

Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to be heard and to the person who will be reading my testimony for me.

As a person with history of Anorexia, I am aware that denial of food assistance to an applicant eligible in every other way but for drug felony history has the potential to create an eating disorder. Also, such denial has the potential to inhibit drug relapse prevention or inhibit drug use cessation because nutritional status is paramount to success with avoiding relapse and also with recovery from addiction. Although drugs have not been part of my personal health challenges, I cycled through eating disorder and trauma hospitalizations where I have listened to stories of patients who also have the additional challenge of drug addiction. I have two nephews with a history of street drug sales and was saddened that employment was so difficult for one post-incarceration that he returned to drug sales, and then back to the corrections system. Currently, he's in a program where he is living outside a prison in a place where he's had to survive COVID twice. I cringe how he might have not survived if he were malnourished.

When researching how the barrier for drug felons came along, I learned some Kansans feel strongly that felons should be required to access food via a pantry or soup kitchen rather than have the "easy" road of paying for food at a grocery store using a SNAP card. For me, the only thing easy about using my SNAP is that it helps me buy food. The judgments from people who suggest the cell phone I may have with me while shopping or the vehicle I arrived in certainly show I am defrauding the system are not so easy for all of us to shrug off. It's as if people think you shouldn't make use of a program that will help you have the technology which our society runs on, and that you should have sold that vehicle for whatever little you could get for it before you went to apply for food assistance.

For me, having a card that I can't use to buy a birthday card for someone or to purchase a new bulb for a headlamp or any number of other purchases that my Anorexia attempts to convince me are more important than food, is important for me to avoid a relapse which will send me back to the hospital. Given my very low income, the SNAP card helps me have better success in actually having food in my home. Eating disorder support groups are far fewer than groups for other substance use disorders and for a while I was lucky enough to be embraced by a Narcotics Anonymous group who would modify the slogans for me. One slogan is about keeping a distance between an addict and the narcotics, it says, "If you don't have it, you can't use it." and for me, group members would shift the tones of the words slightly saying, "If you don't have it, you can't eat it." As someone who has survived trauma, this helped inspire me to push myself to endure the overwhelming trips to the grocery store. So much bright light, so many choices, people, sounds. Ugh. So, they supported me by reminding me that if I don't have food in my home, I'm far less likely to eat food.

The idea other people battling Anorexia who may have a felony history should be required to get to a pantry or soup kitchen because a felon must make more an effort than a non-felon to access food is an idea I hope no one on the committee shares.

What if we ensured ALL Kansans had access to food regardless of their past?

Requiring people who are struggling to meet their nutritional needs to make an extra effort to show up to various pantries and soup kitchens is possibly going to result in them having to subsequently seek financial support to access health care, and while the cost for just one of my two-week Anorexia hospitalization was over \$30K, I think removing a SNAP barrier and assisting all the felons with or without a history of eating disorders is a more cost-effective thing to do.

It appears many people in support of the drug felony SNAP barrier simply feel these felons ought to be required to get a job in order to pay for food without the need for SNAP. How is this supposed to work? Which employers are considering all drug felons for employment? We know that children perform poorly in the classroom if they are malnourished. Wouldn't it be equally detrimental to the chance for a drug felon to gain employment if they were malnourished while filling out a job application or during a job interview?

During my effort to become more aware of the ideas of Kansans who support the existing rule, I came across others, who like me, oppose it. One thought was so profound I'd like to repeat it. In reply to the argument drug felons must continue to be blocked from SNAP because they will sell their SNAP for drug money, and should be required to access food at a pantry instead, someone shared that they had seen homeless people get food from the pantry and see them a few blocks away selling them so no matter which way they get the food, on a card or a pantry run, at least someone is eating.

We all hear about people falling through cracks in the system. I think it very important to try to identify who needs extra help to spend their SNAP on their own nutritional requirements and get them the additional resources so they can make wise choices, but if they do sell their SNAP, who is buying? If it is someone who has ample financial resources for purchasing food but sees a discount in purchasing someone's SNAP for a bargain, then let's address this greed issue, and if it is someone who lacks the financial resources for purchasing food, we need to explore what pushed them through the cracks to be meeting their needs illegally.

The most troubling ideas I discovered in support of the current rule is that druggies don't want food and that denying them access to food is consistent with wanting all druggies gone.

I met more than a few alcoholics during my trauma and Anorexia hospitalizations and I learned the human body can convert alcohol to energy with far less trouble than bite chew swallow digest with food. The problem is - that alcohol does not sustain the good function of the body or brain.

So leaving anyone who doesn't want food without food is a sure way to enhance the potential they will make bad choices and missteps of body. It only takes one castaway person to make a malnourished blunder that could impact dozens of other people.

It could be anything from forgetting to unplug an appliance and burning down an entire apt complex, to malnourished driving errors, to losing their balance and falling off the curb into an oncoming school bus, with the resulting trauma impact on all who witness the scene.

Punishing anyone by withholding food absolutely always leads to negative effects which impact more than the starved person. I feel strongly that food is not only a human need, it is a human right and should never be used to exact punishment or put someone in jeopardy of causing death or injury to themselves or others. Please remove the current SNAP barrier impacting applicants with a felony history.

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