



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

July 14, 2015 ♦ 3:45 p.m. – 5:30 p.m.
Marbury Plaza
2300 Good Hope Road SE
Washington, D.C. 20020

PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #1

Commissioner: This is now an open and public testimony session. We have a number of people that have signed up. I ask for your patience as you wait your turn to speak. We have about 40 different people who have signed up to speak. We had originally said that each person would get five minutes but I don't think that's really going to work out because we'll be here until 9:00 at night. So, I'm going to ask you to keep your remarks and your testimonies very brief.

Please remember that this open session is being recorded and transcribed. Anyone who comes up to testify is also welcome to submit written testimony to us. And in this session also we will not have any question and answer from the Commission. At this point the Commissioners are simply here to listen. We will be very strict on time.

So, please, Mary Council from RTI is going to be giving you your time. The first person on our list is David Beckmann. Welcome. Thank you.

Participant #1: Thank you for serving on this Commission. I'm the president of Bread for the World, which is a broadly interdenominational Christian advocacy movement. We work on world hunger as well as hunger in this country. And we're really encouraged by what's happening in the world. Around the world there's dramatic progress underway against hunger, poverty and disease. And it's in all kinds of countries, from Bangladesh to the United Kingdom. So, it just makes it really clear that if our country wants to deal with hunger, if we really want to deal with this, we can do that. We can, in fact, probably end hunger in the U.S.

Churches and charities can't make substantial progress against hunger on our own. We have crucial roles to play. But just the federal nutrition programs provide 20 times as much assistance as all the churches and food banks in the country. So, if the Congress cuts those programs by 5%, they wipe us out.

Some people think SNAP and EITC need to be cut to reduce the fiscal deficit. But I'm struck that by tolerating widespread hunger and poverty, we contribute to the fiscal deficit because hunger makes people sick. It makes many people obese. So, there are a lot of people who have been battered by a life of hunger and poverty who end up for 20 years on



SSI and Medicaid and Medicare and really the deficit issue comes down to Medicare and Social Security. So, if we tolerate hunger, that also encourages or contributes to the deficit.

To end hunger, we need to maintain and improve the federal nutrition program. So, it's urgent that Congress pass a Child Nutrition Bill. Why can't we get a Child Nutrition Bill passed in a year? So, that needs to be done. Congress should not cut SNAP. SNAP benefits are declining. In this context, with low unemployment, they're starting to come down and they should come down. The cost of SNAP should come down over the next couple years if the economy continues to recover.

Also, I specifically want to recommend reviving the Hunger Free Communities Program. In 2010, for one year Congress provided five million dollars to support hunger coalitions around the country. And there was a dramatic (flowering?). Only a few groups got the grants but a lot of people got together to think about what they wanted to do. So, when you have coalitions at the community level they help to coordinate things and they make the federal programs work in local communities. So, it would be really high leverage for Congress to, say, put in five million dollars to revive the Hunger Free Communities Program.

I think the Commission needs to be clear that broader measures to reduce poverty are also crucial to ending hunger. So, fiscal and monetary policies that contribute to full employment, stronger tax credits for the working poor, immigration reform doesn't cost any money. It would generate money in fact. And then also measures to reduce mass incarceration. Again, it wouldn't cost money. It would save money. And all of these things; there's bipartisan interest and these actions would all reduce hunger.

Gallop does a little poll just on the phone asking people if they've been able to afford food. The latest Gallop poll suggests that hunger is down to the level of 2008, that there's been a dramatic drop in hunger. So, right now is really a great time for the Commission to launch a push toward ending hunger in America. Because of the global progress, the nations of the world in September at the U.N. are going to commit themselves to ending hunger in the world by 2030.

So, what I suggest is that this Commission propose that the United States too make a serious plan to end hunger by 2030. Thanks.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #2

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. All right. Our next guest is Mike Curtin.

Participant #2: Thank you for convening this conversation and including us in it. I'm going to try to edit this as I go along. So, I apologize if we don't get it all carefully here.

Mike Curtin with D.C. Central Kitchen. Because we are a non-profit with "kitchen" in our name, many people naturally associate us with providing meals to hungry members of our community. We know that food alone will never end hunger. We will not feed out way out of hunger. That's why D.C. Central Kitchen, at its heart, is a culinary job training program for chronically unemployed men and women in our city. Seventy-five percent of our students are returning citizens; 70 have histories with substance and 90% of the women we train in our program are survivors of abuse or trauma. We do not require a GED to enroll. Our students enter with literacy numeracy levels ranging from second grade to post-college levels. But despite these challenges and the structural challenges of conducting our program in a dilapidated, crumbling shelter we have been able, since 2008, to graduate 5,081 men and women with a 90% job training rate.

When the recession struck in 2008, we were only conducting four classes a year, producing 47 graduates. But in the past two years, we embarked on a series of public-private partnerships including two "pay for success" grants that have allowed us to expand to eight classes and we've now graduated 102 people last year.

These "pay for performance" partnerships, however, are far from perfect. Too often we found that the pre-defined performance metrics to be arbitrary and unreflective of our target population's most pressing needs. One grantor wanted us to perform by increasing participant literacy levels to the eighth grade level or above. Setting aside for a moment that we were already succeeding in having a 90% job placement rate and the fact that literacy and numeracy [inaudible] was not a core competency of our program, what that established was a cliff that students were only going to fall off if they increased from second grade to seventh and a half grade level, for which they would earn nothing and we would earn nothing as well for the work that we'd already put in.

Certainly, we understand that reading and math skills are important. And high school equivalency is a huge determiner in obtaining full-time employment. That concerned us. So, what we did is we developed a transitional employment program with a for-profit kitchen incubator here in town. After the 14 week program, we subsidized above minimum wage jobs for these individuals. Every single person in that program found full-time employment with these new food entrepreneurs when this program was completed. However, the funder did not feel that subsidizing those wages post-graduation was worthy of the funding



and they didn't fund that program. We have sought and have found private funding to continue that program into the future.

Non-profits can't fight hunger alone. After all, we just provide 5% of the more than 100 billion in food aid distributed throughout this country to food insecure Americans. But we are more than vendors and guarantees. We're the mission-driven solution engines that have been driving for decades to Americans who rely on SNAP that just aren't food insecure but they were hungry for a better life. Given an opportunity to develop marketable skills in a supportive environment and looking to be treated with basic dignity and respect; to learn from qualified professionals who believe in them, these individuals can replace dependency with self-sufficiency.

And this respect and dignity are important words. Just as we can't feed our way out of poverty, we can't shame or punish our way out of poverty or hunger either. We are very concerned about some of the proposals we are hearing from around the country regarding drug testing for SNAP recipients, for example. If we want to be fair about this, let's make everyone who gets a federal benefit, like taking a mortgage deduction on their income tax or dependent deductions for day-care [clapping] take the same drug test and then be specific about how that saved money. Money not going to the federal government in taxes can be spent.

We need to be less focused on commissions. Every new governor coming up with a new plan, coming up with catch phrases, coming up with a new plan when the folks on the ground are still here, still working no matter what we're doing. We need leaders not to turn their next set of priorities to catch phrases. But we need them to invite the non-profit groups that are at this table, that are in this room, that you're meeting around the country to be involved in these discussions from the very beginning.

We know from the hundreds of men and women that we train every year that everyone wants to do better for themselves and their families. No one wants to live in a shelter. No one wants to tell their children that they don't have enough food for dinner tonight or breakfast tomorrow. And we believe that the non-profit sector with dignified, creative, thoughtful public-private partnerships can be the bridge to get people to that place. Thank you very much.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #3

Commissioner: Thank you very much. That was a perfect five minutes. [Provides instructions on submitting written testimony] Our next guest is Bruce Meraviglia and William Taft. Together you are testifying. You are five minutes total. Thank you.

Testimony from Participant #3 redacted at his request.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #4

Participant #4: Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for inviting us here. As a former military officer in the air force and former executive myself in a non-profit, due to a change in my own medical situation, (issues?) I'm dealing with, I've become more closely associated with issues of homelessness and hunger for veterans. And much of what I've seen we're talking about helping to alleviate.

One thing that I'm concerned about is that we're seeing an increasing number of veterans that are approaching homelessness. We have people who are returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. They've lost their incomes from the military. In our recession there are few jobs for them. The Obama administration last week announced another 40,000 men and women are going to be reduced from the military. As a result of declining incomes, they're facing homelessness. As a result of homelessness they're facing systemic hunger.

Our system currently does not allow people to gain benefits, medical or food stamps, without permanent addresses. And I'm concerned that without the address, as a result of their homelessness that hunger is going to become the most fundamental issue of survival for these people. There aren't enough charitable agencies to reach out for these people and to provide them with temporary mailing addresses that will allow them to gain or regain benefits. And I'm wondering if there isn't a way that can reduce the bureaucratic burden on these individuals or redefine the rules requiring permanent addresses so that they may maintain some degree of assistance from the Food Stamp program, if nothing else so that the hunger does not become an overwhelming survival issue for these people that are approaching this status.

