

Representative Concannon and members of the committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss House Bill 2525.

Contrary to popular assumptions, many Kansans are not looking for a handout or a way to live off the system. They simply want to live lives that will mean not worrying about where their next meal is coming from or how safe their children are when they drop them off at daycare.

That is what expanding access to childcare subsidies and food assistance means to Kansas families.

It also means not living in fear of being found by an abuser because the benefits sustaining basic needs are tied to cooperating with child support authorities. It means peace of mind to grow professionally because the ability to participate in work or education programs is unrestricted. It means the freedom to breathe longer than one day or one month because the slightest change in circumstances, like an unexpected bonus on the job, does not send the family's stability into a tailspin.

To give you some perspective on what expanding access to childcare subsidy and food assistance means to Kansas families, I would like to share the story of a single mother. She had no desire to become a single mother but life being what it is, led her marriage to end in divorce. She did have the desire to create a better life for herself and her child, so she decided to attend school to earn a degree.

Her job paid minimum wage which put her just under the guidelines to receive food assistance. She qualified for food assistance but processing the application took some time. She would survive on resilience and street smarts until the application was approved. She did not have health insurance because her probation period delayed the start of insurance benefits. She would depend on over-the-counter treatments and home remedies as long as possible.

She counted down the days until her probation period ended and benefits would begin to allow her some breathing room. She began taking online classes because she did not qualify for childcare subsidy. Her divorce came with a child support order which was counted towards her income even though no child support was being received. Things were difficult at times, but she was encouraged because she was on her way to creating a better life for herself and her child.

None of that mattered the day she received a call from her daycare saying that her child was sick. She was blessed to have a supervisor who allowed her to leave work without the threat of losing her job. She had no money to put towards treatment and the doctor was under no obligation to provide services. She could ask for samples. Work out a payment arrangement from their already limited financial resources. Anything to help her child feel better.

Respiratory infection, breathing treatments, and antibiotics. From experience she knew the office visit would be well over \$1000 without insurance. That would mean no textbooks for classes. Would her professors understand? Her child was not their problem. Without warning she found herself in the same position as hundreds of other Kansans, facing an unexpected health emergency, forced to make difficult decisions.

Food assistance and childcare subsidies represent critical lifelines. If we sincerely desire to grow our state, we must remember who we are as Kansans and create legislation that supports meaningful opportunities for our families instead of penalizing them for simply being human.

I thank you for your time and respectfully stand for questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tara D. Wallace, MSW, LSCSW". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "W".

Tara D. Wallace, MSW, LSCSW, CTF-CBT, RYT