

# DCF LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



*1/25/2021*

**TESTIMONY OF**

Tanya Keys, Deputy Secretary  
Kansas Department for Children and Families

**TESTIMONY ON**

SB 43

**Chair**

Baumgardner

**Vice Chair**

Erickson

**Ranking Member**

Sykes

**and**

**Members of the Committee**

## SUMMARY OF ISSUE & DCF POSITION

Senate Bill 43, the Promise Scholarship Act, establishes the Promise Scholarship Program. This program would provide state funded scholarships to eligible Kansans to attend certain two-year associate degree programs or career and technical education certificate programs.

While DCF supports the concept and policies within SB 43, the agency is neutral on the bill due to the potential fiscal impact on the state.

## CONTEXT & HISTORY

DCF currently provides postsecondary education assistance through the Kansas Foster Care Educational Assistance Program, also known as the Tuition Waiver Program. The tuition waiver is available to youth who are enrolled at a Kansas Board of Regents post-secondary institution (university, community college, technical program) and meet one of the following criteria:

- In the custody of DCF and in a foster care placement on the date the youth attained 18 years of age; or
- Released from custody of DCF prior to attaining 18 years of age, after having graduated from high school or fulfilled the requirements for a GED while in foster care placement and the custody of DCF; or
- Adopted from a foster care placement on or after the youth's 16th birthday; or
- Left a foster care placement subject to a permanent custodianship or guardianship under chapter 38 or 59 of the Kansas Statutes Annotated.

For students who qualify for the Tuition Waiver Program, educational institutions waive the costs of tuition and associated fees. Youth remain eligible for the Tuition Waiver through the semester in which they turn 23, as long as they remain in good standing at the educational institution and are making satisfactory progress toward completing the educational program (as defined and monitored by the institution).

Additionally, DCF provides workforce training and development programs to Kansans through Economic and Employment Services programs like SNAP Food Assistance and TANF Cash Assistance. Most individuals that receive benefits through these programs are required to either work a certain number of hours a week or be enrolled in a DCF employment program. Services provided through employment programs include job training, soft skills training, assistance finishing GED or high school equivalency, help in getting and retaining employment, and more.

## EFFECT OF LEGISLATION

The Promise Scholarship Program could be an important support for many of the populations DCF serves. Education, especially post-secondary education, can be a path to a higher quality of life. Individuals that were formerly in foster care, like any other Kansan that qualifies, could make use of the program to further their

education or advance their career. Likewise, recipients of economic assistance programs and those enrolled in employment programs that qualify could also make use of the program to enhance their career prospects.

## FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGISLATION

While DCF alone cannot calculate the fiscal impact of this legislation, the department has serious concerns about its fiscal viability. DCF cannot estimate how many individuals would participate in the program given the large pool that would be eligible, but last year's iteration of this legislation came with a fiscal note of \$17.3 million annually. As of the writing of this testimony, no fiscal note for SB 43 had been posted to the legislature's website, but DCF is concerned about bill's fiscal impact given the similarity in pool of eligible individuals between SB 43 and last year's legislation.

DCF whole heartedly supports SB 43's intention to broaden post-secondary assistance to Kansans. However, we are also wary of the potentially large financial impact the bill may have given the size of the pool of all individuals that would be eligible for scholarships. Given the state's uncertain fiscal situation, DCF is currently neutral on this legislation.

## DCF POSITION

DCF and the Governor are willing to have conversations with the author of the bill to discuss the proposed Promise Scholarship program. However, the potential fiscal impact of this legislation is a significant issue given the detrimental influence of COVID-19 on the state's revenues. DCF remains neutral at this time but looks forward to further engaging with the author of this bill on this important issue.