



PO Box 654
Lawrence, KS 66044
KansasInterfaithAction.org

<https://kansasinterfaithaction.org>
mrieber@kansasinterfaithaction.org
(913) 232-2336

Oral Testimony by Rabbi Moti Rieber in Opposition to 26rs2581 - Income Verification for Free School Lunch Program

Senate Committee on Government Efficiency, Sen. Renee Erickson, Chair - January 27, 2026

Mme. Chair, Members of the Committee -

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I serve as executive director of Kansas Interfaith Action, a statewide, multifaith issue-advocacy organization that “puts faith into action” on a variety of important social and economic justice issues. We partner with the many of the Mainline denominations in Kansas, including the local judicatories of the ELCA Lutheran Church, the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Diocese of Kansas, and the United Methodist Church.

I offer testimony in opposition to [this bill] as a clergyperson called to uphold the biblical imperative to care for the most vulnerable among us. The imperative to care for the poor appears in hundreds of verses across both the Hebrew and Christian Testaments, and in other faith traditions as well. These scriptures call for compassion, fairness, and our collective responsibility to care for the marginalized. I probably shouldn’t have to reference these very familiar verses, but this bill suggests that this body might need a reminder, so here are a few representative verses:

*“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will repay him for his deed.” – **Proverbs 19:17***

*“For there will never cease to be poor in the land. Therefore I command you, ‘You shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in your land.’” – **Deuteronomy 15:11***

*“If you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday.” – **Isaiah 58:10***

*“And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’” – **Matthew 25:40***

*“Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day... and gives wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy...” **Quran, Surah Al-Baqarah, 2:177***

And this is from a statement by ELCA Advocacy called, “For Such a Time as This: Protect school meals and SNAP funding,” dated March 19, 2025:

In a nation of great wealth and resources, no child should ever go hungry. There are 42 million people in this country – 13 million of them children and over 5 million of them seniors – living in households struggling with hunger. Lack of access to nutritious food sets children apart at an early age, resulting in problems like lower test scores, decreased attention in the classroom and sickness. Childhood hunger also has life-long negative effects on a child's development and growth that continue into adulthood. Access to consistent and nutritious meals gives children the fundamental and necessary elements needed to grow, learn, love and play.¹

Nearly one in five Kansas children are food insecure, and this number goes up in our poorer counties, both rural and urban. Yet we know that a hungry child cannot learn, cannot focus, and cannot fully participate in school. This limits their opportunities, and the effects last into the next generation. So ensuring access to food is not only a moral imperative, it is sound policy.

Placing additional political barriers between children and food is deeply concerning. When we have a proven, federally supported tool that allows schools to ensure every child is nourished, our moral obligation is to remove obstacles—not create new ones. Feeding a child should not be subject to legislative permission.

This bill would create additional barriers for families who are already struggling and would undoubtedly take food out of the mouths of children who are in need. The FPL for a family of five is \$38,680. 130% of that is \$50,284. The average rent in Kansas is \$1,325, which is \$15,900 a year. Why a kid whose parents make \$45,000 should get lunch and one whose parents make \$51,000 should not is beyond me. They're both poor, and they both deserve to be fed.

Eligibility investigations have a cost, and they're usually far higher than the cost of the program itself. In this case, the legislation puts the cost burden onto schools and school districts, as an unfunded mandate - artificially keeping the fiscal note low by foisting the expense on someone else. And the bill might even be illegal, as federal guidelines say that we are required to accept self-attestation. Even if that were to change, that certainly wouldn't change our moral objections to the bill.

This bill continues the damaging “welfare reform” framing that has dominated this legislature for the past 10 years. Yet the results of the previous such efforts show that putting a magnifying glass on eligibility inevitably means more hardship for more people – poverty rates go up, hunger rates go up, foster care rates go up - and it's the least of these who suffer the most. We urge this legislature to move away from this cruel and immoral attitude and toward an attitude of generosity and care for our children.

Three potential ways to do this would be: 1) making free lunch available to every student in Kansas, as eight other states have done, and which would be our preferred outcome; 2) raise the eligibility limit to 180% of FPL, as Ohio has done; or 3) eliminate the ban on broad-based categorical eligibility as that is yet another negative effect of the Hope Act.

I urge you to oppose this bill and instead support policies that expand access to school meals, honor the dignity of families, and reflect our shared responsibility to care for one another.

¹ [Protect school meals and SNAP funding - ELCA Resources](#)