



Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas

Proponent Testimony for HB 2723: Committee on Welfare Reform
March 5, 2024

Chair Averkamp, Vice Chair Howell, Ranking Minority Member Meyer and members of the Committee:

My name is Becky Gray, and I support House Bill 2723, with amendments. I have dedicated my career to affordable housing and homeless solutions in both the public and private sectors, primarily in Southeast Kansas, where I currently serve as the Executive Director of Building Health, Inc. (BHI), a non-profit subsidiary of the Community Health Center of Southeast Kansas (CHC/SEK). CHC/SEK is a 501(c)(3) private not-for-profit, providing medical, dental, and behavioral health care to over 80,000 Kansans. For twenty years CHC/SEK has been increasing access to healthcare and established BHI to address the lack of safe, affordable housing in the region, because we know that housing security is essential for improving the health and prosperity of the unhealthiest region in the state.

Funding through this bill could be immediately deployed to fill the gap in funding for construction of “The Station,” a \$5.5 million project designed to **co-locate supportive services and educational organizations alongside homeless day services and accessible efficiency housing units, eliminating barriers to service and shelter.** This project is support in an application to the Kansas Housing Resources Corporation by the following entities, whom will be providing participant referrals: the City of Pittsburg, Crawford County Sherriff, Crawford County Mental Health Center, Catholic Charities, and Southeast Kansas Community Action Program. Moreover, educational opportunities at The Station are designed in collaboration with, and to serve the needs of, Kansas Works and Pittsburg State University, further developing a regional workforce.

In the last two years, CHC/SEK has provided homeless day shelter services to 314 people experiencing homelessness, with nearly 40% moving into permanent housing while engaged in our services. The Station will allow for more efficient use of resources and increased collaboration in our region which is home to nearly 33% of the Balance of State Continuum of Care’s unsheltered population.

I respectfully request the following amendments to BH 2723, which will ensure the funding will be used to build on existing strategies, where unique local partnerships allow for collaborative solutions that meet the needs of the community.

- Ensure rural Kansas has equitable access to the funding by establishing a rural set aside for counties smaller than 50,000 in population;
- Allow the local match funding to come from a variety of sources, including philanthropy, in-kind efforts, non-profit and for-profit organizations, and state and federal resources, as allowable.
- Prioritize projects that support economic and workforce development through community partnerships.

We believe that CHC/SEK’s 1,100 employees providing healthcare throughout sixteen clinical locations across Southeast Kansas, coupled with a homeless intervention and housing development strategy that addresses the full continuum of housing needs, will improve health, expand the workforce, and strengthen the economy in a region that is ripe for reinvestment.

Respectfully,

Becky Gray, Executive Director
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