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MEDIA CONTACT:

BRIAN KENNEDY

919/856-2153

briank@ncjustice.org

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JUSTICE CENTER

P.O. Box 28068

Raleigh, NC 27611-8068

www.ncjustice.org

TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE:

Creating an Adequate SNAP Employment and Training Program is Essential to Reducing Hunger and Building a Strong Workforce in North Carolina

BY BRIAN KENNEDY, PUBLIC POLICY FELLOW

Each night, nearly 630,000 North Carolina households struggle to place enough food on the table.¹ At 15.9 percent, the rate of hunger is still well above its pre-recession level of 12.9 percent, making North Carolina the state with the 12th highest rate of hunger. Even worse is the 244,000 North Carolinian households that face extreme hunger issues, which means they are often missing meals. Homes with children and households led by women are at even higher risk of becoming food insecure.

Hunger is the result of many factors, but at its core it is related to the ability of households to make ends meet. Research has shown that reducing food insecurity leads to increased economic stability.² Food secure homes are more likely to be able to pay for necessities such as rent and medical expenses. As fewer quality jobs are available, more families struggle to afford enough food. Although the unemployment rate has begun to decline, in 77 counties in North Carolina there are more jobless workers than there are job opportunities. In 22 counties, there are more than two workers for every job. The growth of quality jobs has been especially slow for rural communities, where post-recession job growth has been four times slower than their neighboring urban counties.³ Since 2009, more than 40 percent of the state's new jobs were created in Wake and Mecklenburg counties.⁴ Without investing in training the workforce, it is difficult for communities to attract employers and businesses who bring new jobs.

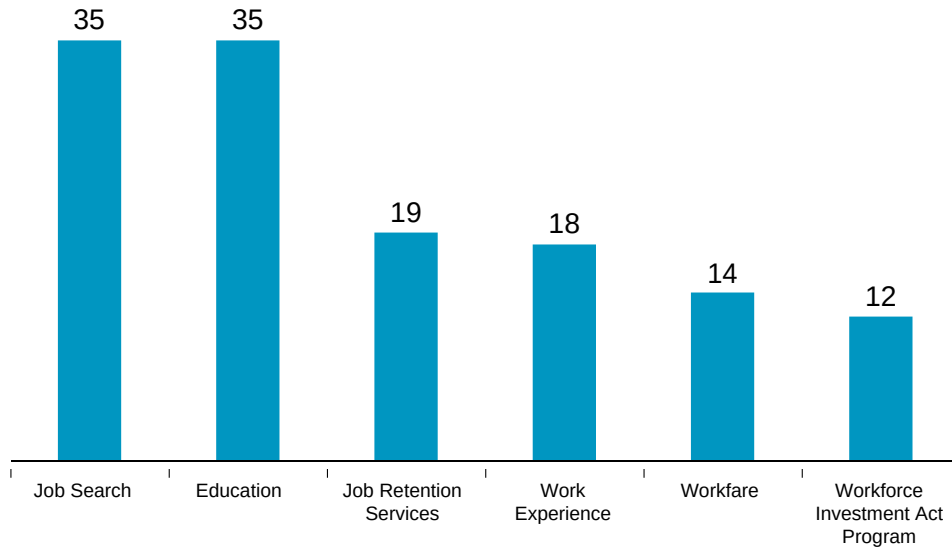
The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Employment and Training program, or SNAP E&T, is designed to address the intersections of hunger and joblessness. In 1985, Congress passed the Food Security Act, which created the Employment and Training program with the explicit goal of "[providing] opportunities for food stamp recipients to improve their employment prospects and reduce reliance on food stamps."⁵ North Carolina operates both the SNAP program that provides food benefits and the Employment & Training Program.

