



Kansas House Bill 2525
SUPPORT
Written Only Testimony, January 31, 2022

Chairperson Concannon and Members of the House Children and Seniors Committee:

My name is Tracy Russell and I serve as the Executive Director of Nurture KC, an organization that houses the Kansas City Healthy Start Initiative (KCHSI). KCHSI is a program serving pregnant women in Kansas City, KS and Kansas City, MO from 14 ZIP codes with the highest rates of infant mortality. Our model deploys community health workers serving over 250 families annually and 700 total participants, including pregnant and postpartum women, their children up to 18 months old, and fathers. Our community health workers provide cribs, car seats, and diapers as well as safe sleep education, car seat safety, nutrition education and a number of other resources to ensure a healthy pregnancy, delivery and healthy child.

My testimony today is in support of HB 2525 as a necessary measure in improving access to SNAP nutritional assistance and child care assistance for the families we serve. This legislation is vital to healthy pregnancies and healthy babies. Our Healthy Start families come from some of the most impoverished areas of the city where economic instability is a constant struggle. When the pandemic hit, many of our families were among the first to lose their jobs, placing them in precarious situations where meeting essential needs was a challenge. The greatest need that our families faced was food insecurity. Nurture KC responded with weekly produce distribution and while that immediate assistance was helpful, it exposed the necessity of a sustained, systemic response. While the health threat of COVID continues two years later, the economic landscape may be forever changed, particularly for those in the service industry. Recognizing the value of removing barriers to SNAP eligibility is a key first step in acknowledging the ongoing struggle that so many families are facing to put food on the table. Expanding access to childcare assistance is another critical tool in achieving economic self-sufficiency for which families are striving. The high cost of child care for infants is not attainable for the families in our Healthy Start program. This assistance will provide real help to those in greatest need as they provide for their families.

The families in the Healthy Start program are beating the odds and defeating the grim statistics that correlate healthy birth to where one lives. I ask that you invest in these families through adoption of HB 2525, providing a bridge of support that is vital to the health and prosperity of our children. Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Tracy Russell

Executive Director