It becomes an intractable Catch-22 due to their declining financial issues in light of the recession and the drawdown of the military, they lose their home. Without the home, there's no access to benefits. Without access to benefits, mental and physical health issues increase. It becomes a Catch-22 that there appears to be no way out of.

And I would ask you, as part of your Commission, to look for a way to redefine the requirements for a permanent address for these individuals who may not have extended families to fall back on, who may not have the wherewithal to even find temporary housing, be a shelter or other facilities. But without that ability to alleviate the requirement for a permanent address, I see people falling into a pit for which there's no way for them to climb out of. There's no way to address employment issues. There's no way to address mental health issues because survival becomes paramount to everything.

And we've seen too many homeless veterans that are dumpster diving, quite frankly. After the service they given in Iraq and Afghanistan and the military in general, it's unfortunate that our recessionary economy can't support them and give them an alternative to re-enter



the civilian workforce. But if we can't at least help them find a way to survive, to at least eat something better than dumpster diving, simply because of a bureaucratic rule that seems to be intransigent, this causes me a great deal of concern. And I'm concerned about the bureaucratic inflexibility in that area that prevents something as fundamental as being able to alleviate hunger for these individuals. And I would hope that there might be a way to find some way to modify these rules and requirements, at least for this class of individual.

Commissioner: Thank you for your testimony. Thank you for your service. Our next guest is Duke Storen.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #5

Participant 5: Good afternoon and thank you for allowing me time to present today. I work with Billy Shore at Share Our Strength as the senior director of research, advocacy and national partnerships. And under Billy's leadership, Share Our Strength has a mission to end childhood hunger; not simply to address the problem for some.

This goal shapes our strategy, which is based on a few key principles. First, that every individual and organization does have a strength to share in the fight against poverty and hunger. And this leads us to create public-private partnerships as our organizing principle and implementing model around the country.

Second, it's important to implement solutions that meet the scale of the problem. There are innumerable, wonderful projects, priorities but not all of them meet the scale of the problem that they're trying to solve.

It's important to implement solutions that are both sustainable and practical, that draw upon evidence base. And when there is no evidence base, it's time to innovate and evaluate on that innovation.

With the Commission's commitment to look at policies that can reduce very low food security, the research shows that increasing the purchasing power of low-income households yields this desired outcome. Although poverty reduction is not the charge of the Commission, poverty clearly impacts very low food security.

There are a number of policy prescriptions that can directly impact a household's purchasing power: employment wage increases, expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit, increasing SNAP benefits and providing EBT benefit to children and their families during the summer months.

Today I'm going to talk about two of these: the EBT benefit to children in the summer months and increasing SNAP because it seems to fit within the wherewithal of looking at the federal nutrition programs as part of the scope of the Commission's work.

First, increasing SNAP benefits. With 45 million participants, SNAP has the greatest reach among all the existing federal nutrition programs, making it a viable tool and an efficient tool to address very low food security. From 2008 to 2009, the food security of households participating in SNAP improved coincident with the increase that came from the Recovery Act, the stimulus bill, which increased SNAP benefits. It created a natural experiment for us to look at.



However, the food security of SNAP households worsened in the following couple years because of the price inflation of food. So, the SNAP benefits increased, very low food security looked better. Inflation came in. Those benefits remained the same because of the structure of the law, very low food security got worse.

Two USDA studies examined these changes and concluded that the changes in food security were proportionately similar in the two periods, suggesting that associations reflect a cause and effect relationship. Taken together, the results of the two studies suggest that increasing the maximum SNAP benefit by, say, 10% which is \$69 per month for a family of four, would reduce the number of SNAP recipient households with very low food security by 22%. Conversely, reducing the maximum benefit by 10% would increase the number experiencing very low food security by 29%.

On to the summer hunger crisis and summer EBT. So, what's the problem? As Commissioner Rowe said, 21.5 million children receive a free and reduced price lunch during the school year. Only about 3.5 million of those receive a meal through a summer feeding program. If you open your folders, there's a really snazzy map that we did with people smarter than me who know GIS, which you can see sort of paints the picture of the fundamental constraints in the program.

Two things; one is, the program predominantly operates only in low-income communities on an open-site model. This is the orange on your Virginia map. Any place where you see a black dot is where they had a site last year. The things that will strike you is there's a lot of orange places with no black dots. The second thing is the program requires congregant feeding. It requires people to make their way to a feeding site. And when you can do that, it's great. But the problem is the vast majority of children can't do that.

To respond to this challenge, in 2010 Congress authorized a number of demonstration projects. One of them was Summer EBT, which increased the benefit amount on existing WIC or SNAP cards. It reduced very low food security by a third and increased the consumption of fruits and vegetables, dairy and whole grains.

So, as you consider your recommendations to Congress, we encourage you to be evidence-based, find solutions that meeting the scale of the problem, build on existing programs that are practical and scalable. Thank you very much.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #6

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Our next guest is Tangela Fredrick.

Participant #6: Distinguished members of the National Commission on Hunger, thank you for considering my testimony today. Before I begin, I wanted to say that I know you all have been looking at very low food security. I have answered all the questions on the USDA and Household Food Security Survey and unfortunately, I have reported very low food security. Why am I telling you this? This is something that I hate to say, something that I really wouldn't want to admit, really, but I would much rather be telling you that I'm food secure and that I receive a stable and predictable income that makes sure my family can eat well all the time. But that would be a lie. So, I'm not going to say that.

Even though I work about 40 hours a week at a daycare center every week, I'm still very low food secure. So, with that in mind, please listen closely at what I have to say about hunger. My name is Tangela Fredrick. I'm the proud mother of two children, Asaya and Tasir. I have experienced hunger my whole life. Today I want to share with you my experiences on hunger and how it affects both your physical and mental health. And I want to share with you my thoughts on how to stop hunger and the dangerous effects it has on families like mine.

The cycle of hunger has never left my family. My siblings and I lived with my mom growing up. We struggled with hunger then. When she died, we went to live with our dad and we struggled then. The stress of having no food affected him so badly, he began to drink instead of eating. He, in turn, eventually sent us down south to live with our aunt. He thought we'd be better off. But we were still hunger there also. And to top that off, we were missing our dad and our mom.

Hunger destroys people; not only people, it destroys families. All my life I've known the injustice of hunger. I'm definitely an expert on the topic. So, when I learned about Witnesses to Hunger, I knew that I had to join.

Witnesses to Hunger is a group of parents who share their experiences of hunger and poverty. We take pictures of our own lives and we share these stories. One of the first pictures I took for Witnesses to Hunger was of my daughter, Asaya. She was almost one year old. I said in my picture "She's so cute but she's way too skinny." She has been struggling with hunger her whole life, and so have I. Even today I see how much it affects our health. I'll feed Asaya what I can and the very best that I can, the healthiest and the most calorie-packed thing I can afford. But often she's still hungry. The lack of nutrients, the lack of food to fill her belly makes her sick, causing her to throw up bile sometimes, which makes her gag, which in turn sends her into an asthma attack. See what I mean about a



downward spiral? It's one thing after another. It kills me to see her so sick all the time. It hurts me.

Asaya loves school. She's so smart. But when she's sick, she misses class. That means I need to miss work which means an even smaller paycheck, which in turn we're going to go through the same thing next month.

The stress of poor physical health takes a toll on your mental health too. About a year ago I lost my job and I was hospitalized for about two weeks. In turn, my child lost his childcare subsidy. He was no longer able to go to school. The whole time I kept worrying about how I wasn't going to feed Tasir. He was hungry and he was sad. He didn't understand why he wasn't allowed to go to school. He kept asking me was it something wrong with him, was that why he wasn't allowed? And it broke my heart. He did nothing wrong at all. But it weighed on him. He wanted to learn with his friends in a place that was safe and he knew he would be fed.

I pieced together neighbors and friends to watch him but I still was concerned with what he was going to eat. Thankfully, I found another job and Tasir entered school this past fall and graduated Kindergarten in June. I'm so proud of Tasir and Asaya. They're growing up to be such awesome kids. But I don't want hunger to shape their experiences on life. [Takes deep breath]

Commissioner: You can do it. Take some time. You can finish. You can do it.

My mental health has taken a serious toll over the years, especially becoming a mother. I'm consistently worried about putting food on the table for my kids. I'm dangerously underweight. My body has become accustomed to not eating. Even when there's food available I'll just save it for my kids or leave it for somebody else to eat.

But what really gets me depressed is the injustice of my hunger. It's Ramadan and I can't fast. Doctor's orders say I can't. I need the proper nutrients for my body. I'm an American with the freedom of religion but I can't practice my own faith because of my hunger. I can't choose to go hungry to honor my religion when I'm already hungry all the time every day.

Hunger is unacceptable. It's embarrassing to be in a country with so much money and there's so many people hungry on a daily basis on a regular basis. It hurts me so bad to tell my kids that there are no more snacks or you can't have something.

This is not my first time testifying. I spoke before the USDA in 2010. It's 2015 now and I'm back with the same story again. I can't wait for 2020 for another hearing. My kids can't wait. Nobody's kids can wait. These kids are hungry now. What are my kids supposed to do? It's the summertime now. I've got to make up the difference in those meals now.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #7

Commissioner: Thank you. Thank you for your testimony. Our next guest is Lisa Davis.

