



*Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas*

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## House Social Services Budget Committee

January 22, 2014

*Written Response on:*

### **UCS Report**

**Written response provided by:**

Phyllis Gilmore, Secretary  
Kathe Decker, Deputy Secretary of Family Services  
Kansas Department for Children and Families  
Topeka, Kansas

**Response on:**

UCS report

The Kansas Department for Children and Families (DCF) appreciates the opportunity to provide information regarding the use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds. This information is in direct response to the Dec. 17, 2013 report released by United Community Services (UCS) of Johnson County.

We value the organization's efforts to demonstrate that additional efforts are needed to help Kansas families; however, we have many concerns with the report and the methodology used to generate a nonscientific study that we believe paints a picture of childhood poverty that is not based on facts.

Additionally, many of the recommendations made within UCS' report are consistent with efforts that are already underway. DCF is aggressively working to identify and expand services and programs for Kansas families in need. We look forward to investing TANF funds in worth-while programs that have proven outcomes. We want to help adults achieve self-sufficiency and provide youth with the tools they need to break the cycle of poverty.

**UCS Study Methodology Concerns**

The study was conducted in such a way that the results are skewed to demonstrate a lack of programs and services. Those who have benefited from employment services were not surveyed. The group specifically talked with individuals who have not utilized/benefited from DCF employment services and asked opinions of community organizations (that have an interest in maintaining their funding).

The report regularly uses the terms "cases" and "families" interchangeably. Cases reflect individuals, not families. By suggesting these terms represent the same number is inaccurate.

A DCF staff member spent time discussing programs and services available to clients with UCS. However, this information was disregarded and was not included in the report.

## **Inaccurate Conclusions and Statements**

The report indicates that the State has failed to adequately communicate policy changes or service trends with providers. DCF has met all requirements with regard to notifying clients of changes. The department has also made public through news releases and other messaging, important changes to services and programs.

UCS claims that the State does little to help those on TANF who have significant barriers to employment. Both DCF's Vocational Rehabilitation and Economic and Employment Services divisions have extensive programs to aid individuals with barriers to employment. DCF also works closely with the Department of Commerce to empower individuals with the skills they need to find and retain jobs.

UCS criticized the TANF time limit of 48 months. However, as the report indicates, the average family stays on TANF for 14 months—never reaching the reduced time limit.

The report generally looks at 2008 to 2013 when providing analysis of changes in numbers. However, the current Administration's policy changes and use of TANF funds are identified as the problem. The current Governor took office in 2011. One example of how the data is misused: from 2008 to 2009, according to the UCS data, there was an increase of 21,000 children living in poverty. This was prior to the current Administration. Many of unfortunate increases in poverty are a direct result of the earlier recent recession. This Administration has continually worked to help families get back on their feet through employment as the economy has improved.

Welfare policy changes of 2011 were not fully implemented until 2012. The data within the study does not reflect those policy changes. So when the report claims that the childhood poverty rate increased between 2008 and 2012, there is no direct correlation to the number of people currently receiving TANF.

The report claims that fewer people are leaving TANF because their income exceeds the limits. If individuals choose not to reapply for TANF because they now make too much money to qualify, they are not required to disclose that information to DCF.

Finally, the report suggests that DCF fails to engage community partners. DCF has an entire division dedicated to developing and using community partnerships to the benefit of clients. Faith-based and Community Initiatives exists to foster cooperation between the State and community groups. One example of this would be DCF's partnership with NetReach, a Topeka-based organization that seeks to end poverty in a low-income neighborhood.

## **Cash Assistance**

The State of Kansas has one of the most generous cash assistance programs in the U.S. Of surrounding states, only Colorado surpasses the monthly amount of money families receive through TANF. (*See attachment*)

In 2011, DCF announced welfare reforms designed to encourage self-sufficiency. Greater work requirements were created to discourage welfare dependency. TANF participation declined—an indication that more people are working or are not willing to work in order to receive cash assistance. Another fact that was overlooked is that fewer people are receiving TANF as fewer people are applying for TANF. And as demonstrated in the UCS report (pg. 11), fewer applications are actually denied in FY 2013 compared to FY 2011.

## **Employment Services**

DCF agrees with UCS that jobs are critical to Kansas families. We believe employment is the most effective path out of poverty. That is precisely why DCF has two successful division areas that serve the exclusive purpose of helping individuals get and keep jobs. Economic and Employment Services (EES) has excellent programs to help TANF clients. EES works closely with the Department of Commerce's KANSASWORKS program to assess clients' skills and help them obtain job training and employment. From January 2013 through November 2013, 5,638 TANF recipients reported employment (these are previously unemployed individuals who found employment while on TANF receiving job search, training, employment and support services such as transportation, child care and/or direct job placement). DCF's Vocational Rehabilitation serves a similar function of helping individuals with employment services. This division is dedicated to helping persons with disabilities achieve self-sufficiency. In December 2013 alone, 132 Kansans with disabilities achieved employment as a result of Vocational Rehabilitation services. Their average hourly wage was \$9.19. For FY 2013, we helped establish a 20 percent increase in employment for persons with disabilities, compared to five years ago.

## **Child Care**

UCS has criticized DCF's child care assistance program, suggesting that assistance levels are inadequate. Every two years, DCF conducts an assessment of child care options. The average rate is calculated and families who qualify for child care assistance. The report indicates that DCF pays a flat 55 percent of the average rate. The rate varies based on regions within the state. The reported rates by child care providers are analyzed and then rates are established for individual counties and provider type (center/in-home/family child care/relative). In some areas, Kansas pays as much as 80 to 85 percent of the average rate. Only three states in the U.S. set rates

based upon UCS' recommended 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of the average rate. The majority of surrounding states pay 55 to 60 percent of the average. No families receiving TANF are on a waiting list for child care services. TANF Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) and state general funds ensure that TANF recipients receive the child care assistance they need so that adults can work or obtain job training.

## **Conclusion**

The DCF (formerly Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS)) has consistently maintained a TANF reserve balance. DCF will continue to evaluate programs and services that help Kansas families achieve self-sufficiency while meeting the four purposes of the TANF program, as outlined by the federal government.

1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. End dependence of needy parents on government benefits through work, job preparation and marriage;
3. Reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
4. Promote the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.