



Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

Written and WebEx Neutral Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 542
Christy McMurphy, Executive Director, Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition

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Christy McMurphy, Executive Director
Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition
2001 Haskell Ave.
Lawrence, KS 66046

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

I am Christy McMurphy, executive director for the Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition. I thank you for allowing me to provide neutral testimony for Senate Bill 542. The Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition coordinates with communities throughout the state to provide training, education, and support to end homelessness in Kansas. We are also the lead for the Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC), which is the largest CoC in the state, serving 101 counties, excluding Shawnee, Johnson, Wyandotte, and Sedgwick Counties.

While we applaud the state legislature for exploring ways to assist us in our work to end homelessness, we cannot support this bill as it is written. The bill, as written, falls short of real solutions, especially for rural Kansans experiencing homelessness and for rural communities.

While we agree that there needs to be more low barrier shelters in Kansas, we concur with the recommendations presented by United Community Services of Johnson County, specifically removing the mandated enforcement of camping and vagrancy laws. We also recommend a few more changes for the Committee on Ways and Means to consider.

- First, we recommend the one-on-one state match to be extended to the current or next year's HUD-approved CoC programs, which are run by non-profits, and by government agencies. All CoC programs must match the federal CoC grants by 25%. If the one-on-one state match could cover the required 25% plus expand the HUD-approved programs by the remaining 75%, KSHC believes Kansas would visibly move the needle on ending homelessness. This would expand rapid rehousing, permanent supported housing, planning grants, coordinated entry systems and the Homeless Management Information Systems across the entire state. These programs are heavily regulated by HUD and the match money must equal the allowable uses of the federal funds. Given the 2023 awards, we estimate this would cost for one year about \$12.6 million, a drop in the \$40 million dollar bucket.
- Second, we recommend the one-on-one state match be extended to Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG). ESG grantees/subrecipients must match 100% of the federal funds. This again would add numerous housing and services programs plus homeless prevention and outreach programs across the state. We estimate this would cost \$2.17 million dollars, again a drop in the \$40 million bucket.
- Third, we believe there should be a research component funded under this bill. The research should be done by a non-biased, Kansas-based entity. We believe that without a non-biased research component, the state legislature, KDADS and the homeless response system will not learn what was successful and what was not from this legislation for future planning and state funding.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. KSHC stands ready to assist this body develop real solutions to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-reoccurring for our most vulnerable citizens.

2001 Haskell Ave. Lawrence, KS 66046

Staff@kshomeless.com

www.kshomeless.com