



March 8, 2022

Jennifer Adhima, Executive Director
Kansas Head Start Association
Written-only Opponent Testimony SB 501
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairman Hilderbrand and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding a hearing to address Senate Bill 501. I am the Executive Director of the Kansas Head Start Association and I am writing in opposition of this bill and the negative impact it will have on our youngest Kansas children and their families. The Kansas Head Start Association is the voice for the Head Start and Early Head Start programs in Kansas. These programs provide early childhood education services to nearly 7,000 vulnerable young children and pregnant women across Kansas, some of who need food assistance benefits and KanCare (Medicaid) to maintain the health of their young families.

SB 501 would create a series of additional unnecessary and burdensome requirements on young families who are recipients of food assistance benefits and KanCare (Medicaid). Presently, families utilizing these types of assistance are subject to an extensive application process and continuous verification of eligibility. Families receiving these services are already facing numerous challenges in their lives. The requirements outlined in SB 501 would only serve to add to these challenges, not to mention create extraordinary administrative burdens on systems that are already stretched thin, like the Kansas Department for Children and Families.

We also know that children suffer when families cannot access or are faced with multiple barriers to these critical supports. Young children who are hungry do not experience optimal brain growth and development during a period of rapid development. Children cannot thrive when they are hungry and often fall behind academically. Maintaining regular, preventive health care during early childhood as well as before and after pregnancy is critical to a child's future development and the health of a pregnant mother and her unborn child. We also know that additional stress in households, like the stress that would be felt by families required to keep up with the reporting and eligibility verification outlined in this bill, only further compounds the toxic stress that comes from living in persistent poverty. It is well-documented that toxic stress can ultimately affect the short- and long-term growth and development of children living in these homes.

Kansas families are currently facing insurmountable stress and challenges to their family stability and well-being. Public policy should not continue to contribute to the number of barriers facing families and their children but should offer solutions that can positively impact their lives. The

[Kansas Head Start Association](http://www.ksheadstart.org)

832 Pennsylvania St., Ste. 1007 • Lawrence, KS 66044 • 785-856-3132 • Fax: 785-856-3134
www.ksheadstart.org



Kansas Head Start Association believes that the provisions of SB 501 would be detrimental to Kansas families and their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SB 501. I am happy to serve as a resource to the Committee on this matter should you have further questions.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jennifer Adhima".

Jennifer Adhima
Executive Director
jadhima@ksheadstart.org