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Dr. Mariana Chilton, Co-chair  
Mr. Robert Doar, Co-chair  
National Commission on Hunger

On behalf of Bishop Stephen Lane, I am pleased to offer remarks this afternoon for the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. My name is John Hennessy, Interim Canon for Advocacy, and I want to start by thanking the Commission for this opportunity to provide input on public policy to more effectively use existing programs and funds to combat domestic hunger and food insecurity. As we have in the past, the Episcopal Church remains ready to participate in faith-based sector engagement and initiatives to support government nutrition assistance programs while protecting the safety net for the most vulnerable members of society.

The Episcopal Church is committed to fighting the treacherous cycle of hunger and poverty in Maine, nationally and around the world. Enshrined within the Baptismal Covenant of The Episcopal Church is the pledge to "seek and serve Christ in all persons... strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being." Episcopalians in Maine fulfill their covenant both through maintaining an active ministry with the poor and advocating for legislation and public policy that supports vulnerable communities.

According to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net. According to the Census Bureau, SNAP lifted 5 million Americans, including 2.2 million children out of poverty in 2012. However, according to the recently released Kids Count report, the number of Maine children living in poverty is one out of five and our state has the fifth highest rate of very low food security in the nation. It is clear that SNAP is helping but more needs to be done to end hunger.

Last year in Raleigh, NC, our Presiding Bishop, Katharine Jefferts Schori, was asked what her position was on child hunger. She replied, "It's wrong. Any society that willingly permits children to go hungry needs to have its head and heart examined. Hunger saps the spirit as well as the body, but it's especially horrible for children, for it destroys and diminishes their growing bodies and brains."

*(Sen Alford: "That Kid" pervious yet after hidden)*

The Episcopal Church is also deeply concerned about the impact of climate change on food production and food security. We must be clear: the scientific data is stark, even today we experience the effects of climate change with catastrophic floods, scorching heat waves, raging wildfires, lengthy droughts and historic rainfalls. Scientific research shows climate change affects nearly all aspects of life. This includes the world's food security and humanity's ability to grow crops to feed a growing population. The poorest among us will bear the greatest burdens of the changing climate.

Again, I quote our Presiding Bishop who says that humanity has reached a "life and death" decision to change the tide of climate change and that the window of opportunity "will not last long."

"We are waging war on the integrity of this planet," she said. "We were planted in this garden to care for it, literally to have dominion over its creatures. Dominion means caring for our island home."

The faith community and allied non-profit organizations are committed to serving all vulnerable populations, but we need government action to end hunger and poverty in Maine. We believe the federal budget should reflect a government that provides hope, opportunity and a place at the table for all, especially for poor and hungry people. We must have a sustainable budget to protect the most vulnerable among us. We must not balance the budget on the backs of the poor, especially as even more previously middle income families are finding themselves falling into the same straits.

Families in every community in Maine are struggling to meet basic needs. Economic opportunity is a value that has defined our nation. Even before the recession, too many families were struggling to make ends meet, unable to lift themselves out of poverty. The federal budget must not only respond to families in crisis, it also must strengthen our long-term commitment to meeting human needs and providing social service programs to address the underlying causes of poverty and inequality that afflict our nation.

To address the second objective of the National Commission on Hunger, specifically in terms of public-private partnerships, faith-based sector engagement and community initiatives, I would offer the following recommendations.

First, as I have already stated, we need government action to eliminate poverty and hunger in this country. While programs such as SNAP are very effective in terms of providing nutrition assistance to those who are eligible with impressive efficiency, elected leaders and policy makers must remain vigilant and stand ready to do more.

Every day in our country churches, synagogues, and mosques are providing assistance to those in need. We are constantly expected to deliver more while working with fewer resources. Although the church has a mandate from Jesus to feed the hungry, we do not do it to reduce the need for government nutrition assistance. We do it because government has failed to feed hungry people and, as Christians, we cannot let that pass.

Without going to detail, we support many of the recommendations discussed by others this morning, including an increase in the minimum wage, maintaining SNAP eligibility beyond three months for adults who live in areas with significant unemployment, and making the Earned Income Tax Credit permanent. We ask you to recommend to the Congress a continuation of federal support of all hunger and poverty reduction policies.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. We commend your service on this Commission and stand ready to help eradicate the scourge of hunger and poverty in our country.