



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

July 30, 2015 ♦ 8:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
University of Southern Maine, Lee Community Hall
34 Bedford Street
Wishcamper Center
Portland, Maine 04104

Commissioner: Okay, I think we'll begin. Good morning everybody and welcome to the National Commission on Hunger Public Hearing here at the University of Southern Maine. My name is Robert Doar and I am one of the Co-chairs of the Commission. This is our seventh or eighth field visit around the country in our efforts to fulfill the obligation and the charge from Congress to review policies and programs in the country with regard to very low food security and the appropriate spending of existing resources. My fellow Co-chair, Mariana Chilton, will be joining us later but, before we begin, I'd like to have each of our members of the Commission introduce themselves to you and then we will start off with our first witness who is here. So starting with Mr. Shore.

Commissioner: Great, thanks Robert. My name is Billy Shore. I'm the founder of an anti-hunger organization called Share Our Strength headquartered in Washington but active here in Maine and have a small cottage at Goose Rocks Beach not very far from here, so spend quite a bit of time in this state and have enormous love for this state and know many of the anti-hunger activists on both sides of the aisle and really pleased to be here today and have an opportunity to learn from you.

Commissioner: Hi, my name is Rus Sykes. I'm currently an independent consultant. Formerly I was a Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute for Public Policy Research and before that I was the Deputy Commissioner in New York State, running SNAP, TANF, multiple other programs. I'm sitting at the very college here today where my son-in-law attended school and my daughter and he were married here in Portland back 4 years ago and so I also have a great fondness for this state and hope to learn a lot from all of you today, and thanks for hosting us.

Commissioner: I'm Deborah Frank. I'm a pediatrician from Boston. I actually trained a couple of the docs who are here at Maine Medical Center. I'm kind of a crock. I have a bad cold and a bad back, so if I don't shake hands with you, it's because I believe in the germ theory of disease. I don't want to spread it but I'm here, so.

Commissioner: And I'm Robert Doar. I'm a Resident Fellow in Poverty Studies at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington. Prior to coming to AEI about a year and a half ago, I served for 7 years as the Commissioner of Social Services under



Mayor Michael Bloomberg in New York City and I was also the State Commissioner in New York State prior to that. We are just four of a ten-member commission. Our other members are from around the country and have been at various of our other hearings. This is a for-the-record hearing. The testimony will be gathered and put on our website and will be reviewed by our members and our staff to write a report that we hope to complete by the end of October, making recommendations to Congress and the Administration. We greatly appreciate all of the attendees and people who are here.



**MARY MAYHEW
COMMISSIONER OF THE MAINE DEPARTMENT
OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

Commissioner: And we greatly appreciate our witnesses, and our first witness is Mary Mayhew, the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. We are very pleased that she could take the time to come join us today, and Mary, I'll just turn it over to you and we'll then have testimony, some questions, and then we'll be on to the next one. We are keeping track of the time because we have a long list of witnesses and we want to get it all in but we will be here all day. So Mary, off to you.

Mayhew: Good morning Robert, members of the Commission, thank you very much. My name is Mary Mayhew and I am the Commissioner for the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Maine's Department of Health and Human Services has an annual budget of more than \$3.5 billion and is responsible for the management of the state's Medicaid Program, temporary assistance for needy families, child welfare, mental health and substance abuse programs, aging and disability services, public health, administering the Federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program and many other health and social service programs. I often say that as large as this particular agency is here in Maine and the challenges of overseeing such a large agency, it is also an opportunity to look more holistically at the families and the individuals we're serving to evaluate how well we are providing in an integrated fashion and meeting the needs of individuals and families to improve their outcomes. And in that regard I am extremely appreciative of the Commission's mandate to identify recommendations that would support program reforms focused on effectively using existing resources and funds to address domestic hunger and food insecurity and certainly, to reduce the need for government nutritional assistance programs while protecting the safety net for the most vulnerable members of our society. When Governor Paul LePage came to office in 2011 and I took on my current role, I was similarly tasked by the Governor to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs and to ensure that the most vulnerable were getting their needs effectively met. We had to urgently address the significant financial challenges that had plagued DHHS for more than a decade and the massive budget shortfall within the department. The Governor's core mission was to ensure that our budget, in fact, did reflect the needs of our most vulnerable populations and that the programs were demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness and that we defined success based on helping people off of welfare programs and reducing dependency on government. It was clear that the significant growth in programs and increased spending over the decade was not effectively aligned with our most vulnerable populations or in accessing the outcomes of that spending. These are critical questions that have not been asked about many government programs and clear expectations that have not been set. What are the objectives and outcomes? How are we defining success? What are the quantitative measures and outcomes against which we are able to evaluate any



