

My name is Cecilia Douglass. I live in Garden City with my three children. Two teenage daughters and a vibrant little guy with a fascination with dinosaurs and commercial equipment.

Today I am writing in **support of HB 2371**. I strongly encourage the adoption of the proposed legislation because of my firsthand experience with the negative impact the current requirement imposes.

I spent over 10 years as a single parent to my daughters, starting at the age of 16. With a high school diploma and a drive to thrive, I knew government assistance was necessary to ensure my girls had enough food and quality child care so I could work full-time. I relied on SNAP and Child Care Assistance until the glorious day in 2013 when someone at the Department of Children and Families local office informed me I finally made enough to no longer qualify. Rather than being upset, I felt empowered. I knew the assistance was temporary and was meant to help me find self-sufficiency for my family to no longer rely on government aid.

In 2017 I was abandoned by the father of my son halfway through a planned pregnancy. I had a miscarriage 6 months prior and was considered high-risk until my second trimester. In 2016, I accepted a job with better flexibility to accommodate the needs of my pregnancy. This move allowed me to maintain doctor appointments and rest when necessary but also came with a significant pay decrease. At the time I accepted the job I was one of the two-income earners in my household. Within the first three months of my pregnancy, my son's father spent all of our money on two skiing trips, PC gaming equipment, a large vehicle, and an expensive dog. Needless to say, I was left in crippling debt. I felt overwhelmed by the idea of trying to provide for my two daughters while also taking care of my physical health under financial pressure. I logged on to apply for SNAP benefits right after my son's father left. Despite the hit to my income, I didn't qualify based on my household size. The debt my ex left me with wasn't taken into consideration when I applied. My gross income was reviewed and it was determined I wouldn't qualify until my son was born.

By August of 2017, I started a new job with better pay, benefits, and flexibility. Still attempting to recover financially, I returned to the website to apply for SNAP benefits. I knew child care wasn't necessary since my employer would allow me to bring him with me to work for the first six months. Before I could submit my application for food assistance, I had to authorize a child support enforcement order. This step seemed excessive for a form of assistance I saw as temporary. My son's father has not attempted to connect since leaving five months into my pregnancy. I hope one day my son may have a relationship with his father. However, I don't believe it's the state's responsibility to enforce that without my true consent. To make it a requirement for temporary assistance programs seems like a waste of government resources for little payoff. I have a child support enforcement order in place for my older two children. I can assure you that the enforcement order has done nothing to relieve us of our financial hardships. Especially considering the absent parent in this case regularly works for employers paying cash wages, or jumps to a new job once he notices his paychecks being garnished.

My hope is this plea resonates with you as you move forward. Though I no longer require state aid it breaks my heart to think of other mothers forced to rely on peanut butter, milk, eggs, and cheese from WIC to nourish their children in financial hardships.

Thank you kindly for your time and attention.