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Kansas Food Bank

Second Harvest Community Food Bank

Opposition to Senate Bill 248 – Senate Committee on Assessment and Taxation

Chairwoman Tyson and members of the Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of Harvesters—The Community Food Network, the Kansas Food Bank and Second Harvest Community Food Bank, which together serve the hungry and food insecure in all 105 counties in the state. Last year, our networks of charitable food pantries distributed more than 44 million pounds of food to those in need in Kansas, from our smallest rural communities to major metropolitan areas.

We oppose Senate Bill 248 because **it is a tax increase on Kansans.**

Less than one year ago, this committee, the full Senate, the full House and the Governor all agreed to eliminate the state-level sales tax on food over a three-year period. Before we have had even 50 days of limited food sales tax relief, this bill reneges on the promise to Kansans to reduce the tax burden on their most basic necessity, at a time of record-high food inflation. **This bill breaks the legislature's promise to Kansans while the state sits on the largest budget surplus in state history.**

This bill appears to promote “healthy” eating, but **whose definition of “healthy” does it use?** Lucky Charms wouldn't be taxed, but sugar-free salsa would? My neighbor wouldn't be taxed on peanut butter, but because my child is allergic to peanuts and I have to buy almond butter, I would be taxed? Green beans from China wouldn't be taxed, but Kansas-grown and milled flour would be?

And **who will be the arbiter of “healthy” moving forward?** The grocery industry introduces more than 20,000 new products every year. Who will categorize all of those foods as “healthy” and “unhealthy”? And who will help grocers track all of those items? This is a significant burden for all grocery stores, but especially small-town grocery stores that operate their own point-of-sale systems.

As has been made clear over the years as Harvesters has advocated for the complete elimination of the state-level food sales tax in Kansas, the food sales tax is a regressive tax affecting low-income Kansans more than anyone. **The lack of transparency in this policy is also the most difficult on those who can**

**least afford it.** Many low-income consumers must track their grocery budgets to the penny. When they get to the checkout line, they will not have any idea how much the tax portion of their bill will be, or if it's correct. If you have ever been in a grocery store checkout line and have to put items back because you can't afford them, you know how mortifying this can be. Why would we do this to Kansans? Please vote no on SB 248.