program in terms of whether it is making a difference in the lives of the individuals and families we are serving? Too often the measure has solely been based on numbers served, benefits provided. The 1996 reforms to AFDC, now TANF, are great examples of setting clear expectations. The program is time-limited and is intended to promote independence and employment stability. States are held accountable and evaluated against their performance in the percentage of clients who are participating in work or work-related activities. And importantly, states are given significant flexibility in the design of these programs to accomplish these objectives. It is imperative that there be focus within your charge of defining what constitutes effectiveness for the programs that are focused on hunger. Is there agreement on the measure and the data? Are the programs serving as a safety net for the most vulnerable and are the programs geared toward ending government dependency? In 2005 in Maine there were 152,910 individuals receiving SNAP Food Stamp benefits and in 2013 there were 249,119 individuals receiving these benefits. 129% growth in 8 years and the cost of the program grew from \$160 million to \$360 million. Maine ranked second in the nation for the percentage of the households receiving Food Stamps. Dependency was growing. Our efforts over the last several years have been to promote employment and to improve and enhance the integrity of these programs to ensure that those who are eligible are, in fact, receiving benefits and that taxpayer funds are not being squandered. The Governor understands that the best answer to ending poverty is a job. He is committed to restructuring welfare programs to help individuals on a pathway to success, economic stability, and financial independence. In that regard we would strongly encourage that the Commission include as a recommendation the elimination of the federal waiver of work requirements for 18- to 49-year-old able-bodied adults without dependents. It is critical that every welfare program be geared toward promoting employment, not discouraging work. We know the value of employment from the income it generates and the self-sufficiency it supports and the self-confidence and self-esteem it promotes. SNAP is not an antipoverty program. If you are receiving SNAP benefits, you are living in poverty and we in the Lepage Administration believe that with a little help every nondisabled working-age adult has the capacity to pull themselves out of poverty and experience the life-changing transcendent dignity that comes from gainful employment. With that philosophy in mind, we recently raised expectations within SNAP. Last year there were 12,000 able-bodied adults that fit the definition within the federal Food Stamp Program without dependents or ABAWDs on SNAP in Maine. For the first time since the recession Maine declined the federal waiver, allowing ABAWDs to collect SNAP beyond 3 months without working, volunteering, or undergoing training. Since reimplementing the requirement that these individuals work 20 hours per week, volunteer an hour a day, or attend vocational training, the number of ABAWDs on SNAP in Maine has dropped from 12,000 last year to just 2,169 as of last week, a drop of more than 80%. That is saving taxpayers over \$1 million per month. This has helped Maine to rank first in the nation for Food Stamp enrollment reductions in the past year. If every state did the same, it has been estimated that federal government would save \$7.1 billion per year, nearly 10% of the cost of the entire SNAP Program. That \$7.1 billion is money that could be better used, delivering



meals at home to the elderly and disabled. At the peak of last winter's harsh blast in a 1-month period close to 200 Maine seniors were on waiting lists for Meals on Wheels, even as able-bodied young men were receiving Food Stamps. Maine has the oldest population in the country. Nearly 10% of Mainers are over the age of 65 and in just 10 years that figure will double to 24.5%. This is a looming crisis of food insecurity for Maine, for many Maine seniors that will reach a boiling point without bold action to reform and reprioritize our food assistance programs. I know that I am running out of time, so I am going to try and prioritize a couple of other recommendations. The second word of the SNAP acronym is Nutrition. Why then are we allowing scarce dollars to be spent on chocolate bars, potato chips, soda, energy drinks, and candy? Our SNAP purchase in Maine, I'm going to actually highlight, we clearly believe and especially as we look at two federal programs, Medicaid and SNAP. Those two programs should absolutely be working in concert and not in conflict. We have a rising epidemic in obesity, both for adults and children. The prevalence of diabetes, we have got to repurpose the SNAP Program to have an emphasis on nutrition. We would strongly encourage a federal reform to restrict the use of SNAP benefits for soda and junk food at a minimum. We would also encourage, as we have in many other programs, enhanced transparency on how federal tax dollars are being spent. What is being purchased? I'm sorry. I'm just paraphrasing now to expedite the testimony.