Participant #7: Good afterwards. My name is Lisa Davis and I am the senior vice president of government relations for Feeding America. And I appreciate the opportunity to offer some of our policy recommendations as you move forward with your work.

Our network of 198 food banks serves every county in our nation. And each year we provide about 3.4 billion meals to 46 and a half million Americans. And it's not enough. Our food banks are model of innovation, embodying all that is best and bright of public-private partnerships. And while their core mission is to provide emergency food assistance to the millions of people who continue to turn to us each week and each year in the wake of the recession, increasingly they're beginning to focus on ways to shorten the line and ways to develop partnerships and programs to help address underlying needs because hunger is a symptom. It's not a cause.

The clients that we serve are facing tremendous challenges. More than half of them are in households with a working adult. And yet nearly 70% of them face regular tradeoffs between paying the rent and buying food for their children, being able to find transportation to keep or to search for a job, paying for their out-of-pocket medical costs taking their kids to the doctor. And it is an endless cycle of trade-offs that make it very challenging for people not only to meet their immediate needs but to put their lives back on a course towards stability and opportunity.

Ending hunger in our country requires a coordinated public-private response. I'm very proud of the work that our network does and yet there is no way that the charitable response can replace the importance of strong federal safety net programs. And while the USDA programs are working successfully, particularly in helping low-income families who will be the last to recover from the recession and its aftermath, there is more that can be done to strengthen those programs.

Duke Storen talked very eloquently about the need to strengthen the summer food service program. That should be one of the top priorities of Congress and this Commission, strengthening both the site-based model but providing alternatives to communities where the sites are not available or the kids are simply too disbursed.

There are other policies that can help as well. Tax policy is an important lever to help make sure our nation's charities have the resources that they need. Seventy billion pounds of nutritious food goes to waste each year. And there is a federal food donation tax deduction



that 95% of farmers and growers cannot take advantage of that deduction because of the accounting method that they use.

We hear every day from farmers and growers in communities all across America that they want to donate, they have the food to donate. Our clients desperately want access to that fresh produce. And yet the cost of donating outweigh the costs of dumping or not harvesting that food. And this is something that we need to change.

We also need to look at ways to address hunger among very vulnerable populations. The number of food-insecure seniors has increased by about 130% since 2001 and yet they remain under-enrolled in SNAP and the Commodity Supplemental Food program which provides monthly food assistance to seniors serves only about 599,000 seniors where the list of seniors that need those programs is much greater.

Congregate and home-delivered meals for seniors need to be strengthened as our society ages. So, while hunger is a challenging problem and a very complex problem, we can solve hunger with policies that will strengthen our federal nutrition safety net and recognize that the high number of enrollment in SNAP and other programs is not due to some failure of poor people to want to improve their lives but by the deep economic havoc wreaked by the greatest recession since the great depression and the lack of opportunity too many young people in poverty are facing.

So, I commend you in your work, I thank you for your time and together we really can end hunger in America. Thank you very much.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #8

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Our next guest is Jeremiah Lowery. [Pause] Are you both named Jeremiah Lowery? [Laughter]

Participant #8: I'm Jeremiah. I am the research and policy coordinate at the Restaurant Opportunity Center in D.C. This is Jessica. She's a member of the Restaurant Opportunity Center in D.C. I'm just going to speak for a brief little bit and then will pass it over to Jessica to say some of her thoughts.

The Restaurant Opportunity Center represents over 800 restaurant workers here in Washington, D.C., we do a number of things. We offer job training. We offer fine dining training and also bartender training to anyone here in Washington, D.C. We also help with job placement here in Washington, D.C., as well. We also work with restaurant owners, helping them pay good wages and good benefits to their workers. We open their books and say "Hey, you can charge an extra dime for your tomatoes and you can actually provide paid sick days or you can add an extra 15 cents and you can give each worker in your restaurant a living wage."

We also work on policy and that's my job. In late 2013, we were part of a coalition that worked on a bill to extend paid sick days to all restaurant workers here in Washington, D.C. Since then we've part of coalitions to ban [inaudible] returning citizen, prevent wage theft and also now we're part of a coalition to extend paid family leave to all workers here in Washington, D.C. We've worked on the Equal Pay bill and now we're working on a ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage for all workers here in D.C. to at least \$15 per hour.

So, we have a lot of work cut out for us here in D.C. and I think we believe at the Restaurant Opportunity Center that one of the best ways to fight hunger, as Greg was saying earlier, is to make sure that each person in Washington, D.C. has a good job; not just a good but a job with livable wages and good benefits as well and also collective bargaining because we believe that workers should ultimately determine their own destiny in the workplace.

And so right now one of the main reasons why we're working on raising the minimum wage here in Washington D.C. is because 81% of restaurant workers here in Washington D.C. don't get paid a living wage. We have a large percentage of back-of-the-house workers who are victims of wage theft. Just a year ago, a major restaurant here in Washington D.C. was paying their restaurant workers two dollars an hour with no tips. Over a hundred workers in their restaurant were getting paid two dollars an hour with no tips. And so, some of them had to work 90 hours just to even get transportation to catch a ride to the restaurant.



So, we believe on the national level some of the best ways to combat hunger, once again, are raising the minimum wage, ensuring that we have equal pay, ensuring that everyone has access to benefits like paid family leave, paid sick days and also collective bargaining as well.

So, I'm going to pass it over to Jessica.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #9

Participant #9: Thank you. So, a lot of what the Restaurant Opportunity Center is about and in general is I understand a lot of what this Commission is about in a lot of ways is getting people off of SNAP. I understand that—and I would posit two views of that, is to, one, perhaps look at what SNAP is as something different and something that's not necessarily to get people off of if it is to go in line with the goal of ridding hunger, at least for the next, say, 50 years, to be really fair and reasonable.

I think the biggest issue we're coming to right now clearly comes back to what we're talking about, is wages. For restaurant workers, people who are tipped workers. I am a server. Servers and bartenders, the federal minimum wage for us is \$2.13 per hour. In 1938, when the first minimum wage was instituted at 25 cents per hour, when adjusted for inflation is approximately \$3.50 per hour, which means that since 1991, restaurant workers have been making below poverty, below the lowest minimum wage, below minimum wage has ever been.

So, aside from just eliminating the tipped wage, one thing that we can also do as far as with SNAP and other benefits such unemployment to people who are dealing with poverty and hunger is to create a graded system. A lot of the problem with SNAP is if I have to make \$1200 a month or less to get SNAP and I'm an honest citizen and I am working, the moment I make \$1205, I get off SNAP. So, suddenly I'm able to afford \$189 worth of food that I wasn't paying for before because I'm making \$5 above the mandatory limit. A graded system, so if you're making \$5 more we'll take \$2 off. You're making \$400 more, we'll take a couple of dollars off, would encourage people to work to get jobs, say with unemployment a lot of these [inaudible] are disincentives for people to do better for themselves because they cannot get government benefits which they vitally need and are relying on to better themselves when they are being cut from their programs the moment they make a penny over these amounts. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. And your name again?

Participant #9: My name is Jessica, Jessica Wynter Martin.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #10

Commissioner: Thank you. Our next guest is Anne Sheridan.

Participant #10: First, I'd like to thank the Commission for soliciting this public input and for the opportunity to testify. I'm before you as someone who has acquired views about hunger, and there are two impacts of hunger, particularly childhood hunger, over the last number of years. I led the Maryland Partnership to End Childhood Hunger on behalf of Share Our Strength and most recently directed the Governor's Office for Children for Governor O'Malley, which is a coordinating agency within the state government that put together all our child-serving agencies.

This initiative has been continued under Governor Hogan I think for two important reasons; one, the need. Maryland is known as a very affluent state and yet we don't have a single jurisdiction within the state that's truly hunger-free. Whatever your identity is, as someone from the eastern shore or western Maryland, suburban, urban, rural; in every one of our communities we have families that struggle with hunger.

And secondly, it's just a smart investment. It supports long-term success in so many ways. Maryland's vision for its children is that all of our children will be successful and reliable access to adequate nutrition is simply a core building block to that it fuels academic performance, health outcomes, and behaviors that lead to a stronger and more competitive workforce. And I personally don't know of any more powerful message to send to a child than that we care enough about you to feed you.

The Commission has a really exciting opportunity to influence both the public debate and the debate in Congress. So, I'd like to only make two very, very brief points. First private-public partnerships work and to the end that this Commission can be influential in encouraging Congress to incentivize those partnerships, they provide a literal and figurative place for people to come together to problem-solve and address barriers. They allow and facilitate the participation of lots of different types of organizations and people. In the case of Maryland, our partnership was able to also attract additional funding and resources. And most importantly, we've had success. When we look at our data in Maryland over the last number of years, we have succeeded in driving up our participation in school-based programs and in SNAP. And so we know that there are literally thousands of at-risk families that have benefitted from improved access to nutrition.

I also hope that the Commission can play some role in influencing the ongoing effectiveness of these programs. It is the product of many, many years of hard-won on the ground experience. We know what kind of isn't working and we know that if we afforded states and communities a little bit more flexibility that they would be able to do what they're doing even better. So, that would be a really important step forward in continuing the



impact and truly reaching our goal of ending childhood hunger; not just in Maryland but in all of our states.

