

National Commission on Hunger Public Hearing
July 30, 2015, Portland, Maine

Testimony by Jim Hanna, Executive Director, Cumberland County Food Security Council (CCFSC) and Chair of the Food Security Subcommittee of the Portland Mayor's Initiative for a Healthy and Sustainable Food System (jhanna@ccfoodsecurity.org)

Yesterday, my grandson, James, became one year old. Two weeks ago his brother, Max turned three. In a few short years, these boys will be in the Portland School system. This is system that features 37% of the food it serves from local sources with a goal of 50% in by the time Max is in Kindergarten.

It is also a school system that for that past few years has consistently had about half of its students from families who are income eligible for **free** school meals. To put it another way, e.g., every other student lives in a family with an annual income, if it was four people, that would be about \$30,000 or less. This is in a city that has seen the rise in the cost of living exceed that of most other cities in recent years.

I provide that context, having worked in Maine's food system for more than 20 years with a focus on solving hunger. I have many friends and collaborators in the room today who have shared important information that will help you in your task to find solutions to hunger. I am proud to work in Maine. However, I am embarrassed to acknowledge for all of our efforts, we can demonstrate very little measurable progress in increasing food security since USDA began measuring it in the mid 90s. In fact, in Maine, the increase in very low food security over the past 10 years, as measured by USDA, has only been exceeded by Missouri.

As the Director of a collaboration committed to increasing food security in our county, I am encouraged by our group's willingness to cooperate in new ways to address this complex community problem. Each of us realizes we cannot solve hunger as single organizations and isolated individuals.

On behalf of the high level perspective of our collaboration's shared goals, and in light of your goal to solve hunger while conserving federal resources, I ask your Commission's help in the following areas:

- Educate and advocate the role of a fair economy in solving hunger.
- Maintain federal nutrition standards, especially in federal child nutrition programs, with the major burden being on the food manufacturers not on low income consumers.
- Establish shared goals that unify our efforts and set baselines by which we can work together to measure progress.

One thing our Council agrees on is that there is adequate food for every person in this county and in our country. If we agree it is our goal is to solve hunger, then we can

reorganize our communities and economic system in ways so food insecurity does not happen.

The food safety net of SNAP and child nutrition programs are essential and must be maintained until we establish a fair economic system. Elements of a fairness economy include livable wages, income security, affordable food and housing and agreement that we will not punish and demonize people if they experience economic hardship. We can structure our economy so that taking care of each other during challenging times is a priority.

We must protect our children and each other from food that degrades our health. Research clearly shows the negative health effects of the majority of the processed food that finds its way to our tables, not just the tables of the poor. If we are talking about accountability, we must hold the people who manufacture our food accountable for the health outcomes of the food they produce. They can afford to invest in the infrastructure to make healthier food for everyone and we will all benefit. We need a commission of your stature to raise the issue and hold corporations accountable. We cannot reverse the progress we have made in improving the quality of the child nutrition programs

We need shared goals and ways to measure progress to those goals. You have heard some clearly opposed perspectives today. That partisanship must be a real challenge to your commission. I believe we can agree that people, especially children, should not be hungry. Starting there, we can establish benchmarks and work together on the shared national project of solving hunger in a measurable way.

As you can see, I take hunger personally. I could pretend that my grandsons will be immune to the effects of hunger. But if they are in a classroom with friends who are vulnerable to the health, education and physical development stresses resulting from inadequate nutrition it impacts them and the whole Portland community. We all are complicit and we all have to bear the costs of that.

Please consider me and our Council at your service as the Commission works to end hunger in our communities.