



9 S. Jefferson Ave.

Iola, Kansas 66749

January 31, 2022

Lisse Regehr, CEO

Thrive Allen County

Verbal In-Person Proponent Testimony

House Committee on Children and Seniors

Greetings Chairperson Concannon and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Thrive Allen County. Thrive Allen County is a nonprofit organization located in Iola focused on improving health, economic development, recreation and education conditions in our county and the state. Our vision is that Allen County will become the healthiest rural county in Kansas, which we pursue by supporting and encouraging programs, policies and resources that promote access to healthcare, healthy lifestyles and positive community conversation.

We urge you to support HB 2525 because of the overburdensome red tape the legislation removes on food and child care assistance for low-income Kansas families. The current child support cooperation requirement punishes the parent living with the children for non-cooperation, which could be avoided with other common sense measures to increase child support cooperation. Instead, the current approach gatekeeps these essential resources and only hurts the kids caught in the middle. The limitations on student parents' use of child care assistance is detrimental to their continued growth professionally and in the workforce, especially since the high cost of child care can deter families from focusing on their education. Each of these regulatory barriers takes food off the table for struggling Kansas families, increases the risk of further straining the foster care system, and makes it harder for families to seek economic stability.

One of most common reasons children enter the Kansas foster care system is neglect. Research indicates that access to food and child care assistance helps mitigate child neglect and prevents more children from entering the foster care system. HB 2525 represents an investment in preventive family supports to help ensure more children don't enter the foster care system. Food is a basic necessity for life and access to high-quality early childhood education for children is comparable in its importance because of the substantial positive impacts that high-quality child care has on early childhood brain development. Considering only 12 percent of the income-eligible Kansans access the child care assistance, the counterproductive regulations being addressed in HB 2525 are instrumental in preventing low-income families from enrolling their kids in quality child care programs.

Rural Kansans lag behind their urban counterparts in obtaining a college degree, with only 22 percent of rural Kansas students from 2015-2019 having earned a post-secondary degree or certification- compared to 39 percent of urban Kansans. Rural Kansans who are pursuing their post-secondary education should be able to access the DCF child care subsidy without additional barriers that might prevent them from getting the child care support they need in order to complete their education. More Kansas parents completing their post-secondary education leads to them earning higher wages and increasing economic growth in our communities, which is needed in rural Kansas where wages and economic growth are either declining or stagnant.

Kansans' kids should not go hungry or miss out on foundational early childhood education because of their socioeconomic status, especially when the state programs designed to assist them are hindered by harmful and unnecessary regulations. Passing HB 2525 would assist families in overcoming the financial barriers that prevent our most vulnerable kids from thriving.

Thank you for holding a hearing on this common sense legislation. Please reach out if you have any questions.

Sincerely,
Lisse Regehr
President and CEO
Thrive Allen County