

**Statement of Support  
For the Establishment of a  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of Food Security**

**Food Research & Action Center (FRAC)**

**U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity**

**May 18, 2022**

The Food Research & Action Center (FRAC) supports the “Discussion Draft, to amend Title 38, United States Code, to establish in the Department of Veterans Affairs an Office of Food Insecurity, and for other purposes” set for hearing on May 18, 2022, before the House Veterans Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity. This critical legislation will amplify the Department of Veterans Affairs efforts to address food insecurity among veterans and their families.

FRAC works to improve the nutrition, health, and well-being of tens of millions of people struggling against poverty-related hunger in the United States through advocacy, partnerships, and by advancing bold and equitable policy solutions. FRAC has championed work to address food insecurity among veterans and participates in the Military Family Advisory Network and Veterans Health Administration (VHA) efforts to screen and intervene to address food insecurity among patients.

Food insecurity, even marginal food insecurity (a less severe form), is detrimental to the health, development, and well-being of people and is associated with some of the most **common and costly health** problems in the U.S<sup>1</sup>. A 2021 Economic Research Service Report, *Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans*, found that **11.1 percent** of

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<sup>1</sup>Food Research & Action Center (2017). Hunger & Health: The Impact of Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Poor Nutrition on Health and Well-Being. Available at: <https://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/hunger-health-impact-poverty-food-insecurity-health-well-being.pdf>

veterans between the ages of 18 to 64 lived in households reporting food insecurity, while 5.3 lived in households experiencing very low food security<sup>2</sup>. After controlling for demographic characteristics that normally predict food insecurity, such as age, educational attainment, and income, the risk of food insecurity is 7.4 percent higher among veterans than nonveterans ages 18–64<sup>3</sup>.

By creating an Office of Food Security, this legislation represents a critical step to prioritize, accelerate, and sustain the Department of Veterans Affairs' work to address food insecurity among those who have sacrificed so much for our nation. Of note, the Veterans Health Administration has screened millions of patients for food insecurity and connected veterans and their families to crucial federal nutrition programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), school meals, child care meals, summer meals, and emergency food sites, such as food banks and pantries. By providing funding to build out these efforts to screen and intervene veterans at risk for food insecurity, this legislation will enshrine the importance of this work, identify gaps in services, and connect veterans to available federal nutrition programs and other resources.

This legislation recognizes the critical role the federal nutrition plays in addressing food insecurity among veterans and their families. The federal nutrition programs are among our nation's most important, proven, and cost-effective public interventions to not only address food insecurity but also to improve health, nutrition, and well-being. A growing body of research links these programs to a wide range of positive outcomes for families and the nation. Federal nutrition programs improve dietary intake and nutrition quality; support healthy growth of children; boost learning and academic achievement; reduce poverty and increase family economic security; and lower health care spending.<sup>4 5 6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Rabbitt, M.P., & Smith, M.D. (2021). U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service Report. Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans. Available at:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=101268>

<sup>3</sup> Rabbitt, M.P., & Smith, M.D. (2021). U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service Report. Food Insecurity Among Working-Age Veterans. Available at:

<https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details/?pubid=101268>

<sup>4</sup> Hartline-Grafton, H. & Dean, O. (2017). Hunger and Health: The Role of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in Improving Health and Well-Being. Available at:

<https://frac.org/research/resource-library/snap-public-health-role-supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-improving-health-well-being-americans>. Accessed on February 14, 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Hartline-Grafton, H. & Dean, O. (2017). Hunger and Health: The Role of the Federal Child Nutrition Programs in Improving Health and Well-Being. Available at:

<https://frac.org/research/resource-library/hungerhealth-role-federal-child-nutrition-programs-improving-health-well>. Accessed on February 14, 2022.

<sup>6</sup> Hartline-Grafton, H. & Dean, O. (2019). WIC is a Critical Economic, Nutrition, and Health Support for Children and Families. Available at:

<https://frac.org/research/resource-library/wic-is-a-critical-economic-nutrition-and-health-support-for-children-and-families>. Accessed on February 14, 2022.

Ensuring access to SNAP, in particular, is a critical step in supporting food security among veterans. Nationwide, according to the USDA, 1,174,027 veterans (6.6 percent of all veterans) received SNAP benefits,<sup>7</sup> improving veterans' purchasing power necessary to buy food in a dignified way at military commissaries and other food retail outlets that accept SNAP. A recent survey estimated that only 59 percent of eligible veterans were enrolled in SNAP.<sup>8</sup> The USDA has identified veterans as a priority population for state SNAP outreach plans, including partnership with local VHA facilities.<sup>9</sup> Accessing SNAP not only helps veterans everywhere put food on the table, it reduces poverty, supports economic stability, and improves health outcomes.

FRAC looks forward to supporting the Department of Veterans Affairs work to address food insecurity. Alongside increasing veteran participation in SNAP and other federal nutrition programs, eradicating food insecurity and hunger among veterans and their families will require a national response that addresses underlying causes (e.g., a lack of well-paying jobs and a lack of affordable housing). This draft legislation is an important step in the right direction.

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<sup>7</sup> USDA Food and Nutrition Service. Veterans Receiving SNAP by State (2018-2019 average). <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/veterans-receiving-snap-benefits-state>.

<sup>8</sup> Cohen, A. J., Rudolph, J. L., Thomas, K. S., Archambault, E., Bowman, M. M., Going, C., Heisler, M., O'Toole, T. P., & Dosa, D. M. (2020). Food Insecurity Among Veterans: Resources to Screen and Intervene. *Federal practitioner: for the health care professionals of the VA, DoD, and PHS*, 37(1), 16–23. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7010340/pdf/fp-37-01-16.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> USDA Food and Nutrition Service. FNS-GD-2021-0064. <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/introduction-priority-areas-state-outreach-plans>.