



Testimony of Tracy Keagle, Founder and Executive Director of Humanity House

Humanity House is a nonprofit organization that was founded in Iola, Kansas after a young boy, having difficulties choosing a gift for Christmas, was asked what he wanted. He replied, “All I want for Christmas is food in my house.” From the inception of Humanity House, it was found that citizens of Allen County most needed help with food, housing, and utilities. The most notable projects include:

- Food pantry that is available to anyone no matter income status
- Utility assistance to help those who can not afford their utility bill for the month
- Grandma’s Kitchen, providing hot meals twice a week for free
- Assisting individuals with SNAP, LIEAP, and other applications to receive assistance.
- Organizing classes, raising awareness, and addressing the issues that those in poverty meet every day through advocacy work.
- The Humanity House Community Garden which has grown and given away 32,000 pounds of produce in the past four years.

The HOPE Act’s denial of SNAP to persons with a felony drug charge is the denial of a person’s basic human right to food.

When a parent has children, but has a felony drug conviction, taking away their benefit allotment for food is the same as taking food out of their children’s mouths. We do not deny people who have committed drug felonies food while they are in prison, why would we deny them food when they have now served their time?

In denying their ability to receive SNAP, they are denying them the nutrition that the person needs to be able to work, remain healthy, take care of their children, and reintegrate into society –thereby hindering their ability to become functioning and productive members of society.

To ask someone to complete a drug rehabilitation program and then to submit to drug testing to receive food is saying that a person who has a substance abuse issue doesn’t deserve to be fed.



If instead of putting people into prison or jail for a felony drug offense, the person was put into a drug rehabilitation facility, this program would almost make sense. However, the person coming out of prison on a drug offense has to have an evaluation to get into a facility. They have to have either money to pay or a medical card, and the facility has to accept the medical card. They may have lost or had their identification and social security cards stolen and have to wait. Then there is the issue of the children who are still without a parent for an even longer period of time.

In a perfect world, there would be no trauma, no substance, no crime of any sort, families would always have enough to eat, a warm home with running water and electricity, and enough money to live comfortably. But our world is not perfect, so the best we can do is have a government policy that doesn't continue to punish those who have made mistakes by taking the food out of their mouths.