

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2141

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I have served for the past 43 years as a legal advocate for low income Kansans, the last 14 as the Executive Director of Kanas Legal Services, Inc. I am now retired. In that role, I have been keenly aware of the role that federally funded benefits, including SNAP, can have on the resilience of low income families. Children who eat meals do better in school. Families that have food can focus on meeting other needs of the household. We should also remember that the Food Stamp program was strongly supported by Republican leaders in Congress, including Senator Bob Dole. This was because the two beneficiaries of higher food consumption are low income families and farmers. This program provides a resource that can only be spent on one thing, the commodities that farmers provide.

One group of people that I believe should be considered strongly as the committee considers this bill are parents who have recently been allowed to take their children out of foster care. These are families who have struggled to meet a list of court ordered actions, and have succeeded. They are again providing a home for their children, at considerably less expense to the State than foster care. They may be relying on Food Stamps, in addition to their wages, to provide food for those children. But, they are likely to be among those families who lose some SNAP benefits under this proposed bill. While children are in foster care, the Court puts them under an order to pay child support to the state. This support is calculated using the same methods as child support is calculated for divorced or never married families. This child support continues to be due, unless fully paid, when the children are returned to the parent's home. The adults in these families, who we want to prioritize providing a stable household for their children, medical care, and nutritious meals, would be excluded from participation in the SNAP program because of this bill. They owe the child support to the State of Kansas. They may not be able to meet a court ordered payment plan for support and provide for the needs of their children. But, unless they do, they receive less SNAP benefits. For many, this may be a cost benefit analysis. Do they pay the \$100 per month due on a typical child support payment plan in order to gain \$ 79 (\$237average monthly benefit in Kansas/3people in the household) monthly SNAP benefits? I want these families struggling to keep children from returning to foster care to have both. I want them to be able to put off their child support debt until they are more financially stable and have the SNAP benefits available to feed the entire family.

This bill would only impact very low income workers. Because it holds SNAP benefits as the carrot for child support compliance, it only affects those who would be eligible for SNAP benefits. Roughly calculated, those are people who work full time at \$8.50 an hour or less. Low wage workers are the only ones effected by this will, as they are the only households eligible for SNAP benefits. Higher income workers would not be eligible for SNAP benefits and, therefore, would not face any penalty included in this bill.

I have further calculated that the Kansas Child Support Guidelines would require payment of about \$245 a month in child support. That calculates to 17% of the income of this worker, making \$8.50 an hour for full time work. After payment of child support and tax deductions, this worker would have \$1,060 a month to meet all their needs, \$12,720 a year for rent, utilities, transportation payments and food needs beyond the \$ 79 in monthly SNAP benefits.

The committee should also pay attention to the fiscal note on this item. The original fiscal note was \$1 million to modify the computer systems and \$1 in annual costs for personnel. This cost would be reduced by the amendments made in the bill. However, no new fiscal information is available. The committee would be acting without