

March 7, 2019

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Kansas Action for Children
Written Neutral Testimony on Senate Bill 197
Senate Assessment and Taxation Committee

Chairwoman Tyson and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide neutral testimony on Senate Bill 197. Kansas Action for Children’s vision is to make Kansas the best state to raise a child and to be a child, and our organization shapes health, education, and economic policies that benefit Kansas children and their families.

Tax policies implemented in 2012 undermined the financial well-being of working families. While gradually and responsibly lowering the food sales tax rate can be part of the continued fiscal recovery from the Brownback tax plan, we urge policymakers to consider alternative options that would target low- and middle-income Kansans.

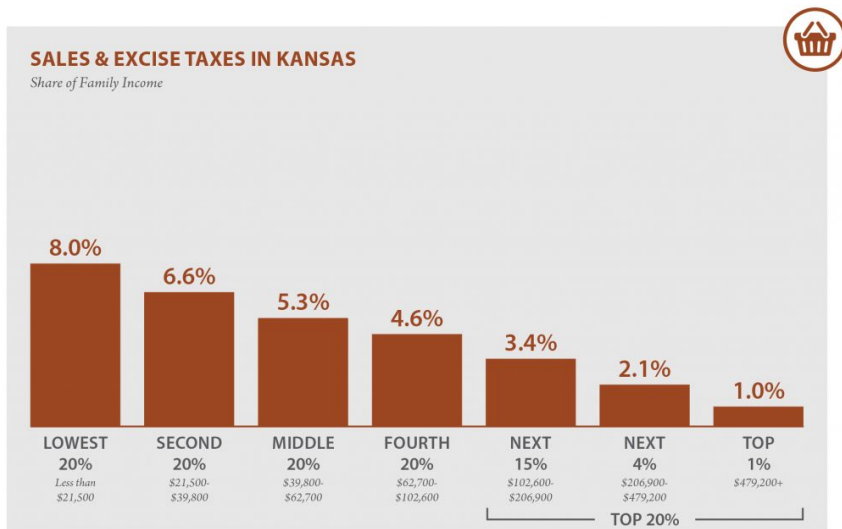
The current food sales tax rate is too high. Kansas is one of only seven states to fully tax the sale of groceries and has the second-highest food sales tax rate in the nation. County and city governments levy additional taxes, bringing the total sales tax rate as high as 11% in some areas and pushing some Kansas communities far above the national average.

The high food sales tax hurts Kansas families, particularly low-income Kansans. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, the state’s increasing reliance on sales tax hurts Kansas’ poorest residents. The lowest 20% of income earners in Kansas pay an average of 8% of their income in state and local sales and excise taxes, compared with 1% for the top 1% of earners.

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While lowering the food sales tax would help low- and middle-income families, there are more targeted policy solutions, which will likely have lower fiscal notes, that can help these Kansas families put food on the table.

While Kansas currently has a food sales tax refund, the amount of the refund, along with the eligibility level, severely limits the number of beneficiaries.

In 2013, the credit was made nonrefundable, which was coupled with changes in eligibility. The credit was previously refundable, meaning filers whose credit amount exceeded their tax liability could receive the difference. Nonrefundable credits are less helpful for low-income earners, who often do not have high levels of tax liability to benefit from the credit. These changes dramatically decreased the number of filers able to benefit from the credit.

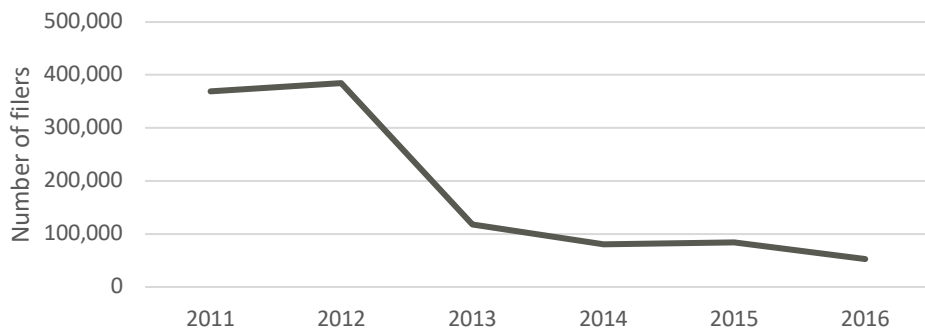
For those who continue to qualify, the credit is only \$125 per person listed on the return. The current amount of the food sales tax credit does not provide substantial assistance to low-income families that are eligible. According to the official USDA, the weekly cost of a “thrifty” food plan for a family of four is \$148.90.

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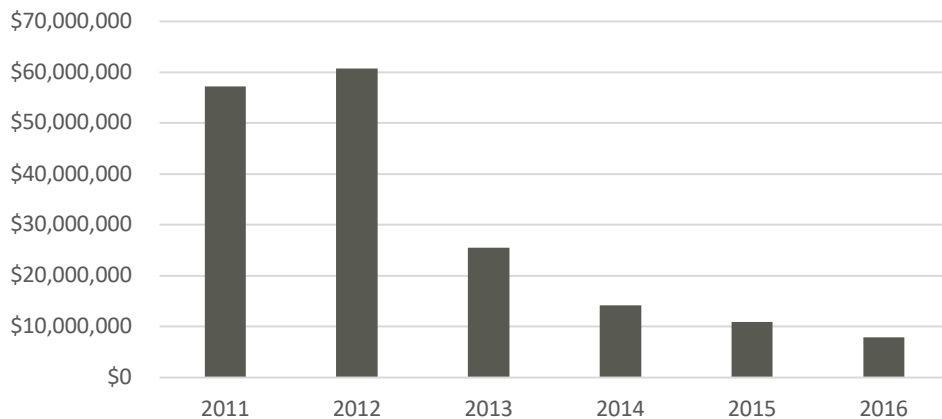
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Kansans receiving Food Sales Tax Credit declined dramatically after eligibility, refundability changes in 2013



Source: Kansas Department of Revenue, Division of Taxation. Tax Expenditure Reports 2012-2017.

Total refunds spent on Food Sales Tax Credit



Source: Kansas Department of Revenue, Division of Taxation. Tax Expenditure Reports 2012-2017.

Increasing the amount of the refund, while broadening who is eligible to receive it, would be a targeted and cost-effective solution to helping working Kansans access healthy food.



Kansas Action for Children supports fiscally responsible strategies for helping low- and middle-income Kansans make ends meet. At this time, as we continue to rebuild after years of economic challenges, we encourage policymakers to consider more targeted policy solutions to help working families in our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss Senate Bill 197 and please do not hesitate to contact me at adrienne@kac.org if you have any questions.

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