

TO: The Kansas House of Representatives Children and Seniors Committee

FROM: Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Ph.D., M.S.W., Associate Professor
The Ohio State University College of Social Work

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RE: Written Testimony in Support of **HB 2525**

Dear Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of **HB 2525**, which would increase access to programs that are critical to Kansans of low-income and by doing so, head off important downstream effects on women, children, families, and Kansas taxpayers. My name is Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Associate Professor at The Ohio State University College of Social Work.

A large body of research has demonstrated the pernicious ways in which economic strain and food insecurity affect family functioning including a family's ability to care for their child's basic needs and to provide a nurturing and safe environment that is free from violence (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). In my research with Professor Donna Ginther, an economist at the University of Kansas, we have been examining the effects of state social safety net policies such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on child abuse and neglect during the Great Recession, which began at the end of 2007 and continued to ripple through the U.S. economy as late as 2013. SNAP has been recognized as a critical, near-cash stabilizer of child and family well-being during economic recessions. In our research, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Award # 1R01CE003098) and currently under peer review, we find that state SNAP policies play a significant role in preventing child maltreatment and foster care entries (Johnson-Motoyama & Ginther, 2021).

For example, in our national study, we find states with higher counts of policies that increase program participant income such excluding child support from income calculations, simplifying reporting, providing transitional SNAP benefits to those exiting TANF, and increasing income through Broad Based Categorical Eligibility experience large reductions in reports accepted for child protective services investigation: -353 per 100,000 children. Policies that increase program participant income are also associated with 95 fewer substantiated reports and 77 fewer reports substantiated for neglect per 100,000.

Our results also show that policies that increase program participant income are associated with fewer children entering foster care. Each additional SNAP policy adopted by a state that increases program participant income is associated with 45 fewer total foster care placements per 100,000 children. These findings comport with past studies that suggest even small amounts of income can prevent child maltreatment among families with limited resources.

Notably, the costs of SNAP benefits are small relative to the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment and foster care. While states may be inclined to find ways to reduce program costs, our findings from the Great Recession suggest limiting access to SNAP results in harm to children and considerably higher costs to taxpayers in the long run. Conversely, policies that increase access to SNAP and boost the income of SNAP program participants may see important protective effects for children, families, and for state budgets.

For example, if we convert our study estimates into caseloads, we find the addition of a single policy such as eliminating child support from income eligibility calculations could reduce the number of children entering foster care by approximately 46 per 100,000 children, which equates to 324 of Kansas' 704,300 children (U.S. Census, 2021) in a given year. The average monthly cost of a foster care payment for one child in Kansas is approximately \$2000 per month and children spend an average of 20 months in care (personal communication, R. Gaston). Therefore, foster care costs for 324 Kansan children equals \$12,960,000. For the same number of children, the cost of the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three (\$401) (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021) for 20 months is approximately \$2,598,480, a difference of more than \$10.3 million. Notably, foster care payments represent just a portion of the human and societal costs associated with separating children from parents. Our findings suggest that to prevent increases in child maltreatment and foster care and to protect state budgets, it is in the state's best interests to maximize program access and generosity to address basic human needs. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, these findings underscore the critical importance of the SNAP program for children and families as well as the potential unintended costs of state SNAP policy choices.

Concluding Remarks

Past research suggests the actions that states and localities take now to support families in need matter for child maltreatment prevention. Policies such as **HB 2525** that increase access to programs such as SNAP and child care subsidies and increase program participant income are likely to have positive impacts. Therefore, these concrete supports to address basic needs should be among the top priorities at the federal, state, and local levels to prevent child maltreatment and other forms of violence.

References

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- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes, and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 685-704.
- Johnson-Motoyama, M., & Ginther, D. K. (2021) Association between State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Policies and Child Maltreatment Victimization and Removals to Foster Care in the US, 2004-2016. Under review.
- Personal communication, R. Gaston, Kansas Department of Children and Family Services. Information on duration of foster care placements: Length of Stay and Reason for Ending Out of Home Placement SFY2017. [Internet]. Available from: http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2017DataReports/FCAD_Summary/LengthofstayFY2017.pdf
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