Commissioner: That's fine.

Commissioner: It's okay. You're fine. We're in good shape.

Mayhew: How much Mountain Dew versus milk is being purchased with Food Stamps? That transparency can do more to inform the reforms at the federal government level. It would be akin to paying for Medicaid services, paying, reimbursing doctors and not knowing what care has been provided to Medicaid beneficiaries. We don't tolerate that in Medicaid. We have moved aggressively in both Medicaid and Medicare to actually now assess outcomes and determine whether or not the services are effectively improving health. We have got to hold Food Stamps to that same level of accountability. Are we improving food nutrition and assistance and improving the health outcomes for those who are receiving these benefits? We truly believe that with common sense reforms, we, in fact, can use the resources within this program more efficiently, more effectively and free up resources to target programs truly designed to address hunger. There is fraud and abuse in this program. We know that there are individuals trafficking their EBT card for drugs and cash. We've got to do more to address that fraud and to repurpose those resources for those in the safety net, who truly need these services and with that, I will conclude my testimony and again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide our comments. You have a set of recommendations that we submitted to Congress last fall. We continue to stand by the importance of those reforms. Thank you very much.



Commissioner: Thank you Commissioner. I want to turn to my colleagues. Do you have any questions?

Commissioner: I do. I always have questions. Thank you Commissioner. I appreciate your testimony. I think you're probably aware that New York State submitted a demonstration project several years ago to do exactly what you suggest to ban the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages that USDA denied. It would've covered the entirety of New York City. We had, you know, overlaps of the incidence of pediatric diabetes and everything and I'm just wondering are we ready in this country finally and had the support of many public health organizations, although it had the opposition of many anti-hunger organizations. I'm just curious how you think we could get people to understand the relationship between SNAP and Medicaid, particularly.

Mayhew: Well, I appreciate that and I, too, have seen a lot of support for that reform, certainly, continuing to connect the dots between the efforts we're waging to improve health, to improve public health. We've got to make a connection to the Food Stamp Program. I do believe that the transparency of the data, what is being purchased. We certainly know as we've seen some of the data that's been shared with us, it's alarming and I think that improving that transparency can go a long way to advancing that particular reform of restricting and reinforcing nutritional choices.

Commissioner: On the ABAWD, I just have one more question.

Commissioner: Sure.

Commissioner: On the ABAWD issue you noted a significant drop in the numbers when you basically turned down the waiver and began to require the compliance with work. Did you have enough slots to offer people work activities if they didn't have jobs and what do you attribute the drop to, that people did not want to work, people had other income? I'm just curious.

Mayhew: Well, certainly, people may have come off as their income increased. We aggressively advocated and provided information about employment and education training opportunities, utilizing our Maine Department of Labor Career Centers to provide those resources, to offer trainings. We have very little participation. We engaged with an organization, in fact, here in Portland, around volunteer opportunities that would also provide educational resources upon completion of the volunteer program. We directly did outreach to the individuals within the ABAWD category. We simply did not get the response or the interest in those programs.

Commissioner: Thank you.



Commissioner: Doctor?

Commissioner: Yeah, I have a couple of questions. First of all, what was the economic activity generated by federal dollars in Maine by your very high SNAP rate? Secondly, have you been monitoring rates of food insecurity and health outcomes among the people who have left SNAP? There is certainly data that food insecurity is tied to increased utilization of health care resources, very expensive health care resources, as you cited. And the third is, I think we're all very concerned about Meals on Wheels. I think you've nailed it but that's not a USDA program. It's complete and I, what do you think about putting Meals on Wheels on Medicare?

