



Written and WebEx Neutral Testimony Regarding House Bill 2723

Given by Matt Faulk, Program Director, Bert Nash, Lawrence, KS, and a Steering Committee member of the Kansas Balance of State Continuum Care

3/1/2024

Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care Leadership

Dear Chair, Awerkamp and Members of the Committee on Welfare Reform:

I am Matt Faulk, a member of the Balance of State Continuum of Care's Steering Committee. I am giving this testimony of behalf of the Steering Committee's leadership team. The Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care, which covers 101 mostly rural counties, is providing this letter to voice a neutral position on HB 2723 for the following reasons.

While the Balance of State Continuum of Care applauds the decision of state leadership to dedicate funding to helping address homelessness, this cannot exist as a single, one-time action on behalf of the state. The magnitude of homelessness and affordable housing need is so great that any adequate and effective action must be sustained or ongoing until objective analysis demonstrates a decrease in homelessness and rampant housing instability across the state. To provide an example, in the regions of the state experiencing the highest numbers of homelessness, assessments performed by third parties have identify the need for hundreds of millions of dollars in additional affordable housing and homeless services to address homelessness as it exists today. One-time allocations such as HB 2723, while a good start, will therefore not result in the substantial impact needed or intended by state leadership.

Additionally, without ongoing and significantly greater investment that also targets upstream causes, legislation mandating legal action against camping and vagrancy will overcrowd the judicial system, jails, and detention centers, therefore increasing the local tax burden without any long-term benefits because adequate investment addressing underlying causes and sustainable solutions has not been made.

Moreover, legislation must honor and support the local community's ability to set policy and target resources base on local studies and decisions to address the unique needs of the give community. Local control is equally imperative in the work to address widespread social issues across the state because it acknowledges the unique differences between communities across the various regions. Addressing the needs within the frontier and rural communities means implementing different strategies and approaches than those necessary in urban areas. The different regions must therefore retain the capability to assess and address their unique needs, with the state offering resources in a flexible manner allowing local regions to align them with locally assessed needs.

Sincerely,

Beth Waddle, Chair
Executive Director
My Father's House
Paola, Kansas

Jami Crowder, Vice Chair
Program Director
Catholic Charities of Wichita
Pittsburg, Kansas

Debbie Snapp, Secretary
Executive Director
Catholic Charities of Southwest Kansas
Dodge City, Kansas