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We Must Maintain Our Investment in SNAP: An Efficient, Effective Way to Prevent Hunger and Reduce Food Insecurity

(AUSTIN, Texas) — The Center for Public Policy Priorities released the following statement today regarding the Congressional House Government Oversight Committee hearing on fraud in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly Food Stamps).

“The Center for Public Policy Priorities shares the federal government’s commitment to safeguard taxpayer dollars and applauds USDA’s success, in partnership with the states, at reducing SNAP fraud to historic lows. Given its efficiency and effectiveness at preventing hunger and reducing food insecurity, we call on Congress to maintain its investment in SNAP and reject any efforts to cut benefits or otherwise undermine the program’s ability to fight hunger.

“SNAP, which helps low-income individuals and families supplement their food resources, is critical in Texas where one in six families struggle to afford food. Over three-quarters of the 3.6 million Texans who receive SNAP benefits are children, seniors, or persons with disabilities. To qualify, a family’s net earnings must be below the federal poverty level, \$22,350 for a family of four. The majority of SNAP households include someone who works, and program rules require all able-bodied adults to work to receive benefits.

“USDA Undersecretary Kevin Concannon credited electronic benefit transfer (EBT) technology, which replaced paper stamps beginning in 1995, as the major factor in helping the government reduce trafficking to one cent on the dollar. EBT was rolled out statewide in Texas in 1997.

“The vast majority of SNAP retailers and participants play by the rules. Only three-tenths of one percent of supermarkets that accept SNAP benefits engage in trafficking, or the exchange of benefits for cash. And technology enables states to spot fraud when it occurs from the program and take immediate action against those who attempt to abuse the program.

“Payment accuracy is also at historic highs, with 98 percent of recipients entitled to and getting the right amount of benefits. Nationwide the error rate is 3.81 percent, one of the best across federal programs. In Texas the error rate is even lower, at 2.13 percent, which earned the state a \$6 million bonus last year.

“The government’s successful administration of SNAP earned the program high praise from the *National Journal* in 2007, which named it one of government’s top ten successes, citing its high payment accuracy and responsiveness during natural disasters.

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Reporters who wish to request an interview with the center’s Senior Policy Analyst Celia Cole should contact Brian Stephens at stephens@cphp.org or 512.320.0222, ext. 112.

About the Center

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