

Good afternoon Dr. Chilton, Mr. Doar, members of the National Commission on Hunger:

My name is Madonna Sactomah and I am the mother of 5 children. I am also the former Passamaquoddy Tribal representative for the Maine State Legislature. I am a veteran of the United States Navy.

I live in Perry, Maine which is 4 hours north of here and a very rural part of our State. I grew up on the reservation and have witnessed children and families struggle with illiteracy, mental illness, and poverty. Far too often illiteracy is a direct outcome of living in poverty.

I have worked for many years within my community. I have worked as a health administrator at the Pleasant Point and Indian Township health centers. I have also worked on projects near and dear to my heart such as teaching the Passamaquoddy language drama classes.

On the reservation we were dependent on USDA programs to supplement hunting and fishing. Programs like SNAP and the Child Nutrition Programs was the only thing that kept us from going hungry.

I, like others, went to school because there was hot food there. I went to school on the reservation up until 8th grade.

When there was legislation about the need for more Summer Food Service Program sites in Maine presented to the Education Committee on which I served, I was shocked. I asked to testify and shared with the Committee the sadness that I felt hearing that thousands of Maine children were going hungry in the summer. I told them that I never thought I'd see the day when things were better on the Reservation than what was happening outside of it.

Because of the USDA programs available to children on the reservations, we always could eat.

Every child in our country should have that right.

I was moved to tears during that testimony. Children should never experience hunger.

So I ask you to recommend to Congress to strengthen all the child nutrition programs. They help children learn and be successful. They helped me be the person I am today.

Quality education is also important. When I was in school, I took what I could from it but what it offered was lacking.

After graduating from 8th grade we were moved to schools outside of the reservation. When it was potato picking season, many students would drop out of school to work in the fields to help make money for their families. Many students would not return to school and those that did struggled to keep up with their peers. Lack of education makes it harder for people to obtain jobs.

When people can't get jobs, they need to know they can use SNAP.

People have pride. It is difficult for people to admit they are in need.

SNAP should not be conditional. If a state qualifies for a waiver because of high unemployment, then they should be granted one.

Maine has the responsibility to get food to those in need and to feed all citizens. I ask you and the U.S. Congress to continue fully investing in all U.S. citizens by protecting and enhancing vital nutrition programs such as SNAP and Child Nutrition Programs like the Summer Meals program.

It is unconscionable for anyone in the U.S. to be in a position without food. If we were the type of country that we profess we are, then we would not have hunger in U.S.

I ask you Commission, to bring back to the Congress, the important message that we need jobs in our local area, investment in the surrounding regions where we live, and stimulating commercial development that will sustain long-term economic growth.

Until we have that in place, we need SNAP programs that are not conditional upon finding a job, nutrition programs that feed children year round and more SNAP to our elders who often have special diets.

Thank you.