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Shelley Mann
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Harvesters—The Community Food Network
Sub Sub SB 95, Testimony for Health and Human Services Committee

Chairman Hawkins and members of the Committee:

I am Shelley Mann and I am here today representing Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the regional food bank serving northeast Kansas. Our nonprofit network includes more than 300 charitable food pantries, kitchens and shelters providing food assistance to hungry and food insecure children, seniors and adults in 16 Kansas counties.

With the Kansas Food Bank in Wichita and the Second Harvest Community Food Bank in St. Joe, we provide emergency food assistance to hungry Kansans in every county in the state. Together we provide a meal or groceries to more than 136,000 Kansans every month.

Harvesters supports Sub Sub SB 95. At a time when 14.2% of Kansans are food insecure and an alarming 21.3% of Kansas children are food insecure, we must improve access to the safety net supports designed to help lift them out of poverty.

I lead the SNAP Outreach Team at Harvesters. Our outreach program and call center assists clients with their SNAP applications. We educate the community about the SNAP program and its requirements, help clients understand the paperwork they receive from the Division of Children and Families, and help them navigate the variety of processes necessary to receive benefits. Since 2012 we have assisted over 2,000 qualifying Kansas families with their initial SNAP applications, provided support and answered countless questions.

It is the mission of our program to make sure that every application we help submit is accurate, complete and ready to be processed immediately by a caseworker. Typically, having the assistance of an advocate improves the accuracy of an application because we can help catch small errors and make sure that all of the necessary documentation is included with the application. This not only saves time for the clients, but also saves time for the caseworkers at DCF, thus saving money for the state.

With the current system, we can only help people complete an online application if we are physically with them and can have them type their own name in the signature field. If we are assisting them over the phone—as we often are with many of our rural clients—we have to fill out the application by hand and mail it to the individual to sign. (We cover the postage and also include a postage-paid envelope, assuming that if someone doesn't have enough money

Harvesters' mission is to feed hungry people today and work to end hunger tomorrow.



for food, they don't have enough money for postage. The cost to Harvesters for postage alone is approximately \$4 per application.) When the individual receives the application, he or she signs it and attaches the necessary documentation, such as pay stubs, proof of residency and photo identification. Since Harvesters staff are not there to do quality control checks, we have to cross our fingers that clients include the correct documents with the submitted application.

By the time most individuals reach out to us for help, they have exhausted all of their other options and are at a crisis point. Increasing the application time by as much as 50% (adding as many as 14 days onto the up-to-30-day review of the application by DCF) makes the situation even more dire. Electronic voice signature is an inexpensive technology solution that is a win for all involved. Hungry Kansans are helped by a shorter application window, DCF is helped by more complete and accurate applications, and Harvesters is helped by fewer resources for both staff time and postage.

Recently we spoke with a 77-year-old woman from Alma, Kansas, in Wabaunsee County. The closest DCF office is more than a 30-minute drive away. With limited technology skills, the online application is complicated, and the 26-page paper application is cumbersome and intimidating. Being able to complete and submit an online application over the phone through us would make her path to benefits quick and efficient for both her and her caseworker. The current process for assisting clients gets the job done, but is not nearly as efficient as it could be with the help of electronic voice signature.

We ask for your careful consideration and vote in support of this bill that will help vulnerable Kansans have better access to the nutritious food they need to survive and thrive.

Respectfully submitted,

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