



## TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL HB 2371

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Kansas House Committee on Children and Seniors

Monday, February 22, 2021

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Opportunity Solutions Project

Chairman Concannon, Vice Chair Esau, Ranking Member Ousley, and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Opportunity Solutions Project (OSP), a nonprofit organization that advocates for state and federal policies to advance the power of work so that more people may realize the American Dream.

I am here on behalf of the OSP today to offer opposition testimony to HB 2371 which would provide broad expansion of welfare benefits by removing the current statute which requires a person to show good cause with child support cooperation enforcement in order to be eligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). In addition, HB 2371 modifies current statute by exempting a person from the work-requirement for Child Care Subsidy if the adult is *“enrolled in a public or private elementary or secondary school or postsecondary educational institution.”*

While I believe there are many well-intentioned advocates in support of this legislation, it is important to point out that as proposed, this is providing help that hurts. Eliminating child support cooperation for SNAP applicants may sound helpful, but the reality is it means less kids and families receive their rightfully due child support. And while it might seem reasonable to eliminate work-requirements for childcare subsidy, this bill sets no minimum for hours a person must be enrolled. Before I provide the case of why OSP opposes HB 2371, I want to make the case why the current statute represents good public policy.

In 2015 the Kansas legislature passed comprehensive welfare reform including making a person ineligible for SNAP assistance if they have not cooperated with child support enforcement without good cause. A person is then immediately able to participate in SNAP once it is determined they are cooperating with the Child Support Enforcement Program at the Kansas Department for Children and Families. So, what was the impact in Kansas for this new requirement? In essence, more rightfully owed money going into the pockets of hardworking moms and dads from noncustodial parents. Within six months of this new provision in state law, child collections increased by 40 percent.<sup>1</sup>

Also, of note, and this is significant, the current law has a provision for “good cause” effort. Meaning, the law provides good cause exemptions when such cooperation isn’t in the best interest of the child—such as when there is a risk of domestic violence—and children enrolled in the program will never be sanctioned for their parents’ decisions i.e., the SNAP sanction is only on the parent’s portion of the SNAP benefit. With such a positive impact to low-income families, especially families owed their child support payments, it is hard to understand the benefit of HB 2371.

Again, HB 2371 would remove this provision allowing a person to refuse to cooperate with child support enforcement and still receive SNAP. This means a person may be caught in the cycle of poverty and government dependence longer than needed if they were not required to comply with child support enforcement.

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<sup>1</sup> [Child-Support-CoOp-Costs-FINAL.pdf \(thefga.org\)](#)

Another provision of the 2015 Hope Act that, HB 2371 will remove, is the work requirement for those receiving childcare subsidy if they are “*adults enrolled in a public or private elementary or secondary school or postsecondary educational institution.*”<sup>2</sup> It is important for the Committee to understand that the Opportunity Solutions Project is not against low-income families receiving childcare subsidy. Childcare subsidy can be an important assistance program for parents who need childcare while they work or attend school to pursue a degree or certification that helps propel them towards self-sufficiency. **But that is not what HB 2371 proposes.** Instead, as drafted, an adult enrolled in a secondary or postsecondary educational institution is exempt from the work requirement. This means for example if HB 2372 was passed, a person could enroll in a one-hour elective at a state college in the History of Video Games and be exempt from the work requirement to receive childcare subsidy.

Again, while we support economic assistance programs that help the truly needy, OSP opposes legislation like HB 2371 that opens the door for people to receive childcare subsidy without requirements and minimal academic participation. Simply being enrolled is not a high enough bar, and we believe the current statute strikes the right balance between receiving assistance and encouraging an individual to better themselves through work participation or further education.

I want to close with a couple observations about this bill and the state of welfare in Kansas. First, I hope the Committee has a chance to review the fiscal note for HB 2371. While I do not disagree with DCF’s conclusion that HB 2371 will add additional FTEs to implement. I do wish they had considered the impact this bill will have on future collections. If the state saw an increase in collections after the HOPE Act passed in 2015, it is reasonable child support enforcement would see a decrease in collections as well. From what I can see this is not contemplated in the fiscal note. Also, when Kansas implemented HOPE Act reforms in 2015 and 2016, many advocates noted that this had and will continue to cause more children to enter the child welfare system. However, I do want the Committee to know this warning has not come true. In fact, according to recent numbers presented by the Governor’s office and DCF, the projected number of children coming into care is decreasing, despite HOPE Act being in statute since 2015.<sup>3</sup> Thankfully, it appears the dire warnings of keeping the HOPE on the statute books has not materialized.

I want to note that many dedicated and passionate people have spoken on this issue today in support of a bill OSP is against. And while I believe this Committee should not support HB 2371, I do recognize the good work that many of these organizations do in helping serve vulnerable families and children and to that, “thank you”.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today and I will gladly stand for questions at the appropriate time.

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<sup>2</sup> [hb2371\\_00\\_0000.pdf \(kslegislature.org\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> [FY2022\\_GBR\\_Vol1-UPDATED-2-1-2021.pdf \(kansas.gov\)](#) pg. 112.

