



# Healthy Communities W Y A N D O T T E

**To:** Chairperson Schmidt, Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee  
**From:** Gretchen H. Kunkel, Chair of Policy Committee, Healthy Communities Wyandotte  
**Date:** February 2, 2017  
**Re:** Senate Bill 95 "SOAR Act" – Support

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 95. I am writing on behalf of Healthy Communities Wyandotte (HCW), a coalition of more than 100 diverse organizations and individuals dedicated to creating a healthier Wyandotte County. These members recognize that the "social determinants of health"—the conditions in which people live, learn, work, and play—have a strong impact on the health of a community. Poverty is one social determinant that is linked to higher rates of death and disease. Safety net programs like SNAP and TANF mitigate the effects of poverty and are critically important for the health of vulnerable Kansans, particularly our children.

Senate Bill 95 will give new mothers more time to obtain sustainable employment and find quality childcare, making it easier for vulnerable individuals to access food assistance benefits, and providing a safety net for our community in times of economic hardship.

*Modify TANF work requirement*

The 2016 HOPE Act introduced a new restriction requiring new mothers to return to work only two months after giving birth. This requirement is extremely prohibitive because infant care is scarce and expensive. Waiting lists for infant care can be filled for months and, **in Wyandotte County, the average weekly cost is \$197 for center-based and \$151 for home-based infant care.** These costs decrease significantly after the first year of a child's life. Reinstating the work requirement to one year will give new mothers sufficient time to obtain sustainable employment and find quality, affordable childcare.

*Acceptance of voice signature*

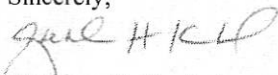
Currently, community partners, such as Harvesters Food Bank, that assist individuals who are not able to physically come to a partner site must complete a lengthy paper application for TANF, SNAP or Childcare Assistance by hand and send it to the applicant to sign and attach additional documents. The completed application is then sent to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) for data entry and processing. Allowing community partners to accept a telephonic voice signature on behalf of an applicant will significantly improve the process for both applicants and DCF. This will have tremendous impact on homebound and elderly individuals in our community as well as individuals who struggle with literacy.

*Allow DCF secretary to request waiver in times of distress*

It is important to return the authority to request the federal waiver for work requirements option to the DCF secretary for times of high unemployment or insufficient jobs (such as the 2008 recession). Unemployment is trending down in Wyandotte County, but this is an important protection to have in place during times of economic downturn in order to fully support members of our community.

For these reasons, we urge the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee to support Senate Bill 95.

Sincerely,

  
Gretchen H. Kunkel