

Health and Human Services Committee
Opposition to HB 2600
February 16, 2016
Sister Therese Bangert
Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth

Last week for many of us in the Christian Faith was Ash Wednesday – the beginning of the season of Lent. The Church calls us to reflect on our relationship with Our God and one another, to grow these relationships for the good and to prepare for the New Life promised at Easter. The prophet Isaiah tells us:

“This is the fasting that I wish . . .

Setting free the oppressed

Breaking every yoke;

Sharing your bread with the hungry

Sheltering the oppressed and the homeless . . .

And not turning your back on your own.” (Isaiah 58)

Sharing your bread with the hungry:

I want to begin today with a few statistics from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) on Food Insecurity which is defined as **"a household-level economic and social condition of limited or uncertain access to adequate food."**

Kansas facts:

- One of every 6 Kansas households (16.5 %) was food-insecure in 2013.
- To put this in numbers 183,000 Kansas households, representing approximately 460,000 people, were food-insecure.
- In 2013 more than one in five Kansas children (22.5 %) lived in these households.
- The majority of food insecure households consisted of working families - and 68% had one or more full-time worker.
- In 2011 Kansas ranked 44th in the nation in participation of persons eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This means that 31% of the individuals who are eligible do not receive SNAP benefits.

From where I stand such statistics should be having all of us debating a bill that would be making it simpler for parents to feed their hungry children. I suspect/hope some in this room have attempted to help a struggling friend or relative apply for SNAP. There is nothing simple about the process.

Quite frankly I don't disagree with fraud investigators p. 7, but is there equal concern for outreach workers to assist families where there are hungry children?

And I don't disagree with D on p. 9 about the request for replacement of EBT cards. But it is my understanding that neither of these things need to be in law for DCF to accomplish them.

What I do find troubling is what I judge as a lack of respect for the struggles of persons living in poverty. I have attached to my testimony a Guest Editorial from the KC STAR. Ms. Wing's reflection on her mentoring relationship speaks of that respect to me. Of the relationship with her mentee Ms Wing says:

She has opened my eyes to the institutional roadblocks we put in front of families that are trying to get it right and improve their situations. Kahtea's ex-husband left her with a \$5,000 utility bill.

She works a full-time, hourly job. How is she to take off work (losing precious income) to go to the utility office to try to negotiate a losing situation?

An Amendment to HB2600:

I would ask this body to reconsider a policy change that you made last year in the HOPE Act. Back in 2006 the Kansas Legislature passed a bill that gave those who had a record of a drug felony the right to still receive Food Stamps. I worked with a team from SRS (now DCF), drug counselors, the Department of Corrections and a bi-partisan group of legislators to educate legislators on the importance of this legislation – especially for mothers who were coming out of prison and were deemed able to be reunited with their children – thus SRS and DOC's interest. I ask you to remove this "institutional roadblock" to families that are trying to get it right for their children and themselves.

I want to conclude with a story told by a world famous Kansan – Dr. Karl Menninger. During the last years of his life, I enjoyed a relationship with Dr. Karl. He had a great compassion for children and for people who lived in poverty. The story:

A five-year-old girl stood in her crib in a ward of the Neurological Institute, erect, motionless and mute. A few weeks prior to her admission, she had suddenly become strange, refusing to answer to her name, refusing to eat, refusing to remain in bed. She would wrap herself in a dirty blanket and turn her face to the wall, wetting and soiling herself.

*One of the nurses remembered that upon one occasion she thought she heard the child say in a singsong rhythm,
"Say you're sorry, say you're sorry."*

On this clue, a doctor took the child's hand and said to her seriously, "I am sorry. I am very, very sorry." Upon this she turned slowly to other doctors and said, "Say you're sorry." And each of them did.

Then she began to talk. A week later she was acting like other children again (although she continued to have therapy for two years.)

One wonders how frequently another person's life would be changed this miraculously if they could be told in the right way at the right time by some of the rest of us that we are sorry! Well, we are, aren't we?

With the Hope that we are sorry about the hungry children in our state

I greet you with Peace and promise my continued prayers for your work.