Mayhew: Well, let me, our view certainly at the state level and I would assume at the federal level is that there is a pie that gets divided and resources that are competed for and that to the extent that you can improve the efficiency and the management of the Food Stamp Program, it would, in fact, free up resources that could be reprioritized for Meals on Wheels and other programs that are critically important to addressing nutritional assistance for seniors, in particular, and other disabled individuals. In terms of economic impact, I guess partly my concern with that is we certainly want to benefit from the economic impact of federal funding but we want to make sure that that federal funding is tied to clear performance expectations, that it is aligned with the priorities for this state, that we can demonstrate that there is a return on investment, if you will, both in terms of the efficient use of the dollars but that the outcomes are quantitative and qualitative, that we can point to effective use of those dollars in improving the health of the individuals that are being served, you know. The concern that I have—

Commissioner: I'd like to know about your data then on that. I think you're absolutely right. You do need the data and have you got any of it yet?

Mayhew: Well, part of our challenge, now if you want to talk about Medicaid that is where states have access to significant meaningful data. Now states need to do a better job as we are seeking to do in becoming comfortable and understanding that data and driving reforms and having data-informed decision making. We are at a disadvantage in the Food Stamp Program. We do not have the kind of data that could better inform whether we are, in fact, moving the needle in both addressing hunger and addressing nutritional health of the individuals being served. I think part of my concern and, you know, and I am not an expert in how the determinations around food insecurity and very low food security, how that is, does somebody need to clap? [Laughter] No, it's okay, it's all right. [Laughter]

[Several inaudible comments.]

Mayhew: Well, I don't need the light to continue to respond.



Commissioner: That's right.

Mayhew: So you can see me.

Commissioner: There we are.

Mayhew: So, you know, obviously, I'm very interested in the research that has been done around the collection of data of information to assess food security. Now Maine's food insecurity has grown at the same time that the caseload size of Food Stamps doubled. So I have a number of concerns as to whether or not increasing access to the benefit is, in fact, affecting the ability to address that insecurity but more importantly, really drilling down to those who have expressed that they have gone hungry at a period of time and that, it is very similar to all of our work across the many programs within—

Commissioner: Okay, you need to show that to me, [Laughter] I'm, okay, to me, not to the witness.

Commissioner: Okay.

Mayhew: I want to make sure that we're looking at all of our programs and being very clear about the data that is intended to evaluate those outcomes and are we, in fact, supporting and funding strategies that clearly are improving health, improving the outcomes, improving the economic stability for those individuals and creating their financial self-sufficiency.

Commissioner: Billy? Oh, you want more?

Commissioner: I was just going to say, you may be not be aware that there is a two-item question that can be put into medical records to screen for food insecurity that, you know, if you have charge over what you have to ascertain for Medicaid people, you might, we can certainly send you information about it.

Mayhew: No, I think that truly, again, going back to the value of this agency's structure in having certainly the Maine's Center for Disease Control under this department, Medicaid, TANF, Food Stamps, and the opportunity to really look more holistically and to conduct that kind of research would provide us, not only with a better assessment of the status of those indicators but also, to begin to align our programs, which I would just emphasize that the flexibility that states need to have to tie together these programs that combine the social supports with the medical supports. We know the social determinants of health and our ability, so many of the federal programs are siloed. The funding streams are restricted and it detracts from a more integrated, flexible approach to really addressing what are more comprehensive needs to really get at hunger and poverty and economic instability.



Commissioner: Billy?

Commissioner: Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner, for your very well-prepared and thoughtful testimony. Question about it sounded like the high watermark for SNAP participation here was about 250,000 in 2013.

Mayhew: Yes.

Commissioner: I'm assuming that's gone down a little bit now.

Mayhew: It has.

Commissioner: And of the, when you talked about the able-bodied adults without dependents, there were that focused on, I think, 12,000 individuals, what does that say about the rest of the folks on SNAP? One of the things we've wrestled with is conflicting statistics about how many on SNAP are children or disabled or elderly and so if we're dealing, if you've dealt effectively with the able-bodied adults without dependents, are the rest of the folks on SNAP here people who should be and are getting what they need and deserve or are there other issues to pay attention to there?

Mayhew: Well, I would, perhaps, direct the Commission to take a stronger look at how the work requirement is applied to the, how that is defined for able-bodied adults without dependents because there are many exceptions that while someone might initially fit that description there are then many exceptions to whether or not the work requirement still applies. So the universe of those that are within that category is larger but when you apply the exceptions to the work requirement, that's what brought us down to about 12,000. There, as you know, and again, we oversee our mental health programs and a significant focus within our efforts to support people with mental illness is, again, to promote employment. Employment is absolutely an evidence-based recovery model initiative that when people become employed, their need for mental health services decreases. In substance abuse, as well, one of the exceptions for able-bodied adults without dependents is that if they're in a substance abuse treatment program, they're also exempt from that work requirement. I just think we need to take a little, we need to take a closer look at how that, those exceptions are today crafted and are they, in fact, in the best interests of helping to support individuals on that successful pathway to employment and out of poverty.