SNAP Employment and Training targets skill development to those facing hunger

SNAP E&T is a program that seeks to provide skills training and employment supports to SNAP participants. States decide how and where they will place SNAP E&T programming and what services they will provide. Most programs are administered by

FIGURE 1: Many states allow a wide-range of qualified SNAP E&T work activities

Number of States that allow each type of work activity



SOURCE: SNAP Employment and Training Toolkit. U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2014

non-government organizations that provide vocational education, work experience opportunities, job search and retention support, and other work activities. In order to eliminate financial burdens on states to provide SNAP E&T, the Federal government offers grants to help offset administrative and program costs. There are two types of federal funding that could help to improve existing state E&T programs: E&T Program Grants and 50 Percent Reimbursements.

PROGRAM GRANTS - Known as “100 Percent Money”, these grants are intended to pay for the development, administrative, and operational costs the state may incur in creating and implementing E&T programs.

50 PERCENT REIMBURSEMENT GRANTS - If the state spends more than its grant money on the development and administration of E&T programs, it can be reimbursed for 50 percent of its existing costs. SNAP regulations requires North Carolina to reimburse E&T volunteers and participants for costs related to participating in E&T programs. These expenses may include child care, transportation, or educational materials.

The Food and Nutrition Service Employment and Training program (FSN E&T), North Carolina’s version of SNAP E&T, is supervised by the state but administered by individual counties. That means that the responsibility for providing E&T opportunities falls to the counties. Currently E&T operates programs in only nine of North Carolina’s 100 counties.⁶

What a successful SNAP E&T Program looks like

Washington State’s Basic Food Employment and Training Program (BFE&T) utilizes a *third-party match* model. That means community colleges and community-based organizations provide Employment & Training services instead of the state. The state then uses federal funding to reimburse the partner organizations. This model uses the expertise of local organizations and colleges while reducing the amount of money invested by the state. Additionally, BFE&T is an *expanded* third-party model. This means that in addition to providing services and programming, community colleges and

community-based organizations handle a majority of the administrative and client pipeline services. BFE&T programs provide SNAP recipients with traditional job services as well as critical support services like child care, transportation, clothing, and housing support. Between 2005 and 2013, BFE&T served 56,800 individuals.⁷ Almost three-fourths of Washington's childless adults who get SNAP benefits receive services from community colleges, while the remaining are served by community-based organizations. Since 2005, 71 percent of participants have become employed with a median income of \$11 per hour. There are several factors that led to BFE&T's success. Washington State took advantage of the administrative flexibility built into SNAP E&T and created a program that used existing knowledge and systems. They created strategic partnerships and leveraged the state's existing workforce programs and state agencies. North Carolina is in a position to replicate much of the successes seen in Washington.

The Importance of Expanding SNAP Employment & Training Opportunities across North Carolina

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that North Carolina was selected to participate in SNAP to Skills, a federal effort to support the state in expanding and improving its E&T program. In order to help North Carolina develop a third-party partnership program, the project intends to increase FNS E&T staffing, expand the variety of qualified work activities, and increase the number

of counties that provide employment and training services. Just this year, Mecklenburg and Buncombe counties have led the way by working with non-profits to provide employment and training services. These efforts will use public dollars to leverage private contributions and expand the number of slots available to those seeking skill training that can lead to jobs that eliminate hunger.

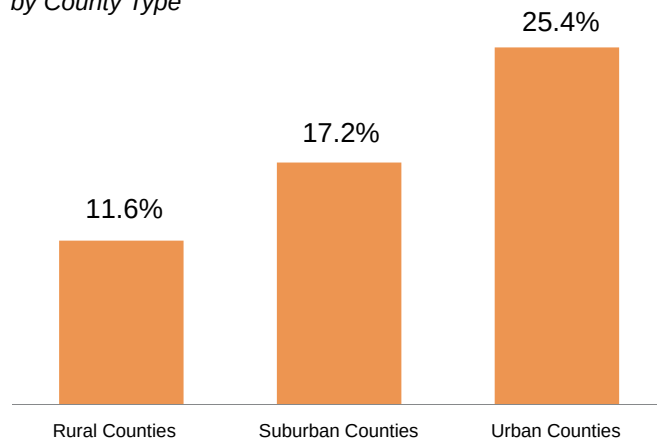
While committing to improvement is a good first step, these are modest improvements relative to the significant need, especially in light of the decision by legislative leaders to cut back on state investment in skills training.⁸ The county by county approach means that North Carolinians in counties with modest resources and already thin-stretched administrative capacity often miss out. Additionally, HB 318, passed in 2015, imposed new and unnecessary time-limits that hinder the ability of present and future administrators of the program to address hunger among childless adults during future economic downturns and stents of high