So, thanks again for this opportunity and for the work that you're doing.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #11

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Ginger Zielinskie.

Participant #11: Thank you to the Commission for providing the forum to engage in this critical discussion. My name is Ginger Zielinskie and I serve as president of Benefits Data Trust, a national not-for-profit committed to transforming how people in need access public benefits. BDT works with government and private sector partners to use data-driven strategies to identify individuals likely eligible but not receiving public benefits. Since our inception in 2005, BDT has successfully completed more than 460,000 benefit applications that help eligible individuals better afford food, shelter, and health care.

I'll focus my comments on two distinct points that BDT believes are valuable to informing the dialogue and the Commission's recommendations moving forward.

First, hunger prevention is a critical investment that saves government money and improves outcome for diverse populations in need. When hungry people eat and are able to meet their basic needs, better outcomes are achieved and they cost the safety net significantly less over time.

At present, BDT is engaged in research connecting SNAP and [inaudible] enrollment data with Medicare and Medicaid health care claims data. The research shows that when low-income seniors who are duly eligible for Medicare and Medicaid, are able to access SNAP and [inaudible—Y-HEAP?] they are 30% less likely to be admitted to a nursing home. The larger the monthly benefit amount, the stronger the impact. The average SNAP benefit amount for a senior is \$1632 a year. In comparison, the average cost for a dual eligible senior to be housed in a nursing facility is \$80,000 a year.

Despite the large percentile savings and improved outcomes associated with SNAP, the data shows that less than half of all dual-eligibles are currently enrolled in SNAP. This must change. In addition to the moral case that no one in this case should go hungry, there's a strong economic case that helping vulnerable people access food is a good investment that can have a significant impact on curbing health care costs, specifically long-term care costs, a line item that is much larger than what we spend on nutrition programs overall.

Second, in order to truly alleviate hunger in this country, vulnerable individuals and families need to be served comprehensively and the systems that serve them must become integrated. Hunger cannot be solved in a vacuum and services can no longer be delivered in silos. The system as it is designed now is fragmented and hard to navigate. Applications are complicated and challenging to complete. Local, state, and federal agencies must commit to person-centered delivery and must work to break down institutional barriers to access.



Antiquated systems and processes must be replaced with 21st century technological systems supported by data-driven efforts to ensure that individuals' needs are met comprehensively. Specifically, federal and state data can and should be used to ensure that low-income individuals and families in need are served comprehensively. For example, under the leadership of HHS and USDA, several states have leveraged SNAP enrollee data to increase access to health insurance programs, saving states significant administrative time and money and helping hundreds of thousands of vulnerable Americans access health care.

Similarly, USDA has been proactive in developing the elderly simplified application program, which allows state agencies to use existing data and simplified processes to break down barriers to access for seniors in need. At present, only six states utilize a demonstration program. Congress has the opportunity to convert this successful demonstration program into a state option, making it easier for states to employ. By approving this budget request, Congress will demonstrate their commitment to streamlined data-driven service delivery for vulnerable seniors across the country. Using data in this way should no longer be an exception but it needs to become the standard. Federal and state policies need to better support cross-agency data sharing and health and human services integration. Data and technology must be better leveraged in order to reduce barriers to access and ensure that eligible children, families, and seniors get the help they need when they need it most so that they can work towards a healthier, more financially independent life.

As Alfred Marshall, one of the founders of economics wrote, "The most valuable of all capital is that invested in human beings." Anti-hunger programs are investment in human capital that help kids thrive in school, improve health outcomes for low-income individuals, and allow seniors to age in place with dignity. It is our shared responsibility to ensure that we fully leverage these investments by using available resources like data more effectively and building service delivery systems that are person-centered and serve individuals and families comprehensively. Not only is this our shared moral imperative, it is a critical and smart investment that will generate strong returns now and in the future.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #12

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Joanna Cruz?

Participant #12: Good afternoon, Commissioners. I am Joanna Cruz. I am a proud mother, hard worker, and entrepreneur. I am a member of Witnesses to Hunger. Witnesses to Hunger is a group of women and men who share their personal experiences with hunger and poverty. We take pictures of our own lives to show what poverty truly looks like. We are experts on hunger, and we speak for ourselves, our children, and our community.

Today I would like to speak with you about my own experiences and invite you to know my Witnesses to Hunger brothers and sisters so you can truly understand the hunger that exists in this country.

To show you what poverty in America can look like, I want to share with you a picture. This picture is of a kitchen, of my kitchen. This was taken six years ago when I lived in a house with no heat and no running water. My two kids, ages 2 and 6, lived here with me. I tried my best to take care of my kids but despite my efforts, my kids were always sick and we were often in the hospital because of our situation.

As you can imagine, I measured very low food secure when I lived here. I took the USDA's food security survey and was able to report that I knew all along that we were hungry. I struggled to find ways to feed my kids in a kitchen that looked like this. I would cook dinner on a hot plate in the one pot that I had. I was scared to ask for help because I was afraid what might happen to me and my kids. I always made sure my kids knew not to talk about what was happening at home with anyone at school. I didn't feel safe with seeking help and I am sure there are many people living in similar or even worse conditions who put on a brave face because of the fear of people knowing the truth; the fear of the judgment they will face, or the fear that their children will be taken away. This fear is so strong that coming forward can seem impossible. But here I am to tell you that we exist and we need help.

I was so ashamed of this kitchen and it is hard for me to look at this picture and remember living in that house. No one wants to and no one should live that way. I am so thankful not to live in such a place any longer. But for many Americans, this is their reality. Behind locked doors, families are struggling. They are making impossible decisions between buying food for their family or keeping a roof over their head. Many Americans do not have running water or heat in their homes, using their stoves to heat their houses. These are unacceptable conditions that no family should face, but many do.

As parents, we try our best and we want our children to do their best. I'm so proud of my children and I think they can accomplish whatever they put their minds to, given the right



opportunities. I hope today you think of my kids and all kids. We need to stop blaming people for their situations and stop drawing the line between who we think are deserving and undeserving. If you want to know how to address hunger in this country, the only way it's going to happen is if we all work together. If we commit to end hunger and make sure no child goes to bed hungry, until we make a commitment and until we stop judging people, change will not happen and we'll continue to be hungry.

I have come a very long way since that kitchen. I could not afford, in Philadelphia, to fix my home so I made a difficult decision to leave the stability behind and move my children with my mother. I now consider myself lucky because I had somewhere to go. But many other families are forced out of their homes because they cannot manage the necessary repairs. I now live in New Jersey in a house that is warm and where I can wash my hands or fill a pot with water.

Despite the change in my life, I still cannot make ends meet. I work 35 hours a week cooking food for other people while struggling to feed my own family. I work the night shift so I am there to take care of my children during the day, meaning that in addition to being hungry, I am tired all the time. While I'm in a better place, the trauma of living in bad conditions still haunts me. I live in fear; fear of utility companies coming to shut off power or even if the bills are paid I am still scared. I still count every meal every day for fear that there will be a day we will again be without food. I'm still haunted by the trauma of begging my daughter not to cry about being hungry. To this day she will only tell me once she's hungry. After that, she will stay quiet and not ask again because there is no food.

There is also the pain we, as parents, go through every day knowing how bad things can get or how bad things have been and how scared we are to go to bed hungry, cold, scared at night with sleeping kids who haven't got that.

I have submitted written testimony if you guys would like to continue reading it.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #13

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Alex Ashbrook. Our next guest, Alex Ashbrook.

Participant #13: Good afternoon. My name is Alex Ashbrook. For 8 years I've been the director of D.C. Hunger Solutions, an initiative of the Food Research and Action Center. In my work, I've learned two fundamental truths about hunger. First, its existence in any prosperous nation is a moral disgrace. And second, hunger can be solved.

Indeed, if the United Nations can meet its millennium development goals of reducing the proportion of undernourished people in the world in developing nations by half, there is no reason that we cannot eliminate hunger in the world's most affluent country. But solving hunger demands an aggressive approach that recognizes the pernicious and long-lasting impact of both very low food security and low food security as well as the struggles and potential hunger of those the government calls "marginally food security."

An approach that builds on a large body of research about what solutions works and an approach that acknowledges that shared economic prosperity and a strong public safety sector are precursors to any plan. The devastating impact of food insecurity, even moderate levels of food insecurity is great for adults, children, and seniors alike.

Given the wide-reaching repercussions of food insecurity, I hope the Commission will focus its work on addressing the issue of food insecurity in its entirety rather than the small subset that is identified at one point in time as experiencing very listen. Why? The charge of the National Commission on Hunger is to address policies to "combat domestic hunger and food insecurity" and the Commission should provide recommendations aligned with this support and charge.

The consequences of food insecurity are catastrophic to millions of Americans who are outside the very low food security identifier. I'd like to comment on some time-tested solutions that work. And I'm not going to comment too much. Here's my written testimony. I'm going to skip on. But any plan to address hunger must seize the opportunity to maximize all of these fabulous federal nutrition programs and promote policy ideas that can improve the use and impact of these programs.

