



**National Commission on Hunger Public Hearing
Public Testimony**

May 19, 2015 ♦ 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Statehouse Convention Center
101 E Markham Street
Little Rock, AR 72201

PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #1

Commissioner: And after this last group goes then we will, Robert Doar and Dr. Susan Finn will be leaving back to their homes and back to their other jobs but Billy Shore and I will stay around and have an open dialogue with anybody who would like to stay. So I'd like to call up the Cooperative Extension.

Participant #1: Hi, I'm Rosemary Rodibaugh with University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension and we are the education outreach component of the University of Arkansas, Division of Agriculture, our land grant university. And we are an implementing agency for SNAP Ed and have been for 19 years, about to submit our 20th plan. So our program has grown to, from 16 original counties to all 75 counties thanks to a request from DHS to implement our program in all of the counties because there is a need in all of our 75 counties. We deliver our nutrition education program through partnerships with many, many partners around the state, many of who, who have spoken today and we work with children from pre-K through older adults. Last year we reached close to 50,000 individuals with our education programs and that was through 685,000 contacts. So we know that one single contact isn't going to make a huge difference, so we try to reach our SNAP participants multiple times. We work with Head Start schools, with public schools, senior centers, food banks and pantries, WIC offices, and many other groups and we try to teach people to make healthier food choices. We teach basic nutrition principles but we also show them how to stretch their food dollars. We show them how to use the foods that they get in their pantries, or from pantries and commodity foods and so forth. We test a lot of, we test the recipes before we provide them to people and so just anecdotally a couple weeks ago we were testing, trying to find tasty recipes in which to use canned spinach and that was not really easy. We tried several recipes before we found something that really tasted good. So we do want to provide useful information to our clients. We work, we have worked with DHS and USDA to help expand the number of markets that, farmers markets that accept EBT and we've started school gardens and community gardens in partnership with others around the state. So we really are working to help SNAP Ed participants or SNAP participants eat healthier, be more active, and stretch their food dollars. So I know that there's a cap on the SNAP Ed budget and that has been with us since 2010, since the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act but it, SNAP Ed really is making a difference. We're able to help people, especially with the youth audiences but even with the adult audiences through our programs. We let them taste foods that they would not ordinarily spend their resources



on because they don't know that they're going to like these healthier choices, so SNAP Ed is an important program and I hope that the funding will not be cut but if at possible at some point, increasing the funding for SNAP Ed. It's making a difference in every state in the country. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. [applause] We have another person that put their name on the list and that would be Elaine Bultena or Boltena.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #2

Participant #2: My name is Elaine Bultena and I am the volunteer coordinator for the Food Ministry at First United Methodist Church in downtown Little Rock. I'm excited to be here today to tell you about our unique community food program, which opened in October of last year. The name of our program is called FANN, which stands for Friends and Neighbor Network. FANN meets twice a month to combat food security in downtown Little Rock by providing fresh produce and nutritious foods to low-income families but at the heart of FANN is community. It is a dignified community-building program that offers a hand up rather than a handout. And here's how it works. FANN members meet every, meet at the church every second and fourth Tuesday of the month. The members sign in and they pay a \$3.00 membership fee each time. The food truck from the Arkansas Food Bank Network arrives promptly at 6:00 PM and the FANN members kick into action. Some help unload the truck. Some begin sorting the food, while others are working the sign-in table and then we have others who are putting baskets out, so the food can be divided up later. Everyone works together to make sure each household gets their fair share. This process of unloading, sorting, and dividing takes about 30 to 45 minutes and then once everyone has their food, we all sit down for a community building time, which normally lasts 15 to 20 minutes. This time consists of a welcome and announcements, concerns and celebrations, and inspirational time, which can be a prayer or a song or a reading of a poem but the best part is that the members take responsibility for this community-building time and they lead it themselves.

