

February 21, 2020

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Chair Suellentrop, Vice Chair Berger, Ranking Member Bollier and members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Catholic Charities Wichita. Our ministries work to alleviate poverty and build stronger families throughout all 25 counties served by the Diocese of Wichita. Our services provide emergency shelter for victims of domestic violence, families experiencing homelessness, food for the hungry, services for veterans and immigrants, and care for adults with disabilities and seniors. Preserving the dignity of all clients is an integral part of our services and we strive to maintain ministries and facilities to serve our clients with excellence.

Catholic Charities supports the request of returning to the Secretary of the Department for Children and Families, the authority to request federal waivers for work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) in times or areas of high unemployment and/or insufficient job availability.

More than 370,000 Kansans are food insecure (12.7% of the population), which means they don't necessarily know where their next meal is coming from. During times of unforeseen crisis these numbers can increase, if proper measures are not in place to alleviate the needs of Kansans. The weight of the burden is left to pantries to try and assist those in need who are in crisis.

One of our ministries is Our Daily Bread Food Pantry, a program that provides groceries in a client centered choice format to those in need. We provide a dignified and respectful experience with a commitment to the improvement of health and nutritional wellbeing.

Our Daily Bread serves more than 10,000 individuals which supports over 4,000 families annually. The success of our program is reflected in the partnerships we have within our community, the support DCF provides to those that qualify for food assistance, and our ability as a whole to mitigate crises. Without adequate resources from DCF, we believe we would be unable to serve our clients if high unemployment lasted for an extended period of time.

We believe that if the Secretary holds the authority to issue federal waivers, our ability to address the needs of our community during times of unforeseen economic situations, will be improved and the needs of struggling families will be met in a more timely manner.

Our impact under the proposed bill would improve client services and ensure that we could continue providing people with assistance rather than having to turn families away due to depletion of food resources. We see individuals and families at their most vulnerable, and being able to provide them a service when they otherwise would have nothing, would not only help them get back to stability, but help in preserving their dignity.

The access to food is a basic human right. It is our belief that giving the federal waiver authority back to the Secretary of the Department for Children and Families would help support relieving food insecurity for individuals and families in their time of need and help Kansans lead healthy, productive lives.