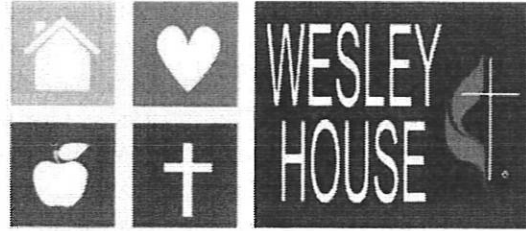


February 3, 2017

Marcee Binder
Executive Director & Pastor
Wesley House
411 E 12th
Pittsburg, KS 66762
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 Marcee Bender and I am the Executive Director and Pastor of Wesley House in Pittsburg.

Wesley House is an outreach mission of Pittsburg First United Methodist. It was established in 1982 to address the needs of low-income families in the area. The ministry has grown and evolved throughout the years, but the primary purpose remains the same- to help those who are struggling in Crawford County to live less stressful lives. Our goals are to reduce food insecurity and eliminate homelessness in Crawford County.

Wesley House's two primary programs are the food pantry and daytime homeless shelter. The food pantry is the largest food pantry in Crawford County serving over 12,000 duplicated clients in 2016. Clients can access the food pantry once a month. Individuals must be at or below 185% of the federal poverty guideline. We secure all this information into a database. Within this program is a Family Stability Action Program that works with clients who have utilized the food pantry six months in a consecutive year. Family Stability Action Program works to provide job skills, employment opportunities, budgeting, life skills, healthy eating/lifestyle skills and other tools that would help families become more stable in their lives. This project is in partnership with the Crawford County Health Department.

The daytime homeless shelter is funded through the Federal Emergency Solutions Grant. The goal of this program is to identify barriers to stable housing and work with the homeless case manager in removing those barriers. This program offers our homeless neighbors a safe climate controlled environment so that they can work on provided computers to search for employment and housing opportunities. Our homeless neighbors meet with our homeless case manager once a month to establish and work on goals to move them into stable housing. While at Wesley House, they can take showers, utilize our laundry facilities and enjoy a hot breakfast and lunch. Part of the daytime homeless shelter is the Identification Support Program which helps individuals who do not have proper identification to secure their proper documents so that they can become employed and housed. That project is funded through the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas.

The Hope act is important to Wesley House because it would assist us in providing services for our most vulnerable individuals more efficiently. The ability to assist our people with their SNAP applications with telephonic signature would be highly valued at Wesley House. Let me give you an example. Last June, we had a 78-year-old homeless man named Jerry show up at

Senate Public Health and Welfare

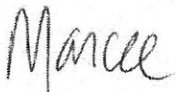
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Attachment 6

Wesley House. He was in horrible medical condition suffering from diabetes, malnutrition and dehydration. He also did not have teeth so understanding him was very difficult. Jerry did not have the ability to write and had impaired vision due to high blood sugar. He did not have income or proper medical insurance. Our first meeting, we could not even figure out his name because of his impaired speech. My homeless case manager worked with Jerry for hours to help with his lack of services. Every time that she had to fill out government documents, Jerry had to be in the office with her. She was unable to mail the documents because he was homeless, he could not read and had impaired vision. Jerry's ability to receive services was based solely on the ability of the case manager. There were times that he was too sick to be able to do this so the process was severely delayed. He finally started receiving services in December. It took Wesley House over six months to figure out how to navigate a very tedious system while Jerry tried to survive on the streets with only the food that Wesley House could provide him. I am proud to say that with a lot of hard work, Jerry is housed, receives SSI and SNAP. There was absolutely no way that Jerry would have been able to fill out the 28-page application by himself or mail it to the proper place or even get to the local DCF office in Pittsburg. The SNAP process could have been sped up if my homeless case manager would have been able to assist Jerry with telephonic application signature.

In response to the ABAWD waiver, Wesley House strongly recommends that the control is given back to the Secretary of the Division of Children and Families during difficult economic times. Far too many times, our homeless clients can receive SNAP benefits for the three month period. After that, they are back to square one. They cannot function properly in society when they cannot get daily food or take care of basic hygiene and transportation. Able bodied does not mean able minded. There also has to be a certain skill set when hired for a job and that is lacking for my homeless clients. Many of them are illiterate and cannot follow simple directions but are not intellectually disabled enough to receive disability. So during extremely bad economic times, if a person has already received three months of SNAP, they are out of luck period. For example, I have a 43-year-old homeless man named James. James has been homeless for over three years. It started with a divorce and loss of job because of drugs. Throughout his homelessness, James has had to steal, eat out of dumpsters and trade personal belongings just for food. The last three years have taken a tremendous toll on his body. In the last six months, he has been having continuous stroke-like symptoms. Because he does not receive consistent medical care, he cannot apply for disability. So, he remains unable to receive housing due to lack of income and food. We all need food to survive. Food is not a luxury item. The resources in small town America are limited for James and others like him. No one should ever be reduced to having to eat from a dumpster.

Thank you for your consideration. If I can answer any further questions please feel free to reach out to me at wesleyhousepastor@yahoo.com or 620-232-3760.



Marcee Binder
Wesley House