At the end of the meeting, everyone loads up their food and heads home. FANN's intent is to offer relief in the monthly grocery bills by providing nutritious foods every 2 weeks, money that would normally go for groceries can now be used for other expenses, such as medicine, rent, utilities, or transportation. FANN is a program that empowers people who have hit very hard times. It offers hope and it offers accountability. It's centered around food, but its main focus is building relationships and building community. Our food minister, food ministry team at First Methodist learned about the FANN model for food insecurity in a book called *Toxic Charity* by Robert Luktin. *Toxic Charity* addresses how churches and charities good intentions can actually have dire consequences for those we're trying to help. I would like to close by sharing a recent story about our FANN members. It's a testament about the power and potential that this program has. As I mentioned earlier, the members pay a small \$3.00 fee at each meeting. Now this money does not go towards the purchase of the food. First Methodist has received grants and donations and that is the money that we use to purchase the food. The \$3.00 fee is placed in a community fund that's used for however the members want to use it. For example, it can be used for gas money for the food truck. It can be used to bring in guest speakers or it could be used for parties, whatever the members choose. Our FANN has been operating for 7 months and in that time the community fund has grown to over \$400.00. So at a recent meeting we began discussions about how we're going to use this money. So it was suggested by one of our



members, Shirley, and everyone agreed with Shirley, that a portion of this money should be donated back to the Arkansas Food Bank Network and part of it be used for a picnic in MacArthur Park. So on Monday, May 11th our church van transported several FANN members and myself to the food bank to present them with \$200.00. The food bank staff was very gracious when accepting the check and offered our FANN members a tour of their beautiful facility. It was a great day. Our FANN is very new and we have many kinks to work out but this model works. It's been working in Atlanta, GA for many years and it can definitely work in Arkansas. So I would like to encourage others to consider and adopt this empowering model. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. [applause] So we're going to take a 5-minute break. For those of you who want to stick around and have a dialogue with Billy Shore and me, we would welcome that to happen. Thank you.

Commissioner: That doesn't mean that we have to continue to pound away if we're done pounding at 2:30, I think everybody would probably welcome the opportunity to fly off and do something else, maybe go feed some more kids after school. [laughter] We do as much as it's probably tempting to stay where you are, maybe what we could do, Andrea, these are wireless mics, right? If possible, if we can keep this conversation in, see these two?

Anater: Yeah.

Commissioner: So I don't know if we can, if you want to, just keep it on the mics. We'll keep the conversation on the microphones for as long as you feel that we need to do so and that the energy is good and that the information is good. So—

Commissioner: And just one thing I'd like to add, which is yesterday and today have, for me, been very valuable but particularly the testimony today, a number of you had testified about the issues regarding seniors has been something that, you know, we haven't talked about as much in the Commission yet, so that, I feel that really elevated for us this issue is very valuable and I think there's going to be a lot of discussion among our colleagues about how to think about that further.

Commissioner: Actually, that brings up a question that I wish that I could've asked in the moment and maybe I think whoever testified on the issue of seniors, if he's still around, this was the issue of the 100% participation, oh, and the CFSP Program, the Community Supplemental, the CSFP, right?

Commissioner: Yeah.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #3

Commissioner: Yeah, the supplemental food program. Okay, well, so does anybody understand what that's about, why is it that 100% participation on 1,000 people—

Participant #3: I can.

Commissioner: Okay, if you could do it with the microphone it would be great and you're welcome to stand up at the podium and make it all formal or you can just stand—

Participant #3: I can make it formal.

Commissioner: Sure.

Participant #3: All right.

Commissioner: Okay, and—

Participant #3: Because I will drop the microphone.

Commissioner: Okay, because if Arkansas has a rate of food insecurity among seniors at 40%—

Participant #3: Right.

Commissioner: —1,000 people doesn't feel quite right to me.

Participant #3: Right.

Commissioner: Is that particularly from the local community numbers or what is going on there?

Participant #3: Right, each state is allocated a number based off of food insecurity rates and population, mostly population. Arkansas has three agencies in the state that facilitate the CSFP Program. I work for R Back Incorporated. We do CSFP for a 9-county area. We are allotted 1,374 slots every month. We fill that and in each of our counties we have 50 to 100 people on the waiting list and people who just get up, give up and, give up the chance that they're going to get on there, on that list. So, you know, they get excellent distributions when they qualify but when you're 60 and over and the only way you're going to get on that list is if somebody moves or passes away, it can be a long, long wait. They get monthly issues of food but again, it doesn't cover the population by half that we are serving.



Commissioner: Thank you very much. And if you want to add more information to any of the testimonies that was given today, please, do go to the National Commission on Hunger website, which is HungerCommission.rti.org?

Anater: .org.

Commissioner: HungerCommission, so you can say it for us, Andrea, please, sorry. HungerCommission, just Google it and you'll find it. [laughter] There's an RTI in there somewhere and I just want to give a shout out to our staff, Andrea Anater and Mary Council from the Research Triangle Institute that's been supporting the Commission and here, she's going to come up with the website because it's not on our materials. We are also on Twitter, please, do follow us on Twitter and retweet. You can see that we don't tweet much but we want you to tweet a lot and that's @NatlCommHunger, okay. So please, we do have a public place where, on our website where you can submit links, you can't submit an attachment but you can submit a link. You can submit up to 1,000 words. Please do send on your information. Send your ideas to us. This is an open forum. So I had that question answered. Thank you.