Commissioner: Got it, thank you. Well, just to ask, to get a ballpark sense, maybe by asking the question the other way, the universe of, here in Maine, of children, disabled, seniors, how would you quantify that, that this set of issues would not apply to? Is that 80% of the folks who are on SNAP or less?



Mayhew: Yeah, I would say certainly probably in that ballpark of 70% but again, you know, it's looking at how well are those programs still meeting the needs of those seniors, of those disabled individuals, of children, how do we begin to perhaps more effectively measure, you know, a senior who is homebound with a Food Stamp benefit or is struggling to prepare meals is still going to go hungry if they don't have those necessary supports coming into their home. Children who are in families where the adults are trafficking their EBT card for drugs or for cash are not deriving the benefit from that Food Stamp support. There are opportunities and there are creative programs, innovative programs, I'm sure here and elsewhere in the country, that I would certainly encourage that we identify some best practices to both encourage flexibility at the state level but also to further inform some of the reforms that we know that financial literacy is a challenge, that nutritional education is an issue, access to fruits and vegetables. How do we promote greater access to farmers markets? I know you're going to hear later from the Good Shepherd Food Bank, you know. What are some of the programs that are bringing farmers markets and the availability of that produce closer to individuals to where they are, partnerships with federally qualified health centers to bring together both that health emphasis and access to the food that will support that improved health?

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Mayhew: You're very welcome.

Commissioner: We've been joined by our Co-chair, Mariana Chilton. We're glad to have you here, Mariana. We knew you were coming and are really, we're always better when you're with us, so glad to have you.

Commissioner: I'm better when I'm with you, too.

Commissioner: That's good.

Commissioner: I'm glad to be here. I'm sorry I was late and I'm sorry and I'm sorry that the lights turned off as soon as I stood near the light bulb. [Laughter] I also want to say I'm really glad to be in Maine. I'm from Philadelphia. I'm a researcher on food insecurity and I primarily work with families with young children under the age of 6 and I'm very sorry I didn't hear your testimony, so I have no questions and I defer it back to Robert.

Commissioner: And Commissioner, I just have one. I was struck by the rise in very low food security in Maine from 2000 when it was around 2.8% and now it's up near 7% and that was commiserate with a big increase in SNAP benefits and we have found when we go around the country SNAP recipients say often that the program



gives us a card but it doesn't help us get a job. And I wonder whether you think that there's a chance that this greater emphasis on employment, with a little bit of a stick involved, because if you don't comply, you may lose the benefit, could lead to more employment and less very low food security.

Mayhew: You know, we have a tendency in some of these programs to make things more complicated than they necessarily need to be. There is no doubt and we certainly have seen this in TANF that if we can help people on that pathway and can see them to employment that it changes multiple aspects of their life and we know that from their own feedback to us about how their, their lives have been transformed and for the families that their children's lives have been transformed and the model that the parents now represent being employed and the opportunity to help people with that economic stability, we believe, can go much farther in addressing food insecurity and promoting the kind of stability for those families that would more productively address hunger.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. I think we're ready for our next witness.

Mayhew: Thank you.

Commissioner: Commissioner Mayhew, we're glad you could have us come.



JASON TURNER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE SECRETARIES INNOVATION GROUP

Commissioner: Okay, so we, I don't know, our next witness is Mr. Jason Turner, who I believe is here. He's the Executive Director of the Secretaries Innovation Group. Mr. Turner is also an alumni of the commissionerships of social policy programs, having served as Commissioner both in New York City and in Wisconsin and at the federal level and we're very honored and appreciative that you could make the trip to Portland to join us today.

