



March 5, 2015

RE: SB 256 Testimony for Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Dear Chairwoman Pilcher-Cook and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in opposition to changes in eligibility for social safety net programs proposed in Senate Bill 256. Greater Kansas City LISC is the local office of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the nation's largest community development organization, dedicated to revitalizing underserved urban and rural neighborhoods. Since 1981, LISC has invested over \$116 million in the Kansas City area, leveraging more than \$621 million in total development and injecting \$7 of national resources for every local dollar invested.

As we work to transform neighborhoods into healthy and safe communities, we must consider the public health and public safety of all residents, in particular, children and vulnerable families. **Nearly half of all Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Assistance (SNAP) participants are children and 82% of all SNAP benefits go to vulnerable households that include a child, elderly or disabled person.** Changes proposed in SB 256 would disproportionately affect these low-income families.

The bill also puts a lifetime ban on individuals convicted of a drug felony. This equates to a double punishment, penalizing individuals working to successfully reenter society, obtain gainful employment and support their families. It also puts low-income children in danger of food insecurity due to past actions of their parent/guardian. Hunger can lead to relapse and recidivism, further endangering children and families. As we work to create tools that encourage successful reentry into our neighborhoods and reduce recidivism, roadblocks like this ban stand in our way. **Only eight states deny SNAP to ex-offenders with prior drug-related offenses, and enacting the ban now would be a step backward for Kansas.**

SB 256 would also prohibit categorical eligibility, a tool that helps states reduce paperwork and administrative costs. People who are eligible for one federal program are often eligible for multiple programs. Categorical eligibility streamlines operations and reduces processing costs, so banning this efficient tool would be counterproductive.

For these reasons, Greater Kansas City LISC urges the committee to oppose SB 256.

Respectfully,

Stephen Samuels
Executive Director