



February 24, 2020

John Wilson, President
Kansas Action for Children
Written testimony in support of Senate Bill 379
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee

Chairman Suellentrop and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 379, which would authorize the secretary of children and families to request a waiver from certain limitations under the food assistance program. Kansas Action for Children's vision is to make Kansas the best state to raise -- and be -- a child. KAC shapes state and federal policies that improve health, education, and financial outcomes for young children and the adults who care for them, especially those living in poverty.

The so-called Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) waiver, at first glance, might seem like a policy that would solely affect adults without children. In practice, however, low-income children and youth would also benefit from the waiver. Children under the age of 18 and the adults who live with them are technically exempt from the three-month time limit for SNAP and not in need of a waiver. However, this does not reflect the complex financial arrangements that low-income families sometimes use to put food on the table. This bill could benefit the following populations:

- Children with noncustodial parents.
- Children whose extended family members provide financial support.
- Youth aging out of foster care and unaccompanied homeless youth.

Food insecurity remains a major threat to health and well-being in our state, particularly for children. While every family wants to be able to provide healthy and fresh food for their youngest members, many families in Kansas struggle to provide. In 2018, 18.3 percent of Kansas children under age 18 lived in food insecure households.¹ That means roughly 130,000 Kansas children survive without a dependable source of food.

Food insecurity has devastating consequences for children. Without access to healthy food, children's health, education, and development all suffer. Research shows that nutrition is one of, if not the, most critical environmental influences on developing infants and children.²

¹ KIDS COUNT Data Center. Food Insecurity. Annie E. Casey Foundation. Original Data Source: Data Source: Feeding America: Map the Meal Gap. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/10238-food-insecurity?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/any/false/870,573,869,36/any/19818>

² The Urban Child Institute. "Nutrition and Early Brain Development." March 25, 2011. <http://www.urbanchildinstitute.org/articles/updates/nutrition-and-early-brain-development>

When children don't have access to the nutrition their developing minds and bodies need, they are at greater risk for obesity and other long-term health problems. Hungry kids are also more likely to repeat a grade in elementary school, experience developmental impairments in areas such as language and motor skills, and have more social and behavioral problems.³

SNAP is a critically important resource for children given their higher prevalence of food insecurity and high rates of participation. Research links participation in SNAP for 6 months with an 8.5 percentage point decrease in food insecurity for households with children.⁴ In fiscal year 2019, an average of 205,260 Kansans participated in the program.⁵ Nearly three-fourths of Kansas SNAP participants are in families with children.⁶ However, 29 percent of eligible individuals in Kansas do not receive the benefit.

Beyond its role in fighting food insecurity, SNAP significantly reduces child poverty and helps struggling families make ends meet. The economic impact doesn't stop at the individual family. It is estimated that "in a weak economy, \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.70 in economic activity."⁷ Nearly all (97 percent) of SNAP benefits are spent in the month they are received, with more than half (59 percent) being spent in the first week, meaning SNAP funds go back into local economies almost immediately.⁸

With the possibility of an upcoming recession, as well as emerging layoffs in Wichita, this bill can give the state another tool to support those impacted by local and national economic downturns.

Kansas Action for Children supports SB 379. This bill would help low-income adults, as well as the children who may rely on them, meet basic needs. We can't help Kansans achieve economic mobility by keeping food off the table. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

³ Feeding America. "Hunger deprives our kids of more than just food." <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts>

⁴ James Mabli, Jim Ohls, Lisa Dragoset, Laura Castner, and Betsy Santos, "Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security," U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service, August 2013. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Measuring2013.pdf>

⁵ Kansas Department of Children and Families. Public Assistance Reports. <http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/ees/Pages/EESreports.aspx>

⁶ Nchako, Catlin and Lexin Cai. "A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by State Fact Sheets (Kansas)." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. December 3, 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Kansas>

⁷ Nchako, Catlin and Lexin Cai. "A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by State Fact Sheets (Kansas)." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. December 3, 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/a-closer-look-at-who-benefits-from-snap-state-by-state-fact-sheets#Kansas>

⁸ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. "Chart Book: SNAP Helps Struggling Families Put Food on the Table." February 13, 2018. <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/3-13-12fa-chartbook.pdf>