Turner: Thank you very much Commissioner Doar. Thank you Mr. Sykes, Commissioner Sykes, colleagues from New York state and New York City, I'm pleased to have this opportunity and thank you all for this opportunity to appear. Well, I'm going to make, I'm going to jump right in and make six points here but first, I have to find them. Here we go. First, I'm going to say that households experiencing very low food security in the last 30, in the prior 30 days is very low in America, as you might expect in a wealthy country that we have this blessed country we call America. We've produced a lot of food and we've distributed a lot of food and people have access to food by and large but the explosive growth in SNAP recipient households and corresponding federal expenditures does not appear to be related nationally to the number of households actually experiencing food insecurity. Third, because of the fungibility of benefits, SNAP really, in truth, is an income transfer program. It's not primarily a program whose effect is to increase nutrition and reduce food insecurity because it's already low. And number four, we find that for the first 5 years after the welfare TANF was reformed in 1996 Food Stamp recipients, along with TANF recipients, increased their work levels, increased their income levels, closed their cases but, and very closely paralleled the success of TANF in that first 5-year period but after that, the two programs diverged. So they were almost unconnected anymore in terms of the caseload. Number five, I'm going to argue that the surest way to achieve nutritional well-being among Food Stamp beneficiaries is through personal consumption changes, not through the acceptance of high levels of Food Stamp transfers and even greater transfers through the Food Stamp Program. That is unlikely to be the surest way to improve the nutritional standards of families, of low-income families. And finally, overall family well-being, including nutritional well-being, will be achieved through the greater personal responsibility of life choices, including food choices combined with work and I think this, the last panel, Commissioner Mayhew, made that remark. To recapitulate your gracious introduction, Mr. Doar, I just want to say that our Secretaries Innovation Group is made up of 16 state Human Services Secretary, including Commissioner Mayhew and represents states that make up about 40% of the U.S. So essentially, our organization has a lot to say about how the Food Stamp Program is run in the states nationally and our organization, the Secretaries Innovation Group, proposed to Congress in 2013 a Food Stamp work program, which was adopted by the House compromised with the Senate, is now law and active and funded in 10 states. So I now would like to turn to the first chart on, that you have in front



of you and it shows that the numbers of households experiencing food insecurity is essentially unrelated to the prevalence of Food Stamp benefits. These are national figures provided by FNS in the quality control sample and the blue line shows the millions of households receiving Food Stamp benefits and the red line shows the numbers of households with experiencing very low food security in the last 30 days and you'll see that the red line is basically flat over since 1996. It bumps up and down a little bit and the SNAP households have just exploded. So the first question you have to ask is there should be a correlation between the growth of Food Stamps if, in fact, it operates to reduce hunger and the millions of families that are experiencing very low food security and there's no relationship. The reason there's no relationship is that very low food security is largely a factor relating to work and other personal choices more than it is the access to available food, either through the Food Stamp Program or other options. Really because of the fungibility of benefits, this is actually an income transfer program but the bad thing about Food Stamps unlike TANF is there's no reciprocity inherent in the program as there is in TANF. In TANF there's an obligation to participate in activities leading to self-reliance, economic self-sufficiency, and of course, the byproduct is higher family income. There's no such requirement in Food Stamps, although there is a Food Stamp Employment and Training Program as we've, as this, as you have heard from other testimony, I'm sure, it's underutilized. The next chart shows a very close correlation between the Food Stamp prevalence and TANF reforms. We all know that in 1996 there was a major change in the TANF Program in the AFDC Program, which created TANF, and required those who were receiving benefits to look for work and to be subject to a temporary 5-year lifetime benefit. When that was, when that change occurred, poverty, the big three indicators, poverty, employment, and dependency all moved sharply in the right direction and Food Stamps followed it, which you can see in the lines between 1996 and 2001 on your chart. For example, in Milwaukee poverty, childhood poverty was cut by 50% in just 5 years. Employment in New York City during the period Mr. Sykes was in office and Mr. Doar, employment in New York City went from for mothers with no high school education, the U.S. Census Bureau found only 14% were in the labor force at the beginning of this period in 1995, the year before the reform. And in 2001 just 6 years later that, the proportion in the labor force jumped to 46%. 14% to 46% as measured by the Census that is a public policy success that redounded to Food Stamp beneficiaries because at that time Food Stamp and TANF beneficiaries were very closely matched, almost everybody on TANF was on Food Stamps but also, the reverse was true at that time for families and able-bodied families. You see here, though, starting in 2001 there's a divergence. TANF, which retained its work requirement has been flat and yet, Food Stamps encouraged by the USDA and many advocates has taken off in terms of its caseload and the blue line there represents the total adult nondisabled but look at the red line, which is made up of nonelderly, nondisabled working-age population not in work at all, it's gone from 2.7 in 2001 to 8.7 million.

