



January 26, 2022

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Kansas Action for Children
Proponent testimony for HB 2215
House Committee on Corrections and Juvenile Justice

Chairman Owens and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2215, which would allow Kansans with drug-related felony convictions to access nutritional support through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), known as food assistance in Kansas. 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.

Food assistance is one of our most effective anti-poverty programs. In Kansas, most food assistance families include children,¹ and in 2020, an average of 95,192 Kansas children relied on the food assistance program each month.²

SNAP is 100 percent federally funded, and the program prevents Kansas families from facing hunger, supports and encourages work, and increases social and economic stability overall. Passing HB 2215 will help formerly incarcerated people reintegrate into their families and communities as they rebuild their lives.

Current law is punitive for entire families. **When a parent is disqualified from food assistance, the entire household must stretch less money further.** The whole household could even become ineligible due to how benefits are calculated, punishing not only the individual but also their children after they have already served the sentence the judicial system assigned.

Additionally, restricting access to the program is counterproductive to the goal of reintegration because food assistance is a proven work incentive program. Because of the benefit calculation structure, households almost always see higher total incomes with modest

¹ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>

² <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7896-snap-benefits?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/574,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/any/15225>



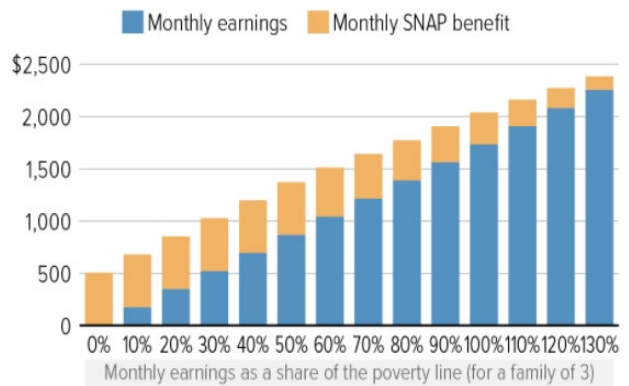
earnings increases. This allows them to continue receiving nutritional support while also encouraging them to work toward self-sufficiency.³ This helps people leave the program more quickly.

Federal rules favor earned income over unearned income when determining food assistance benefit amounts. Earned income results in more food assistance dollars than the same amount of unearned income would.⁴ A program that meets a basic need *and* encourages persistence in job searching is particularly well suited to encourage reintegration.

In addition to incentivizing work, the food assistance program helps individuals have access to enough healthy food. Formerly incarcerated individuals are twice as likely as the overall population to experience food insecurity.⁵ When someone does not know where their next meal is coming from, they are less able to focus on activities, such as seeking employment and housing, areas where formerly incarcerated individuals already face significant barriers.⁶ This population often faces overlapping barriers, as both food insecurity and incarceration are disproportionately faced by low-income families. We must take steps to ensure that these individuals have the resources they need to purchase the necessities that keep their families healthy.

Thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 2215, which will help ensure that all Kansas families have enough to eat, and to ensure that all Kansas kids grow up healthy and thrive. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me at erin@kac.org.

SNAP Benefits Gradually Phase Out as Earnings Rise



Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2017

³ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/the-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-includes-earnings-incentives>

⁴ <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/ees/Pages/Food/FoodAssistanceFAQs.aspx>

⁵ <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/02/10/food-insecurity/#:~:text=A%202019%20study%20found%20that,incarcerated%20women%20and%20Black%20individuals>

⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7753628/>