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Written Testimony in Opposition to SB 488
Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit testimony regarding SB 488, which would expand the duties of the inspector general to audit and investigate all state cash, food, and health assistance programs, including the authority to subpoena, administer oaths, and execute search warrants.

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. All too often those same systems work against them and create barriers.

Here is a look at the hardworking Kansans, trying to get by and occasionally needing a little help:

- 300,000 Kansans are food insecure, and every dollar counts at the grocery store for them.¹
- 154,000 Kansas children live in homes with a family income less than twice the federal poverty level.²
- 68% of Kansans who participate in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program are in families with children.³
- 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.⁴ 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.⁵ Of those 447,000 struggling households, only about 20% are receiving food assistance.⁶

¹ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, Kansas. 2021. <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2021/overall/kansas>

² 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>

³ Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2023. https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/snap_factsheet_kansas.pdf

⁴ United Way. ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed Kansas Report. 2023. <https://www.unitedforalice.org/household-budgets/kansas>

⁵ 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>

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



SB 488 provides Kansas officials far reaching oversight over these hardworking Kansans trying to navigate complicated systems and provide for their families. We are opposed to SB 488 and its attempt to discredit programs that struggling Kansans need.

This bill gives the inspector general extended powers to audit DCF programs like SNAP. While auditing itself isn't the problem, we are concerned with the additional oversight and target this bill places on specific programs for no clear reason:

- It sets no parameters for the number, type, scope, or rationale for the audits the inspector general would conduct.
- It gives the office unfettered access to personal information of assistance program participants.
- It allows the inspector general to subpoena, execute search warrants, and perform other law enforcement activities.

Oversight is important, but this bill creates unnecessary scrutiny over programs and their participants that already have oversight. DCF has multiple systems against which they cross-check data of applicants to detect potential fraud. Those systems include KEES, Social Security Numbers, citizenship records, and more. The department also uses an identity verification interface and cross checks applications against Kansas systems such as the lottery and Department of Labor. Further, they have a fraud hotline that allows the public to report potential fraud for investigation. If potential fraud is discovered, DCF has a Fraud Investigations Unit to investigate, detect, prevent, and prosecute fraud in public assistance programs. When suspected fraud is discovered, DCF can refer it to the appropriate law enforcement for prosecution.⁷ This bill duplicates the many of the efforts DCF already has in place, such as a fraud hotline and fraud inquiry and investigation based on records DCF is cross checking data against.

To target these programs even more when there are already measures in place and very little fraud to begin is a waste of state resources and represents an attack on programs that are designed to help Kansans. Kansans already is ranked almost last in the nation for SNAP accessibility and has one of the lowest rates of participation of eligible people.⁸ These additional efforts to investigate and attack individuals receiving assistance and cast doubt on the programs is redundant of existing efforts at best and a tactic to take funds away from Kansans who need them at worst.

I urge you to stand against SB 488. Thank you for your time and consideration, I look forward to continuing work with this committee to ensure all Kansans can thrive.

⁷ DCF General Counsel. "Public Assistance Verification and Fraud Prevention." presented to the House Committee on Welfare Reform, January 2024.

https://www.dcf.ks.gov/Agency/Testimony/Documents/2024/1_25%20H%20WR%20DCF%20Fraud%20Prevention%20Final.pdf

⁸ Melton, E. "Qualifying for Food Assistance in Kansas." Kansas Action for Children. 2023.

https://www.kac.org/qualifying_for_food_assistance_in_kansas