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Kansas Action for Children
Written-only Testimony in Opposition to SB 488
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairperson Gossage and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide to testify in opposition to SB 488, which would expand the Office of the Inspector General's duties to include cash and food assistance programs. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

KAC opposes SB 488 because it would likely require duplicative efforts of state agencies; presents data privacy concerns for Kansans participating in cash, food, and health assistance programs; and is unnecessary.

The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, called food assistance in Kansas) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, including cash assistance. SNAP is guided by federal law with specific definitions, procedures, and penalties for program fraud and investigations of fraud.

Within DCF, there already exists a Fraud Investigations Unit under the Office of the General Counsel. There is no need to create separate audit and investigative authority for food and cash assistance programs. The state must follow these rules already; creating a separate investigative process is unlikely to be able to replace existing DCF processes and would waste taxpayer dollars on redundant work.

Additionally, it does not make sense for food and cash assistance investigations to be brought under the Office of the Inspector General because that Office does not have the extensive knowledge of the programs and the corresponding federal rules and regulations that DCF already knows well. This bill would likely require new relationships and data-sharing agreements with at least two federal agencies and one state agency.

The bill would also remove statutory language that protects participant privacy and limits the Office of the Inspector General's access to only data pertinent to investigations. This raises serious concerns surrounding program participant data and health privacy.

The bill very loosely defines cash, food, and health assistance. Presumably, this would allow the Office of the Inspector General investigative authority over other programs, not just those under the SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, and CHIP umbrellas. This would further expand our concerns into taxpayer spending, the state's compliance with federal rules and regulations, and participant data privacy.

Finally, it is unclear what problem, if any, this bill is attempting to solve. There does not seem to be a need for new definitions of cash, food, or health assistance or changes to fraud investigative processes for those programs. In fact, this expansion of duties could make the Office of the Inspector General less effective in its duties. The Medicaid program is complex enough as it is. Adding, at minimum, two other complex programs to the Inspector General's workload would stretch staff very thin.

There are several policy options available to ease the administrative burden for cash, food, and health assistance participants and administering agencies. I encourage the Committee to consider some of those options instead, and I urge you to oppose SB 488.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please reach out to me at erin@kac.org.