



## Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

Written and Web-Ex Neutral Testimony Regarding House Bill 2723

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Remote Location: Garden City, KS

Chair Averkamp and Members of the Committee on Welfare Reform:

Thank you for allowing me to provide neutral testimony for House Bill 2723. As an employee of the Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition (KSHC), which serves 101 most rural counties and a Southwest Kansas resident with extensive experience working with our homeless population direct services, victim services, and re-entry services, I have some concerns regarding the limitations imposed by House Bill No. 2723.

**This bill could unintentionally create silos for emergency shelter.** Homeless services in rural areas like Southwest Kansas are often fewer and far between. Shelters, when available, might serve large geographic areas, making them physically inaccessible to many in need. Additionally, services such as soup kitchens, day centers, or employment programs may be limited or non-existent. Many rural settings in Kansas have limited access to permanent supportive housing programs, rapid rehousing programs, and other supports you may find in more densely populated areas. Allowing communities to assess their locality and area for the right type of housing program would ensure the entire state of Kansas can address homelessness based on local needs. The social vulnerabilities of over-crowding in Southwest Kansas are a result of lack of affordable housing. Expanding House Bill 2723 beyond emergency shelter could provide options for affordable housing or voucher programs such as transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing, which is greatly needed in rural Kansas.

**The stipulation that only cities and counties can apply for funding excludes most rural areas.** This restriction disproportionately affects rural areas, which often lack the institutional infrastructure of larger urban areas but face unique challenges in addressing homelessness and related issues. Many rural communities rely on a network of small non-profits and community organizations that are experienced working with their homeless population. These organizations are crucial in delivering services that are tailored to the community's needs, yet under this bill, their direct access to funding would be hindered. By excluding these organizations from directly applying for funding, the bill risks overlooking the nuanced needs of rural populations and potentially widens the service gap in these areas. It is essential to modify the bill to include provisions that allow non-profit organizations, especially those in rural areas, to access funding directly or through partnerships that do not require burdensome administrative structures. Expanding eligibility would ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and recognize the critical role these organizations play in serving Kansas's most vulnerable populations.

**Rural areas of Kansas may be excluded from applying based on the 1:1 match requirement.** The requirement for matching funds can be a barrier for small municipalities or non-profits, potentially limiting their ability to access these funds. While state-matching funding can stimulate investment and collaboration, its design and implementation must consider the capacity of all stakeholders to contribute to ensure equitable access and maximize the benefits of such

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programs. In rural areas, there may be intense competition for the limited available resources. Multiple organizations or initiatives may be vying for the same local funding sources, volunteer hours, and in-kind donations creating a challenging environment for securing the necessary match.

**The enforcement of ordinances regarding camping and vagrancy** can cause adverse effects to communities. These actions can lead to increased demand for emergency services, shelters, and transitional housing. If local resources are already stretched thin, this can strain budgets and community services further. The requirement for local governments to enforce camping and vagrancy ordinances could lead to legal challenges, especially if enforcement is perceived as criminalizing homelessness. This also ties grant eligibility to law enforcement actions, which could raise ethical concerns.

Ultimately this bill is a great step forward for Kansas. It's important to keep in mind that this bill will not end homelessness in Kansas but will hopefully reduce the number of individuals and families who are living unsheltered. Shelters and housing programs alone are not sufficient, more affordable housing and supportive services are needed in every community across Kansas.

With the changes mentioned above, KSHC and I would support this bill. I thank you for your service to Kansas and for the opportunity to express my concerns about House Bill 2723 in its current form.