



# Senate Public Health and Welfare

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## **SB 379**

Presented by:

Rebekah Gaston

Director of Policy/Director of Economic & Employment Services

Kansas Department for Children and Families

Ethan Belshe, Legislative Liaison  
DCF Administration Building, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
(785) 296-8378 [ethan.belshe@ks.gov](mailto:ethan.belshe@ks.gov)  
[www.dcf.ks.gov](http://www.dcf.ks.gov)

**Testimony of:**

Rebekah Gaston

Director of Policy/Director of Economic and Employment Services  
Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF)

**Testimony on:**

Restoring the authority for DCF to request temporary waivers of food assistance time limits

Chair Suellentrop, Vice-Chair Berger, Ranking Member Bollier and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony regarding Senate Bill 379. SB 379 would allow Kansas to request a waiver of food assistance time limits for certain adults without disabilities or children on their cases during extended periods of exceptionally high unemployment.

Federal law allows able-bodied adults without dependents on their cases only three months of food assistance benefits unless they are working 20 hours per week. Despite the label, able-bodied adults without dependents may have children who reside with them part-time, or may have an undiagnosed physical or mental disability. They may be former foster youth, homeless veterans, or workers laid off during an economic downturn.

When a labor market area suffers high unemployment for twelve months or more, federal law allows state agencies to request a waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) of food assistance time limits for individuals in that particular Labor Market Area.

As the state agency administering the food assistance program, DCF monitors food assistance clients' work participation to ensure clients receive only three months of food assistance if they are not working 20 or more hours per week. Since 2015, the secretary of DCF has been barred by state statute from exercising this federally allowed option to request the temporary waiver of food assistance time limits from the USDA.

In December 2019, the USDA announced strict new rules that narrowed eligibility for the time limit waiver to very limited circumstances. State agencies are now required to show that the unemployment rate in a strictly defined Labor Market Area is over 10% for a 12-month period, or is 20% higher than the national unemployment rate for a 24-month period (and no lower than 6%). It is a tough bar to meet, but if unemployment in a Kansas Labor Market Area is high enough to qualify for a waiver, many Kansans will be denied adequate access to food without an extension of the food assistance time limits.

With the recent displacement of thousands of Kansas workers at Spirit Aerosystems and across the aviation supply chain, and the possibility that these displaced workers' unemployment insurance benefits will run out before they are re-employed, it is critical that DCF have the authority to adapt policies to meet Kansans' needs for food assistance during the toughest economic times. Imagine if this displacement occurred at a time of a recession or very high unemployment. If the Legislature was not in Session at that time, no action could be taken to apply for this federal waiver for many months.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the option to request a waiver when applicable for the temporary extension of food assistance time limits. I am glad to answer questions from the committee at the appropriate time.