

TO: The Kansas House of Representatives Children and Seniors Committee

FROM: Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Ph.D., M.S.W., Associate Professor
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RE: Testimony in support of **HB 2371**

Dear Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **HB 2371**, which would increase access to programs that are critical to Kansans of low-income and by doing so, head off important downstream effects on women, children, families, and Kansas taxpayers. My name is Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, Associate Professor at The Ohio State University College of Social Work.

A large body of research has demonstrated the pernicious ways in which economic strain and food insecurity affect family functioning including a family's ability to care for their child's basic needs and to provide a nurturing and safe environment that is free from violence (Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010). In my research with Professor Donna Ginther, an economist at the University of Kansas, we have been examining the effects of state social safety net policies such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) on child abuse and neglect during the Great Recession, which began at the end of 2006 and continued to ripple through the U.S. economy as late as 2013. SNAP has been recognized as a critical, near-cash stabilizer of child and family well-being during economic recessions. In our research, which is funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Award # 1R01CE003098) and currently under peer review, we find that state SNAP policies play a significant role in preventing child maltreatment and foster care entries (Johnson-Motoyama & Ginther, 2019).

For example, in our national study, we find states with higher counts of disqualifying policies such as noncooperation with child support, failure to cooperate with the requirements of other cash assistance programs, and bans from SNAP due to drug use experienced a 3.6% ($p < .05$) increase in child maltreatment reports when compared to other states. Notably, some policy options intended to improve SNAP access, such as increasing asset limits for SNAP, had no discernible effects on SNAP caseloads yet significantly reduced child maltreatment. These findings comport with past studies that suggest even small amounts of income can prevent child maltreatment among families with limited resources, even when effects on SNAP caseloads may be negligible.

Notably, the costs of SNAP benefits are small relative to the direct and indirect costs of child maltreatment and foster care. While states may be inclined to find ways to reduce program costs, our findings from the Great Recession suggest limiting access to SNAP results in harm to children and considerably higher costs to taxpayers in the long run. Conversely, policies that increase access to SNAP and boost SNAP investments may see important protective effects for children, families, and for state budgets.

For example, if we convert our study estimates into caseloads, we find the addition of a single income generosity policy such as eliminating child support cooperation requirements as

proposed in **HB 2371** could reduce the number of children entering foster care by 7.3%. Based on our estimates, this translates into approximately 390 children at the sample mean. The average monthly cost of a foster care payment for one child in Kansas is approximately \$2000 per month and children spend an average of 20 months in care (personal communication, R. Gaston). Therefore, foster care costs for 390 children equal \$15.6 million. For the same number of children, the cost of the average monthly SNAP benefit for a family of three (\$401) for 20 months is approximately \$3.1 million (Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 2021). Notably, foster care payments represent just a portion of the human and societal costs associated with separating children from parents. Our findings suggest that to prevent increases in child maltreatment and foster care and to protect state budgets, it is in the state's best interests to maximize program access and generosity to address basic human needs. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recession, these findings underscore the critical importance of the SNAP program for children and families as well as the potential unintended costs of state SNAP policy choices.

Concluding Remarks

To date, the U.S. Congress has passed a number of coronavirus related legislative actions to enhance unemployment insurance, increase federal funding for Medicaid, and increase food security spending. For example, the 2020 CARES Act made direct payments to taxpayers and introduced economic support for small businesses, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) passed an eviction moratorium to protect 43 million renters nationwide that the Biden Administration extended through March 2021. However, recent reports suggest existing measures have not been sufficient to stave off food insecurity or bolster resources for household spending, rent, child care, or mortgages. Additional federal investments are necessary to stabilize income, and concrete supports must be a priority. In the meantime, past research suggests the actions that states and localities take now to support families in need matter for child maltreatment prevention. Policies that increase access to programs such as SNAP and child care subsidies are likely to have a positive impact. Therefore, these concrete supports to address basic needs should be among the top priorities at the federal, state, and local levels to prevent child maltreatment and other forms of violence. The COVID-19 pandemic and national reckoning on racial justice also illuminates the historic dynamics of poverty and inequality in this country and presents us with the opportunity to examine how we might better address the fundamental needs of children and families. I support **HB 2371** and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

References

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- Conger, R. D., Conger, K. J., & Martin, M. J. (2010). Socioeconomic status, family processes, and individual development. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 72(3), 685-704.
- Johnson-Motoyama, M. & Ginther, D. (2019). *Changes to the U.S. social safety net are causally related to child maltreatment: Policy is a strategy for prevention*. The 21st National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect (NCCAN), Washington DC, April 24-26, 2019.
- Personal communication, R. Gaston, Kansas Department of Children and Family Services. Information on duration of foster care placements: Length of Stay and Reason for Ending Out of Home Placement SFY2017. [Internet]. Available from: http://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/PPS/Documents/FY2017DataReports/FCAD_Summary/LengthofstayFY2017.pdf