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Kansas Action for Children

Written-only Opponent Testimony on 26RS2581 (School Meals)

Senate Committee on Government Efficiency

Chairperson Erickson and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the bill that affects free school meals and the Community Eligibility Provision. We are writing in opposition to this bill. Instead of making it harder for Kansas families to access food, we would like to see the Legislature pass bills that expand access to food.

Free school meals are available for families who make 130% of the federal poverty level (FPL) or less. This means that two parents working full time at \$11 per hour, with two kids in school, would make too much money to qualify for free lunches even though this family brings home about \$37,000 per year after taxes. After accounting for rent, utilities, transportation, clothing, and other essential items, there isn't a lot of money left for groceries.

When a family fills out an application for free school meals, the current practice, which is mandated by federal law, is for school districts to accept self-attestation regarding household income. This practice helps alleviate what is known as the "benefits cliff," where families often see their net resources decline once their income reaches a certain threshold. This resource decline occurs when all-or-nothing approaches recognize that a family making 130% FPL could use a hand up, but does not recognize the same for a family making 131% FPL. While a 50 cent raise at work might appear to put more cash in a family's bank account, the loss of benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and free school meals can result in a net loss for that family. This bill would likely lead to more instances of families experiencing the cliff effect, causing them to become food insecure.

Lawmakers across the political spectrum have acknowledged that families are struggling.

Coming into the 2026 session, one of the stated priorities of legislators was to reduce some financial burdens, such as property taxes that many Kansans are increasingly struggling to afford. We applaud efforts to responsibly reduce tax burdens and help struggling families. However, property taxes are not the only area where Kansans are being financially impacted. For a typical family, food costs make up a larger share of the budget than property taxes, and food prices have increased by 29% over the past five years.¹ Families making just over the

¹ Diaz, J., & Wise, A. (December 16, 2025). *Chain Restaurants Are Hit by Tariffs and Inflation. How Do They Control Costs?* <https://www.kuow.org/stories/chain-restaurants-are-hit-by-tariffs-and-inflation-how-do-they-control-costs>

poverty line could use relief in areas beyond property taxes, especially since lower-income families are more likely to rent and not benefit from that type of relief. **Lawmakers should be searching for ways to alleviate the burden of rising food costs, yet this bill seeks to do the opposite, causing some families to lose access to free or reduced-price school meals.**

We are also concerned about the administrative burden that additional verification would put on schools. Anecdotal accounts from school administrators suggest schools would need to hire additional staff to process applications if this bill were to become law. Funding would need to be pulled from other program areas to pay for these new positions. Schools that are frequently under-resourced cannot afford these changes.

For these reasons, we ask that you reject this bill and instead look for ways to expand access to food. Instead of making it more difficult for schools to sign up for the Community Eligibility Provision, like this bill also does, the state should provide incentives to help make it easier for schools.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important topic. You can reach me at dustin@kac.org if you have any additional questions.

About Kansas Action for Children

KAC is a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. KAC does not receive any funding from local, state, or federal government sources; however, we have a keen interest in the state budget because of its impact on children and families.