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Testimony to Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

February 1, 2015

Bill 372

At United Community Services of Johnson County (UCS), we agree with Governor Brownback when he said in his state of the state address that we have an obligation to help Kansans who are struggling. We believe the first way to help is by making public assistance accessible and responsive to the poor families with children who need help. We cannot reduce poverty if public assistance fails to reach poor families.

Statewide, TANF serves only 12 for every 100 children living in poverty. In 2010, TANF reached 20 poor children for every hundred. In Johnson County, where UCS is located, the reach is even less, with only five of every 100 poor children served by TANF. The Kansas TANF program is not providing an effective safety net.

Two well-known poverty researchers, Greg J. Duncan and Katherine Magnuson, have shown that poverty among young children not only slows them in school but also shrinks their earnings as adults. TANF is often a critical source of income for the most vulnerable families with young children, suggesting that policy changes within TANF that cut income, such as establishing harsher sanctions or shorter time limits or significantly reducing benefits, could harm young children now and into the future.

The provisions of SB 372 do not serve to lift families out of poverty or protect young children from harm. Rather, they add more restrictive policies changes that make TANF less available and could further reduce TANF caseloads.

The state has an obligation to help Kansans who are struggling. Meeting that obligation begins with an accessible and responsive TANF program.

Submitted by: Karen Wulfschuhle, Executive Director