



3801 Topping Avenue
Kansas City, MO 64129

215 SE Quincy Street
Topeka, KS 66603

Toll-free 877.353.6639
www.harvesters.org

Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Sen. Mary Pilcher-Cook, Chair
Sen. Elaine Bowers, Vice Chair
Thursday, March 5, 2015
1:30 p.m.
Room 118-N

Re: Opposition to SB 256

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the regional food bank serving northeast Kansas. Our nonprofit network includes 302 charitable organizations providing food assistance to hungry and food insecure children, seniors and adults in 16 Kansas counties.

SNAP lifetime ban

Harvesters opposes legislation to impose a lifetime ban on benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, known as “food assistance” in Kansas) for persons who have been convicted of a drug-related felony. The 1996 federal law that put this ban in place is flawed and counterproductive, which is why 42 states, including Kansas, have opted out of the ban. To put the ban back in place would be a step backwards.

It is already a struggle for persons with low incomes and felony drug convictions to find employment and support themselves. Denying food assistance to such persons increases the risk that they may return to criminal activity and relapse into drug and/or alcohol use instead of achieving the rehabilitation that so many desire. Compassion and sound public policy meet in our current policy because access to food helps sustain recovery from addiction, promotes public safety and reduces recidivism.

In addition to being a hunger issue, HB 2381 is also a justice issue. Under federal law, SNAP cannot be denied to any other ex-offender. This means that a person can commit murder, a sexual offense or even treason, serve their time and then receive SNAP—if they meet income and other requirements. The Kansas ban would apply only to those with past drug felonies and inordinately punishes those with drug offenses who have served their sentences per the order of the court.

Elimination of the SNAP federal waiver option

Eliminating the ability of the Secretary to utilize the federal waiver for work requirements option in times or areas of high unemployment and/or insufficient jobs reduces flexibility to respond to difficult situations in the future. The waiver was very important for individuals who had difficulty securing employment during the 2008 recession when job opportunities were scarce. The waivers are not permanent and the Secretary can rescind them when it is determined they are no longer needed. But to eliminate ability to use waivers in the future ties the hands of the Secretary to respond to the very real needs of Kansans who are struggling.

SNAP categorical eligibility ban

Categorical eligibility is an important option for states that seek to reduce paperwork and the cost of administration. In many cases, people who are eligible under the guidelines of one federal program are eligible



for additional federal programs as well. By denying the Secretary the option to streamline operations and develop efficiencies in the future, the ban on categorical eligibility is counterproductive.

SNAP outreach ban

Harvesters supports SNAP outreach that helps raise awareness among our most vulnerable Kansans about the help for which they may be eligible. This outreach is particularly important for those who have recently fallen out of the middle class because of the loss of a job or unexpected medical issues and expenses.

Through our outreach efforts, we have met thousands of people who are unaware of the assistance for which they may be eligible or are simply overwhelmed by the process. (Kansas' SNAP application is 23 pages, compared to Missouri's, which is just four.) These newly poor can utilize SNAP benefits to help stabilize their families and get back on their feet, keeping them out of long-term poverty. But they can only use the programs if they know about them and understand them, which is the role of SNAP outreach.

TANF eligibility

Ensuring that families and children have access to the food they need to live healthy and productive lives includes provision of sufficient financial resources. For the most vulnerable Kansans who depend on income supports like TANF, fair processes and adequate benefits are an important part of a food security system.

We ask for your careful consideration and vote in opposition to this bill.

Respectfully submitted,



Valerie Nicholson-Watson
President & CEO