unemployment.⁹ Reducing investments in skills training while placing strict restrictions on support services makes it even more difficult for poor North Carolinians to escape poverty.

Expanding training opportunities is even more important for workers in rural and suburban counties. Researchers project that within the next three years, one-third of North Carolina's jobs will require a four-year college degree.¹⁰ In 2015, more than a quarter of the population in urban counties aged 25 and up held bachelor's degrees. In rural counties, just over 11 percent of the people held four-year degrees. There is an education and training gap in North Carolina's rural and suburban communities. If we want to build a strong economy, it is critical that North Carolina work to train and develop *all* of its future workforce.

FIGURE 2: Expanding skills training is vital to rural and suburban counties

Portion of the Population with Bachelor's Degrees by County Type



SOURCE: American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2010-2014

The 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides funding for state and local employment and training programs. In North Carolina, there are roughly 2,000 WIOA supported training programs offered in counties across the state. In 29 of the 77 counties where childless adults are affected by the new time-limits, there are no WIOA training programs. More than one-third of North Carolina's jobless workers who are able to hold a job are at risk of losing SNAP benefits after only three months of being unemployed. Setting a statewide goal to match all adults receiving SNAP who can work to an Employment & Training option if they volunteer is important.

SNAP Employment and Training is a unique policy tool that can help North Carolina fight to reduce hunger while simultaneously building a more talented and better trained workforce. Making sure there are enough funds for the training so that it is affordable and moves people to sustainable employment is critical.

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APPENDIX

County	Number of Childless Adults Subject to the Time Limit	Unemployed Persons in August 2016	Job Openings in August 2016	Jobless Worker per Job Opening	WIOA Eligible Training Programs*
Alamance	1,308	3,725	3,801	1.0	76
Alexander	325	773	281	2.8	0
Alleghany	61	239	179	1.3	0
Anson	548	619	408	1.5	4
Ashe	213	562	367	1.5	0
Avery	109	375	203	1.8	0
Beaufort	568	1,132	958	1.2	17
Bertie	391	540	274	2.0	0
Bladen	524	973	495	2.0	0
Brunswick	1,066	2,909	1,668	1.7	0
Buncombe	3,603	5,136	10,402	0.5	66
Burke	883	1,998	2,096	1.0	48
Cabarrus	1,167	4,500	5,284	0.9	47
Caldwell	960	1,845	1,193	1.5	35
Camden	60	242	79	3.1	0
Carteret	678	1,541	1,528	1.0	21
Caswell	273	521	183	2.8	0
Catawba	2,123	3,594	5,301	0.7	55
Chatham	326	1,418	838	1.7	44
Cherokee	289	604	581	1.0	15
Chowan	231	356	348	1.0	8
Clay	90	211	69	3.1	0
Cleveland	1,833	2,539	1,874	1.4	13
Columbus	621	1,368	529	2.6	2
Craven	1,014	2,147	2,340	0.9	17
Cumberland	4,835	7,947	8,667	0.9	80
Currituck	91	588	357	1.6	0
Dare	179	960	1,271	0.8	0
Davidson	1,872	3,822	2,134	1.8	34
Davie	260	913	624	1.5	4
Dusin	208	1,407	828	1.7	34
Durham	2,693	7,142	17,892	0.4	32
Edgecombe	1,318	1,882	1,825	1.0	1
Forsyth	2,695	8,841	11,929	0.7	84
Franklin	633	1,513	623	2.4	0
Gaston	3,193	5,527	3,986	1.4	11
Gates	87	271	87	3.1	0
Graham	129	231	91	2.5	0
Granville	376	1,261	1,086	1.2	1

APPENDIX (cont.)

