

TESTIMONY OF REBEKAH GASTON  
CHILDHOOD HUNGER INITIATIVE DIRECTOR  
KANSAS APPLESEED CENTER FOR LAW AND JUSTICE  
BEFORE THE KANSAS SENATE COMMITTEE ON  
PUBLIC HEALTH AND WELFARE



IN OPPOSITION TO SENATE BILL 256

MARCH 5, 2015

Chairperson Pilcher-Cook and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding Kansas Appleseed's concerns about provisions regarding reduced eligibility and decreased outreach for food assistance which are proposed in SB 256. Kansas Appleseed is a nonprofit, nonpartisan anti-poverty policy advocacy organization committed to vulnerable and excluded Kansans. Our organization asks you to oppose SB 256, as it will prevent or discourage low-income children and families in Kansas from accessing the food assistance benefits that in many cases stand between them and extreme food insecurity.

**Limiting outreach will increase food insecurity in Kansas**

SB 256 prohibits state and federal spending on many forms of outreach promoting food assistance benefits and enrollment. If Kansas limits the information available to those who are facing food insecurity – particularly to those who are newly food insecure because of a recent job loss or health crisis – thousands of additional Kansans will needlessly go hungry because they do not know they qualify for food assistance or they don't know how to apply for food assistance benefits. In 2012, only 72% of eligible Kansans received food assistance.

**Lifetime bans on drug offenders are overly punitive**

SB 256 creates a lifetime ban preventing a person with even one felony drug conviction from receiving food assistance in Kansas. This policy is excessively punitive and it inhibits rehabilitation of drug offenders by making it more difficult for them to climb out of poverty.

As the provisions of SB 256 will only serve to increase food insecurity in the state, Kansas Appleseed respectfully asks that you oppose the bill.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rebekah Gaston  
Childhood Hunger Initiative Director  
Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice