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Testimony in Opposition to HB 2141

Dear Chair Awerkamp, Vice Chair Wilborn, Ranking Member Meyer and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to present testimony regarding unintended negative consequences for Kansans if HB 2141 is enacted.

As an attorney practicing in family and consumer law, I am currently representing multiple clients who will struggle more to provide meals for the families if this legislation is passed. I am sharing their stories because I know there are thousands of similar Kansas families who will be harmed in the same ways.

One client is a man in his forties who has tens of thousands of dollars in child support arrears from years he spent in prison due to a drug addiction. He is now in recovery, staying sober and working a full-time job to care for his teenage daughter whose mother is now dealing with her own substance abuse issues. His paychecks are being garnished heavily, with 50% being withheld and sent to DCF for those years of past-due child support. This legislation would remove food assistance as one of few remaining lifelines that provide a way for him to put meals on the table and care for his daughter.

Another client is a hardworking single mother in her thirties with two young children. She works at a low-paying job, and food assistance helps her buy groceries for her boys. She completed the many steps to apply and be approved for food assistance, but was extremely confused by the additional paperwork she received months later from DCF's child support contractor. She thought that the 28-page food assistance application had already provided the information DCF needed, and assumed the additional packet of paperwork was sent in error. A co-worker and I spent two hours helping her navigate the process to complete and submit her child support paperwork so she would not be deemed "non-cooperative" and have her family's food assistance cut off.

The sweeping, under-researched policy change to deny food assistance to anyone who owes child support would create new barriers for thousands of Kansas families who already face a steep climb to keep their families safe and stable. And the current, but also ineffective, policy denying food assistance to custodial parents who struggle to complete stacks of paperwork,

should also be reconsidered. **I urge you to get more information on the unintended consequences before you add another obstacle between Kansas families and success.**

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions from the committee.

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