

April 6, 2010

Position Statement

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Kansas City Regional Health Foundations Call for Balanced Review of Kansas State Budget

As leaders of three foundations dedicated to improving the health of people in the Greater Kansas City region, we have watched closely the state budget deliberations in Kansas. As the discussions continue to focus on budget cuts, we and our board members feel compelled to speak up regarding the impact that this limited approach will have on the lives of Kansans.

It is clear our state is facing financial difficulty. Kansas has experienced three straight years of declining revenues, and the upcoming fiscal year that begins July 2010 will mark the fourth consecutive year of revenue declines. Out of a state general fund budget of \$6 billion, more than \$1 billion has been cut in the last two years – and more reductions are anticipated.

As state leaders approach these decisions, our foundations are asking lawmakers to give equal time to discussions about revenues. We understand the pressure lawmakers feel when discussing issues that relate to taxes. However, we believe our elected leaders have a responsibility to consider revenue options as well as spending reductions as they search for fiscal solutions that will work for the benefit of all Kansans.

Our three foundations fund dozens of organizations and initiatives in the region that provide a critical safety net for some of our state's most vulnerable residents. Through these relationships, we have seen how the recession has placed even greater stress on Kansas families. The unemployment rate in Kansas is at 6.8%, up from 6.3% in December. The Kansas Department of Labor reports that as of February, Kansas businesses lost 43,700 jobs over 12 months, a 3.2 percent decline. Data show 337,859 Kansans are without health insurance. The greatest increase in uninsurance was among children, which rose to 9.6% in 2007-2008, and that was before the start of the recession.

While most people comprehend the importance of living within their means, there can become a point when those means simply aren't enough to cover even the most basic needs. When people cannot meet their basic needs, it is our experience that the impact isn't just on their immediate household – the consequences flow into neighborhoods and communities.

These effects are seen in poorer health, higher crime rates, homelessness, chronic poverty and other conditions that damage the quality of life in our state. When cuts are made to one area of health and human services, the costs simply shift to other, more expensive, systems of care.

Our foundations are not advocating for or against any specific legislation. However, as some legislators maintain that budget cuts are the only option, we feel compelled to speak up about the damage this one-sided approach will have on the lives of Kansans. Furthermore, we are encouraging other nonprofit organizations to join us in communicating this message.

We believe Kansans are ready to consider and support well-informed public policy discussions that take a balanced approach to solving our state's financial challenges.

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