for our entire community. For way too long there have been discriminations, both intentional and unintentional, of people with disabilities throughout America. The Americans With Disabilities Act has gone a long way to help support people with disabilities receiving equal access to places and services that people without disabilities enjoy. A lot of progress has been made that we should be proud of in helping people be as independent as possible. One of the areas where a huge discrepancy still exists though is with employment. Nationally, unemployment for people with disabilities runs about 70%, far greater than that of the general population. What we know is that still too often people with disabilities are not afforded an equal chance to compete for jobs. In our community, that is almost 100% because of employers unintentionally not having a full appreciation of the talents and qualities that people with disabilities have. Last year I heard some concerns from Council members that they were concerned about this creating an unfair playing field for people with disabilities and perhaps even create a reverse discrimination situation. I would respond by saying that it is going to take a whole lot more than just this consideration policy to create anything close to an unfair playing field for people with disabilities.

We have found many instances where a person with a disability that we support had to have some extra advocacy done for them to get a chance to perform a job. When the opportunity was extended to them, they proved to be valuable employees and team members for the business hiring them.

The City's ADA policy is a great first step in creating equal access to things, but it is only a first step to being a welcoming community for all citizens. Being a welcoming community should mean more than just doing the minimum of having an ADA policy. Things like the Disability Consideration Policy can make doing the right thing easy for hiring managers. Who doesn't want making good decisions made easier for them? Where accommodations are needed for the person to do the job, there are funding streams available to help get those done. However, the vast majority of accommodations needed cost very little.

Hiring people with disabilities has been proven to be good business for the companies that have had welcoming practices for all people. There are studies that show that by putting people with disabilities to work who are receiving public assistance is a smart decision. By reducing or eliminating the need for people to receive entitlements and putting them in a position of paying taxes, our government is better off.

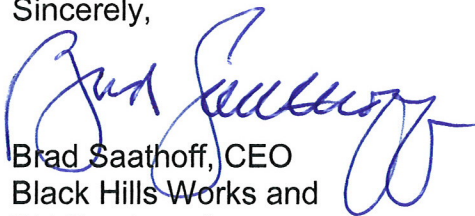
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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER / EQUAL HOUSING OPPORTUNITY

For example, a study done that shows the benefits to the government for just custodial workers who are working on jobs like the ones we helped people obtain at Ellsworth Air Force Base, made a positive contribution to the government of \$6,523 per year per worker. A national survey on consumer attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities showed that 92% of the American public view companies that hire people with disabilities more favorably than those that do not. A good workforce is one that mirrors the makeup of the customers it serves. It makes good sense for the city to have a workforce that includes people with disabilities that appropriately represents that makeup of our community. We really do not have a healthy economy unless we have a values-based economy as well where we value everyone who wants to and can work to actually find work and be successful.

We have a very special community in Rapid City and having in place a good policy helps us ensure that we are doing all we can do to see everyone be successful and feel welcome here. Please vote to continue the practice of affording people with disabilities consideration for City employment opportunities.

Sincerely,



Brad Saathoff, CEO
Black Hills Works and
BH Services, Inc.