

February 22, 2021

Honorable Chairwoman Concannon and members of the House Committee on Children and Seniors,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for HB2371, which would remove some of the most onerous provisions of state law that constrain the options and compromise the futures of low-income families. As a social worker, I have had the privilege of working with parents—especially mothers—struggling to leave poverty and build a more promising tomorrow for their children. I have worked even more closely with nonprofit organizations that help these families cope with the holes in the public safety net. Many of these families, and all these organizations, are particularly stressed right now, as the pandemic has devastated low-wage jobs, closed needed educational supports, and exacerbated housing insecurity. Enacting HB2371 would remove some of the most difficult obstacles people face trying to access essential nutrition and childcare supports—and send an invaluable message that the state is on the side of those trying to improve their children’s well-being. Two specific provisions of HB2371 are particularly imperative:

1. Section 11 removes the requirement to cooperate with child support, to qualify for food assistance. Current law forces custodial parents dealing with adversarial non-custodial parents and those trying to navigate contentious arrangements, to choose between the food assistance they need and their child’s best interests.
2. Another provision exempts adult students enrolled in education from the work requirements for childcare subsidy. We know that completing postsecondary education is the best way to leave poverty—and the surest route to long-term economic mobility.¹ In Kansas, 23% of all undergraduates are parenting.² I have gotten to know many of these hard-working, multitasking (mostly) moms. If these parents complete degrees, they’ll contribute more than \$78,000 more in lifetime taxes than if they only had a high school degree.³ However, even when they have regular, affordable childcare, the challenges of succeeding in school while tending to children’s needs are daunting. When childcare is unavailable or unaffordable, degree completion often becomes impossible.

Even if HB2371 passes, the lives of low-income families will not be easy, especially as the state continues to grapple with pandemic-related uncertainty and a stagnant economy—the brunt of which fall on those with the least ‘cushion’. Importantly, though, this legislation, particularly the changes highlighted here, would remove barriers that unnecessarily make these Kansans’ lives even harder. Especially in these times, we should use every tool to help people meet their needs. HB2371 is a crucial step in that direction.

Thank you for your consideration,



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¹ Pew Research Center. (2012). Pursuing the American Dream: Economic Mobility Across Generations. Retrieved from:

https://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/reports/economic_mobility/pursuingamericandreampdf.pdf.

² Institute for Women’s Policy Studies. (2020). Kansas Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Kansas.pdf>.

³ Ibid.