



Testimony in Support of House Bill 2141

Kansas House Committee on Welfare Reform

February 9, 2022

Steve Greene on behalf of
Opportunity Solutions Project

Chairman Averkamp, Vice-Chair Howell, and members of the committee,

My name is Steve Greene, and I represent Opportunity Solutions Project (OSP). OSP is a non-profit, non-partisan advocacy organization dedicated to advancing policies that reduce barriers to work, protect state benefits for the truly needy, and ensure that the government is accountable to taxpayers and citizens.

I am glad to speak in support today of House Bill 2141. The purpose of HB 2141 is simple. It would require a non-custodial parent i.e. the parent who does not have physical custody of their child to cooperate with child support enforcement as a condition for receiving food assistance.

In essence, it would implement what most Kansans believe to be true; that non-custodial parents should make good faith efforts in economically supporting their child before receiving tax-payer funded food assistance programs. Under current law, a person can apply for welfare and receive food assistance, all while failing to cooperate with Kansas's child support enforcement officers who are trying to get a single-parent the support she is owed. Or all while failing to keep up with court-ordered payments to that single-parent that he can afford.

This is unfair to the custodial parent, mostly single-moms, working to provide for their family and the child. And it's unfair to the taxpayers, who, on one hand, are paying to maintain child support agency officials and a judicial system to get child support to those moms and, on the other hand, paying individuals who are ignoring or subverting that system.

Kansas has the systems in place already to make this change. In 2015 the Kansas legislature passed comprehensive welfare reform including making a custodial parent ineligible for food assistance if they refuse to cooperate with child support enforcement without good cause.

So what was the result of this new requirement?

Within just six months, child support collections increased by nearly 40 percent among those impacted.¹ Since the change, low-income families in Kansas gained an estimated \$1.8 million more in child support each year. More support has translated into less need for government assistance, allowing many to move out of poverty and end their dependence on welfare programs entirely. This means that more rightfully owed money is

¹ <https://thefga.org/research/child-support-cooperation-ending-cycle-dependency/>.

going into the pockets of hardworking moms and dads from noncustodial parents. This is certainly a good thing.

And more and more states are adopting these policies. Nebraska now requires child support cooperation for both custodial and non custodial parents.² In 2019 the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) published a memo urging states to require child support cooperation through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).³ The USDA noted in the press release that:

“Increasing the number of states that implement child support cooperation requirements will benefit families, help non-custodial parents assume responsibility for the well-being and stability of their children, and provide more children with the support they deserve. We stand ready to provide technical assistance to any state interested in implementing this policy.”

This is pretty simple. Under this new law, anyone who is cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement Program at the Kansas Department for Children and Families and who is up to date on court-ordered child support payments will keep their eligibility.

For a non-custodial parent, ‘cooperation’ usually just means agreeing to take a paternity test so that a child support order can be put into place to enforce the obligation under the law. And making court ordered payments is exactly what it sounds like—following a court order. And if the non-custodial parent’s circumstances change—like if he loses his job—he just has to follow the normal procedures of getting his support order adjusted based on his new income. Again, this bill simply requires non-custodial parents to meet their obligations.

For those that choose to ignore law enforcement and court orders, the sanctions only apply to the adult, and not other members in the household receiving food assistance. Let me repeat that—no matter what either parent does, no child will lose food assistance. In addition, current law and Kansas Department for Children and Families practice allows for “good cause exemptions,” in case of concern for the safety. Like the option to get a support order adjusted based on new circumstances, there is plenty of flexibility in these requirements to meet unique circumstances.

Finally, this bill is about helping foster connections between a child and their non-custodial parent. We all agree, child support enforcement is good policy. In fact, the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement noted in a 2016 paper that, “In 2012, it is

² https://www.nebraska.gov/rules-and-regs/regsearch/Rules/Health_and_Human_Services_System/Title-466/Chapter-03.pdf.

³ <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pressrelease/2019/usda-006519>.

estimated that the child support program avoided \$5.2 billion in public costs, more than three times the amount that is retained by the government to repay welfare costs.”⁴

With such a positive impact on low-income families, especially families owed their child support payments, it's hard not to see why the Kansas legislature would not support this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.

⁴ https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ocse/sbtn_csp_is_a_good_investment.pdf.