



Flint Hills BREADBASKET

February 5, 2023

Testimony Regarding House Bill 2140

Chairperson Averkamp and Members of the committee,

As the Executive Director of the Flint Hills Breadbasket, a non-profit food distribution network in Manhattan, I have the privilege of serving many of the people in my community who are experiencing food insecurity. During the course of each day, I greet and visit with people of all ages and walk of life who have at least one thing in common. Their financial resources are not sufficient to allow them reliable access to nutritious food. Many are working multiple jobs to make ends meet. Others might “just” have one job- often in critical but underpaid areas such as home health care. And a growing number of guests coming to us for support have shared that they are caring for their parents, grandchildren, and other family members. They are part of an unpaid and often unrecognized workforce.

Increasing the maximum age in the definition of an Able-Bodied Adult Without Dependents (ABAWD) from 49 to 59 years of age would have a markedly negative impact on many Kansans. In our daily interactions, we know that many Kansas workers have very little control over their work hours or weekly schedule. Especially in the service fields, where some of the lowest wages are paid, workers are frequently sent home early if business is slow, or called in to work during unscheduled hours when staff is short or things are busy. This creates an untenable situation for many employees- they have little to no control over schedules, making it hard to balance a second job or other opportunities for advancement. These are not workers who would necessarily benefit from an employment and training program. They know how to work and are in fact working. They have good work skills. That does not mean that the hours are there from an employer who is managing their staff costs. It is outside the worker’s control. Requiring a population who have been in the work environment for decades to participate in work training misdirects those resources- in an environment where meaningful work training programs are already stretched thin. In all the proposals to increase the challenges for people who need support, there has been little focus on how many employment opportunities there actually are in Kansas that offer a guaranteed schedule of 30 hours or more.

SNAP benefits are supplemental by definition and it is highly unlikely that any recipient is able to meet their basic food requirements with the sole support of SNAP. Most guests that we serve are cobbling together their weekly food needs through a variety of sources. In Manhattan that might include free/reduced lunch, SNAP dollars, nutritional support through the Breadbasket or other food pantries, community meals (Common Table in Manhattan provides a free meal seven nights a week to anyone who comes), Blessing Boxes, and other community outreach.

At the core, one must ask what the ultimate goal of this modification to the existing statute is. Is it to increase the number of Kansans between the ages of 50-59 who are working? Is it to increase the number of hours they are working? If that is the goal, has it been established that this population is willfully not working? Or could the issue be the availability (or lack thereof) of employment opportunities that offer that level of hours at a living wage? If the goal is to reduce the number of people receiving these benefits or reduce the amount of money spent, then this modification is

likely to achieve that end. If the goal is to increase the number of people who will rely upon places like the Breadbasket for nutritional support, this modification is also likely to achieve that end. If the goal is to improve the health and lives of Kansans, it seems unlikely that this modification will be successful.

The Breadbasket and other food networks across Kansas and the United States have experienced significant increase in the level and intensity of need for nutritional support. We are serving more people and their level of need is higher. Legislative changes like those proposed in HB 2140 will not help us change that trend. We stand ready to work with our legislators to improve the lives of people in our communities through shaping policies that help people have the education, skills, and opportunities to meet their basic needs. There are many ways that we can work together to improve the lives of people in our communities, and we look forward to the opportunity to do so.

Respectfully submitted.

Karla Hagemeister

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Flint Hills Breadbasket