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Christie Appelhanz, Vice President of Public Affairs
Kansas Action for Children
Testimony for Senate Public Health & Welfare Committee Hearing on Senate
Bill 256

Chairman Pilcher-Cook and members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to share our concerns about the changes proposed in SB 256 regarding eligibility for social safety-net programs. Kansas Action for Children is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to shaping health, education and economic policy that improves the lives of Kansas children and families. On behalf of the children of Kansas, we stand in opposition to SB 256.

Programs to Help Families Work and Escape Poverty

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Child Care Assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are programs that help low-income families achieve self-sufficiency and escape poverty. SB 256 would limit access to these work supports by imposing unnecessary restrictions and limitations. TANF is a short-term program to help families cover basic needs during a lapse in income. Child Care Assistance helps parents work or pursue education and job training by covering some of the costs of child care.

Decreasing Eligibility and Increasing Poverty

Childhood poverty in Kansas has grown significantly in the past five years—from 15 percent in 2008 to 19 percent in 2013. The Department of Children and Families has already implemented many of the policies outlined in this bill through administrative actions, resulting in a 28 percent decrease in children receiving TANF assistance despite growing childhood poverty. For example, by shortening the time a family can receive TANF over a lifetime from 60 months to 48 months, 950 families lost assistance. The program is already temporary; instituting a shorter lifetime limit results in a missed opportunity to invest in families.

Limiting Efficiency

SB 256 prohibits the state from using categorical eligibility, by which families can be found eligible for multiple programs with similar eligibility guidelines. This not only limits access for families but also requires additional work by the state to process and verify multiple applications with similar requirements. The bill also prohibits the use of state or federal funding to provide outreach about food assistance programs. Limiting outreach results in disparate access across different parts of the state and places additional burdens on food charities.

Poor Kansas children cannot afford to wait for basic necessities. For these reasons, we respectfully request that committee members protect opportunities for kids and families by opposing SB 256.



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