



February 7, 2023

Erin Melton, Food Security Policy Advisor
Kansas Action for Children
Opponent Testimony on HB 2140
House Committee on Welfare Reform

Chairperson Awerkamp and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today in opposition to HB 2140. Kansas Action for Children is a non-profit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. KAC works to shape state and federal policies that improve health, education, and financial outcomes for young children and the adults who care for them.

We oppose increasing the age range for those who would qualify as an “able-bodied adult without dependents” because it would destabilize children’s care networks and force older Kansans to make the impossible choice between helping their families and having enough to eat.

HB 2140 would increase the age range from 18-49 to 18-59 for those categorized as “able-bodied adults without dependents” (ABAWDs) under the Kansas food assistance program. This means that Kansans aged 50-59 struggling to put food on the table would become subject to a 30-hour-per-week work requirement. If they don’t meet that requirement, they would either face further hoops to jump through to maintain eligibility or lose the benefits that help them purchase groceries.

Food assistance is our first line of defense against hunger and one of the country’s most effective anti-poverty programs. It provides low-income Kansans with 100 percent federally funded dollars to be spent on food at the grocery store. Right now, one in 10 Kansans and one in seven children in Kansas are going hungry.¹ This bill would make it even harder for those already experiencing food insecurity to have enough to eat for every meal.

There are several reasons why this bill is harmful and would make it harder for older Kansans and the children in their lives to eat. HB 2140 would destabilize children’s care networks; punish Kansans who already face age discrimination in the workforce by making it harder for them to afford food; and add administrative cost and complexity for state agency staff and older Kansans.

¹ Feeding America. (2020). *Food Insecurity among Child (<18 Years) Population in Kansas*. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2020/child/kansas>

Just because someone does not have children in their food assistance household does not mean they are not helping raise and care for children.

In Kansas, where there is a significant shortage of child care spots, this is particularly relevant. Imagine a single mother with a baby living in a county where there are no child care openings. For her to go to work and pursue financial stability for herself and her child, her 55-year-old mother, whose low income qualifies her for food assistance, has offered to work only part time so she can have the flexibility to help care for her infant grandchild as needed.

In 2022, available child care capacity in Kansas met only **44 percent of demand**,² and in 2021 there were **21 rural counties with no child care openings** for infants and toddlers.³

If this law were to pass, this grandmother would have to choose between enrolling in an employment and training program that she does not need (wasting taxpayer dollars) or continuing to have the flexibility to provide care for her grandchild during the day – but losing the food assistance benefits that keep her healthy enough to do so. Either way, her grandchild will have a less stable environment in which to learn, play, and grow.

If she chooses to continue providing care, she would be punished for making the decision to be at work for less than 30 hours each week in order to provide for her family. Then, she would have to wait three months before reapplying for food assistance, even if she begins working 30 hours per week before those three months are up.

Forcing Kansans in their 50s to make the impossible choice between participating in work training programs they don't need so they can afford to eat or going without the food they need to help care for the children in their lives is harsh and unnecessary. It would jeopardize Kansas kids' – and our state's – futures. KAC believes that we should give families the flexibility to make the best choices they can for the children they care for, and HB 2140 takes that flexibility away with potentially far-reaching consequences. **We urge the Committee to oppose HB 2140.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today. Please feel free to reach out to me with any further questions or discussion, or if you'd like more information, at erin@kac.org.

² Child Care Aware. (Accessed 2-4-2023). *Kansas State Point-In-Time Child Care Data*. <https://stage.worklivesystems.com/Kansas?county=all>

³ Child Care Aware. (n.d.). *Data & Research – The State of Child Care in Kansas*. <https://ks.childcareaware.org/data-research/>