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Kansas Food Bank

Second Harvest Community Food Bank

Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 254

Chairman Thompson and members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the Kansas Food Bank and Second Harvest Community Food Bank, which together serve the hungry and food insecure in all 105 counties in the state. Last year, our networks of charitable food pantries distributed more than 46 million pounds of food to those in need in Kansas, from our smallest rural communities to major metropolitan areas.

We oppose Senate Bill 254 prohibiting the state or any county or local agency from providing any public benefit to any individual without first verifying that they are citizens. The bill is vague and broad-reaching and could unravel the public-private partnership that is vital to Kansas' food assistance system.

Our food banks provide food to nearly 550 charitable food pantries in churches and community centers throughout the state. These are not sophisticated organizations—they're just Kansans answering the call to feed their neighbors. Some characteristics of our partner food pantries:

- 67% of food pantries have no paid staff and rely entirely on volunteers.
- 61% of volunteers are 60 years of age or older.
- Each food pantry utilizes an average of 35 volunteers each month who together provide an average of 162 hours of service each month.
- Our network pantries serve more than 200,000 Kansans every month.

It is through many of these pantries that the state of Kansas distributes the USDA commodities it receives through The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). The state provides fruits, vegetables and other staples from U.S. growers and producers and our community-based food pantries distribute those foods to children, seniors and families in need.

Under the provisions of this bill, food pantries receiving TEFAP foods would have to check the citizenship of every adult receiving that food. The burden is on the community-based organizations and their hardworking volunteers to carry out this verification on behalf of the state.

Imagine, if you will, a 70-year-old volunteer serving at a mobile pantry distribution in their church parking lot at 10 a.m. on a chilly Saturday morning. Under the provisions of this bill, it appears they would need to check the immigration status of every person coming through the line, whether they've known them for decades or not. How would this work in practice?

- The volunteer would need to ask for citizenship verification of every adult. If a person doesn't have proof of citizenship with them, they would be turned away.
- If a person does have the necessary documentation, the volunteer would have to determine the veracity of that ID.
- If the individual is a qualified alien, the volunteer must somehow access the "systematic alien verification for entitlements program, operated by the United States department of homeland security" to verify the individual's lawful presence. A volunteer. In a parking lot. On a Saturday morning.
- While no audit mechanism is defined in the bill, it is assumed the pantry volunteers would have to keep a copy of the ID in order to prove to the state that they did not provide a public benefit to an unauthorized individual.
- If a pantry could determine how to make copies of sensitive documents of hundreds of people in a parking lot on a weekend morning, pantry volunteers would then have to securely store that sensitive information for an indefinite amount of time to prove to the state that the law was followed.

All of this to give someone a can of corn.

And this is only TEFAP. The broad and vague definitions "state and local public benefits" would impact multiple nutrition programs administered by the state in partnership with community-based organizations, most of which provide nutrition assistance to help vulnerable Kansas seniors stay independent and healthy. Some examples include:

- The Commodity Supplemental Food Program—senior food boxes
- Meals on Wheels—home-delivered meals for homebound seniors
- Senior congregate meal sites—meals provided in churches and community centers for seniors
- Senior Farmers Market Nutrition Program—vouchers for seniors to purchase food at their local farmers market

Please vote no on SB 254. Kansas' charitable organizations, the volunteers that are their lifeblood and our most vulnerable citizens who are struggling to put food on the table are the ones who would pay the price for a broken federal immigration system. Please don't overburden with bureaucracy good Kansans who are just trying to feed their neighbors.