Imagine if the Commission took action to propose an increase in the SNAP benefit by 10%. According to a recent USDA report, this would reduce the number of SNAP households with very low food security by 22%. As a starting point, the Commission should adopt the recommendations from the Strengthening the Federal Nutrition Assistance program section of the report that the Commission called "A current and prospective scope of hunger and food security in America: A review of current research."



The Commission should ensure that all its recommendations related to the federal nutrition programs remove access barriers, help improve participation and allow for growth in these programs so that the nutrition programs can respond to the needs of food-insecure families in good time and in bad.

Of note: SNAP; cutting or changing the structure of SNAP would harm not just millions of the neediest people in our country, but would damage states and localities and overwhelm charities that are already unable to meet the needs. Instead, the Commission should act knowing that the total number of people who will be on SNAP will decrease if the economy responds to raise the full allotment level to the low-cost food plan rather than the inadequate thrifty food plan, maintain SNAP choice, continue to prohibit split issuance, let all households use the medical deductions so that they need not choose between health care and food, and eliminate the shelter (path?).

In terms of the child nutrition programs, people have brought up the issue with the Summer Food Service program. There are two acts on the Hill right now that are addressing viable policy solutions to the problems (of?) the Summer Meals Act as well as the Stop Childhood Summer Hunger Act.

Finally, the federal nutrition programs cannot end hunger alone. Many of the federal nutrition programs, especially SNAP and WIC, provide income support to households. But improving household economic security cannot be left to the nutrition programs alone. Other key investments for the Commission to consider include raising the minimum wage and indexing it to inflation, promoting policies like paid sick leave and paid family leave to help improve maternal and infant health and well-being.

In conclusion, the convening of the National Hunger Commission presents an opportune time for our nation to come together to address hunger. Let's make this moment in time count. Make it!



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #14

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Next I'm calling up Denise Speed. Denise Speed.

Participant #14: Good afternoon, everybody. All right. Since we're talking about food insecurity, my name is Denise Speed. I've lived here in Marbury Plaza for 14 years. Yes, I am food insecure. I'm in school right now, and I have a daughter who has special needs, and she's in a private school, and she's an honor roll student.

This is how it affects me. There's nothing worse than you tell your child, who is a growing teenager, that she can't eat this, she can't eat that because you've got to live beyond a certain day. And it's a little hard to live off a certain amount of food stamps until I finish school. Basically, what it comes down to, being food insecure you have to go and go through a lot of resources and what not. It is really aggravating because basically I'm doing what I'm supposed to do as a parent, right? But when there's no husband or boyfriend or any other kind of support, everything falls on me. And I know there's some people behind me that probably have the same thing going on. If something falls down, believe me, I'm hitting the wall right now. And I hope this message gets through to whoever is in charge that look, the cutting that they're doing, in the long run you think that you're saving money but you're not. It is gonna hit you somewhere in the long-run and either it's going to be hungrier people, people are going to commit more crimes to get food. I know people up the street who are up at Safeway stealing chickens so they can feed their kids and stuff like that. This is the reality of what's going on out here. There's a lot of really ungodly, unsavory things going on so people can survive.

And I'm not going to go through all the flowery details and everything, but basically you need to help these people out here because it's not getting any better. It's getting worse. And when I say "worse," and I hate to be the bearer of bad news, you hate to be walking to your car one day and somebody's gonna stick you up. OK? They're not going to care. They need what they need. One minute, got you.

Only thing I can say is please do whatever you can. I don't care how you do it. Yeah, I don't. Just get it done. I know there's a way we can work this out. If they can go and do the trade thing with Iran, which they did today, they can solve food insecurity. I hate to take it there. But that's the way it is. You know, I'm not going to fake [inaudible]. If they can work out all these things with all these other countries, why in the hell can't we solve food insecurity? How about that?



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #15

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Pam Ryan? Not here. Josie Gonzalez? OK, going down the list. Samantha Davis? OK. Lionel Battle.

Participant #15: So, I'd just like to say I'm a tenant of Marbury Plaza, and I heard everything that was said. I think we need to work together as a body because if we love one another we're supposed to be our brother's keeper. And I thank God for all of you. And I know we can do this. And I thank God for the panel here tonight and I think all the topics are good and everything is well. And I just want to say be encouraged, hang in there! We can do it together. Sings: "I need you. You need me. We're all a part of God's body. Stand with me. Agree with me. I need you to survive. It is his will that every need be supplied. It's very important to me. I need you to survive. You pray for me. I pray for you. I love you. I need you to survive. I won't harm you with words of my mouth. I need you. I need you to survive. It is His will that every need be supplied. It's very important to me. I need you to survive."



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #16

Commissioner: Thank you. Thank you very much. Wes Rivers?

Participant #16: Good afternoon. Thank you for letting me testify. I'm a policy analyst with the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute. I'm here today to testify on the importance of federally funded nutrition programs in helping D.C. residents stay fit and achieve economic stability.

The SNAP program, for example, serves more than 140,000 residents, or 20% of the District's population and it is responsible for lifting 14,000 residents out of poverty during the years after the recession. Likewise, of the 178 schools in the District, 162 schools are currently enrolled in or eligible for free and reduced-price lunch through community eligibility. This means that national nutrition programs are having an impact on a large share of the population's health and food security.

These supports are very important given D.C.'s economic circumstances. D.C.'s poverty rate has climbed to 19% since the recession. Wages for many workers have stagnated, leaving the typical low-income household to survive on \$10,000 a year. As the cost of living in the city continues to increase, national nutrition programs will be key in helping residents maintain stability.

Given that, we hope the Commission will recommend increases in benefits, especially in SNAP, so that residents can continue to make ends meet in the District. Higher benefits will help more residents navigate the high cost of D.C., free up money for housing and transportation and will lift more residents out of poverty.

We also urge the Commission to explore the root causes of hunger. As mentioned before, the District has had stagnant wages among low-skill, low-wage workers and over the past decade, average income for the poorest 40% of residents has remained flat. Yet, rents have increased steadily in a housing market that has catered to an influx of new, higher-income residents. Low-cost housing in the private market has virtually disappeared and as a result, 64% of low-income renters spend more than half of their income on rent.

Not surprisingly, when families face high housing costs, they are forced to cut back on other necessities, including food. A study of the joint center of housing study shows that low-income families with severe affordable housing cost burdens spend \$160 less on food than low-income households that do not face severe housing burdens.

We urge the Commission to look at ways to address economic determinants of hunger in conjunction with improvements in national nutrition programs. D.C. has already made strides, increasing the minimum wage to \$11.50 an hour, putting \$100 million towards



affordable housing production trust fund, and expanding the state-earned income tax credit to be one of the best in the country.

Still, there is more that can be done here and in other states. And D.C. FPI hopes the Commission will explore these types of policy remedies. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #17

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testify. Erika Kelly? Erika Kelly?

Participant #17: Good afternoon. Thank you, Commissioners, for the opportunity to speak before you today and certainly for your commitment to finding solutions to the problem of food insecurity in our nation. I'm Erika Kelly with Meals on Wheels of America and speaking on behalf of the 5,000 Meals on Wheels programs in communities across the country. These programs are big and small, rural and suburban, urban, serving both nutritious meals in the home or in congregate centers such as senior centers working each day to ensure that 2.5 million vulnerable seniors are able to live safely, healthfully, and independent in their own homes for as long as they wish.

As the National Commission on Hunger continues its work, Meals on Wheels of America urges you to keep the unique needs of millions of seniors struggling with hunger in isolation at the forefront of your decision-making process. Ensuring that both today's and tomorrow's seniors receive the proper nutrition needed to maintain health and improve quality of life is not only an investment in our nation's fiscal future but it is a preventative prescription for significantly reducing Medicare and Medicaid expenses.

At no time in our history has the issue of senior hunger been at a more critical level. Regardless of what statistic or report you see, it is undeniable that the problem is grave, growing and expensive. Or to put it in another order, the problem is also growing gravely more expensive the longer it goes unaddressed.

If we look back just a few years to the start of the recession in 2007, we've seen a 68% increase in the number of food insecurity seniors in this country. And today there are nearly one in six 60 years and older who may not know where their next meal is coming from. And of particular concern to this Commission is the number of those who are very low food insecurity. That number has increased 132% since 2001 and the proportion, the number of seniors, very low food insecure seniors has risen by 232% since 2001. Thank you

I will submit for the record my written remarks as well as additional policy priorities. But I certainly, again, would suggest that you look to these programs are part of the solution to some of our nation's fiscal challenges. We can provide Meals on Wheels for an entire year for the cost of just one day in a hospital or one week in a nursing home. They are a preventative solution to the growing problem of food insecurity in our country and, again, would be happy to serve as a resource for any additional ideas.

The letter that I will submit for the record outlines additional policy priorities. And I certainly hope that you look to older American backed nutrition programs, charitable tax



incentives and increasing the charitable mileage reimbursement for those that are delivering meals as far as 150 miles on a given day for a route. So, that would go a long way towards reducing food insecurity among our nation's most vulnerable seniors. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #18

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Monica Kamen.

