

Written Testimony of David Tidwell

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Before the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture

Hearing entitled “The Power of Work: Expanding Opportunity through SNAP.”

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Chairman Glenn “GT” Thompson, Ranking Member Angie Craig, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the critical role that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program’s (SNAP) Employment and Training (E&T) component plays in breaking the cycle of poverty, fostering self-sufficiency, and strengthening local economies. As the President and CEO of HOPE Ministries of Baton Rouge in Louisiana, I have witnessed firsthand how the strategic investment in workforce development through SNAP E&T transforms lives and communities.

The Mission of HOPE Ministries

HOPE Ministries is dedicated to preventing homelessness and promoting self-sufficiency and dignity. Our mission is to equip individuals with the tools necessary to break the cycle of poverty through employment readiness, financial literacy, and success coaching. We provide a holistic approach that integrates career training, personal development, and financial coaching to create sustainable change. Our organization serves as a bridge between individuals facing economic hardship and long-term financial independence, ensuring that participants not only find jobs but also build lasting careers.

The Need for Employment and Training in Louisiana

Louisiana has one of the highest rates of SNAP participation in the nation, with nearly 20% of residents relying on the program for basic nutrition assistance. In East Baton Rouge Parish alone, 84,434 residents—almost 19% of the population—are enrolled in SNAP (U.S. Census, 2022). This high participation underscores the need for robust employment and training services to help individuals transition from reliance on benefits to long-term economic stability. Without access to E&T funding, these individuals would remain trapped in poverty, unable to gain the skills and credentials needed to secure high-wage employment.

SNAP E&T's Impact on Workforce Development and Economic Growth

The SNAP E&T program provides an essential pathway for individuals facing economic hardship to gain marketable skills, credentials, and employment. In Louisiana, the program has had a profound impact:

- **Statewide Investment:** In 2023, 30 partner organizations were reimbursed \$8.1 million in federal funds for providing E&T services. This funding has allowed us to offer job training, career coaching, and wraparound support that align with industry needs.
- **Long-Term Economic Impact:** Investing in employment and training leads to significant economic benefits, including reduced reliance on public assistance, increased tax contributions, and overall economic growth in local communities.

HOPE's SKILLED BR Initiative: A Bridge to Success

Many workforce development providers operate in silos, creating gaps in services and unnecessary barriers for participants. HOPE's SKILLED BR initiative breaks down these barriers by ensuring seamless access to workforce training, career services, and direct employment opportunities. Through an integrated, shared online platform, SKILLED BR connects direct service providers, employers, educational institutions enabling better coordination in serving and referring individuals in need. By leveraging this comprehensive network, barriers to accessing essential services are minimized, ensuring participants receive the support they need to build successful careers.

Employers also benefit from this model, as they gain access to a pipeline of career-ready workers equipped with industry-recognized credentials. By fostering collaboration among service providers, SKILLED BR helps bridge the skills gap and ensures that more individuals can successfully transition from training to sustainable employment.

The Importance of R.I.S.E.: Expanding Access to Education

At HOPE Ministries, we recognize that education is the key to escaping poverty. That is why we developed R.I.S.E. (Reaching Individual Success through Education), an initiative that provides SNAP recipients with access to training and certifications in high-demand career fields. The R.I.S.E. initiative offers both online and in-person training opportunities, ensuring that participants can access flexible, career-focused education.

- **Online Certifications:** R.I.S.E. provides online education in nine career fields, including HVAC, electrical, plumbing, solar energy, and construction. These certifications allow participants to qualify for in-demand jobs that offer family-sustaining wages.
- **In-Person Industry Training:** R.I.S.E. also offers hands-on, instructor-led training in fields such as:
 - **Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Training** – Equipping participants for careers in transportation and logistics.
 - **Medical Training and Certifications** – Offering credentials in medical assisting, phlebotomy, and other healthcare professions.

- **Skilled Trades and Manufacturing** – Providing pathways into construction, welding, and industrial maintenance.

By combining online accessibility with hands-on instruction, R.I.S.E. ensures that participants gain the education, training, and industry certifications needed to secure stable, well-paying employment. Without SNAP E&T funding, these life-changing educational opportunities would be out of reach.

The Role of Financial Coaching in Economic Stability

At HOPE Ministries, we go beyond employment training by providing **financial coaching** to ensure long-term stability for our clients. Through financial literacy and coaching, participants learn how to budget, manage debt, and build savings—critical skills that help prevent future financial crises. By combining financial education with career training, we assist individuals in making sound financial decisions to achieve self-sufficiency. Many participants have successfully transitioned from government assistance to financial independence, demonstrating the effectiveness of this comprehensive approach.

Success Stories: The Real-World Impact of SNAP E&T

Through our work, we have seen incredible success stories that demonstrate the effectiveness of SNAP E&T:

- **A New Path for Tasha:** Struggling to find steady employment, Tasha turned to SNAP E&T for support and a chance to change her future. With access to workforce training and career development, she gained the skills needed to enter the banking industry. Today, she is employed with a major banking institution, earning a stable income and no longer relying on public assistance.
- **Gary's New Beginning:** After incarceration, Gary was determined to build a stable future. Through the RISE Initiative and with tuition assistance from SNAP E&T, he completed his CDL training and received career placement support. Today, he is successfully employed as a professional truck driver, earning a living wage and creating a fresh start for himself.

Why Continued Investment in SNAP E&T Matters

The successes of Louisiana's E&T program illustrate the necessity of continued investment and expansion. The Farm Bill's renewal presents a critical opportunity to:

- **Enhance Funding for Participant Support:** Increased reimbursement for essential services like childcare and transportation will enable more individuals to complete training and secure employment.
- **Strengthen Employer Partnerships:** Greater flexibility in funding can facilitate employer-driven training models that lead to immediate job placements.

- **Expand Access to High-Quality Training Programs:** Investments in industry-recognized credentials and apprenticeship opportunities will bridge skill gaps in key sectors.
- **Support Faith-Based and Community Organizations:** Leveraging these trusted networks can enhance outreach and program effectiveness, ensuring that marginalized populations receive tailored support.

Conclusion

SNAP E&T is not merely an employment program—it is a lifeline that transforms individuals, stabilizes families, and contributes to economic vitality. By strengthening and expanding this program, we can ensure that every SNAP recipient has the opportunity to achieve self-sufficiency.

Respectfully submitted,

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