

To: Chairman Gene Suellentrop and members of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
From: David Jordan, United Methodist Health Ministry Fund
Date: February 21, 2020
RE: Senate Bill 440

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 440, which would allow single parents of infants to participate in home visitation as part of their TANF work requirements.

The United Methodist Health Ministry Fund (Health Fund) is a 33 year old, \$55 million health philanthropy located in Hutchinson. Our mission is to improve the health of Kansans. We focus on three strategic areas - access to care, early childhood development, and Healthy Congregations, a program aimed at addressing community health through engaging churches throughout Kansas. Over last three decades, we have provided over \$70 million in funding to improve the health of Kansans.

As I noted, one of our strategic areas of funding is early childhood development. We support early childhood initiatives because **research shows investing early creates not only the best health outcomes, but also the greatest return on investment.** Through support for evidence-based early childhood development programs, we can ensure our youngest Kansans enjoy nurturing family environments so they are primed for a healthy life and prepared for school success.

Compared to the national average, Kansas kids are more likely to endure Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) — chronic, persistent stressors like abuse, neglect, parental substance abuse, prolonged parental absence, maternal depression, and economic instability. Research shows ACEs causes toxic stress, which impedes brain development.

Home visiting programs are an evidenced based strategy to mitigate the impact of ACEs. Evidenced-based home visiting programs assist parents with taking an informed, active role in the lives of their children. Research demonstrates there are multiple benefits of quality home visiting programs that positively impact outcomes including:

- preventing child maltreatment
- supporting positive parenting,
- improving maternal and child health
- promoting child development
- increasing school readiness

We recognize that investing in these programs is going to show a major return on investment and improve health outcomes, which is why we are funding and coordinating the implementation of the Attachment Bio-behavioral Catch-up (ABC) Program. The current initiative is a \$2.4 million three-year project to provide the ABC intervention to high risk families at five sites throughout the state. Other funders in this project are the REACH Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, the Wyandotte Health Foundation, and Hutchinson Community Foundation.

As an intervention to address adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), ABC has been shown to lead to increased parental sensitivity and responsiveness to child needs, improved executive function, improved rates of school readiness and greater student success. In Kansas, our project evaluators from the University of the Kansas School of Social Welfare found that during the first two years of the ABC Early Childhood Initiative, the project has served 310 high risk families (693 children) from various circumstances and backgrounds including court referrals and children at risk for removal from their homes. Preliminary findings from the evaluation include:

- ABC is having a positive impact on families being served in Kansas
- Results show positive changes after participating in ABC in child functioning as well as parenting skills and caregiver knowledge
- ABC is an evidence-based intervention that is well-liked by parent coaches and families and leads to positive outcomes.

Overall, we see ABC and other home-visiting programs as a way to improve health and education outcomes, reduce child maltreatment and equip parents with skills to make a positive impact on their children's lives. For these reasons, we support Senate Bill 440, which would allow single parents of infants to participate in home visitation as part of their TANF work plan.

SB 440 would make it easier for parents to participate in critical home-visiting programs, which would improve the parenting skills and the odds of their kids having a successful life.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of SB 440.