



January 31, 2022

John Wilson, President & CEO  
Kansas Action for Children  
Written and Verbal Testimony in Support of 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, which would increase access to critical programs that help low-income Kansans put food on the table and find high-quality care for their children. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

**Too many families struggle to make ends meet, and statutory requirements that restrict access to critical anti-poverty programs prevent families from achieving self-sufficiency.** HB 2525 is a step forward in making it easier for parents and caregivers to put food on the table, enroll their children in child care, pursue education and training, and ultimately establish financial independence and improve their children's health and happiness.

**Passing HB 2525 will prevent Kansas kids and their families from facing certain barriers to economic opportunity.** Our state is facing joint crises of poverty and inaccessible, unaffordable child care. Between 2000 and 2017, child poverty nearly doubled in Kansas. **Statewide, 101,000 children lived at or below the poverty line in 2019<sup>1</sup>** – the most recent data available. For a family of three, that was an income of \$21,330 a year or less.<sup>2</sup> Kansas families are struggling to meet basic needs.

The jobs of today do not account for the challenges of workers with young children. Shift work, overnight job responsibilities, and unpredictable schedules make child care access and stability precarious. The child care system struggles to meet the current needs of Kansas families, and those who can find child care often cannot afford it. That's why they need your help. Modifications to the child care assistance program can alleviate certain pinch points for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/43-children-in-poverty-100-percent-poverty?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/18/false/1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133/any/321,322>

<sup>2</sup> [https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated\\_legacy\\_files//187731/2019-pctpovertytool-highlight.pdf](https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/migrated_legacy_files//187731/2019-pctpovertytool-highlight.pdf)



parents.

Seeing this pressing need, and after conversations with Kansans across the state, we found the following provisions in HB 2525 will provide real and immediate relief to Kansas children and families by:

**Eliminating the child support cooperation requirement for the Kansas food assistance and child care subsidy programs.** Kansas is among the few states with this provision, which deters parents struggling to pay grocery and child care bills from pursuing these supports. There are many reasons why it might not be in a family’s best interest to pursue child support. Forcing parents to do so can push some parents into decisions they know are not best for their children and can even put families in danger. Some families have been abused by the other parent and are trying to keep their family safe, while others may have their own informal support arrangements worked out privately to suit their own family’s needs. In effect, Kansas has set up an “all-or-nothing” system where parents either receive both child support and child care assistance, or they get neither.

**Exempting students enrolled in public or private K-12 education or postsecondary educational institutions from child care subsidy program work requirements.** Kansas is one of only 10 states with a minimum weekly work requirement for parents in postsecondary education to be eligible for child care assistance.<sup>3</sup> Minimum work requirements make it difficult for parents to maintain eligibility given the unpredictable schedules of low-wage work, especially when combined with school demands.

**Removing barriers to increase the likelihood of students finishing school.** Kansas is one of the most restrictive states when it comes to parents pursuing further education or training and simultaneously receiving child care assistance. Our state has added restrictions that the federal government does not require, including time limits, reduced degree and program choices, GPA requirements, and allowing only one parent per household to be in an education or training program. These limitations do not incentivize work or help parents and children. Instead, they often drive families deeper into poverty by making parents choose between child care and working toward greater financial stability.

Child care and food assistance households are already facing economic hardship: the maximum monthly net income to receive food assistance for a family of three is \$1,830,<sup>4</sup> and the

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<sup>3</sup>[https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100141/state\\_child\\_care\\_assistance\\_policies\\_for\\_parents\\_in\\_education\\_and\\_training\\_0.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100141/state_child_care_assistance_policies_for_parents_in_education_and_training_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/recipient/eligibility>



maximum monthly gross income to receive child care assistance is \$4,575 for a family of three.<sup>5</sup> New research suggests that families can stay together – and kids can avoid the foster care system – by accessing food and child care assistance programs as there is a correlation between increased access to public support systems and decreased child welfare system encounters.

Current Kansas statutory restrictions are ineffective and even costly, and Kansas taxpayers are bearing the financial burden through an inefficient system of counterproductive barriers. This is why Kansas children and families need legislative action to help them establish stability and be healthy and thrive. Every parent wants their children to be happy and healthy – and the changes we are requesting would help parents provide for their children.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 2525 and for creating space for this important discussion. There is much more research, data, and insight to share, and Kansas Action for Children is happy to be a resource to the committee as you consider next steps. Feel free to reach me at [john@kac.org](mailto:john@kac.org) if you have any questions.

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/eas/pages/child\\_care/childcaresubsidy.aspx](http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/eas/pages/child_care/childcaresubsidy.aspx)