



TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 79

Presented to
Kansas House Committee on Welfare Reform

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Chairman Averkamp and members of the committee:

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of Senate Bill 79, a commonsense reform that will ensure Kansas' nutrition assistance programs promote real nutrition—not just cheap calories.

We are facing a national health crisis, and Kansas is no exception. Obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are robbing Kansans of their quality of life while putting unsustainable strain on state healthcare programs. We see this in our Medicaid costs, in our overburdened hospitals, and in the rising number of families suffering from chronic disease.

Yet, despite this crisis, the #1 item purchased with food stamps is soda. Not milk. Not protein. Not fruits or vegetables. Sugary drinks provide no nutritional value and directly contribute to the very health conditions straining our system.

This bill is not about cutting benefits or telling people what they can and can't eat. It is about bringing SNAP back in line with its original purpose—helping families access real, nourishing food. It's about ensuring taxpayer dollars are used wisely and efficiently.

What Senate Bill 79 Does

SB 79 directs the Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) to apply for a federal waiver from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prohibit the use of SNAP (food stamp) benefits to purchase soda and candy. If denied, DCF must reapply annually until the waiver is granted.

This bill aligns SNAP with the same principles already applied to other government assistance programs, like WIC, which restricts purchases to nutritious foods only. SNAP should be held to the same standard.

Why This Bill is Critical for Kansas

1. Taxpayers Shouldn't Have to Pay Twice

SNAP was designed to fight hunger, not fuel obesity, diabetes, and heart disease. Yet today:

- 72% of Kansas SNAP recipients are also on Medicaid, meaning that the same taxpayers funding these junk food purchases are also footing the bill for diabetes treatments, hospitalizations, and medication that result from them.
- Kansas Medicaid is overwhelmed by preventable, diet-related diseases, draining resources from education, infrastructure, and other critical state needs.

2. Smart Government = Smart Spending

This committee is tasked with ensuring government programs run efficiently—and allowing SNAP funds to be spent on junk food is the definition of wasteful spending.

- Kansas already prohibits SNAP funds from being used for alcohol and tobacco—why? Because these programs are meant to serve the public good.
- The WIC program already follows this model, ensuring that only nutritious foods can be purchased with federal dollars. It works—and Kansas should apply the same principle to SNAP.
- Big corporations profit when we allow SNAP dollars to fund soda and candy purchases. PepsiCo and Coca-Cola alone made \$6 billion in food stamp sales in 2016.

3. The ‘Food Desert’ Argument is Outdated

Some will argue that limiting soda and candy purchases will hurt families who live in food deserts. But the reality is:

- Walmart, Amazon, and other major retailers now deliver fresh groceries statewide, ensuring that all Kansas SNAP recipients have access to healthy food.
- Local farmers’ markets accept SNAP, offering fresh, nutritious alternatives.
- This bill doesn’t take away benefits—it simply ensures those benefits are used for real food that nourishes families.

Bottom Line: Kansas Should Lead on This Issue

This is not about restricting freedom—it’s about responsibility. Just as we don’t allow food stamps to be used for alcohol or tobacco, we should not be subsidizing sugar-laden products that are driving chronic diseases.

Kansas has an opportunity to set the standard for smart, responsible public policy. SNAP is a nutrition program—it should actually promote nutrition.

SB 79 is a win for taxpayers, a win for public health, and a win for common sense. I urge you to support this important legislation.

Thank you, and I welcome any questions.