Commissioner: Just two other things that I would raise. One is that, you know, relative to other places that I've traveled, there's a lot of relatively young people in the room here, which I think is great because there are a lot of places where I haven't seen as many of the younger generation as focused or committed to this issue and so I think the more we can be doing in terms of the long term to continue to reinforce that, that would be great and if there's ideas that you have, I can't tell you how many places I've been where at a meeting, something like this, you just would not, you know, in terms of the anti-hunger activists in the room, we haven't seen kind of that younger generation there. So I'm really thrilled to see that representation here. Second thing is we talked about some of the issues that we talked about are becoming ripe very fast, so Congress will be dealing with the Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation that reauthorizes school breakfast and summer meals and CSFP and all of the programs.

Commissioner: And WIC.

Commissioner: And WIC could happen towards the end of this year. It's probably more likely that it'll happen at the beginning of next year, since Congress rarely meets its own deadlines but some of the things that we were chatting about, like more flexibility around summer feeding to the extent that you have strong opinions about those things, letting your representatives know about it sooner rather than later would be really important because the Child Nutrition Reauthorization will



really be in front of us before we know it and these, that could happen actually even before this Commission issues its report. This Commission's report will be broader than child-hunger issues, so it'll, it's not like one impacts the other but it's very important to make sure that we stay aligned with the legislative process and timetable.

Commissioner: The website is HungerCommission.rti.org.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #4

Commissioner: Anyhow, so we'll open it up to any other comments or questions or anything, if there are any issues you'd like us to address about the Commission going forward or what we've already done, glad to do that. Yes?

Commissioner: On the microphone, if you please, for posterity and for the public who couldn't be here today.

Participant #4: Okay, I have had the opportunity to work with some organizations to develop a consequence map of poverty. So it's just a fancy way of saying the system of poverty and what we see is that in addressing nutrition and addressing other issues of poverty, you can't address one without the other. Have you seen that realization across different states and will the Commission be addressing the link between nutrition issues and other issues within poverty?

Commissioner: Thank you for the question. Do you want to start in, Billy, or shall I?

Commissioner: Well, it's a, you know, it's, for us, at least, I would say it's kind of the central threshold question in terms of the way we think about this issue and the tension that I have found working on this issue for a long time is that addressing poverty is very complex and a lot of, even likeminded people or people on the same side of the political divide will have a lot of different opinions about how to do that. And, of course, our nation has struggled with it even as the economy has picked up, we've still got some 45, 46 million Americans living below the poverty line, even though the economy has recovered for a lot of people, you know, above poverty. So there's an element of it which has been seemingly intractable. I don't think it is in the long run but it seemed that way. On the other hand, the food and nutrition programs are a little bit more straightforward. One of the things we say at Share Our Strength is that, you know, solving poverty is complex but feeding a child is not. We have in place school breakfast and we have emergency feeding and we have the systems to do that. So in a, kind of a triage sense, we have focused on, at a minimum, get food to kids and families who need it, so that they have an opportunity and a chance to get themselves in a better position while you continue to try to figure out the longer-term issues of poverty but clearly, hunger is a symptom of poverty, and as Dr. Patrick Casey was talking about this morning in his testimony, if you look at the issues facing families who present as food insecure, there's a whole set of issues that are all part of this complicated web of poverty. So I think one of the things that we'll try to do as a Commission is that we've talked about at least on a preliminary basis, we haven't decided this but put forward some very specific recommendations dealing with this category of very low food security but also say these are other issues that in the long term must be addressed even if we don't have solutions to them yet.



Commissioner: Yes, and I also have to say in terms of the Congressional mandate for their Hunger Commission, it is focused primarily on hunger and our report is due to Congress and then to the secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture, which in many ways is very limiting because we should be sending it to the Secretary of Education, Housing, and Urban Development, Department of Labor, et cetera, et cetera, the Veteran's Administration.

Commissioner: There's nothing stopping us from doing that, right? [laughter]

Commissioner: Nothing is stopping us from doing that and that has been a part of the conversation. So we'll see how well we can address it and again, what we will be focusing on as a Commission is what we can do through bipartisan consensus effort some things that are, can be right in front of us that we can recommend that Congress get going on as soon as we release the report and then also thinking more about the long term, something that's, gives us 10 years of work ahead that we should be working on. If you could tell us your name?



