



February 19, 2021

House Children and Seniors Committee

Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing addressing House Bill 2371. I am writing as a proponent of this bill and the positive impact it will have on Kansas children and families. I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association. The Kansas Head Start Association holds the vision of "Kansas leads the nation in early childhood learning for the success of every family". Access to adequate food and quality childcare are necessary to achieve this vision.

HB 2371 addresses restrictions in access to federal resource; Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Child Care Subsidy program.

The purpose of the SNAP program is to assure that children and families are able to access adequate nutrition which is vital for the healthy growth and development of children. An income eligibility driven program, SNAP focuses on low-income households. SNAP helps fill the gap between the cost of quality food and a low-income household budget. Children do not perform well in school or early learning settings when they arrive hungry and do not receive adequate nutrition at home.

The current Kansas requirement of cooperating with Child Support Enforcement to access SNAP benefits is a deterrent for parents raising children on their own. Fears related to an abusive absent parent can keep potentially eligible families from participating in this important resource. Children should not be hungry because their caretakers are afraid to access a service that will provide quality food for the household.

Head Start programs have worked help families access adequate food during the pandemic. As COVID persists, Kansas families whose income has been impacted could be helped by the SNAP program. Concerns about an absent parent could restrict access to a helpful program when families are experiencing lower income due to reduced hours at work or a job loss due to the pandemic.

HB 2371 will address several harmful restrictions to the very positive Child Care Subsidy program.

Child Care Subsidy, funded through the Child Care Development Fund, provides child care services at no or low cost for families where the caretaker is employed, a student, receiving TANF or in Foster Care.

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Similar to SNAP, Child Care Subsidy in Kansas requires cooperation with Child Support Enforcement. While the involvement of an absent parent in a child's life is generally thought to be positive, when the absent parent is abusive the danger to the child or custodial parent outweighs the benefit. An absent parent involved in negative behaviors may expose a child to traumatic situations creating Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs are well known to not only harm a child at the moment but also well into adulthood. Public policy should not put children in harms' way.

Removing the current work requirements for parents who are adult students enrolled in public or private elementary or secondary school or postsecondary education from work requirements increases the opportunity of completing their education or training. Obtaining a high school diploma or advanced training increases the potential earning ability of a parent. Increased earning potential can decrease the need for subsidy supports over time.

Likewise, removing all requirements imposed on adults pursuing postsecondary education for childcare assistance, most notably the 24-month lifetime limit and the restrictions on both caregivers participating in school will increase the chances the parents will be able to complete their education. Advanced education increases potential earning power and improves the financial stability of Kansas families. Reducing poverty among Kansas families increases the development, learning and life outcomes for Kansas children.

Head Start and the Kansas Head Start Association work with families to improve the lives of children and families experiencing poverty. The provisions of HB 2371 align with our goals through the Parent Family Community Engagement Framework of economic stability and well-being for families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding BH 2371. As Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association, I am happy to be a resource to the Committee on this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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