



February 18, 2021

House Committee on Children and Seniors

Chairwoman Concannon and Members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted in support of House Bill 2371 on behalf of the three food banks that together make up the Association of Kansas Food Banks: The Kansas Food Bank (Wichita), Harvesters—The Community Food Network (Topeka, Kansas City), and Second Harvest Community Food Bank (St. Joseph, Missouri).

Our food banks support HB 2371 because it helps our most vulnerable low-income Kansans get the help they need to keep their families healthy and safe. While we support all aspects of this bill, we will speak specifically to the importance of rescinding the child support requirement for eligibility for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known in Kansas as the Food Assistance Program.

Together our three food banks serve the hungry and food insecure in every one of Kansas' 105 counties. While our networks of food pantries and kitchens are the backbone of the charitable response to hunger in Kansas, we are only part of the solution. The most far-reaching and stable source of food assistance for those facing food insecurity is SNAP. This federally funded and state-administered program provides more than \$320 million annually to low-income, elderly and disabled Kansans to help them purchase the food they need in local grocery stores. Our food banks provide information to our agencies and their clients about the SNAP program, which may provide families with more significant and stable support than the charitable system can provide.

One of every four children in Kansas are food insecure, and many of them could benefit from the food resources provided through the federal SNAP program. But state-imposed requirements currently in place in Kansas are a barrier to that much-needed help. The child support cooperation requirement for SNAP participation is one of those harmful provisions.

Under current Kansas law, an applicant for SNAP nutrition assistance must check a box indicating that she/he will assist the Department for Children and Families with child support enforcement. According to Harvesters SNAP outreach staff, nearly one-third of people they assist with their SNAP applications stop when they get to the child support enforcement question and do not complete the application. This requirement does not help the state recover child support funds; this requirement creates a barrier to children getting the nutritious food that they need.

The USDA estimates that just 71% of eligible Kansans receive the federal SNAP benefits for which they are eligible. There are many reasons for these low participation rates, but the child support enforcement requirement is certainly one of them.

We may never know how many people have chosen not to apply for SNAP benefits out of fear. They may be fearful for their family's safety if they re-engage an abusive partner through the child support program. They may be fearful of losing the in-kind support the non-custodial parent provides in lieu of child support they can't afford to pay because they don't have reliable employment. They may be fearful of seeing the non-custodial parent go into debt and face legal consequences if they are unable to pay, which will impact the financial and non-financial support their child receives for years to come.

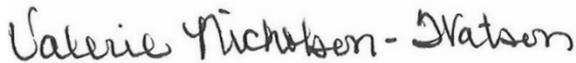
The reality is that the overwhelming majority (82%) of children in poverty who are eligible for the child support program already participate; the small number of families who do not participate likely have well-founded reasons for not doing so. Threatening economically fragile families' access to food is simply not the right way to increase engagement with the child support system.

We ask for your careful consideration and vote in support of this bill that will help ensure that Kansas families have the work and family supports they need to lead healthy, productive lives.

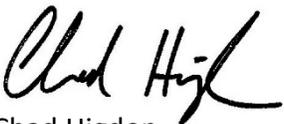
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Walker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "B".

Brian Walker
President & CEO
Kansas Food Bank

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Valerie Nicholson-Watson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "V".

Valerie Nicholson-Watson
President & CEO
Harvesters—The Community Food Network

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chad Higdon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "C".

Chad Higdon
CEO
Second Harvest Community Food Bank