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #5

Participant #5: I'm Noel Hubler. I represent Ray of Hope Food Pantry, Inc. It's located in Russellville, Arkansas in Pope County and I deal with a lot of people there. One of the issues that I want to address is our veterans and military. We have a high population of those there and actually, Arkansas has a high population of it overall but what I see in our pantry is this, I see a lot of them that don't want to come because they're Vietnam-era veterans, World War II veterans, Korean War veterans and I see also a lot of seniors that fit into this same category and when I say that, they have the proudness, the pride. The pride doesn't want to let them come and use those facilities because they feel like, "I don't need that. That isn't how I was raised," and so on and so forth. SNAP is one of the issues with them. They own a home. They own a car. So with that, then they're limited on how much they get for Food Stamps. That needs to change. There needs to be a change put in there and take away that ownership of that. I'm sorry but I consider this to be serfdom, you know. We're not back in the 1700s where we live under a king, where the serf goes out and brings everything in and they don't get anything. We need to change that. Let's take care of our people. I have a solution for that. It's a very big solution and I think you need to go to the Congress and Senate and put a Commission together. This Commission needs to look at the foreign aid that we put out all over the world and we need to review it and we need to say, "Listen, you don't play by our rules. You hate us. You want to kill us. You want to do this to us. And we're taking it away from you and we're bringing it back home where it belongs." We need to take 10% of that or 15% of it and put it into these programs, so that the money is there to support these programs, to support SNAP, support education, support the literacy. I deal with a lot of people that are not literate. So I work with the library. I work with jobs and family services to get people computer literate so that they can go and get a job but here's another problem. We have people with a record this long. They want to work and nobody wants to take them on. We need to solve that, same way with taking care of our veterans and seniors. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you. I think you've identified one of the, you know, hardest, one of the biggest challenges of this, which is providing services for people whose voices just don't get heard. If it's somebody with a record, if it's somebody who's a Vietnam-era vet, you know, their voices are not the voices that are reaching Congress and hopefully, that's part of what this Commission will be able to do, so thank you.

Participant #5: Welcome.

Commissioner: Speaking of which, is there anybody in the room that works with people who have recently come out of prison, to help them with job training and help them to find jobs? Because the rates of that, too, is a very underrepresented



population in the food insecurity numbers but in a study that I recently read, 90% of people who had recently gotten out of prison reported food insecurity in the previous 30 days, 90%. So anybody working with prisoners, former prisoners?

Participant #5: Yes, ma'am, once again, Noel Hubler.

Commissioner: Yes.

Participant #5: I do work with a lot of folks in that area and my cohort over here from RVAC, we work hand-in-hand together with a lot of that. One of the issues that we see in our area and it's not just Pope County, it's Pope County, Yale County, Conway County, and Johnson County, is a lot of the people do not want to take felons into rentals. So that makes housing a hard thing, okay, and then on top of that is the job service type things. Okay, personally I think job and family services should have a mentorship program where they can say, "Hey, we're going to get you in with this employer and this employer is going to give you a 90-day trial period," okay. That mentor needs to take and say to them, "Has this guy been here," or, "This gal been here every day or every week," whichever way they want to report it. If they haven't, with the Parole Board, working with them, also, if they don't do what they're supposed to do, throw them back in the slammer. I've been part of a program like that in Wisconsin and it worked real well. We had a recidivism rate there of 20%. So I know it works.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Unidentified: May I say something along with that, I'm sorry, I don't mean to [inaudible]. RVAC in the River Valley area, we have a drug treatment center and we see a lot of people who are paroled out to our care, who have felony records, who talk about getting into drugs because they're, it's fast money. It's an easy way for them to provide food and shelter for themselves. Easy as in the money comes in easy, it goes out easy but then they wind up in trouble. And when they come to our care for the first time they are exposed to gardening. They're exposed to how to fix nutritional foods. We approach it as if nutrition and a holistic approach will be the one thing that heals them mind, body, and spirit. Nutrition can't be separated from their treatment and then, also, when you have someone because they have a record, who can't get a job, who then can't provide for themselves those basic needs then recidivism rates do increase. So we have to address that with wrap-around services that include nutrition education, job placement and that again is where this idea that nutrition can't be compartmentalized outside of poverty and that individuals who come out of the prison system have to be taught how to shop, how to eat correctly and how to access those foods and then given the ability to access those with living wages and assistance programs.



Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: We can take comments on our website, right, and questions?

Commissioner: Yeah, I have some questions. I was waiting for commentary but I'm going to fire away, if that's all right with you, Billy?

Commissioner: Okay, go ahead, go.

Commissioner: I've really appreciated the testimony that we've received today, both the formal and then the public and then just this dialogue right now. I haven't heard anything about empowerment programs, programs that actually empower individuals beyond helping them learn about what's going on in the kitchen but about helping people assume their sense of political power so that their voices can be heard at the national level, and perhaps that's unimportant to the equation of food insecurity but I was wondering if there was anybody who works on issues of empowerment, civic engagement, in the room?

Unidentified: That's the least of priority at this time. It's getting people to the right position.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thanks.

Unidentified: I'm sorry.

Commissioner: Wait, one second, there's a lady coming up to the mic, it looks like. Go for it, Kathy. Hold on, sir. After you, Kathy Webb?

Webb: Thank you, and this might not be the answer that you were hoping for but I think part of the issue is this, about this is that so many of the people that we do work with are elderly, are disabled, are kids, are families who are working two jobs and I've worked on civil rights issues since I was a kid and always in that equation were many of the people, regardless of what the issue is, who are also working alongside me on that particular issue. But I think on this issue it has been different because of all of the reasons that I enunciated just before. I hope that that's something that can change and it's something that we do talk about and we try to engage more of the families that we work with to get involved politically but these are families who have always felt that they haven't had a voice and that they're struggling so much to make ends meet, to feed their kids, to keep their lights on. I think it represents a difference between a lot of the other political empowerment issues that I've worked on in the last 40 years.



Unidentified: Just to reiterate that, she is very right on what she's saying but it's the, the last thing that comes to people's mind because they're so busy trying to get back on their feet, just like she said. I can give you an example. Yesterday I had a family come in that was burned out, lost their home, and they're trying to figure out how they're going to get back on their feet, you know. If it wasn't for our pantry and other organizations that we work with, they wouldn't be back on their feet, you know. You lose a home and what do you have, you know? You got to really work your tail off to get there. The homeless person, they've made bad decisions somewhere along the line that there gets them to the point where they're homeless. They can't make rent. They can't pay electric bills, those kind of things. They got all those worries that they're playing with and the last thing they're thinking of is political things.

Commissioner: I'm not talking just politics. I'm talking about civic engagement, that's working in their community or not necessarily working in their community but being, getting an opportunity to learn about the policies and programs that affect their lives and I'm not up here to philosophize but I just want to encourage you to check out the website of Witnesses to Hunger, all of those moms that are a part of that program are actually expressing some of their experiences and doing it in a very, in a way that's really fabulous and very meaningful civic engagement that's way beyond politics. It's just engaging with their own communities and being able to speak out on their own issues.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #6

Participant #6: Good afternoon, my name is Susan Forte. I'm the executive director of House About It Community and Economic Development Agency, located in the city of North Little Rock, work and service small cities in the delta and in rural Arkansas. We work with these underserved communities that are below poverty. Our goal and our, what we work on doing this, helping to rebuild these communities and we realize that once we go into these communities that we are providing a better quality of life for the residents in those areas and these are in the poorest part. I want to put emphasis on an area that is close to us, that's located in southeast Arkansas, which is right below Little Rock. It is an area where really need help, that is in Sweet Home, Higgins, Wrightsville, Hensley, Woodson, all that is southeast part of Arkansas is a very distressed area and there is such a great need. We're dealing with seniors. There's a lot of senior population there. There's a lot of youth population there, a lot of hunger, a lot of unnecessary with help with utilities, you help with, you know, different things in life and this is an area that's dear to my heart, that if I can find someone to work with me in that area to get things done because it need to be done. And we provide, we, what we look at, we're the voice that helps strengthen these areas because a lot of time when we work, go into these areas, these people don't know what to ask. They know they need help but don't know who to ask and so what we do, we make ourself available. We make ourself where we'll be able to help them to ask for what they need and then to help them get what they're needing and that is an area that is so dear to my heart, so I am open. We have a booth down at the Rural Services, come down there and just, you know, stop me and let's see if we can get something done in that southeast Platts County area. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Any other lasting, any other questions, last questions or comments? Thank you all for coming to our public testimony. Please, stay in touch with the National Commission on Hunger. We're delighted to be in Arkansas. Thank you. [applause]