Kansas Action for Children

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Kansas Action for Children
Verbal Proponent Testimony on SB 415
Senate Committee on Judiciary

Chairperson Warren and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 415. We support this bill because it would give Kansas families more tools to remedy health and safety issues in their rental homes, and it would allow them to remain securely in the place they call home, improving their health, well-being, and future opportunities.

Kids who live in homes with mold, lead, non-working appliances, structural issues, no heating or cooling, or other serious health and safety hazards are more likely to experience negative health outcomes, including chronic issues such as asthma, lung cancer, and respiratory infection.[1] **However, under current Kansas statute, renters living in unsafe conditions have little recourse to compel their landlord or property management company to address health and safety issues.**

For those unable to get their issues addressed, it may seem like their next best option is to move to a safer environment, but that is often not a possibility for many renters. In Kansas, 84,547 renters make less than 30% of Area Median Income, but there are only 29,295 rental units available that are considered affordable for this population.[2] This shortage of affordable housing means there may not be another housing option available within a family's budget.

Even if such an option existed, the upfront costs associated with moving can be prohibitive. Before a renter even knows if they will be accepted as a tenant, they are required to pay an application fee. If rejected, they must apply to another place where they'll be confronted with yet another application fee. Once they find a place that will accept them as a tenant, they are typically required to come up with a sum of money to cover the first and last months' rent, a

[1] Wimalasena, N. N., et al. (2021). *Housing Risk Factors Associated with Respiratory Disease: A Systematic Review.* National Library of Medicine. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7998657/

[2] Harati, R. (2025). *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes.* National Low Income Housing Coalition. https://nlihc.org/gap/state/ks

security deposit, and any applicable pet deposits. These financial barriers prevent families from being able to seek safer and healthier housing options.

**Even if these barriers didn't exist, we should be looking for ways to keep families in their current home.** Stability is highly important for healthy childhood development, and housing insecurity disrupts that stability. Research shows that children who go through periods of housing insecurity experience a wide range of physical and mental health issues.[3,4] For kids who have to switch schools, it has been found that each move is associated with a corresponding decline in reading and math scores, as well as fewer positive social skills and higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems.[5]

On the other hand, remaining in the same home for an extended period has many known benefits. Those with a strong sense of community are significantly less likely to report depression, anxiety and stress symptoms, and people who know their neighbors report higher life satisfaction and sense of belonging.[6,7] Kids also benefit from consistently attending the same school year over year. When students can remain in one place, they develop a support network of friends that increases their feeling of belonging. As teachers and administrators within that school get to know them over time, they better understand their needs and develop a vested interest in watching them grow and succeed.

For extremely low-income renters in Kansas, housing typically accounts for more than 50% of their budget.[8] **When families commit most of their budget to a place to live, they should be able to have a reasonable expectation that it is a safe and healthy environment.** Connecting the Kansas Residential Landlord and Tenant Act to the remedies and enforcement provisions of

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[3] National Alliance to End Homelessness. (2024). *Nationwide, More Children Live in the State of Homelessness than in Most American States.* https://endhomelessness.org/resources/sharable-graphics/nationwide-more-children-live-in-the-state-of-homelessness-than-in-most-american-states/

[4] Hare, D. (2025) *The Costs of Childhood Housing Insecurity.* Kansas Action for Children. https://www.kac.org/the_cost_of_childhood_housing_insecurity

[5] Society for Research in Child Development. (2016). *Children's Social and Academic Functioning is Impeded When Their Families Move More Often.* https://www.srcd.org/news/childrens-social-and-academic-functioning-impeded-when-their-families-move-more-often

[6] Park, E., et al. (2023). *Sense of community and mental health: a cross-sectional analysis from a household survey in Wisconsin.* Family Medicine and Community Health. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10314672/

[7] Lu, C. (2015). *How's Life in the City? Life Satisfaction Across Census Metropolitan Areas and Economic Regions in Canada.* Government of Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2015046-eng.htm

[8] Mid-America Regional Council. (2024). *More than 3 in 4 extremely low-income renters are severely cost-burdened.* https://www.marc.org/news/economy-housing/more-3-4-extremely-low-income-renters-are-severely-cost-burdened

the Kansas Consumer Protection Act, which SB 415 does, is an important step toward turning that expectation into a reality.

**We encourage you to support this bill, as it will give Kansas renters an important tool to help them stay in their homes, in their schools, and in their neighborhoods where they can thrive as part of a community.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. You can reach me at dustin@kac.org if you have any additional questions.

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***About Kansas Action for Children***

Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit policy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.