



March 22, 2023

Erin Melton, Food Security Policy Advisor
Kansas Action for Children
Opponent Testimony on HB 2141
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Chairperson Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to HB 2141. Kansas Action for Children is a non-profit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. KAC works to shape state and federal policies that improve health, education, and financial outcomes for young children and the adults who care for them.

KAC opposes HB 2141, which would harm Kansas kids by making it harder for both their parents to make ends meet. The bill would restrict access to the food assistance program, our first line of defense against hunger and one of the most effective anti-poverty programs in the country. Food assistance provides grocery benefits to Kansas families living on low incomes to help ensure children and their parents have enough to eat while they work to get back on their feet. Right now in Kansas, one in ten people and one in seven children are going hungry.¹ HB 2141 would not lead to more financial support for these children. Instead, it would counterproductively punish low-income non-custodial parents for falling on hard times by taking food off of their tables.

The Department for Children and Families (DCF) estimates that **69 percent of the families eligible for child support already receive regular payments.**² The remaining minority of families have decided it is in their children's best interest not to pursue child support through formal channels.

Some may have informal support arrangements because the non-custodial parent cannot make regular payments but provides larger payments of periodic financial support or in-kind support. This legislation would disrupt those arrangements and could discourage custodial and non-custodial parents alike from applying for food assistance in the first place, even though their families need temporary support to help pay for groceries.

¹ Feeding America. (2020). *Food Insecurity among Child (<18 Years) Population in Kansas*.
<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/child/kansas>

² Kansas Division of the Budget. (2023). *Fiscal Note for HB 2141*.

http://kslegislature.org/li/b2023_24/measures/documents/fisc_note_hb2141_00_0000.pdf

In addition to requiring cooperation with child support, the bill would disqualify non-custodial parents who already are cooperating with child support from food assistance for missing or only partially paying child support, or in which they owe any arrearages. The bill, as amended, would require DCF to check for this payment delinquency at application and at the 12-month certification point, but it does not specify how much someone can be behind on payments, or how many payments they can have missed, before being disqualified. **Regardless of the specifics of implementation, the bill still would punish already-struggling parents by making it harder for them to eat – and therefore less capable of financially supporting their children.**

Some non-custodial parents are also custodial parents to other children currently living in their household. Disqualifying them means that their household's grocery budget must be stretched even further. Moreover, if they experience temporary financial instability due to their car breaking down, a child getting sick, or their work hours getting cut through no fault of their own, it could lead to simply not having enough to make all of their payments that month. **Adding to this hardship by taking away the benefits that help them feed their families will make it less likely that they can get back on top of making all of their household payments.**

Only three states currently have laws requiring non-custodial parental cooperation with child support for food assistance eligibility, and that is largely because of the immense administrative and financial cost for the communication between the child support payment system and the food assistance eligibility system that would be required by this legislation. This bill would waste taxpayer dollars only to make it less likely that the children in Kansas receive the support they need from their parents. **For all of these reasons, we urge the committee to oppose HB 2141.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please contact me at erin@kac.org.