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Kansas Food Bank

Second Harvest Community Food Bank

Testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 85

Chairman Erickson 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 to 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 85. The bill's requirements for "continuous review and comparison" of data will place more strain on the Department for Children and Families and threaten the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/Food Assistance benefits of low-income Kansans.

Kansas struggles to connect eligible seniors, working families with children and individuals with disabilities to SNAP, ranking 42nd in the country in SNAP participation. This is because Kansas already has very strict eligibility rules and significant verification requirements, as evidenced in the 31-page application for benefits.

Many of the data sources outlined in the proposed bill are already used by the state to check eligibility. While it's not clear why more frequent data matching is necessary or how such a process would create any real efficiencies, it is clear that it would cost taxpayers money.

In reviewing this bill, we struggle to see who these provisions help or what problem they solve.

They don't help Kansas taxpayers, who will be on the hook for millions of dollars to increase bureaucratic red tape. Kansas already has the 10th highest cost-per-SNAP-application in the nation because of the amount of red tape in the Kansas program and this bill would make it worse.

They don't help the budget. This bill would increase software and personnel costs and result in no corresponding programmatic cost savings to the state. SNAP benefits are funded 100% by the federal

government and administrative costs are a 50/50 match. Kansas would be on the hook for the costs of the additional data matching, but any reduction in benefits would be retained by the federal government.

They don't help Kansas government run more efficiently. This bill would require Kansas taxpayer dollars be spent on data matching contracts with for-profit vendors to re-verify information that has already been carefully checked by DCF. We know from other states that these data matching agreements often result in outdated information being sent to caseworkers as "alerts." These alerts all have to be checked and cleared by staff, which prevents staff from processing outstanding applications and renewals. In Ohio, for example, millions of duplicative "alerts" have bogged down the state's computer system, resulting in legislative directives to fix this costly issue.

Please oppose SB 85. Excessive data matching won't accomplish any real efficiencies, will cost taxpayers money and could harm the food security of our most vulnerable Kansans.