



Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

Written and Web-Ex Neutral Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 542

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Remote Location: Garden City, KS

Chair Billinger and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for allowing me to provide neutral testimony for Senate Bill 542. As an employee of the Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition (KSHC), which serves 101 most rural counties and a Southwest Kansas resident with extensive experience working with our homeless population direct services, victim services, and re-entry services, I have some concerns regarding the limitations imposed by Senate Bill No. 542.

This bill could unintentionally create silos for emergency shelter. While infrastructure for emergency shelters is absolutely needed, it's important the language in this bill includes ongoing coordinated efforts from the CoC's and HUD's framework. While larger cities such as Wichita have their own CoC and housing needs, the Statewide Homeless Coalition serves 101 mostly rural counties across Kansas. Shelters, in rural and frontier areas in Kansas are struggling to stay open and secure adequate operational funding. Expanding the use of these funds beyond infrastructure would allow communities to assess their locality and area to fund the right program and ensure the entire state of Kansas can address homelessness based on local needs. Expanding Senate Bill 542 beyond emergency shelter could provide options for affordable housing or voucher programs such as transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing, which would move individuals and families out of shelter and prevent sheltering silos.

Contingencies in the infrastructure bill will eliminate opportunities for ongoing federal operational funds.

Incorporating HUD's CoC framework into the implementation of SB No. 542 can enable Kansas to leverage federal funding and support. By aligning state efforts with the objectives and requirements of the CoC program, Kansas can maximize the impact of federal grants aimed at reducing homelessness. This alignment ensures that state-funded infrastructure projects and services are designed to meet established federal criteria, enhancing eligibility for ongoing funding for operations and support. HUD's CoC program encourages inclusivity and coverage across all regions, including rural and urban areas. By adopting this principle, SB No. 542 can ensure that its impact is felt statewide, including in rural and frontier areas often overlooked in policy planning. Ensuring that grant funding and resources are accessible to these areas is crucial for a comprehensive strategy that leaves no community behind in the fight against homelessness.

The enforcement of ordinances regarding camping and vagrancy could lead to legal challenges, especially if enforcement is perceived as criminalizing homelessness. This also ties grant eligibility to law enforcement actions, which could raise ethical concerns. Incorporating HUD's CoC framework would ensure new and existing shelters can apply for other federal funds to stay in operation.

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Ultimately this bill is a great step forward for Kansas. It's important to keep in mind that this bill will not end homelessness in Kansas but will hopefully reduce the number of individuals and families who are living unsheltered. Shelters and housing programs alone are not sufficient, more affordable housing and supportive services are needed in every community across Kansas.

With the changes mentioned above, KSHC and I would support this bill. I thank you for your service to Kansas and for the opportunity to express my concerns about Senate Bill 542 in its current form.