County	Number of Childless Adults Subject to the Time Limit	Unemployed Persons in August 2016	Job Openings in August 2016	Jobless Worker per Job Opening	WIOA Eligible Training Programs*
Greene	263	471	203	2.3	0
Guilford	8,448	13,549	17,744	0.8	34
Halifax	1,112	1,600	1,237	1.3	0
Harnett	1,201	2,918	1,747	1.7	72
Haywood	696	1,244	1,148	1.1	22
Henderson	669	2,206	2,339	0.9	53
Hertford	418	592	673	0.9	11
Hoke	746	1,246	467	2.7	0
Hyde	60	146	47	3.1	0
Iredell	659	3,911	6,000	0.7	51
Jackson	372	988	795	1.2	35
Johnston	1,766	4,078	2,467	1.7	52
Jones	173	232	100	2.3	0
Lee	601	1,458	1,371	1.1	142
Lenoir	924	1,475	1,327	1.1	34
Lincoln	700	1,882	1,662	1.1	0
Macon	268	788	655	1.2	0
Madison	227	478	267	1.8	2
Martin	386	642	296	2.2	6
McDowell	730	975	648	1.5	3
Mecklenburg	10,086	26,908	64,095	0.4	199
Mitchell	132	369	241	1.5	3
Montgomery	260	600	298	2.0	35
Moore	506	1,922	2,912	0.7	38
Nash	1,096	2,886	1,238	2.3	0
New Hanover	2,266	5,399	7,552	0.7	2
Northampton	268	565	311	1.8	0
Onslow	1,281	3,477	3,891	0.9	25
Orange	809	3,407	6,061	0.6	5
Pamlico	150	274	128	2.1	14
Pasquotank	421	1,047	1,111	0.9	42
Pender	553	1,368	652	2.1	0
Perquimans	168	318	160	2.0	0
Person	476	979	462	2.1	10
Pitt	1,899	4,968	6,317	0.8	6
Polk	144	430	264	1.6	2
Randolph	1,275	3,251	2,325	1.4	43
Richmond	1,022	1,130	804	1.4	33
Robeson	2,814	3,602	2,009	1.8	0

APPENDIX (cont.)

County	Number of Childless Adults Subject to the Time Limit	Unemployed Persons in August 2016	Job Openings in August 2016	Jobless Worker per Job Opening	WIOA Eligible Training Programs*
Rockingham	1,219	2,301	1,737	1.3	19
Rowan	1,494	3,564	2,877	1.2	44
Rutherford	952	1,606	915	1.8	12
Sampson	566	1,628	803	2.0	29
Scotland	749	1,024	865	1.2	0
Stanly	565	1,352	1,085	1.2	64
Stokes	359	1,070	372	2.9	4
Surry	709	1,599	1,596	1.0	34
Swain	163	371	227	1.6	0
Transylvania	379	681	442	1.5	5
Tyrrell	50	109	61	1.8	0
Union	1,376	5,021	4,607	1.1	11
Vance	1,129	1,304	1,244	1.0	10
Wake	4,186	23,384	49,720	0.5	70
Warren	361	509	152	3.3	0
Washington	216	345	265	1.3	0
Watauga	237	1,329	2,230	0.6	3
Wayne	1,841	2,971	2,422	1.2	30
Wilkes	884	1,412	1,253	1.1	4
Wilson	1,310	2,927	2,286	1.3	1
Yadkin	265	776	560	1.4	2
Yancey	188	391	150	2.6	0

*WIOA Eligible Training Programs accessed 10/11/2016

SOURCE: Special Data Request to the Department of Health and Human Services, July 2015; Total Unemployed and Job Opening for August 2016, NCWorks Online, Area Summary for All 100 Counties; WIOA Eligible Training Programs accessed for each county at NCWorks Online.