



March 19, 2024

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Kansas Action for Children

Written-only Neutral Testimony on SB 542

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Chairperson Billinger and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on SB 542, which would provide \$40 million in one-time, state-matching infrastructure funding for emergency shelter. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

KAC is supportive of policies and funding that provide support for families experiencing homelessness and those who are housed but facing housing instability and cost burdens. We know that safe and stable housing is critical for children's health and educational outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, too many Kansas families are just one emergency away from losing their homes. Several factors contribute to housing instability and homelessness:

- 33.1 percent of Kansas households are renting their homes,<sup>2</sup> and from 2022 to 2023 Kansas' average rent increased 11.3 percent.<sup>3</sup>
- No market-rate unit is affordable for a Kansan working full time at minimum wage. In fact, just to afford a one-bedroom unit, a minimum wage worker would have to be employed 83 hours per week.<sup>4</sup>
- Kansas has a shortage of 55,383 affordable rental homes for extremely low-income renters, those with incomes at or below 30 percent of their area median income.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acosta, Sonya (Feb. 15, 2022). *Stable Housing is Foundational to Children's Well-Being*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/stable-housing-is-foundational-to-childrens-well-being>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2022). *American Community Survey (2022)*, S2501.

<https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S2501?q=kansas%20housing&tid=ACSST1Y2022.S2501>

<sup>3</sup> Leckie, Jon (Dec. 7, 2023). *Renting Trends*. Rent.Com. <https://www.rent.com/research/average-rent-price-report/>

<sup>4</sup> NLIHC (2023). *Out of Reach: Kansas*. <https://nlihc.org/oor/state/ks>

<sup>5</sup> NLIHC (2021). *Housing Needs by State: Kansas*. <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/kansas>



- 23 percent of Kansas households with children are housing cost burdened, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of their monthly income on housing costs, making fewer funds available for emergencies like illness or car troubles.<sup>6</sup>

Knowing that many housed Kansas families are just one emergency situation away from falling into homelessness, we are particularly concerned with one of the bill’s provisions. We are **opposed to the language in SB 542 that requires recipient municipalities to “enforce local ordinances regarding camping and vagrancy.”** This could require cities and counties to spend law enforcement resources on criminalizing people who are homeless through no fault of their own. Too many municipalities in Kansas do not have enough shelter beds to meet the needs of Kansans — which is exactly why this funding is needed in the first place.

This provision is counterproductive. Interaction with law enforcement perpetuates homelessness, making it harder for people to obtain jobs and housing in the future. Additionally, imposing enforcement of potentially harmful and outdated ordinances could upend ongoing efforts of cities and counties to address homelessness in the ways they know work best for their communities.

KAC applauds the intent to bolster communities’ efforts to address homelessness and its causes, but I urge you to consider removing the provision that would require recipient municipalities to enforce camping and vagrancy ordinances. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, and please reach out to me at [erin@kac.org](mailto:erin@kac.org) if you have any questions.

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<sup>6</sup> Annie. E. Casey Foundation (2022). *KIDS COUNT Data Center*.  
<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=KS#KS/2/0/char/0>