



February 3, 2017

Brian Walker
President & CEO
Kansas Food Bank
1919 E Douglas, Wichita KS 67211
Testimony for SB 95

Dear Chair Schmidt and members of the Committee:

Thank you for letting me speak in support of Senate Bill 95. My name is Brian Walker and I am the President and CEO of the Kansas Food Bank in Wichita.

There are three food banks serving the hungry and food insecure in Kansas. The Kansas Food Bank covers 85 counties - the entire central, western and southeast part of our state. Harvesters in Kansas City and Second Harvest, based in St. Joe, MO cover the northeast area. Our food banks provide food to charitable organizations providing emergency food assistance to people in need—from church food pantries to senior housing complexes to homeless shelters. Together we provide a meal or groceries to over 136,000 Kansans every month. Collectively we have distributed over 27 million meals this past year to help feed our hungry neighbors.

Our network of charitable organizations and the thousands of volunteers they rely on, work tirelessly to ensure our hungry neighbors have the food they need to live a productive life. But there is still a huge need for nutrition assistance through government programs such as SNAP.

The charitable sector cannot do this alone. In fact, the charitable sector currently provides about 6% of the food assistance provided in this country. Barriers that decrease access to SNAP increase the number of people coming to our network for help, and our safety net is already stretched thin. More than two-thirds of our member agencies are faith-based or located in a religious organization. More than half have no full-time staff and 39% have difficulty finding volunteers. And the volunteers they do have are aging. Nearly half (43%) of our network's volunteers are over 60. To maintain the strength of our safety net so that it is available to help the food insecure families, children and seniors who are not eligible for federal nutrition programs, we need to make sure that those who are eligible for SNAP and other benefits are receiving them.

Timing is so important when it comes to the SNAP program. By the time we receive a call or ask for help applying for food stamps, the client is often at the end of their rope.

Senate Public Health and Welfare

Date 2 7 17

Attachment 1-1

A mother who only has green beans in her cabinet and ketchup in her fridge has no way to provide a meal for her children. A senior with diabetes, who has only rice and pasta in her pantry, will not ward off the disease without nutritional supports

By the time they come to us, they are desperate for help. But from their initial call to a community partner for application assistance to final approval (or denial), the process can take upwards of 35-45 days.

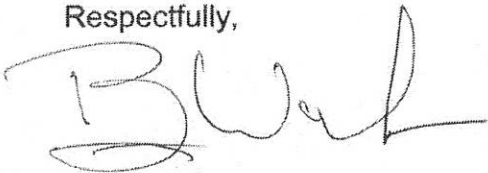
Allowing community partners to utilize telephonic signatures would certainly push the application forward. As it stands now, we assist with the application process via phone conversations with interested applicants. We then mail the hand printed application to the client for their signature. They in turn sign the application, attach the necessary documentation and mail it to DCF. This can take as long as 5 to 10 days, depending on where the client lives and where the closest DCF office is. Once the application reaches DCF, the department has a 30-day turnaround for approval or denial of the application.

Expediting the process with telephonic signature will get the application to DCF immediately. It will save time, which in turn relates to fewer missed meals for food insecure households. Imagine not having any money to buy food. You call for help only to realize that it could be a month or longer before that assistance is available. That is the reality for SNAP in our state. And, yes, benefits are retroactive to when the application was received by DCF, but the lag time in mailing applications for signature digs the meal gap even deeper.

Electronic voice signature would save time and money for the food banks, which provide a pre-paid envelope for the applicants (cost per application is over \$4.00). It would also save staff time for DCF, which would not have to type handwritten applications into their electronic system. They would receive electronic applications and supporting documentation that have received a quality control check and are ready for review immediately.

We need your support to help provide an avenue to the governmental programs such as SNAP for qualified individuals. As a community partner, we are willing to do our part to lessen the meal gap that exists. We need your support to help us connect people to benefits in a timely and efficient manner. Your support of Senate Bill 95 will help us do that. Thank you for your support. If I can answer any questions or clarify our participation with SNAP outreach and assistance, I would be happy to visit with you.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B Walker', with a large, stylized initial 'B' and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Brian Walker
President & CEO
316-265-3663
bwalker@kansasfoodbank.org