

DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



2/22/2021

TESTIMONY OF

Elizabeth Cohn, Director of Child Support Services
Kansas Department for Children and Families

TESTIMONY ON

HB 2371

Chair

Concannon

Vice Chair

Esau

Ranking Member

Ousley

and

Members of the Committee

SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

House Bill 2371 proposes changes to the statutes that regulate child support services, food assistance, and child care assistance. The bill would remove mandatory cooperation for child support services for individuals receiving food assistance and child care assistance. Additionally, it would exempt those enrolled in postsecondary education from the work requirement to receive child care assistance and would remove the lifetime limit for how many months those individuals can receive child care assistance.

DCF supports HB 2371. During these uncertain economic times it is more important than ever that Kansas citizens are able to access economic assistance programs.

CONTEXT & HISTORY

DCF administers the Kansas' Child Support Services program. This program assists families, helping them receive financial support by establishing parentage and orders for child support, locating noncustodial parents, enforcing child support orders, and modifying support orders as appropriate. These services are available to all Kansans who apply, regardless of income.

Currently, statute requires that any family receiving assistance from certain programs, including food and child care assistance, cooperate with child support services in order to be eligible to receive benefits. This can present a barrier to some families that need the support the child care and food assistance programs offer. Some of the most vulnerable individuals in our communities, single mothers or victims of domestic violence for instance, may not feel comfortable pursuing assistance through these programs because they know they would have to participate in child support services and potentially come into contact with the individual that traumatized or perpetrated abuse against them.

Removing the requirement to cooperate with child support services would increase access to both food assistance and child care assistance at a time when many families are struggling. These programs are an investment in the future of Kansas. Investing in families with young children through child care and food assistance helps to prepare children to enter school ready to learn, to be successful in school, and to graduate from high school ready for the job market. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, “the food stamp program has effects decades after initial exposure. Specifically, access to food stamps in childhood leads to a significant reduction in the incidence of “metabolic syndrome” ...and, for women, an increase in economic self-sufficiency. Overall... results suggest substantial internal and external benefits of the safety net that have not previously been quantified.”¹

Likewise, the changes HB 2371 proposes to childcare assistance eligibility would increase access to the program and be an investment in the future of the state. Postsecondary students are working to better their and their families' life trajectory through education. Some of these students, single mothers for example, can't pursue this education without child care and can't pay for child care without the state's assistance. Forcing these students to meet the work requirement on top of school and parenting while also limiting their time on assistance makes it more difficult for these students to continue their educations and build a better life for their families. Removing these barriers would allow these students to continue their education more easily, enhancing their family's economic opportunity in the long term and decreasing the likelihood of system dependence.

¹ <https://www.nber.org/papers/w18535>

EFFECT OF LEGISLATION

House Bill 2371 proposes removing the child support cooperation requirements for food and child care assistance. A review of historical data found on average 2,500 food assistance cases per month are not receiving benefits due to noncooperation with child support services. Were HB 2371 to be enacted, these cases would be eligible for food assistance benefits. Food assistance benefits are 100% federally funded and are passed through the agency directly to the beneficiaries.

This bill also proposes changes related to the minimum hours of work required and restrictions for parents obtaining post-secondary education. It would allow child care assistance to be available for those attending postsecondary education, even if they are not meeting the 20 hours per week work requirement. This is in line with other exceptions to the 20 hour work requirement such as exceptions for those enrolled in DCF's employment services programs or teenagers working to obtain their high school diploma or GED. HB 2371 also proposes removing the cap on the number of months postsecondary students can receive child care assistance. They are currently limited to 24 month lifetime maximum.

The number of child care assistance cases denied or closed due to noncooperation with child support services is minimal. However, due to the proposed postsecondary work requirement exemption, DCF projects increases in the number of post-secondary child care assistance cases by an average of 130 cases per month for FY 22 and 370 cases per month in FY 23. Like with food assistance, the majority of child care assistance is federally funded.

As a technical note, paragraph (k) discusses assignment of child support and DCF would ask the committee consider striking the paragraph for consistency and clarity.

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

DCF projects that, if enacted, House Bill 2371 will increase the child care and food assistance caseloads in the coming years. As mentioned above, the benefits for this increased caseload would be covered through federal funds.

However, additional positions will be needed at DCF to handle this increased caseload. DCF projects 15 FTEs will be required. This will cost \$863,027 AF, \$388,276 SGF in FY 22 and \$853,501 AF, \$383,990 SGF in FY 23.

The bill also proposes changes to several eligibility requirements which may require IT system changes. DCF cannot estimate the exact cost of such changes but included an estimate of \$1 million AF in the fiscal note for impact purposes. This would be a one-time cost in FY 22 and is projected to cost \$435,540 SGF after other funding sources and the federal match are considered.

DCF POSITION

DCF stands in support of House Bill 2371. HB 2371 would increase access to vital assistance programs for some of the state's most vulnerable families during a time of great need. Kansas should invest in these families now by removing these barriers and allowing those that really need this assistance to more easily access these programs.