

Testimony in Opposition to HB 2141

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I have served for the past 43 years as the Executive Director of Kanas Legal Services, Inc. I am now retired. In that role, I have been keenly aware of the role that federally funded benefits, including SNAP, can have on the resilience of low income families. Children who eat meals do better in school. Families that have food can focus on meeting other needs of the household. We should also remember that the Food Stamp program was strongly supported by Republican leaders in Congress, including Senator Bob Dole. This was because the two beneficiaries of higher food consumption are low income families and farmers. This program provides a resource that can only be spent on one thing, the commodities that farmers provide.

One group of people that I believe should be considered strongly as the committee considers this bill are parents who have recently been allowed to take their children out of foster care. These are families who have struggled to meet a list of court ordered actions, and have succeeded. They are again providing a home for their children, at considerably less expense to the State than foster care. They may be relying on Food Stamps, in addition to their wages, to provide food for those children. But, they are likely to be among those families who lose some SNAP benefits under this proposed bill. While children are in foster care, the Court puts them under an order to pay child support to the state. This support is calculated using the same methods as child support is calculated for divorced or never married families. This child support continues to be due, unless fully paid, when the children are returned to the parent's home. The adults in these families, who we want to prioritize providing a stable household for their children, medical care, and nutritious meals, would be excluded from participation in the SNAP program because of this bill. They owe the child support to the State of Kansas. They may not be able to meet a court ordered payment plan for support and provide for the needs of their children. But, unless they do, they receive less SNAP benefits. For many, this may be a cost benefit analysis. Do they pay the \$100 per month due on a typical child support payment plan in order to gain \$ 79 (\$237average monthly benefit in Kansas/3people in the household) monthly SNAP benefits? I want these families struggling to keep children from returning to foster care to have both. I want them to be able to put off their child support debt until they are more financially stable and have the SNAP benefits available to feed the entire family.

The committee should also pay attention to the fiscal note on this item. It is estimated that it would require an increase of 16 new staff to do the required monthly monitoring of cases to stop and start (or decrease and increase) SNAP benefits as people make or don't make child support benefits. This bill would add \$800,000 annually to the cost of government. This is in addition to the \$1,000,000 one time expense to get two computer systems talking to each other. It is also not estimated to have any appreciable difference in the amount of child support collected. Significant cost for no benefit.