



February 13, 2024

Erin Melton, Economic Security Policy Advisor
Kansas Action for Children
Verbal opponent testimony on HB 2673
House Committee on Welfare Reform

Chairman Awerkamp and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition to HB 2673. Kansas Action for Children is a nonprofit advocacy organization working to make Kansas a place where every child has the opportunity to grow up healthy and thrive. We work across the political spectrum to improve the lives of Kansas children through bipartisan advocacy, partnership, and information-sharing on key issues, including early learning and education, health, and economic security for families.

HB 2673 would require the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to annually submit a waiver to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to prohibit Kansas food assistance from being used to purchase soft drinks and candy. The food assistance program is the Kansas name for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is the nation's first line of defense against hunger and provides 100 percent federally funded grocery benefits to hundreds of thousands of food insecure Kansans every year.

KAC opposes HB 2673 because it is an unnecessary and futile effort. As is, the SNAP program is associated with improved nutrition and decreased health care costs.¹ People receiving SNAP already must stretch their dollars at the grocery store and know how to do so in the way that best serves their families. Severely restricting their choices at the grocery store would limit their ability to use their dollars most efficiently.

Additionally, the definitions of "soft drink" and "candy" in Kansas statute are quite broad. This ban would restrict purchases of things people eat and drink every day and that many of us would likely consider healthy, such as granola, breakfast bars, and juice. This broadness could also create confusion and burden for retailers, who would have to evaluate every new product that comes to their stores and determine whether it counts as a soft drink or candy.

¹ Carlson, Steven, and Llobrera, Joseph (Dec. 14, 2022). *SNAP is Linked with Improved Health Outcomes and Lower Health Care Costs*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>

Finally, regardless of what this Legislature wants people to spend or not spend SNAP dollars on, the USDA has never accepted a waiver requesting such restrictions, rejecting them under both Democratic and Republican presidential administrations. This bill would require DCF to submit this waiver repeatedly until the USDA accepts it. This could even strain our state's relationship with the USDA, potentially causing other issues with implementing programs that will help Kansans.

There are several policy options the Legislature could enact that would improve the lives of the Kansas families who benefit from the food assistance program. I encourage this Committee to consider some of those options instead of requiring DCF to spend valuable time on an unneeded and likely impossible pursuit. I urge you to oppose HB 2673.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to HB 2673. If you have any questions, please email me at erin@kac.org.