



TESTIMONY OF HALEY KOTTLER
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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND SENIORS
IN SUPPORT OF HB 2371
FEBRUARY 22, 2021

Members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors:

My name is Haley Kottler; I am a Campaign Director for Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive, and just communities.

Kansas Appleseed supports HB 2371. Ending the requirement of cooperation with child support from eligibility requirements for food and child care assistance, and exempting adults enrolled in school from the 20-hour-per-week work requirement will likely result in more cooperation with child support and will improve the lives of children caught in the midst of custody arrangements.

At first glance, the provision requiring cooperation with child support for benefit eligibility may seem noble in its intent. But in reality, conditioning benefits like SNAP and Child Care Assistance on child support cooperation actually exacerbates the inevitable tension faced by low-income parents between a manageable burden and being able to provide enough income support for the child's well-being.¹ This means that the noble goal of trying to ensure children are receiving enough financial support is actually counterproductive when low-income noncustodial parents are cut off from the stabilizing supports that would otherwise allow them to have better access to better paying jobs necessary for adequate support.

There are many reasons why noncustodial parents pay (or do not pay) the formal child support that they owe, but for parents with limited economic resources, numerous studies show the primary factor in paying what is formally owed is the ability to pay.² Removing a low-income parent from eligibility for food assistance or child care assistance only serves to hamper that parent's potential ability to pay any child support. This means that this policy is harming both the parent and the child.

¹ Cancian, M. "Reforming Policy for Single- Parent Families to Reduce Child Poverty." RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences. 2018. <https://www.rsfjournal.org/content/rsfjss/4/2/91.full.pdf>

² Hodges, L. "Too Much, Too Little, or Just Right? Recent Changes to State Child Support Guidelines for Low-Income Noncustodial Parents." Journal of Policy Practice and Research. 2020. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s42972-020-00016-9>

More than 25% of children in the United State have a parent living outside their household.³ Of children with a non custodial parent, 37% live in poverty.⁴ SNAP benefits are an essential part of increasing a family's overall budget. Reducing this budget puts children at increased risk of food insecurity and inadequate nutrition, and at greater risk of suffering long term consequences to their educational achievement and health.⁵ Research demonstrates that greater access to SNAP results in reduction in hunger, improved dietary intake, reduced obesity, improved academic performance, improved mental health, improved economic self-sufficiency, improved local economies, improved job growth, and reduction of poverty.⁶ SNAP generated an estimated \$631 million in economic activity in Kansas while also saving or creating an estimated 8,500 jobs in just the last 12 months.⁷

Tying safety-net support eligibility to child support compliance supports neither the parent nor the child. Both are harmed by this policy. HB 2371 seeks to fix this problem. For this reason, Kansas Appleseed supports HB 2371.

³ Grall, T. "Custodial Mothers and Fathers and Their Child Support" U.S. Census Bureau. 2018.

⁴ Id.

⁵ Llobrera, J. "Child Support Cooperation Requirements in SNAP Are Unproven, Costly, and Put Families at Risk." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2020. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/child-support-cooperation-requirements-in-snap-are-unproven-costly-and-put>

⁶ Grafton, H. "The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being." Food Research & Action Center. 2017. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf>

⁷ Analysis by Kansas Appleseed using SNAP numbers from DCF and job & multiplier numbers from the US Department of Agriculture for February 2020 - January 2021.