

Testimony of Pastor Carl Frazier in support of HB 2215
Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice, Rep. Stephen Owens, chair
January 26, 2022

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee,

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Pastor Carl Frazier, I am pastor of New Hope and Love Community Church here in Topeka. I am also chairperson of the Kansas Kairos Prison Ministry, chair and acting Executive Director for the Topeka Center for Peace and Justice, Vice Chair of Topeka JUMP, and I serve as a chaplain with the Topeka Police Department. I am here to express my support of HB 2215.

In my ministry, our church received weekly calls from individuals who are in financial needs. Also, through my prison ministry, I have worked with many people who have been in the criminal justice system, including people who have been convicted of drug crimes. I am convinced that banning people who have been convicted of drug crimes from food assistance is wrong. It only adds to the suffering of people who have made mistakes – and have paid for those mistakes already. Furthermore, we have seen weekly individuals who have been wrongly convicted of crimes and have already served 10, 20 30, 40, etc. even at least one case in Kansas.

There are many reasons I could give here, but I'll give only a few:

Drug penalty bans keep people in poverty. People with criminal records have already a much harder time getting and keeping employment. Lack of access to food assistance keeps people in poverty, perhaps making it more likely that they will re-offend in order to feed themselves or their families.

Second, drug felony bans disproportionately affect people of color, because they are more likely to be convicted of drug crimes – even though white, Black, and Latino populations have similar rates of drug use.

And third, food assistance is strongly correlated with improved health outcomes and lower health care costs.

This ban on access to food assistance also negatively affects families, because if the ex-offender isn't counted as a member of the family, then they are seen as having a smaller family and get less in food assistance. This keeps children and families in food insecurity.

My faith tells me that we have a responsibility in looking out for people who are down on their luck.

Matthew 25:35-36 (NKJV)

³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;

³⁶ I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'

it's important for all people to have access to forgiveness and the ability to improve their situation. A ban on drug felons having access to food assistance further punishes people who have already served their time – and their families. It contributes to keeping them in poverty and is racially inequitable. How many felons are dealing with Mental Health issues? For all these reasons, I support HB 2215, and strongly encourage you to recommend it favorably to the full House for passage.

Thank you for your attention, and I will take questions at the appropriate time.