

**Testimony in Support of HB 2091 - Virtual
House Taxation Committee
January 28, 2021
Sister Therese Bangert - Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth**

History:

Because I have walked the halls of the Kansas Capitol during the Legislature for 34 years, I tend to do video memories of policies as they appear again in the process. The issue of the unreasonably high Food Sales Tax in our state has been continuously raised. It has been raised by Republicans and Democrats. It has not been a partisan issue.

One way to deal with this high tax on food was to add a Refundable Food Sales Tax Credit to the 1998 Tax Bill passed by the Legislature and signed by Gov Bill Graves. This 1998 tax bill that was touted as having something in it for everyone, acknowledged the disparity in tax burden for Kansans with low incomes.

I also watched the sales tax be increased several times. In 2009 the State of Kansas needed to have more revenue and the Sales Tax was deemed by Legislators to be the most acceptable tax to increase. I remember having this conversation with Gov Mark Parkinson who did not want to leave the incoming Governor with a dearth of resources and saw the sales tax increase as the only way he could increase Revenue. Sales tax was increased two times during the Brownback Administration.

Today:

So here we are in 2021 and this Committee has put forth this refundable credit bill – to again acknowledge that people of low income pay a greater percentage of their incomes in taxes. This is also a time in our nation when I suspect all of you have seen the unbelievable lines of cars waiting to receive food. These food lines are not foreign to Kansans. I suspect each of you know of the looming hunger in your communities. These pictures of miles of waiting cars tell the story without words that the Stock Market (which has in past months broken records and then broken records again) this Stock Market is not the economy. The economy has left millions of people including Kansans scrambling to feed their families.

Why not just get rid of the Food Sales Tax all together? I would note that like many of you I am not a fan of the Food Sales Tax. However, drastically reducing it or eliminating it does not make common sense as we face the many needs of Kansans, the needs of infrastructure and the need to pay off previous debts. I do not advocate this without an offset of a policy that would replace the revenue from the food sales tax.

Significance:

In the past I have heard some Legislators question what difference this small credit makes. I know from experience with Free Tax preparation sites like VITA that people would come and wait 5 to 7 hours to have someone help them fill out the form to receive their Food Sales Tax Credit. This credit does make a difference. It is welcomed.

As we celebrate the birthday of Kansas tomorrow, founded in 1861, I share with you that our Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth came to this state 3 years earlier – 1858. As Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth our mission is to put our hands and hearts to the task of walking with people in poverty and changing the systems that contribute to poverty.

I want to share a story with you – children in the Capitol bathroom.

These children reminded me that morning of how accustomed I can get to the abundance that is in my life. For me this Food Sales Tax Credit is a way that this legislative body can say to Kansans who do not live in abundance, “we care about you and we want tax policy to be more equitable”.

Thank you for hearing me.

Peace be with YOU and you have my prayers as you make important decisions that impact the lives of people in Kansas. **Please support HB 2091.**