

Rebekah Gaston
Childhood Hunger Initiative Director
Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
Before the Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare
In Support of Senate Bill 95



February 7, 2017

Chair Schmidt and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 95. As a nonprofit, nonpartisan anti-poverty organization, Kansas Appleseed is committed to advocating for policies that protect vulnerable and excluded Kansans. A significant portion of our advocacy work focuses on ensuring every child in Kansas has a safe, secure childhood and a hopeful future, including consistent access to sufficient amounts of nutritionally adequate foods. The provisions of Senate Bill 95 will enhance children's and families' access to food and other necessities.

Food assistance helps provide the fuel children need to succeed in school and have a chance at a better future. Unfortunately, a significant number of individuals who qualify for benefits do not receive them; in 2014, only 74% of qualifying Kansans received food assistance benefits. Eligible Kansans struggle to obtain their food assistance benefits for a number of reasons, including confusion and frustration about completing application requirements, a lack of knowledge about the program, and embarrassment about needing help from the government to provide for their families.

Senate Bill 95 seeks to reduce the confusion surrounding the food assistance application process by allowing the submission of applicants' voice signatures to the Department for Children and Families, a change which will enable third parties to assist with online applications. Under the current system, when individuals call Kansas Appleseed's advocates for help with the food assistance application, our advocates complete a written application form while the applicant is on the telephone, then we mail the application form to the applicant so they can add their signature. The applicant must then mail the completed and signed application form to the local DCF office for DCF staff to review for approval before benefits can be disbursed.

With the option of collecting a recorded voice signature, third parties like Kansas Appleseed could complete an application online and submit it to DCF immediately. This improved process would save several days of mailing time – as it often takes at least a week for an application form's two-stop trip from our office to the applicants' home and from the applicant's home to the DCF office – and would allow struggling families to receive food assistance benefits much sooner. The voice signature option would also create cost savings for DCF, as each 28-page application uses a significant number of printed pages.

Senate Bill 95 also provides the secretary for children and families with the option to request a waiver of the 20-hour-per-week work requirement for a group of individuals receiving food assistance who are labeled "able-bodied adults without dependents" (ABAWDS); the

Senate Public Health and Welfare

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Date 2.7.17

Attachment 20-1

language of SB 95 would allow the secretary to request a waiver only during severe economic downturns like the Great Recession when jobs are extremely scarce. Without a waiver, these ABAWDS may only receive food assistance for three months during any 3-year period. Despite the label of “without dependents,” many of these individuals are non-custodial parents (some of whom still have their children in their homes several days a week). Also included as ABAWDS are young adults who have just aged out of foster care, many of whom need additional support as they try to become self-sufficient.

Senate Bill 95 helps strengthen the safety net, to ensure that struggling families who need assistance have the support they need to climb out of poverty. Kansas Appleseed respectfully asks that you support SB 95.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rebekah Gaston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent than the last.

Rebekah Gaston
Director, Childhood Hunger Initiative
Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice