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JEFF KING  
SENATOR, FIFTEENTH DISTRICT

Chairwoman Lynn and members of the Senate Commerce Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 149.

An increasing number of states have adopted, or are considering, measures to ensure government assistance is being used for its intended purposes. In 2012 alone, 28 states considered legislation regarding drug testing of welfare recipients. Last summer, many of my friends and neighbors in southeast Kansas expressed great concern about the use of government payments to further illegal drug use. Given the illegal drug problem plaguing our state and the need to fight against the problem of drug addiction, it quickly became clear that Kansas needs to join those states adopting similar legislation.

SB 149 would require recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to undergo drug testing if there is reasonable suspicion they are using illegal substances. Under SB 149, the Kansas Department of Children & Families (DCF) would continue to use their existing screening mechanisms to see if a reasonable suspicion exists. The bill would prohibit an individual who fails a drug test from receiving assistance until they have completed drug treatment and job training programs. A second failed drug test would result in the individual having their assistance suspended for a year. Long term suspension would result for recipients who fail a third, or subsequent, drug test.

This bill helps protect at risk Kansas children. In instances where a parent fails a drug test, the portion of cash assistance allocated for their children could go to a third party to administer on the child's behalf.

Similar bills in previous years unnecessarily cost a significant amount of money. Mindful of that cost, the drug treatment programs and job skills training required by SB149 would be covered entirely by existing federal TANF funds. Thus, under my bill, Kansas taxpayers would not bear the cost of this treatment.

Last February, Congress approved a measure allowing states to drug-test individuals who receive unemployment benefits. Under this proposal, potential employers who have a job applicant fail or refuse to take a drug test must report that outcome to the Kansas Department of Labor. This is similar to the requirement in current law that employers who terminate a worker for drug use must report that fact to the Department of Labor. Failure of or refusal to take the drug test would result in the individual losing their unemployment benefits until they complete drug treatment and job training programs. This provision is similar to laws already enacted in Georgia.

The proposal is not intended to be punitive to those who rely on these programs but to identify those with substance abuse problems and assist them in getting the drug treatment and job skills needed to be productive members of the job market. I believe this SB 149 is a responsible, targeted approach to help families overcome the evils of drug addiction and ensure the proper use of welfare and unemployment benefits.

Respectfully submitted,

Senator Jeff King