



United Community Services of Johnson County

Written-Only Testimony in Opposition to House Bill 2141

Julie Brewer, Executive Director of United Community Services of Johnson County

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Executive Director

Julie K. Brewer

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Chair Gossage and Members of the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify **in opposition of HB 2141**. United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS) is a nonprofit agency that provides data analysis, leads collaborative planning, and mobilizes resources to enhance the availability and delivery of health and human services in Johnson County and the surrounding region. UCS is committed to building a community where all people have the opportunity to achieve their individual potential. We believe in the importance of supporting policies, programs and services that are invested in the success of our community's most vital resource - its people.

According to the U.S. Census American Community Survey, in 2021, 36,492 people in Johnson County were living below the poverty line. The 2021 Federal Poverty Level for a family of three was \$21,960, or \$1,830 per month. **Nearly 15%, or 90,341 residents, of Johnson County residents were living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level in 2021.** For a family of three, 200% of the Federal Poverty level was \$43,920, or \$3,360 per month.

Proposed HB 2141 would add the requirement that *noncustodial* parents comply with child support enforcement programs and would disqualify such parents for food assistance for being delinquent in payment of child support; **UCS opposes HB 2141 which increases barriers to accessing critical food assistance for food insecure families in Kansas. In Kansas, one in seven children are currently experiencing food insecurity.**

The food assistance program in Kansas is funded through 100% federal dollars with most participating households accessing the benefit for less than one year. Average benefit amount is only \$217 per person, per month. Increasing barriers to accessing critical food assistance for low-income families will exacerbate food insecurity and family instability. A 2022 University of Kansas study found that a **5% increase in enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) could result in a 7.6% to 14.3% reduction in the number of children placed in foster care—reducing overall state budget expenditures. Conversely, implementing this modification would be fiscally irresponsible,** with an estimated \$1,000,000 cost in reprogramming computer systems, as well as the cost of an additional 16 full time employees to implement this change to withhold food support to a food insecure household.

High inflation and other costs in 2022 demonstrated the fragility of many working families across Kansas who have become increasingly cost burdened in their housing, healthcare, and nutritious food for their families. **UCS opposes HB 2141 which increases barriers for low-income families accessing federal food assistance.**

* jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2794169