



February 13, 2024

Karen Siebert

Advocacy & Public Policy Advisor, Harvesters—The Community Food Network

Kansas Food Bank

Second Harvest Community Food Bank

Testimony in opposition to House Bill 2673 – Welfare Reform Committee

Chairman Averkamp and members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the Kansas Food Bank and Second Harvest Community Food Bank, which together serve the hungry and food insecure in all 105 counties in the state. Last year, our networks of charitable food pantries distributed more than 46 million pounds of food to those in need in Kansas, from our smallest rural communities to major metropolitan areas.

We are opposed to HB 2673, which would require DCF to request a waiver to restrict the purchase of “candy” and “soft drinks” with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Assistance benefits.

We do not support restricting SNAP purchases. SNAP is our nation’s most effective response to hunger. The program provides vital nutrition assistance that preserves the dignity of choice for families living with food insecurity, ensuring participants have the flexibility to exercise their autonomy in determining which foods best meet their needs.

The state is asking to expand government’s reach into people’s kitchens and controlling individual food choices. SNAP participants, like all people, should be trusted to make the food selections that are best for themselves and their families, and the American public agrees. In an October 2023 poll of likely voters, **73% agreed that the government should not take away the autonomy of people using SNAP by putting even more limitations on their food choices.** There is also little support for passing new laws that make SNAP harder to access, as 73% of likely voters do not want new restrictions.

SNAP restrictions harm Kansas businesses. Before the state-level sales tax on food is even fully eliminated, the Kansas legislature wants to put more roadblocks in front of Kansas grocery stores and small businesses.

Under the proposed waiver, **Kansas businesses would not be able to accept SNAP benefits as payment for what many of us would consider healthy snack options**, including protein bars for a quick lunch and trail mix and fruit snacks for the kids after school.

Kansas SNAP recipients will likely not shop in Kansas stores that will not accept their EBT cards for all of the items on their grocery list. As we have seen with the impact of the state sales tax on food, Kansas consumers are willing and many are able to cross state lines to make their food purchases. Kansas SNAP recipients may even choose to shift their food purchases online in order to make the purchases they feel are right for their family, further harming local Kansas businesses.

Out-of-state visitors will also not be able to use their SNAP benefits on these items in Kansas businesses, though SNAP benefits are accepted for those items in every other state. The front-line workers at convenience and grocery stores will be the ones telling travelers and visitors that their benefits don't work in Kansas, likely in awkward exchanges at busy checkouts after payments have been attempted.

Please oppose HB 2673. There are better policy options for promoting healthy eating patterns, both for SNAP recipients and for all Kansans.