Participant #18: Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Monica Kamen and I'm the advocacy coordinator for the D.C. Fair Budget Coalition. We're a coalition of over 70 advocacy organizations, service providers, faith organizations, and community members concerned with meeting the human needs of the District's lowest-income communities. We advocate for funding from the city government across different issue areas from housing, work force development, to health, food, and nutrition programs that create greater economic opportunity and security for low-income residents of the District.

I'd like to speak specifically about hunger from the context of D.C. However, the lessons learned here in the District are likely applicable across all large cities in the country. And I'd also like to echo the comments that George Jones made earlier today. I think my testimony really reflects what he has been saying. We often talk about D.C. as a tale of two cities. According to the D.C. Fiscal Policy Institute, a local think tank, income and equality in the District has reached a 35-year high as low-wage workers have seen their wages fall since the recession and higher wage workers have seen earnings grow by thousands of dollars per year. The unemployment rate in 2014 remains stubbornly high at 7.6%; far higher than 5.5% of 2007 and higher still for some D.C. residents. For instance, 16% of African Americans in D.C. are unemployed compared with 10% in 2007.

One-third of D.C. residents have a high school diploma and are unemployed or underemployed. And according to a recent study by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, a person would need to earn \$28.04 in D.C. to afford an average 2-bedroom apartment in the city.

Though we recently raised our minimum wage to \$10.50 an hour, we have a long way to go before living in this region becomes truly affordable to our low-income residents. In a city where the majority of someone's paycheck is going towards rent, it is no wonder that many of our residents cannot afford to put food on the table.

Addressing hunger in this region and across the country requires more than assessing the relative merits of federal nutrition programs. Indeed, programs like SNAP and WIC, free meal programs at schools are absolutely critical pieces of our safety net to ensure that people who cannot afford food are still able to eat, we must continue to invest in these programs and make sure the benefit levels match the increasing costs of produce, milk, and other basic necessities. We also must ensure that all grocery stores and farmer's markets universally accept SNAP and WIC as payment and welcome beneficiaries.



However, if we truly want to address hunger, we cannot only talk about nutrition programs. While these programs ensure that our lowest income residents go hungry, they do not address the root cause of the problem. We must talk about raising wages, expanding earned income tax credits, and ensuring and low-wage jobs are stable, secure, and come with benefits packages. When people start making more money, they can afford to buy healthy food for their families.

We have to expand real economic opportunities for unemployed and underemployed people to start earning more. And we must make sure that if someone is working full-time, they are earning enough to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #19

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. I'm going to call up Kasey Jones. And then I'd like to call up Paula Reichel to be ready to step in and then Joel Thomas, please be ready.

Participant #19: Good evening. Thank you for creating the opportunity for me to share. I am actually Reverend Kasey Jones. I serve as senior pastor of National Baptist Memorial Church right here in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. in one of the most diverse parts of D.C., the Adams-Morgan, Columbia Heights, Mount Pleasant neighborhoods.

And I'm here; I just wanted to share with you a couple of things. This is a second career for me. And so I'm in my 10th year of pastoring at National Baptist. And one of the things that I have found exciting is our eclectic ministry because we actually represent our community. We are a community church. We don't really have commuters. And one of the things that I have found that is heartbreaking is the level of hunger in our community. And I'm not going to quote stats. You've had a lot of that. I'm sure you know those things back and forth. But I'm here just hopefully to be a voice of encouragement that you all really look at a holistic approach to hunger. And you've heard enough testimony to understand that when somebody's hungry, there are other struggles that fall into place with that.

And I can tell you as a somebody, as a novice, as a pastor we have a hunger ministry. Let me just say this. We're eclectic. We also are a small congregation. We average about 50 a Sunday. But our building is huge and I don't think that that's unusual nowadays in the church. And we don't have a middle class represented in our church. We are working-class and poor folks. But we love our community and we have a heart for it. So what we do is try to be the presence of Christ, be an expression of God's love.

And the way we do that is trying to meet the needs of the folks as best we can. We have a hunger ministry. We are open on Saturdays. Most folks are not open on Saturdays. We're actually one of the few people who are open on Saturdays. We provide meat, produce, as well as non-perishable because of a partnership we have with the Capital Area Food Bank. We're able to do that.

But I also want to say we also run a summer camp to make it affordable for residents who may not have other alternatives that we do charge a minimum income but we also raise scholarships, even with our limited resources. And you all talk about public-private partnerships. I want to say we could probably be the poster child for partnerships. We are a summer meal site. And I encourage you all to really push forward to increase the number of meals that are available through the summer. Because if kids don't have breakfast and lunch, they probably also don't have dinner especially since breakfast can be real cheap. And so I'm hoping that you all will increase that. And I can tell you from our experience.



We've been running our summer camp and we offer three meals because we get a small grant from our convention to be able to subsidize that third meal. And I can tell you that the kids eat that third meal and the parents take home leftovers when available to do that.

Again, the holistic. And I just want to say one quick thing if I can and that is this. I want to also encourage maybe a new way of thinking about this hunger issue. When you look at putting money and resources into hunger, see it as an investment as opposed to a weight. And that as you look at that, that maybe profit is not the only thing that's valued when you invest in something. When you're investing in people that allow them to live with dignity and respect and to continue to move.

I'm a preacher so I'm going to do one last thing! I promise I'm going to get out of your way.

Commissioner: This is your last sentence.

I think the country's doing a great job of understanding when folks have limited abilities and they're requiring change in structure and systems so that they can make it through hallways, make it to bathrooms and to be able to be self-sufficient. And it seems like we're getting better being OK with that. I wish we could be OK with understanding that people work hard and seniors don't have resources because their investment and work did not pay off nowadays in our environment. And that we can see that systems need to be in place so that people can be fed and they can live well and thrive in this country. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #20

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Participant #20: Good afternoon, members of the Commission. I am so happy to follow Reverend Jones because I'm Paula Riechel. I'm the D.C. regional director at the Capital Area Food Bank.

The Capital Area Food Bank is the largest hunger relief organization in the D.C. region, serving Washington, D.C. and its suburban counties in Maryland and Virginia. Last year over 540,000 at risk of hunger, or 12% of the region's population received food through the Food Bank's network of 469 non-profit partner agencies and its direct service programs.

Hunger is growing in and around Washington. The Food Bank's 2014 hunger study showed an 11% increase in the number of individuals served from 2010. And the federal nursing programs are critical to the Food Bank's ability to end hunger in the metro hunger. Even more critical, as has been mentioned, are sustainable policies which further economic security.

In Washington, D.C. this year, policymakers increased the minimum wage while also funding the Food Bank's joyful food markets, school-based pantries which provide free healthy food to families in high need areas. The Food Bank endorses this coordinated approach which promotes self-sufficiency.

To mitigate the most damaging effects of hunger, the Food Bank recommends that the Commission consider aligning resources to ensure that the most vulnerable, senior citizens and children and families, are better connected to food resources. And I'll briefly go through the acronym SOUP for you.

So, the Commodities Supplemental Food Program serves 1500 low-income seniors in the District of Columbia, for whom poor nutrition increases the risk of chronic disease and hospitalization while decreasing the likelihood of aging well in place. The program is available in nearly all states but it is currently not operating in Montgomery or Prince Georges' County, Maryland or the state of Virginia.

As the baby boomer generation ages, it is estimated that 10,000 individuals will turn 65 each day for the next 20 years. It is imperative that our federal programs are primed to meet this need. Steps must also be taken to increase seniors' access to and enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program. In D.C. we recently passed a bill to increase the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30. We would hope if that was successful it would be adopted federally.



And finally, the Capital Area Food Bank strongly endorses the strengthening of both the summer and after school meals program which play a critical role in decreasing learning gaps and supporting working families. As a sponsor of both programs in three jurisdictions, we deal with a lot of paperwork. So, having one process per state would be much appreciated.

And in addition, as Reverend Jones has mentioned, we also endorse the reimbursement of a third meal for summer meal programs.

So, from the Capital Area Food Bank, its partner agencies and the people we serve in the Washington metro area, I thank you for the opportunity to testify.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #21

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. OK, Joel? Joel, you're next. I'm going to call Heather Cosson. Just make sure you're ready. Jill Borak, are you here? I'm crossing this person off. Michael Wilson, are you here? OK. And then Kim Williams. OK. That's the next group of four.

Participant #21: Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joel Thomas, Chef Joel Thomas, and I'm the lead culinary educator for Martha's Table. Martha's Table is a nonprofit organization in Washington, D.C. Since we started 35 years ago, we've been feeding the hungry and the homeless in Washington, D.C. Today we work to address both hunger and nutrition to ensure the most vulnerable in D.C. have the best chance for success.

For the last few years, we've run pop-up grocery-style markets set up in elementary school gyms, cafeterias at the end of each month when family dollars and food assistance usually run dry. At the markets, families shop for free, shelf stable food like whole wheat pasta and rice, fresh fruits and vegetables. Our markets are impactful; not only because we give out fresh high-quality groceries to families but also because we teach families how to cook healthy food with what's available that month at the market and we make it fun.

