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Written Neutral Testimony on HB 2627
House Committee on Welfare Reform

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit testimony regarding HB 2627, which would reorganize requirements for public assistance programs within statute.

My name is Haley Kottler, I am a campaign director at Kansas Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. Kansas Appleseed is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to the belief that Kansans, working together, can build a state full of thriving, inclusive and just communities.

Kansas Appleseed has a long history of working to increase food security to all Kansans through SNAP food assistance as well as other public assistance programs. Simply put, we work with Kansans everyday that struggle to navigate our systems for benefits that are meant specifically for them. Yet, all too often those same systems work against them and create intentional barriers. HB 2627 does nothing to eliminate those unnecessary barriers in Kansas assistance programs, and only reiterates them. As such, we are neutral on this bill.

The requirements in this bill were solidified in state statute under a series of bills in 2015 and 2016 informally known as the HOPE Act. Kansas Appleseed opposed these requirements then, and we continue to do so today. These requirements made it more difficult for the poorest families to access federal assistance programs. In our fight to eliminate hunger across the state, Appleseed warned of the impact such restrictions would have on Kansas families. We are now seeing the results of the HOPE Act, and they are dire for struggling Kansans.

First, it has severely reduced access to SNAP for Kansans, while not accomplishing its goal of getting impoverished Kansans back to work:

- Supplemental is the key word in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or, SNAP. It provides a small amount of benefits to low-income families to supplement their food budget. It reduces stress on tight budgets and frees up income so families can have healthy outcomes. The program is highly effective while being very modest. The average benefit per person per meal in Kansas is \$1.88.¹
- More than 30,000 Kansans were suddenly dropped from SNAP due to work requirements codified under the HOPE Act. These were Kansans who had income below the poverty line, many living in severe poverty. Those that remained on SNAP had better characteristics, but not because of the work requirements. Rather, they were simply better off to begin with, yet they were the only ones still eligible to have SNAP assistance. Meanwhile, Kansans who needed help the most were left behind.²

¹ Food Research & Action Center. "The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Improving Health and Well-Being." 2017. <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-role-snap-improving-health-well-being.pdf> ; Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. "Kansas Food Assistance Program." 2023. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_kansas.pdf

² Rosenbaum, D. and Bolen, E. "SNAP Reports Present Misleading Finding on Impact of Three-Month Time Limit." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2016. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-reports-present-misleading-findings-on-impact-of-three-month-time>

- There is no evidence showing that implementation of work and training requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents creates significant increases in employment.³ Work rates are high among SNAP households that can work. More than half of SNAP households with at least one working-age, non-disabled adult work while receiving SNAP.⁴
- Further, the HOPE Act did not get Kansans back to work. Many of the Kansans who were removed from SNAP due to the HOPE Act, were still unemployed a year later.⁵
- At the same time the HOPE Act introduced more work requirements to SNAP, it also introduced restrictive rules related to child care assistance. The result was fewer Kansans using child care assistance.⁶ Research shows that families with child care assistance are more likely to have stable employment.⁷ Yet, by making it harder for families to use child care assistance, the HOPE Act took away a key support SNAP participants need to find employment—a safe, affordable place for their children to go while they work.

Second, the HOPE Act has led to traumatized children and families. Families struggling to make ends meet have faced significant stress, leaving them hopeless with nowhere to turn. The result has been an increase on the number of abuse and neglect cases on an already imperfect foster care system in the state:

- Decades of research shows that household economic conditions are strongly correlated to child welfare services involvement, with poor children being overrepresented in the child welfare system.
- Researchers have found that as the HOPE Act created new barriers for struggling Kansans to receive assistance, the number of child abuse and neglect cases in the state went up.⁸
- The foster care system in Kansas has historically struggled with the number of children coming into foster care and finding stable, healthy placements for those children. To this day, DCF is still not achieving federal and settlement agreement (*McIntyre*, 2021) requirements to increase safe, stable placements for children in foster care.⁹
- The HOPE act continues to create unnecessary strain on families. Strain which SNAP and other benefits could help alleviate. Kansas children deserve to grow up in healthy families, not a foster home. Instead, the HOPE Act has only shifted the needs of families from safety net programs to the foster care system.

