



204 SW 8TH AVE • TOPEKA, KANSAS 66603 • PHONE 785-227-9247 • FAX 785-861-7438 • WWW.KSCATHCONF.ORG

Testimony on SB 95

Michael Schuttloffel, Executive Director
Kansas Catholic Conference

Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

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9:30 AM

Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

We appreciate the sponsors' effort to help address the problem of poverty in our society. It is impossible to read Holy Scripture, and in particular the Gospels, without coming away with a profound sense of the deep obligation we all have to the poor. "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40).

When addressing poverty programs such as those implicated by SB 95, the human dignity of the poor should always be upheld. Those in need should never be denigrated or portrayed as a burden on society. The needs of the vulnerable should be society's first, not last, priority.

There should also be recognition of all that is required for true human flourishing. As the United States Catholic Bishops have said, "The primary purpose of this special commitment to the poor is to enable them to become active participants in the life of society. It is to enable all persons to share in and contribute to the common good."

In his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (On Human Work), Pope John Paul II wrote:

Work is a good thing for man - a good thing for his humanity - because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfilment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being"...Work is, as has been said, *an obligation*, that is to say, a *duty, on the part of man*. . . Man must work, both because the Creator has commanded it and because of his

MOST REVEREND JOHN B. BRUNGARDT, D.D.
DIOCESE OF DODGE CITY

MOST REVEREND JOSEPH F. NAUMANN, D.D.
Chairman of Board
ARCHDIOCESE OF KANSAS CITY IN KANSAS

MOST REVEREND CARL A. KEMME, D.D.
DIOCESE OF WICHITA

Senate Public Health and Welfare

Date 2.7.17

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own humanity, which requires work in order to be maintained and developed. Man must work out of regard for others, especially his own family, but also for the society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child, and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history (*italics in original*).

With respect to the specifics of SB 95, we share the sponsors' concern with a situation where a mother living in poverty would have to return to the workplace too quickly after having given birth. This is undoubtedly a worthy issue for the committee to deliberate upon. The goal should be to give a mother the support she needs after giving birth so that she and her child can ultimately move out of poverty.

Our people working in Catholic social services agencies have observed that access to affordable child care is a significant problem, including for parents attending school. Finding affordable, licensed child care is proving to be a major obstacle to moving people from assistance to work and self-sufficiency.

The "welfare cliff" remains a serious problem. When people receiving government assistance increase their income, their benefits decrease. This creates a perverse incentive not to work more, not to make more, and in cases where benefits are not offered by an employer, not to work at all.

Thank you for your consideration.