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Written-only Proponent testimony for HB 2525

House Committee on Children and Seniors

Chairperson Concannon and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2525.

As a pediatric registered dietitian, a majority of the families I work with struggle with nutrition security. Although nutrition is foundational to health for all people, it significantly impacts long-term health and education outcomes in children. It is often overlooked that childhood malnutrition is an issue in the United States, however, it is a growing concern that is often not addressed until the child has a severe health complication. Malnutrition perpetuates a cycle of chronic disease that can start as early as infancy.

Malnutrition is caused by not having enough to eat and/or not eating enough nutrient-dense food. When a child does not have access to adequate nutrition, they are at a higher risk of developmental delays, physical delays, poor performance in school, and mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression.

For nutrition to be considered adequate, it must provide enough protein, carbohydrates, fat, calories, vitamins, and minerals. All children need access to three well-balanced meals and two to three well-balanced snacks per day. The short-term benefits of improving nutrition in children include improved speech and language development, mobility, mood regulation, ability to focus in educational settings, energy, self-esteem, and self-regulation. Additionally, the long-term benefits of adequate nutrition prevent or reduce the severity of developmental disability and chronic diseases, like diabetes and heart disease.

Families struggle to provide adequate nutrition for several reasons, including but not limited to, lack of financial resources, lack of access to the equipment required for food preparation, transportation difficulties, and challenges with childcare. Barriers to adequate nutrition further complicate providing nutrition care by limiting treatment options. Despite dietitian appointments being a covered service by most insurance providers, unlike other forms of medical care, there is no prescription for food. Although dietitians work hard to connect families to available resources and provide recommendations that can be executed by the family, families are often discouraged after attending nutrition appointments when they don't feel that they have the means to implement the recommendations.

HB2525 will give Kansans the opportunity to prevent negative outcomes associated with poor nutrition by improving access to nutrient-rich foods for all children.

Thank you for your consideration.

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