

March 8, 2022

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Westside Good Neighbor Center Board of Directors

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Wichita, KS 67203

Opposition to Senate Bill 501—Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Chairman Hilderbrand and members of the Committee:

We are submitting this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 501.

The Westside Good Neighbor Center (WGNC) is a faith-based Wichita food pantry serving residents of Sedgwick County who are struggling to provide food for their families. We serve between 50 and 75 families each week. Clients may come only once a month. However, we see a growing number of families coming to the center for food just to get through the month. These families are living below the poverty line and must make choices between food, shelter, medications or other essential needs most of us take for granted. Senate Bill 501 will endanger the health and well-being of many of our clients. The bill appears to do very little to promote food assistance to those qualified and hurts those who use it with additional unnecessary or duplicated oversight.

We do not see how this bill promotes food assistance. The Kansas government needs to be providing help to obtain food that is available without the complications. These Kansans need the help provided through federal programs that are administered through our State government as the SNAP program. We as a faith-based organization cannot do it alone. We strive to provide what is needed for families to thrive and remain healthy. However, we cannot provide all that is needed each week or month for each family. As we see the number of families coming to WGNC grow and the size of families increase due to extended families living under one roof our resources are strained.

This bill places many new challenges and obstacles for those applying to or continuing their use of the available programs. It will punish many families that are trying to make ends meet. In addition to the burdens this will place on families already stressed with providing food, Senate Bill 501 now calls for additional information from families, shorter deadlines and additional proof of need, and sometimes to a corresponding agency. The application is already long and cumbersome, 16 pages, but now you are asking them to spend even more time completing paperwork and showing “proof of need” instead of them having this time to look for higher paying jobs, jobs with benefits or receiving training for better jobs. Not only is this a burden for them, but will become a burden for taxpayers as additional help is needed to review and verify the forms they will be required to submit.

As government agencies handle the paperwork, they will be required to participate in data sharing and review between several state agencies, even though quality control measures are currently in place. This is definitely an inefficient and impractical expansion of government bureaucracy. Not only is this inefficient, it can lead to backlogs for determination of eligibility, something Kansas has worked to eliminate. Who will be hurt by this, the families that are already struggling to put food on the table?

The guidelines set forth in Senate Bill 501 are punitive, not nurturing for family stability. We ask for your thoughtful consideration and vote in opposition to this bill that will make it more difficult for families to receive the help they desperately need. This bill will increase food insecurity among working poor Kansas families and added pressures to complete paperwork; require additional staffing to review the paperwork by government employees and; and overwhelm charitable food pantries such as ours throughout Kansas. Please vote in opposition to Senate Bill 501.