

January 31, 2022

Honorable Chairwoman Concannon and members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for HB 2525, which would remove some of the most onerous provisions of state law that constrain the options and compromise the futures of low-income families. As a social worker, I have had the privilege of working with many parents—especially mothers—struggling to leave poverty and build a more promising tomorrow for their children. I have worked even more closely with organizations that help these families cope with the holes in the public safety net. Many of these families, and all these organizations, have been strained by the pandemic, which has devastated low-wage jobs, upended essential institutional supports, and exacerbated housing insecurity. Enacting HB 2525 would remove some of the obstacles people face trying to access essential nutrition and childcare supports—and send an invaluable message that the state is on the side of those trying to improve their children’s well-being. Over the long term, food assistance and childcare support position children for upward mobility and greater well-being. Specifically, children who receive needed food assistance have better health, complete more education, and are less likely to require income support as adults¹, while an abundance of rigorous research has demonstrated the positive effects on quality childcare on children’s educational attainment, socioemotional development, and lifelong earnings². These are outcomes we need in Kansas—today and for our future. Toward these ends, two provisions of HB 2525 are particularly imperative:

1. Section 11 removes the requirement to cooperate with child support, to qualify for food assistance. Current law forces custodial parents dealing with adversarial ex-partners and those trying to navigate contentious arrangements, to choose between the food assistance they need and their child’s emotional best interests.
2. Another provision exempts adult students enrolled in education from the work requirements for childcare subsidy. We know that completing postsecondary education is the surest route to long-term economic mobility.³ In Kansas, 23% of all undergraduates are parenting.⁴ I have gotten to know many of these hard-working, multitasking (mostly) moms. If these parents complete degrees, they’ll contribute more than \$78,000 more in lifetime taxes than if they only had a high school degree.⁵ However, even when they have regular, affordable childcare, the challenges of succeeding in postsecondary programs while tending to children’s needs are daunting. When childcare is unavailable or unaffordable, degree completion often becomes impossible.

Even if HB 2525 passes, the lives of low-income families will not be easy, especially as the state continues to grapple with pandemic-related uncertainty and economic upheaval—the

¹ Bailey, M.J. et al. (2020). "[Is the Social Safety Net a Long-Term Investment? Large-Scale Evidence from the Food Stamps Program](#)," *NBER Working Papers* 26942, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc.

² See, among many others, Bakken, L., Brown, N., & Downing, B. (2017) Early Childhood Education: The Long-Term Benefits, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 31:2, 255-26; McCoy, D. C., et al. (2017). Impacts of Early Childhood Education on Medium- and Long-Term Educational Outcomes. *Educational researcher*46(8), 474–487.

³ Pew Research Center. (2012). Pursuing the American Dream: Economic Mobility Across Generations. Retrieved from: https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/economic_mobility/pursuingamericandreampdf.pdf.

⁴ Institute for Women’s Policy Studies. (2020). Kansas Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Kansas.pdf>.

⁵ Ibid.

brunt of which fall on those with the least 'cushion'. Importantly, though, this legislation, particularly the changes highlighted here, would remove barriers that unnecessarily make these Kansans' lives even harder. Especially in these times, we should use every tool to help people meet their needs. HB 2525 is a crucial step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Melinda K. Lewis". The signature is written in a dark ink and is positioned below the text "Thank you for your consideration,".

Melinda Lewis, LMSW
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