³ Meko, Tim. "The Impact of SNAP Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) Time Limit Reinstatement in Nine States." *Urban Institute*,

http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/104451/the-impact-of-snap-able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawd-time-limit-reinstatement-in-nine-states_0.pdf.

⁴ LaDonna Pavetti, "Work Requirements Don't Cut Poverty, Evidence Shows," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, updated June 7, 2016, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/work-requirements-dont-cut-poverty-evidence-shows>

⁵ Rosenbaum, D. and Bolen, E. "SNAP Reports Present Misleading Finding on Impact of Three-Month Time Limit." Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. 2016.

<https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-reports-present-misleading-findings-on-impact-of-three-month-time-limit>

⁶ DCF. Public Assistance Report. 2023. https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/eas/Documents/CURRENT_PAR_SF2023.pdf

⁷ Davis, E. E., Grobe, D. and Weber, R. B. "Rural-Urban Differences In Child Care Subsidy Use And Employment Stability." *Applied Economics Perspectives and Policies* 32, no. 1 (2010): 135-153.

⁸ Ginther, D. K., Johnson-Motoyama, M. "Associations Between State TANF Policies, Child Protective Services Involvement, and Foster Care Placement." *Health Affairs*. 2022. <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/epdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2022.00743>

⁹ Administration for Children and Families. CFSR: Kansas Final Report." 2023.

<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/ks-cfsr-r4-final.pdf> and Center for the Study of Social Policy: DCF, *McIntyre v. Howard*. Period 2. 2023. <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/McIntyre-v.-Howard-Period-2-Progress-Report.pdf>



Contrary to the narrative that families using these safety net programs are taking advantage of the state, these effects of the HOPE Act are felt by everyday, hardworking Kansans:

- 300,000 Kansans are food insecure, and every dollar counts at the grocery store for them.¹⁰
- 154,000 Kansas children live in homes with a family income less than twice the federal poverty level.¹¹
- 68% of Kansans who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are in families with children.¹²
- 12% of households live below the federal poverty level. However, another 27% are households that do not earn enough to afford their basic needs such as housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, and taxes.¹³ These are Kansans with jobs and families. That means 447,000 Kansas households are struggling to make ends meet and are making difficult decisions everyday on how to get by and provide for their family's needs.¹⁴ Of those 447,000 struggling households, only about 20% are receiving food assistance.¹⁵

Too many hard-working Kansans are still struggling to put food on their tables, gas in their cars, and a roof over their heads. We should not be punishing them or making it another hardship on them when they seek out a helping hand.

There is much to be done to ensure Kansans can live healthy and fulfilled lives. Kansas Appleseed continues to stand in opposition to the HOPE Act and the damage it has done to Kansans. However, this bill only entrenches the old, harmful barriers already in place.

We urge the committee to see this bill as an opportunity to really examine and consider what the requirements for public assistance means for struggling Kansans rather than simply reiterating the existing requirements. We know these requirements don't work and create undue hardship for struggling Kansans. Instead, we, as Kansans working together, should strengthen our safety net programs to help individuals and their families weather hard and difficult times they may come across.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I look forward to continuing work with this committee to ensure all Kansans can thrive.

¹⁰ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, Kansas. 2021. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/kansas>

¹¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. KIDS Count Data Center. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5048-children-in-low-income-working-families-by-age-group?loc=18&loct=2#detailed/2/18/false/2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868,867/34,35,36/11455,11456>

¹² Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2023. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_kansas.pdf

¹³ United Way. ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Kansas Report. 2023. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/household-budgets/kansas>

¹⁴ This is the number of households below the federal poverty level and the number of struggling households combined based on the information found at: United Way. ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Kansas Report. 2023. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/household-budgets/kansas>

¹⁵ DCF. Public Assistance Report. 2023. https://www.dcf.ks.gov/services/ees/Documents/CURRENT_PAR_SFY2023.pdf