

Neutral Testimony on HB2627

HOPE Act Reorganization Bill

Donna K. Ginther

Director, Institute for Policy & Social Research
Roy A. Roberts & Regents Distinguished Professor of Economics
University of Kansas

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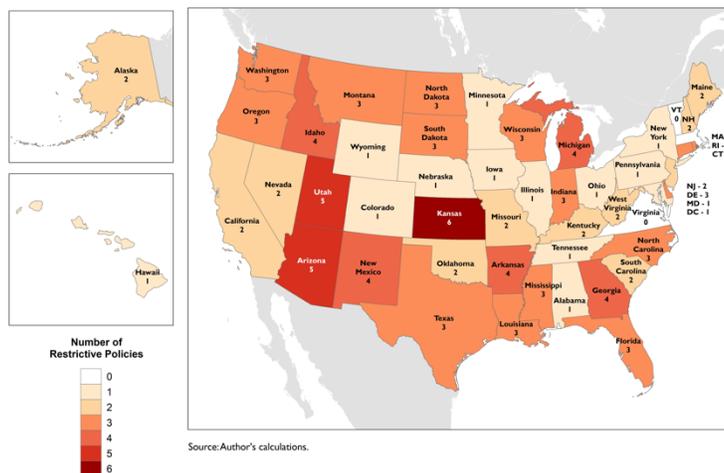
Dear Chairman Averkamp and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 2627 which would reorganize the HOPE Act.

A large body of research has demonstrated the pernicious ways in which economic strain and food insecurity affect family functioning including a family's ability to care for their child's basic needs and to provide a nurturing and safe environment that is free from violence (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). In my research with Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, a Professor of Social Work at the Ohio State University, we have been examining the effects of state social safety net policies such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

(TANF) on child abuse and neglect during the Great Recession, which began at the end of 2007 and continued to ripple through the U.S. economy as late as 2013. After the passage of the original HOPE Act, according to our research, Kansas led the nation in the number of restrictions placed on access to TANF benefits (see the map above). According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Kansas ranks 49th out of the 50 states and District of Columbia in the SNAP Program Access Index as of 2021 (the most recent year available).¹ My research with Dr. Johnson-Motoyama examines the implications of access to the social safety net for child well-being and involvement with child protective services. We have conducted two national studies that examine the role of state policies, like those detailed in the HOPE Act, on child abuse, neglect and foster care placements.

Welfare Benefit Restriction Policy Counts by State, 2016



¹ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/qc/pai>

Our paper, *Associations Between State TANF Policies, Child Protective Services Involvement, And Foster Care Placement*, examined the impact of restrictions placed on access to TANF and child well-being outcomes. We find that each additional TANF policy that restricted access to benefits, such as reduction in time limits and returning to work before a child was one year of age, was associated with a 13 percent reduction in TANF caseloads. We also find that increases in TANF caseloads were associated with significant reductions in neglect victims and foster care placements. Our models also show that restrictions on TANF access were associated with more than 44 additional neglect victims per 100,000 population and between 19 and 22 additional children per 100,000 placed into foster care. Thus, the restrictions on access to TANF embedded in the HOPE Act are associated with increases in child neglect and foster care placements. Given that the HOPE Act is being reorganized, this is a great opportunity to use evidence-based policy to promote access to the safety net and to reduce child involvement with child protective services.

Dr. Motoyama and I have also investigated the association between access to SNAP and child well-being. SNAP has been recognized as a critical, near-cash stabilizer of child and family well-being during economic recessions. In our research, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Award # 1R01CE003098) and we find that state SNAP policies play a significant role in preventing child maltreatment and foster care entries. Our paper, *Association Between State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Policies, Child Protective Services Involvement, and Foster Care in the US, 2004-2016*, found that increased access to SNAP benefits improved child outcomes. In our national study, we find that states with higher counts of policies that increase the generosity of the SNAP program such excluding child support from income calculations, simplifying reporting, providing transitional SNAP benefits to those exiting TANF, and use of Broad Based Categorical Eligibility experience large reductions in reports accepted for child protective services investigation: -353 per 100,000 children. Policies that increase access to SNAP are also associated with 95 fewer substantiated reports and 77 fewer reports substantiated for neglect per 100,000.

Our results also show that policies that increase access to SNAP are associated with fewer children entering foster care. Each additional SNAP policy adopted by a state that increases program participation is associated with 45 fewer total foster care placements per 100,000 children. These findings comport with past studies that suggest even small amounts of income can prevent child maltreatment among families with limited resources.

Notably, the costs of TANF and SNAP benefits are small relative to the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment and foster care. While states may be inclined to find ways to reduce program costs, our findings from the Great Recession suggest limiting access to SNAP and TANF results in harm to children and considerably higher costs to taxpayers in the long run. Conversely, policies that increase access to TANF and SNAP may see important protective effects for children, families, and for state budgets.

For example, if we convert our study estimates into caseloads, we find the addition of a single policy such as eliminating child support from income eligibility calculations could reduce the number of children entering foster care by approximately 46 per 100,000 children, which equates to 324 of Kansas 704,300 children (U.S. Census, 2021) in a given year. The average monthly cost of a foster care payment for one child in Kansas is approximately \$2000 per month and children spend an average of 20 months in care (personal communication, R. Gaston). Therefore, foster care costs for 324 Kansan children equals \$12,960,000. For the same number of children, the cost of the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three (\$401) (Center for

Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021) for 20 months is approximately \$2,598,480, a difference of more than \$10.3 million. Notably, foster care payments represent just a portion of the human and societal costs associated with separating children from parents. Our findings suggest that to prevent increases in child maltreatment and foster care and to protect state budgets, it is in the state's best interests to maximize program access and generosity to address basic human needs. These findings underscore the critical importance of the SNAP and TANF programs for children and families as well as the potential unintended costs of state SNAP and TANF policy choices.

Concluding Remarks

Past research suggests the actions that states and localities take now to support families in need matter for child maltreatment prevention. The state should consider modifying **HB 2627** to increase access to programs such as SNAP, TANF, and childcare subsidies are likely to have positive impacts. Therefore, these concrete supports to address basic needs should be among the top priorities at the federal, state, and local levels to prevent child maltreatment and other forms of violence.

References

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