



TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL HB2525

Kansas House Committee on Children and Seniors

Monday, January 31, 2022

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Opportunity Solutions Project

Chairman Concannon, Vice Chair Esau Ranking Member Ousley, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Opportunity Solutions Project (OSP), a nonprofit organization that advocates for state and federal policies to advance the power of work so that more people may realize the American Dream.

I am here on behalf of the the OSP today to offer opposition testimony to HB 2525 which would provide broad expansion of welfare benefits by removing the current statute which requires a person to show good cause with child support cooperation enforcement in order to be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In addition, HB 2525 modifies current statute by exempting a person from the work-requirement for Child Care Subsidy if the adult is *“enrolled in at least six hours at a public or private elementary or secondary school or postsecondary educational institution.”*

While I believe there are many well-intentioned advocates in support of this legislation, it is important to point out that as proposed, this is providing help that hurts. Eliminating child support cooperation for SNAP applicants may sound helpful, but the reality is it means less kids and families receive their rightfully due child support. And while it seems reasonable to eliminate work-requirements for child care subsidy, this bill sets minimum hours a person must be enrolled.

In 2015 the Kansas legislature passed comprehensive welfare reform including making a person ineligible for SNAP assistance if they have not cooperated with child support enforcement without good cause. A person is able to participate in SNAP once it is determined they are cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement Program at the Kansas Department for Children and Families. So what was the impact in Kansas for this new requirement? In essence, more rightfully owed money going into the pockets of hardworking moms and dads from noncustodial parents. Within six months of this new provision in state law, child collections increased by 40 percent.¹

Also of note, and this is significant, the current law has a provision for “good cause” effort. Meaning, the law provides good cause exemptions when such cooperation isn’t in the best interest of the child—such as when there is a risk of domestic violence—and children enrolled in the program will never be sanctioned for their parents’ decisions i.e. the SNAP sanction is only on the parents portion of the SNAP benefit. With such a positive impact to low-income families, especially families owed their child support payments, it is hard to understand the benefit of HB 2525.

Again, HB 2525 would remove this provision allowing a person to refuse to cooperate with child support enforcement and still receive SNAP. This means a person may be caught in the cycle of poverty and government dependence longer than needed if they were not required to comply with child support enforcement.

¹ [Child-Support-CoOp-Costs-FINAL.pdf \(thefga.org\)](#)

Another provision of the 2015 Hope Act that, HB 2525 will remove, is the work requirement for those receiving child care subsidy if they are *“adults enrolled in a public or private elementary or secondary school or postsecondary educational institution for six credit hours”* It is important for the Committee to understand that the Opportunity Solutions Project is not against low-income families receiving child care subsidy. Child care subsidy can be an important assistance program for parents who need child care while they work or attend school to pursue a degree or certification that helps propel them towards self-sufficiency. Instead, as drafted, an adult enrolled in a secondary or postsecondary educational institution is exempt from the work requirement.

I want to close with a couple observations about this bill and the state of welfare in Kansas. First, I hope the Committee has a chance to review the fiscal note for HB 2525. While I do not disagree with DCF’s conclusion that HB 2525 will add additional FTEs and other costs to implement. I do wish they had considered the impact this bill will have on future collections. If the state saw an increase in collections after the HOPE Act passed in 2015, it is reasonable child support enforcement would see a decrease in collections as well. From what I can see this is not contemplated in the fiscal note. Furthermore, the fiscal note does warn while current federal funds from CCDF will be used to implement this change, it notes *“However, the long-term implementation of these child care assistance changes would likely require additional expenditures from the State General Fund as reserve CCDF funds are projected to eventually be exhausted at the current level of spending.”*

Also, when Kansas implemented HOPE Act reforms in 2015 and 2016, many advocates noted that this had and will continue to cause more children to enter the child welfare system. However, I do want the Committee to know this warning has not come true. In fact, according to recent numbers presented by the Governor’s office and DCF, the projected amount of children coming into care is decreasing and is projected to continue its decline, despite HOPE Act being in statute since 2015.

I want to note that many dedicated and passionate people have spoken on this issue today in support of a bill OSP is against. And while I believe this Committee should not support HB 2525, I do recognize the good work that many of these organizations do in helping serve vulnerable families and children and to that, “thank you”.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and I will gladly stand for questions.
