



Written and WebEx Neutral Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 542

Given by Mathew Faulk, Program Director, Bert Nash, Lawrence, KS, and a Steering Committee member of the Kansas Balance of State Continuum Care

3/15/2024

Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care Leadership

Chairman Billinger and Members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means:

I am Mathew Faulk. I serve as a member of the Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care's Steering Committee and am providing this testimony of behalf of the Steering Committee's leadership team. The Kansas Balance of State Continuum of Care helps coordinate homeless services in 101 mostly rural counties across the state and is providing this letter to voice a neutral position on SB 542 for the following reasons.

While the Balance of State Continuum of Care applauds the decision of state leadership to dedicate funding to help address homelessness, single, one-time action on behalf of the state is insufficient for meeting the need as it exists in the community today. In the regions of the state experiencing the highest numbers of homelessness, third party needs assessments have identified hundreds of millions of dollars in additional affordable housing and homeless supportive services necessary to address the level of need today. This need exponentially exceeds the level of resource allocated in SB 542, ensuring that the bill will not achieve the substantial impact intended by state leadership.

Additionally, mandated enforcement of camping and vagrancy fails to address the issue of migration, forced or otherwise, and would result in an unintended burden on the destination regions in this process. Households experiencing homelessness often migrate, either by choice or by force, to regions that are perceived to be more tolerant or have greater resource. Those regions therefore experience an increasing burden that is not in their control. Mandated enforcement will exacerbate the existing burden in those regions by flooding the local law enforcement and judicial system. Most of the impacted households also lack capacity to pay a significant portion of the associated fines, therefore placing a corresponding burden on the local tax base. Because this bill will not create sufficient shelter or housing, this will also result in the creation of a homelessness jail system, where households without shelter or housing are placed in jail due to cyclical offense from lacking a place to live or shelter because no access to appropriate or sufficient shelter or housing exists.

Legislation must also honor and support the local community's ability to set policy and target resources base on the unique needs of the give community. Local control is imperative in the work to address widespread social issues because it acknowledges the unique differences between communities across the various regions. Addressing the needs within the frontier and rural communities means implementing different strategies and approaches than those necessary in urban areas. Resources must therefore be allocated in a flexible manner that allows them to be aligned with local needs and strategies, rather than applied in a one size fits all manner.

Sincerely,

Beth Waddle, Chair
Executive Director
My Father's House
Paola, Kansas

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