

## Testimony in Opposition to [Senate File 2422](#)

**To:** Senate Health and Human Services Committee Chair Harris, Vice Chair Barker, and Ranking Member Wessel-Kroeschell

**From:** The International Rescue Committee (IRC)

**Date:** March 18, 2026

**RE: Opposition to SF 2422**

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) provides opportunities for refugees, asylees, and victims of human trafficking to thrive in Iowa. We work every day to ensure that families who have survived incredible odds can translate their past experiences into assets for their new communities in Des Moines, Iowa City, and across the state.

For the reasons outlined below, we respectfully must oppose **SF 2422**. While the bill is framed as a measure for administrative oversight, we carefully reviewed and identified that it introduces additional barriers that target our state's most vulnerable legal residents, specifically humanitarian entrants, and works against the goal of helping people rebuild their lives, become rapidly self-sufficient, and give back to the communities that welcomed them as they fled conflict and persecution - the worst imaginable.

### **1. Codifying Restrictions to SNAP for Humanitarian Newcomers**

Section 4 of the bill seeks to codify state-level restrictions on participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), limiting nutrition benefits to only citizens and certain immigrants. This provision would enshrine SNAP participation prohibitions for families of humanitarian newcomers, such as newly-arrived refugees, American military allies welcomed on Special Immigrant Visas (SIVs), or certain humanitarian parolees, like those fleeing Putin's war in Ukraine, into state law, ensuring no change in federal law could allow for Iowa's newcomers to access essential nutrition support.

These families are lawfully present and are often in the earliest, most critical stages of their integration—having just escaped circumstances that risked their freedom and safety. Codifying state restrictions on nutrition benefits places hurdles in front of future access to nutritional assistance, impeding pathways to health, well-being, and self-sufficiency - and ultimately triggers costly downstream impacts for the state of Iowa. Something we can't afford during these economically trying times.

### **2. Punishing Mixed-Status Households and Vulnerable Children**

Section 4 of the bill fundamentally changes how families qualify for food assistance by counting 100% of an ineligible household member's income toward a household's limit. By mandating

that none of an ineligible individual's income be prorated, this bill ensures that many mixed-status households will lose SNAP eligibility entirely.

This provision ignores federal standards and effectively penalizes U.S. citizen children for the immigration status of a parent, likely leaving thousands of children across Iowa without reliable access to food.

### **3. Misuse of the SAVE System and Administrative Red Tape**

SF 2422 also mandates the use of the federal SAVE (Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements) system for all public assistance benefit applicants. While SAVE is a federal tool, it is notorious for data lags and "second-step" verification delays that can leave legal residents without benefits for months due to administrative backlogs at the federal level.

These verification mandates create a "chilled enrollment" environment which deters eligible individuals and U.S. citizens, including the parents of newborns, from pursuing and limiting access to critical services, such as basic nutrition, workforce development, and health. Enabling self-sufficiency among newcomers is of interest to all Iowans as limited, temporary integration resources enable newcomers to become fast and upstanding economic pillars for our communities.

### **4. Negative Economic Impacts on Iowa's Businesses**

The IRC focuses heavily on employment services. Our clients fill critical gaps in Iowa's manufacturing, agricultural, and hospitality sectors. According to the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, we know that approximately 80% of Iowa is used for farmland. We know from the 2024 Iowa Agriculture Economic Contribution Study that Iowa has continued to be a national and global leader in agriculture, holding the number one spot in the production of hogs, corn, and eggs, and much of that economic contribution comes from the state's over 86,000 farms, which are mostly family owned (96% owned and operated). It's no secret that our farms are hurting either. Farm owners and families, and all Iowan citizens, rely on the people we serve to keep Iowa working, producing, and leading.

SNAP and other public benefits are not permanent "handouts" for families; they are temporary tools that allow a father or mother to stay healthy and focused as they start their first job in America, or their children to focus in school and on their homework. We share the Legislature's goal of enabling self-sufficiency and getting folks working quickly. Our years of programmatic experience supporting Iowa's newcomers as they find jobs, open businesses, and buy homes demonstrates that nutritional and other assistance upon arrival is critical to laying the foundation for future economic success.

### **5. Eliminating Retroactive Health Coverage**

Section 6 of the bill drastically reduces retroactive Medicaid eligibility to no more than two months for pregnant women and children, and eliminates it entirely for most other adults.

For refugees navigating a complex new healthcare system, the loss of retroactive coverage means that an emergency medical event occurring shortly after arrival could result in insurmountable debt before they have even secured their first paycheck.

## **6. Legislative Chokehold on Healthcare Access**

Section 10 requires a majority vote from both houses of the General Assembly for any Medicaid waiver expansion that is not determined to be "cost neutral". By defining cost neutrality as no net increase in spending, this bill prevents the Department of Health and Human Services from responding quickly to public health crises or expanding coverage to vulnerable groups without a lengthy political process covered with bureaucratic red tape.

This requirement applies even to waivers approved *before* the bill takes effect, potentially putting long-standing, lifesaving programs at risk of sudden defunding.

## **Conclusion**

Iowa has a proud, strongly bipartisan history of welcoming those fleeing violence and persecution, a tradition famously championed by the late Governor Robert Ray. Senate File 2422 creates a "benefit penalty" for Iowans who live in mixed-status households and builds unnecessary barriers to healthcare and nutrition. These policies do not encourage self-sufficiency and a strong Iowa workforce and community; they foster hunger and instability.

On behalf of the families we serve, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) urges you to protect the health and dignity of all Iowans by **voting NO on SF 2422**.

Sincerely,

Sara Zejnic on behalf of the International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Iowa