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Legal Director
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
for
Senate Public Health and Welfare Committee
February 7, 2017 Hearing

Chair Schmidt and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), please accept these comments for the February 7, 2017 hearing on the proposed Strategic Opportunities to Achieve Results (SOAR) Act (Senate Bill 95).

FRAC, which is based in Washington, D.C., is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. In particular, we have expertise on the role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly food stamps, known in Kansas as Food Assistance Program) and other federal nutrition assistance programs in addressing hunger and promoting health.

SOAR would allow Kansas to leverage federally-funded SNAP benefits to provide SNAP food benefits to jobless adults who are willing to work but reside in areas with high unemployment or other indicators of insufficient jobs. It would allow the secretary of the Department for Children and Families to request a waiver of federal rules that otherwise would time limit SNAP benefits for those adults. The jobless area waivers of the three months (out of 36 months) time limit have been available in federal law since the time limit was enacted in 1996. States have used their flexibility to tailor their jobless area waiver requests to the areas of their states they deem appropriate.

Hunger is a significant problem in Kansas as well as in the rest of the United States. Based on FRAC analysis of data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Census Bureau, 14.6 percent of Kansas households (170,983) are food insecure, five percent of Kansas households (64,546) experiencing very low food security (2013-2015 three-year average). The extent of the food hardship problem also is evident from FRAC analysis of Gallup-Healthways-Well-Being Index Survey data: 14 percent of Kansans respondents said that there were times in the prior 12 months that they lacked money for food they are their family need (2015 data).

Research shows that SNAP plays a critical role in improving dietary intake, protecting against obesity, reducing food insecurity, and improving other nutrition-related and health outcomes. For example, each additional SNAP dollar increases a household's score for overall dietary quality; SNAP participation is associated with better dietary quality among those low-income adults who are food insecure. For more discussion of research on SNAP and public health, go to

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Date 2.7.17

Attachment 15-1

<http://frac.org/research/resource-library/snap-public-health-role-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-improving-health-well%E2%80%90being-americans>

In addition to providing important assistance to participants, SNAP benefits have positive economic impacts on the entire food chain, from farmers and producers, to food retailers. In FY 2016 alone, according to USDA data, 2,042 Kansas retailers redeemed a total of \$349,281,908 in federally-funded SNAP benefits. Based on USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS) estimate, each dollar in federally funded SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity.

In short, SOAR proposal makes sense on economic and health grounds. Workers in areas with insufficient jobs often need extra time to find work that offers the requisite hours to satisfy the federal law. Businesses in areas with insufficient jobs can get a boost from the economic activity that SNAP benefits generate. SOAR would allow Kansas the flexibility other states have in federal law to leverage SNAP benefits for otherwise time-limited adults while they are seeking adequate work hours and bring those 100 percent federally-funded dollars into the Kansas economy and the hard-hit communities that need them.

Thank you for your consideration. If you have any questions regarding this testimony or other issues regarding SNAP, I would be happy to be of assistance. My contact information is below.

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