



Senate Ways and Means

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SB 485

Presented by:

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Testimony of:

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Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF)

Testimony on:

Adding in-home parent-skill-building programs to the programs TANF cash assistance recipients can participate in to meet TANF work participation requirements

Chair McGinn, Vice Chair Billinger, Ranking Member Hawk and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 485, which would allow single parents of infants to count their participation in home visitation programs toward TANF work requirements.

At the Department for Children and Families, we are responsible for protecting children and promoting healthy families. We are committed to meeting families where they are, to provide the services families need in the time and place that those services are needed. The earlier we can provide the services, the better – primary prevention costs less than early intervention, which costs much less than crisis services.

Any delay in service provision enhances the risk that a concern turns into a crisis.

As we focus on protecting children, we know that the most effective strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect are (1) by ensuring families have their basic needs met and (2) ensuring that their parents have the skills and knowledge they need to be effective parents. Senate Bill 485 would allow DCF to advance both strategies for the most vulnerable families.

Families' basic needs include healthcare, food, clothing, diapers and safe and stable housing. The skills and knowledge that parents need include understanding child development, learning and utilizing positive parenting practices, understanding children's mental and physical health needs, and learning the effects of children's exposure to violence.

DCF offers families a number of economic supports to help them get through crises and get back on their feet, including Child Support Services, Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) food assistance, child care assistance and energy assistance.

Under federal law, the TANF program is only available to families with minor children. TANF families are required to cooperate with child support services to establish

parentage and enforce child support orders. Adults who are not working at least 20 hours per week must participate in the TANF Employment Services program, where they receive intensive case management from a DCF career navigator.

Career navigators work with each TANF client to design an employment and training plan that fits that individual's needs. The employment and training program model starts with stabilization, before moving through training, job placement, and employment sustainment.

As TANF clients work through the program, DCF's career navigators help them get past barriers they may encounter. In some cases, it's paying for a car repair. In others, it's helping the client navigate the child care resource and referral network to find and pay for quality, safe, affordable child care that meets their family's needs.

One barrier many new parents on TANF face is the 3-month time limit before they must return to work. Many of these new parents are not able to return to the job they had before the child was born, so they must apply and interview for a new job during the time when they may still be in recovery from giving birth. The challenge is often exacerbated by a lack of family support, a lack of education or training, a lack of transportation, and/or inadequate access to mental and physical health services.

Once the parent finds a job, they need to locate safe and affordable child care for their baby. In Kansas, infant care is in high demand and short supply. Parents with above-average incomes find themselves on yearlong waiting lists. For TANF clients and other low-income parents, safe options in licensed child care facilities are difficult to find, may not be near their homes or jobs, and often cost significantly more than the parents receive in child care assistance payments.

Once an infant starts attending a child care facility, they are exposed to new people and new germs, often leading to a bout or two with illness in the first couple of weeks or months at that facility. Many of the low-income jobs available to TANF clients – in food service or in retail stores – offer only part-time hours, come with unpredictable schedules, and do not allow employees sick leave.

Senate Bill 485 would help new single parents build a solid foundation for themselves and their children by maintaining TANF income supports, and by learning parenting skills in their homes through an evidence-based home visiting model, setting them up for a more successful transition into education or training and employment before the child reaches one year of age.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 485. We believe the bill will strengthen families and protect children by meeting families where they are and providing the support they need at a vulnerable time. I am happy to answer any questions at the appropriate time.