



PRESS RELEASE

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Bi-partisan Senate health committee leaders introduce bill to help Kansas families “soar”

*Schmidt/Kelly bill to improve efficiencies, expand access to
job training for low-income Kansans*

TOPEKA – Sen. Vicki Schmidt (R-Topeka) and Sen. Laura Kelly (D-Topeka) today announced a bi-partisan effort to enact commonsense, fiscally responsible reforms to lift low-income Kansas families out of generational poverty. The “SOAR” Act (Strategic Opportunities to Achieve Results) will expand Kansas families’ access to the support they need to obtain high-quality job training.

“All Kansans want less reliance on public assistance, but we need to think more strategically about how to achieve that goal,” said Schmidt. “Some safety net barriers actually cost Kansas taxpayers more in the long run. We need modest but meaningful solutions to guarantee that short-term restrictions don’t create long-term consequences. This proposal ensures Kansas babies and toddlers will get the food and support they need to grow up healthy, while moms and dads get the training or education they need to obtain good-paying jobs and move off welfare for good.”

The “SOAR” Act offers strategic reforms to help low-income Kansas families get ahead and stay there:

- Exempts parents attending school from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) work requirements and the 24-month lifetime limit for child care assistance, enabling Kansas moms and dads to complete academic or job training programs that exceed 24-months;
- Exempts single mothers of infants from TANF work requirements for 12 months after giving birth, protecting the health of both mom and baby while saving Kansas thousands in costly infant child care assistance;
- Strengthens state flexibility by clarifying that waivers for federal SNAP work requirements can only be requested during challenging economic times, when unemployment is high and jobs are scarce;
- Reduces red tape and administrative costs by enabling the Kansas Department for Children and Families to accept voice authorization for the public assistance application from verified and reliable third parties (such as Harvesters Community Food Network).

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“Work requirements simply don’t take the costly and critical needs of infants into account,” said Kelly. “On average, it costs more to send an infant to child care in Kansas than it does to send an 18-year-old to college,” said Kelly. “It makes no sense to force parents into unpredictable, low-paying jobs that don’t even cover the child care expenses it requires for them to work. It pushes both them and their baby even deeper into poverty. This bill is not only better for the child’s development, it is a more financially sound decision for both the family and the state.”

Schmidt serves as the Chair of the Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee, while Kelly serves as the Ranking Minority Member. A hearing on the “SOAR” Act will be held on Tuesday, February 7, 2017.

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