

Food Bank for the Heartland  
LB 1381 – Opposition – version #2  
Health and Human Services Committee 2/14/24

This letter, in opposition to LB 1381, is submitted on behalf of Food Bank for the Heartland. The changes proposed in LB 1381 increase barriers for people who need access to emergency and supplemental food. Mandating their participation in an Employment and Training program that is not equipped to serve the population in all 93 counties will not serve the interests of our state. Nebraskans in all 93 counties rely on SNAP - a short-term program to assist families with nutrition assistance. A mandatory program and added compliance hoops do not follow the trajectory of a person seeking work who is eligible for or currently on SNAP.

Understanding who is working and who is not is important. According to the Center for Policy and Budget Priorities, close to two-thirds of SNAP participants work in service, office and administrative support, and sales occupations. Many of the jobs most common among SNAP participants, such as service or sales jobs like cashiers, cooks, or home health aides, likely have low pay and irregular work hours, and frequently lack benefits such as paid sick leave. These conditions make it difficult for workers to earn sufficient income to provide for their families and may contribute to volatility such as high job turnover. SNAP supplements low-income earners, helps smooth out income fluctuations due to temporary or irregular hours, and helps workers when they are in-between jobs, enabling them to buy nutritious food.

Mandatory employment and training programs are expensive and difficult to administer and still present significant access barriers to those who need emergency food. Other states that enacted them have not seen significant outcomes. Challenges include inadequate exemptions screenings and excessive verification required to claim exemptions. These may result in sanctions that could mean ineligibility or loss of SNAP benefits. Our SNAP hotline staff frequently receive calls from individuals seeking assistance in understanding “able-bodied” requirements and indicate qualifying factors that were misunderstood in initial screenings.

Mandatorily assigning recipients to a program will not take into consideration access to programs or transportation challenges – especially in a state as geographically diverse as Nebraska. There are still significant areas of Nebraska not served by SNAP Next Step E &T, Third-Party Partners and DOL. Jumping to a mandatory system without the support needed statewide sets the state up for failure. SNAP eligibility would be predicated on services individuals may not be able to access. The net result will be driving more food-insecure neighbors to an already over-stretched charitable food system.

LB 1381 would also remove the waiver option. Nebraska has been discerning in enacting waivers. Taking the waiver option off the table limits the state’s ability to address specific needs for targeted populations. Waivers allow for flexibility in program administration and public/private partnerships that address specific needs like assisting elderly individuals complete their application process with a voice signature or addressing the economic factors

impacting Tribes in Nebraska. Removing this flexibility would set the state back, not move us forward.

For these reasons, we oppose LB 1381.