Recently at a market at Stanley Elementary School, right up the street from here, I was running a culinary cooking lesson with the children. And one of the students, her mother had wanted to take her to McDonald's for dinner. She told her "No. I want to stay with Chef Jo-Jo." I go by Chef Jo-Jo [laughter]. She said "No, mommy. I want to stay with Chef Jo-Jo. I want to make fruit salad because this is fun and it tastes good." So, I had a child turn down McDonalds to make a fruit salad with me.

Unidentified: Great job! [Clapping]

Most of the children we work with live in Ward 7 and Ward 8, food deserts in D.C. with the average obesity rate of 72% and average incomes of \$34,000. Addressing hunger isn't just about getting food into the hands of our most vulnerable residents. It's about meeting families where they are, connecting with them, making healthy cooking and eating fun and supporting families and making sustainable lifestyle changes. We can't just solve hunger with any food. We have to solve it with the right kinds of foods. And we have to make healthy eating fun. Without consideration to nutrition, our efforts will be wasted. Childhood obesity will remain an epidemic in this country and children who live in poverty will continue to face health and learning hurdles that will negatively impact them for life.

Thank you for the opportunity and enjoy the rest of your day.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #22

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Heather Cosson?

Participant #22: Thank you, Commission members, for allowing me to speak with you today. I'm Heather (Rena?) Cosson and I work at the National Foundation to End Senior Hunger, NFESH. In 2008, NFESH commissioned the first-ever comprehensive national study on food insecurity among individuals aged 60 and older in the United States. We've commissioned updates each year and the problem continues to grow in the wrong direction. Our most recent report showed that in 2013, 15.5% of seniors in the U.S. faced the threat of hunger. That means nearly 10 million older Americans are going without enough to eat.

We've been seeing the number of seniors facing hunger increase and at the same time we learned that there is an enormous amount of food going to waste in this country. Nearly 40% of the food produced in the U.S. ends up in landfills. Because of this, we created a solution for the very programs that are tasked with providing food to seniors facing hunger. We've been piloting the program called What a Waste here in the nation's capital with the D.C. Office on Aging.

In senior nutrition programs, we've been measuring and tracking the amount of food going to waste. There are many causes of food waste. Are programs ordering too much food? Are the seniors not eating certain foods? And we look at the health ramifications when seniors throw away the nutrients they need instead of consuming them.

Using cutting edge technology in business practices we've been able to help senior nutrition programs learn exactly where the food waste is coming from, why it's occurring and how we can reduce it. In restaurants and hotels, reducing food waste equals cost savings. But when non-profit feeding programs become more efficient in the kitchen and the dining room, they can serve more of those seniors who need them without increasing their budget.

According to the Administration on Aging, which is the federal agency responsible for overseeing the thousands of community-based senior nutrition programs that receive federal funding through the Older Americans Act, total expenditures for these programs in 2012 was \$1.4 billion dollars. If every program could save 10%, which I believe is a conservative number; the savings would result in approximately \$140 million. And that's money those programs could use to expand their service to serve more seniors in need.

In 2012, approximately 2.5 million seniors were served through programs and our research shows that in the same year, 9.3 million seniors faced the threat of hunger. That's



seven million seniors we are not reaching. And we cannot afford to be throwing away food when there are that many seniors suffering.

In the U.S. we have nearly 10 million seniors going without enough to eat, and at the same time, 40% of the food is being thrown away. This cannot continue. We have to make changes now or we will keep seeing the number of seniors facing hunger rise.

Senior hunger is a growing problem in this country but it is a problem we can solve. We only need the courage and commitment to do so. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #23

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Michael Wilson?

Participant #23: Good evening. My name is Michael J. Wilson. I'm the director of Maryland Hunger Solutions. I drove down from Baltimore to talk to you today and I don't think I can do in 3 minutes what I need to do. But I'm going to do my best. I'm going to give you a slice of what Baltimore and Maryland are like. I'm going to talk a little bit about a recent victory. I'm going to give you some quick recommendations. Then I'll try to give you a voice of Baltimore.

Maryland Hunger Solutions is a statewide nonprofit. We work on all the federal and state nutrition programs. I drove down about 40 miles away. It's a long drive. But Baltimore is a long way from D.C. It's a long way. I mean Baltimore has 84% of the kids are on free and reduced meals. We've got 16.2% of our residents are food insecure. About 5% are severely food insecure; 22.7% of the residents are food insecurity. We have 8.5% of Maryland's residents live below poverty but 22.9% of Baltimore's residents, including 37% of the children.

We have an unemployment rate in Baltimore of about 8.1% but that belies the real problems that we have. African American men between the ages of 20 and 24 have an unemployment rate of about 37%. And in the (Sand Town?) Winchester community where we had riots earlier this year, the unemployment rate is over 50%. Unemployment is not an excuse for civil unrest but a lack of economic opportunity is always a tragedy.

One of the recent victories we had was we had made a change in our state law to encourage community stability. Right away the Baltimore city schools were able to utilize community eligibility. So, every kid that goes to Baltimore City Public Schools will get free lunch and free breakfast, regardless of their income [clapping].

I want to endorse everything my friend Alex Ashbrook said about recommendations but in particular I want to talk about increasing SNAP benefits because the low benefits are a problem in many ways, addressing the general economic challenges, raising the minimum wage, paid sick leave, universal health care and resisting the urge to punish recipients just because we can. Limiting choices, split issuance, reducing benefits because of school attendance, prohibiting former felons from getting benefits are all counter-productive and are not helpful.

Finally, we had a special dinner we had in honor of Dr. King's birthday earlier this year. We had it at church. We served over 200 families, primarily folks who were homeless or who had SNAP benefits because everybody should be able to have a special dinner sometimes.



And when we did that we do, what we often do is we ask people to write on a paper apple. We told them we will give that to policy-makers so that they know what that is.

So, they've said "keep WIC and free meals in schools intact." "A fit child will have a chance to grow up and be a happy, productive adult." "More jobs and homes and food." What are you having for dinner tonight? Will it be enough? What about breakfast?" "Many people, hundreds, women and children cannot respond to these questions. Help please." And finally, this is a plan to end hunger. There are many people who don't know where their next meal will come from. We as a people have the power to change this. Please help us to keep the programs alive. Don't ignore this. We are talking children, women, and men of all races. We have the power to do something. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #24

Commissioner: Thank you. Ken Williams? Not here, OK. Then I said Mary Penet.

Participant #24: Good afternoon. My name is Mary Penet. I'm the director of senior feeding programs at Feed More, Richmond, Virginia. I'm looking forward to the drive back on I-95. [Laughter] I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of [inaudible] vulnerable seniors we serve who have limited access to healthy food. This access is critical to managing chronic and acute health conditions that come not only as a part of aging but also as a response to the years of poor nutrition and poverty.

For seniors, eating nutrient dense foods becomes increasingly important when calorie needs decline but needs for vitamins and minerals remain high. Lisa Davis from Feeding America and Erika Kelly from Meals on Wheels America touched on many of the topics because we belong to the organization so I'll skip what I've written. But I have submitted it.

Since 1967, Feed More's Meals on Wheels has provided more than seven billion meals to homebound seniors. Each year we provide more than 300,000 meals to 1600 recipients. While each person is unique, let me tell you a little bit about them. They are elderly; 25% are over the age of 85. They are socially isolated; 57% live alone. They do their best to get by on a limited income; two-thirds live below 150% of the federal poverty level. And they are not all seniors; 16% of our meal recipients are under the age of 60. The majority have diet-related conditions; diabetes, amputations and loss of vision as a complication of diabetes, renal failure, and stroke.

But as you may have heard, Meals on Wheels is more than a meal. Each year we ask our meal recipients how our meals and daily visits from volunteers impact their lives. Ninety-three percent report eating healthier. Eighty-two percent report improved health. Ninety-nine percent report they no longer worry or they worry less about having enough food to eat. Ninety-one percent report that Meals on Wheels helps them remain safely and independently in their home.

Seniors have a continuum of needs based on their health, mobility and transportation status. Therefore, different interventions are required in order to meet their needs. Congregate and home-delivered meal programs have been one of the core elements of our national strategy for reducing food insecurity among the elderly for over 40 years. Investment in these individuals through the Older Americans Act helped to bend the Medicare and Medicaid cost curves by keeping frail seniors healthier and out of expensive medical facilities.

As the only umbrella organization in the country with membership in both Feeding America and Meals on Wheels America, at Feed More we have a unique opportunity of



connecting food bank resources to seniors identified for a hunger hotline and Meals on Wheels. To improve access to healthy food for older adults, Feed More is launching a pilot program targeting low-income seniors residing in food deserts. We will provide 25 pounds of whole grains, lean protein, fresh produce, and reduced sodium, low-sugar meal components twice a month using T-Phat and purchased food to increase positive health outcomes.

As noted, Virginia does not have a Commodities Supplement Food program, but we look forward to its introduction. Feed More supports a vision of Meals on Wheels of an America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity. Collaboration is key to successfully ensuring that those we serve have resources needed to maintain and improve their health. These kinds of partnerships with sustainable federal funding, including increased T-Phat and expanding CSFP will improve access to healthy food for all individuals and promote positive health outcomes at all ages.

