

Senate Committee Testimony for SOAR (Strategic Opportunities to Achieve Results) Act Bill

My name Pamela Bilyeu, I am an RN and currently serve as the director of Help House, a mission outreach to the residents in Osage County Kansas.

Help House is a non-profit Christian organization founded in 2003 by the Churches of Osage County United, Inc. and is based in Lyndon. Help House was founded for the purpose of providing emergency assistance for the basic needs of individuals and families in Osage County.

Help House exists to provide our hearts and hands to help in an unconditional, compassionate non-judgmental way. In addition, when appropriate, we offer intangible assistance of "food for the spirit" through sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Help House is supported solely by contributions, donations and volunteers. We work in cooperation with other agencies and organizations to help provide complete care to those we serve and to empower them to discover their God-given gifts, abilities, and inner strengths. Our ultimate goal is to guide all toward less dependence on government assistance and more dependence on God and interdependence with others.

Help House partner's with Harvester's, USDA, the United Way of the Flint Hills, and Salvation Army to assist our county's low-income residents with food, utility assistance and emergency assistance. Help House also is a part of the Osage County Interagency Group that works and supports efforts to reduce hunger, decrease poverty, providing avenues for healthcare, and support individuals and families with special services and needs.

I am addressing the importance of the Federal Nutrition Program from the aspect of a rural community food pantry.

Osage County has a population as of 15, 847 according to 2015 KDCF Food Assistance Report. The average monthly use of the "Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program" (SNAP) for Osage County for 2016 was 1403.

At Help House out of the total of 527 households served in 2016, 219 said they received SNAP assistance. 517 Children ages 0-17, 840 Adults ages 18-64 and 96 Elderly received this assistance. 303 of these individuals were handicapped, and 248 were unemployed.

The income guidelines that are used at Help House are the same as the USDA guidelines for the "The Emergency Food Assistance Program" (TEFAP) which Help House is the distributor of for Osage County. The reality is by using those income guidelines, every household we serve would be eligible income wise, to be considered for SNAP.

Nutritional services offered through Help House include a once a month shopping trip to the food pantry, TEFAP distribution, and sponsoring two Harvester's Mobile Pantries out of the four that are available monthly in Osage County.

Senate Public Health and Welfare

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The TEFAP program served 516 households in 2016 and the Harvester's Mobile Pantries averaged 100 households at each location each month. This outreach of food distribution only supplies households for a limited number of days, and only distributes products that are presently available through the Harvester's food bank and donations. SNAP is the additional support for nutritional health to fill in where others programs are unable to provide.

Help House has been an advocate of the SNAP program for the past three years through our partnership with Harvester's. We have been able to direct our clients to the "Harvester's SNAP Outreach Team" for assistance in applying to the SNAP program in Kansas. Clients have expressed gratitude for the assistance they received from this outreach team, and commented that they felt like they were treated well. They especially enjoyed the convenience of the toll free number they could use to call for assistance.

Through our ministry we find individuals struggling with making decisions between purchasing food products versus: medicines, rent, utilities, gasoline, or doctor visits. Healthcare is usually placed on the back burner, especially when there are children in the household. Many of our senior adults clients are the primary care givers of minor children in their home, and have a heavy burden placed on them to provide food while being on a limited income.

The SNAP program helps relieve a great deal of that burden.

We have had the pleasure of seeing clients become "food secure" after being a part of the SNAP program while going through a difficult time in their lives. From recovery from a major medical crisis, with support from local agencies and Help House, they received additional assistance to allow their focus to be on recovery and not on surviving.

We have adult clients who attend Allen Community College and Washburn Tech who also receive the SNAP assistance as well. Having the availability to obtain good nutritional food is a help to these students and allows them to use their financial resources for living and travel expenses to their college. Living in a rural area magnifies these concerns. Supporting these individuals as they are finishing their education and as they enter into the workforce will help them become better productive citizens.

Families who are either temporarily, or chronically in the low-income bracket, benefit from the ability to receive SNAP assistance.