

Proponent Testimony on SB 542
Senate Ways & Means
Tuesday, March 19, 2024

Chairman Billinger and Honorable Members of the Committee,

KDADS wishes to express strong support for SB 542, which proposes \$40 million in one-time funding for building or capital improvements to congregate or non-congregate shelters that provide services for homeless individuals, families, and persons at risk of homelessness. As a state agency responsible for the care and treatment of homeless individuals with disabilities, we believe this bill represents a crucial step towards addressing the pressing issue of homelessness in our community. The language proposed in this bill is nearly identical to the Governor's budget recommendation to include \$40 million to provide grants to assist local governments in responding to and preventing housing insecurity in their communities.

Homelessness is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach. While shelters play a vital role in providing immediate relief and support to those experiencing homelessness, it is essential to recognize that addressing homelessness goes beyond simply providing temporary shelter. It requires investing in infrastructure development across the entire housing service continuum, including prevention, outreach, supportive housing, and permanent housing solutions.

While we commend the proposed funding for shelters outlined in SB 542, we urge the committee to consider broadening the scope of the bill to include infrastructure development for all parts of the housing service continuum. By doing so, we can ensure that individuals and families experiencing homelessness receive the comprehensive support they need to transition out of homelessness permanently.

Recommendations for the Committee:

Expand Funding Eligibility: Amend SB 542 to allow funding for infrastructure development not only for shelters but also for other critical components of the housing service continuum, such as transitional housing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing initiatives.

Prioritize Permanent Solutions: Allocate a portion of the funds towards initiatives that focus on permanent housing solutions, such as affordable housing developments, to address the root causes of homelessness and provide long-term stability for individuals and families.

Promote Collaboration: Encourage collaboration between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and community stakeholders to ensure that funding is allocated strategically and effectively across the housing service continuum.

Emphasize Priority Populations: Prioritize funding for projects that serve marginalized and vulnerable populations, including individuals with disability experiencing chronic homelessness, veterans, and families of children with SED waiver eligibility.

Monitor and Evaluate Impact: Implement mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of funded projects to ensure accountability and effectiveness in addressing homelessness in our community.

We urge the committee to support SB 542 and consider the recommendations outlined above to ensure that funding is allocated equitably and strategically across the housing service continuum. By investing in infrastructure development for all parts of the continuum, we can make significant strides towards ending homelessness and building a more inclusive and compassionate community for Kansans with disabilities.

Although KDADS is supportive of SB 542, we ask the committee and the legislature to reconsider the deletion of the Governor's line item in the budget that accomplishes the same outcome. Approving the aforementioned budget enhancement ensures that these funds can be distributed in a timelier manner.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Respectfully,

Andrew Brown

Deputy Secretary of Programs, Kansas Department for Aging & Disability Services