Thank you very much.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #25

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. We appreciate it. So, I'm just going to tell you who else I have on my list and I just want you all to be ready. I'm just going to call your name so you don't try to duck away. We're going to try to finish this all out by 6:00. The people left on my list are Deborah Simms, Cindy MacIntyre, Jocelyn Moore, Scotland Taylor, Jessica Wynter Martin—I'm not sure I'm saying that right—and Saleemah Akbar. Saleemah, step on up since no one's jumping. Go for it. Thank you for your patience. I appreciate you being here.

Participant #25: My name Saleemah Akbar. I've lived here in Marbury Plaza for 25 years. I've worked since I was 13 years old. I'm not sure a senior yet. I'm only 57. So, I don't qualify for any of the senior programs that they have in D.C. I get food stamps but at the end the month there's not enough food in the house. I have fibromyalgia, osteo-arthritis, and diabetes. With the diabetes they tell me that I have to eat a lot of protein. I don't have enough money to buy enough protein to make it through the rest of the month. So, at the end of the month—8 months ago I weighed 255 pounds. In 5 months I went from 255 to 150. In the last 3 months I'm now down to 144. They say it's my ideal weight. But I know when I go back to the doctor in 2 weeks it's going to be under that because I don't have enough protein to make it through the month.

And all the programs that help people; first of all, I'm not a child so I can't get those and I'm not yet a senior so I can't get those. So I'm stuck between a rock and a hard place. My income pays my rent. I get disability. I'm 100% disabled. That pays my rent, which means there is no extra money for toilet paper. There's no extra money for personal deodorant, lotion, shampoo. There's no extra money for any of that. And my food stamps, there's not enough money for that either because when I go to the store, I try to buy as much protein as I can but there are other things that I need as well, like potatoes, rice. I try to buy in bulk so I can try to make it stretch as far as I can but it always come out to being the same thing. The last week, sometimes the last 2 weeks of the month there's not enough food in my house.

I live alone. I told you I'm 100% disabled. When I leave my house, leave the building I'm in a manual wheelchair. My doctors are working on getting me an electric chair but it still probably won't make a whole lot of difference.

So, you see the product of what you all are talking about right here. Right here. I know you have to feed the babies. I know you have to feed the seniors. But what about the people in the middle? I'm in the middle. I'm 57 years old. I'm in the middle. Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #26

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Deborah Sims? Cindy MacIntyre?

Participant #26: Hello. Thanks for being here. It's because of my dear friend back there in four rows, (Kaki?) Berry. She got me involved in our church's food pantry and it brings us here today. We're members of Grace Episcopal Church. It's located in Alexandria, Virginia. And we found out we don't take Commodities Supplemental Food program so we'll have to work on that.

We're just across the river. Our food pantry is part of our church's outreach program. During the month of June we serve 528 individuals, which makes up 127 households. In May we did 503 individuals and we had 109 households; 264 of them were children. Each household gets a brown bag and in it we try to put a meat, such as a tuna or beef stew, a fruit, a vegetable, two starches, beans, rice, pasta and some cereal. And all of these are cans or boxes. They go in a bag and the bag gets pretty heavy to carry. Most of our clients walk or take the bus.

We try to put some household items such as toilet paper and toothbrushes, have them available, and we have bonus items on shelves such as soup and crackers. Our food comes from various sources. Our major source is a food bank located in Lorton, Virginia. We order food Mondays for delivery on Thursday. We usually get two deliveries a month because they charge us \$50 for the delivery and we have to order at least 735 pounds of food before they'll deliver to us.

We spend about \$1200 a month from them. Periodically we ask other parishioners to clean out their shelves in their own homes and that becomes our bonus items and we ask for cash donations so we can get a ten dollar voucher for a local grocery store to get the perishable items. We have developed a relationship with a grocery store receiving clerk that items that are not out of date but they don't want to sell anymore they give to us so we can use them again as bonus items. But it means we have to get the items from them.

So, a couple solutions that we thought of that would be nice for us. We try to take advantage of the free USDA products and commodities program. Packaging is so large. We got a bag of 50 pounds of rice. It took two of us on a dolly just to move the darn thing, let alone we scooped it out, put it in zip-locked bags and tried to give out pounds of it that way. We tried to get tomato sauce that comes in big number ten pound cans. You only get six per case. We don't have room to store a number of cases, plus nobody can carry the cans home or open them up because they require a special can-opener to get them open.



We also started to contact local grocery stores. And most of them give the items to the food bank. And if you're a member, the food bank charges us \$50 to get the stuff out of the food bank. And our local food bank is located an hour down the road on a good day without any traffic. We can go pick up the stuff but we don't have, most of us living in suburbia drive little cars, so if we send somebody down there they bring about five cases back. It helps but it doesn't—to get advantage of the free things.

So, if we could have a warehouse locally in our community it would be great, with some sort of transportation. If somebody would give us some money for the funds for the grocery store, that would be great too. Thank you very much.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #27

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Jocelyn Moore. Oh, Joycene. You can correct me when you get to the mic.

Participant #27: Hello. My name is Joycene Moore. I didn't prepare a speech or anything. I was told to come here. When I came in there were some things that were being said I didn't like, like limiting what we buy with the food stamps. I feel as though maybe you could teach us how to pick out what's more healthier or something like that. If we don't know, we don't know. Also, I've been here all my life. I'm 57 years old, been in Ward 8. It's 12 of us and we was taught to go to school in order to eat. And if we miss school, we had nothing to eat. OK. So, we grew up with that thought.

Most of my siblings have been incarcerated. A couple of them are gone due to that type of stress of being hunger. All of us was hungry. I watched it all. I had a heart attack in 2012. I have a stent there and a stent in my leg. But before that, I did have a job working with (Ivey Hart?) (Be This Life?) and through my teaching of other people of how to eat better, you know, as far as diabetes and heart and stuff like that is concerned, I learned the symptoms for a heart attack for a woman. And that's what saved my life. I couldn't prevent the heart attack but I saved my life through that. So, I feel as though knowledge is power.

Teach us; develop not a program. Hire me to go out and teach better nutrition and stuff like that. I think knowledge is power. Teach us. Help us. And hunger is very, very destructive. It's not a good thing at all.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #28

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Thank you for your testimony. Lynn Taylor? Jessica Wynter Martin. That's the best I can do. I'm sorry. I'm sure I'm mauling your name.

Participant #28: I have horrendous handwriting. Jessica Wynter Martin is my name. Thank you for giving me the time. I know you guys have heard a couple of my points. I'll be quick. I'm going to go off things I've heard here.

I think there are big things we can do with the SNAP program as it is. And I think one way we can help with hunger is a lot of issues involve nutrition. One method we can do is remove certain types of food from being eligible for food stamps, such as anything made by any McDonalds, Burger King, Taco Bell. They do. In California, at least where I come from, Burger King, you can use EBC there.

Audience Member: Really?

You're not supposed to be able to use—

Commissioner: If you're homeless.

I was able just to try it out just for (gigs?) because I never go there. I went with my food stamps and I was able to buy a meal with food stamps. I gave it to a homeless guy. I didn't tell them that.

So, removal of high-calorie foods like sodas, candy bars, essentially honestly unhealthy foods that we can honestly admit are unhealthy. We need to stop counting pizza as a vegetable. We need to stop counting French fries as a vegetable. We need to just honestly look at the unhealthy marriage of our food of the USDA and the FDA with a lot of corporations that have a self-interest.

By removing those food items and being able to be eligible for SNAP, what you actually do is you open up the door for the healthier foods to be able to spend their SNAP benefits there. I've been there. Having the last \$5 left of my SNAP, and if it's to use my stamps I want to get myself a snack. Do I get an apple, a banana, and an Odwalla which would cost about \$7 on SNAP or do I get a candy bar, you know, a Snickers, a Reese's and a Coke which might cost me only \$2; all covered by SNAP.

So, (if it's about?) dollars and cents, you're talking about obesity, really high obesity rates, that's why. So, we need to get those foods uncovered, stop being covered by SNAP. And another method is to perhaps encourage the grocers that do offer healthy foods is by



offering a reduced rate when you purchase them by SNAP. And the same way they solved, during the recession, if you bought gas with cash you got to save a few pennies on the gallon than when you bought with a card. In the same way, these melons are \$3.50 each; you buy it with SNAP for \$2.50. That encourages the people to buy healthy foods with their stamps, to not buy the unhealthy foods because they can't with their stamps, to create programs that have incentives. For example, I live in Ward 8. Some (of the members are here too?). If you live in Ward 8, you want to open up a grocery store in Ward 8; you should get a benefit for that. You can get a tax deduction of some sort to open up a grocery store within your district, especially if you live there.

And encourage more small businesses, not Safeway's and large corporations, but small businesses to open grocery stores and grocer retailers within these communities and offer these food items, the healthy food items on SNAP. Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Is there someone here whose name I did not call that they put down on the list? OK. This ends our public testimony. I want to thank each of you for being here and for your testimony. Thanks to the Commissioners. Stay in touch.

[End of Recording]