

Amanda Gress, Director of Government Relations
Kansas Action for Children
Testimony on House Bill 2600
House Health and Human Services Committee Hearing



Chairman Hawkins and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns about policy changes that limit the number of Kansas children and families served by the state safety net. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to shaping health, education, and economic policy that improves the lives of Kansas children and families. We oppose HB 2600, and encourage lawmakers to ensure that Kansans who are struggling financially can access safety-net programs like cash assistance, food assistance, and child care assistance to help them meet their basic needs.

Safety-net programs are serving fewer Kansans, despite high levels of need.

The number of Kansas children living in families with incomes that fall below the federal poverty level (\$20,090 per year for a family of three) continues to linger far above pre-recession levels. **Since 2007, the Kansas childhood poverty rate has risen 20%.** However, the state safety net is reaching fewer and fewer families in need of assistance. In 2007 an average of 26,633 Kansas children received cash assistance each month. By 2015 that number had dropped by more than half, to 11,038, even though more children were living in families with low incomes.

Safety net programs improve outcomes for children.

Investing in our youngest, poorest citizens sets the stage for them to flourish as adults. Research shows that a child's early years play a significant role in shaping their life's trajectory. Children served by safety net programs complete more years of school, work and earn more as adults, and experience better health.

HB 2600 creates additional barriers to accessing the state safety net.

HB 2600 will make it more difficult for children and families to participate in the safety net. Verifying the identity of all adults in the household penalizes multiple-adult families, creates additional administrative costs, and delays assistance for children and families who cannot meet their basic needs. **Kansas should instead ensure that the state safety net reaches families in need.** HB 2600 gives Kansas policymakers the opportunity to strengthen the safety net by:

- Extending lifetime limits for cash assistance
- Ensuring cash assistance serves our youngest Kansans by exempting the mothers of infants from work requirements for 12 months
- Authorizing child care assistance for continuous 12-month periods, even if parents experience changes in their employment status
- Lifting bans on spending cash assistance outside of the state and on withdrawing cash assistance from an ATM more than once per day

Kansas should design a strong safety net that serves the people who need it so that families can meet their basic needs in the short term, and so that children have the chance to succeed in life. For these reasons, we respectfully request that committee members oppose additional barriers to accessing the safety net and address existing policies that limit its effectiveness.

720 SW Jackson I Suite 201
Topeka, KS 66603

P: 785-232-0550 | F: 785-232-0699
kac@kac.org | www.kac.org

Shaping policy that puts children first

President & CEO
Shannon Cotsoradis

Board of Directors
Prisca Barnes
Gary Brunk
Jeffrey Colvin, MD
Susan Fetsch, PhD, RN
Ximena Garcia, MD
Terrie Huntington
Susan Jack
Lt. Kelvin Johnson
Marta Kennedy
Angie Knackstedt, BSN, RN-BC
Stephanie Makalous
Francis Mascarenhas
Sarah Mays
Chad Moore, JD, MHA
Marty Rombold
Jamie Schmaltz