Commissioner: One minute, Jason.



Turner: Okay, finally, the third chart shows the growth of nonworking households broken out by families on Food Stamps not working of working age and singles not working. Now one of the interesting things on this chart to me is the purple line represents able-bodied single adults without children. They should all be engaged in work activity and going to work but they're not. And you can see the results from 700,000 to 4.2 million over a period of about 10 years. That's unacceptable. States must take responsibility, not just the federal government for helping these recipients go to work and finally, what is the absence of work and dependency on Food Stamps without work? What does it look like? Well, the absence of work lowers family income, obviously, but it also has other effects. You have a deterioration in your mental capacities, mental health, as well as physical health. This is all shown by the research. Isolation increases, depression increases, and family stress increases. I would encourage this committee to propose a national work program for Food Stamps that parallels, if it's not exactly that same, as TANF. That would do the most, I think, to turn the hunger situation around.

Commissioner: Thank you Jason. Questions?

Commissioner: I don't know if there are any students in the audience but I want to point out as a public health researcher that there is a classic error in research, which is called ice cream and murders both go up in summer. It doesn't mean that ice cream causes murders. That's the same in this case. I also wonder what happened with the great recession in Maine, you're acting, you're implying that all this increase in SNAP and in un-working is individual failure but surely, Maine, like the rest of the country was impacted by economic forces far beyond the control of any individual. I would also point out that you may not be aware of extensive medical research that at least with families with young children, if you compare people to themselves after they join SNAP, very low food security goes down and so, which is a better longitudinal A than B is a better indicator of causality than something like this.

Turner: Well, I would say in response to that, a couple things. First, you're quite right that a correlation is not, does not imply causation. However, when you have a Food Stamp Program, which is doubling in size and the punitive reason for the Food Stamp Program is to reduce hunger, you should see, if the public policy logic model matches up, you should see hunger go down but it doesn't go down. As it relates to recessions, note that in the very strong economic period between 2002 to 2008 Food Stamps growth was, went way up. If it was tied to, more closely to the recession, to economic growth, the Food Stamp Program participation would have gone down but, of course, the federal government at that same time was promoting Food Stamp use and dependency.

Commissioner: Questions?



Commissioner: On your first chart, I think you, on your first chart would that red bar look different if it were a measure of food security or food insecurity other than very low food insecurity? I guess I'm trying to gauge whether all food insecurity is in effect recession proof because it doesn't seem to impact it by the recession at all and I know you're using the metric of very low food security but one of the things we talked a lot about early on here was, you know, what measure we were interested in measuring progress against but for the purposes of this chart, would that be different?

Turner: I don't have the chart that I used to prepare this in front of me but as I recall, the, both indicators of very low and low were both flat over a period of time but I don't have it in front of me.

Commissioner: I have a couple of questions, Jason, thanks. The first one is one of the things we've heard from many people and I know you know this is the case is that the Thrifty Food Plan is itself somewhat outdated and not really ever meant to guarantee food security. In fact, households were meant to supplement their Food Stamp allotment with 30% of their net income after certain deductions but do you think that some of this correlation that doesn't exist between low food security, very low food security, can be related to the inadequacy of the benefit or would you suggest that it's not really related?

Turner: I really don't have an opinion on that, Rus, to be candid with you, so I'm not going to just mouth off. [Laughter] I don't know.

Commissioner: Fair enough. My second question to you is totally unrelated to that. It has to do with the alignment that Commissioner Mayhew talked about, also, with public health benefits and the cost of Medicaid that stem from issues like obesity and diabetes and blood pressure and many things that are correlated to diet, particularly among children. You're well aware of New York's attempt to, you know, have a demonstration project to ban certain items. I just wonder why, in your mind, it seems to me to be a no-brainer. I'm wondering why we haven't made further progress on that.

Turner: Well, I'm glad you brought that up because both you and Commissioner Doar did important work in New York City in raising this issue and bringing it forward to the federal government. Our members, our 16 members, have also attempted to raise this issue and bring it forward in the form of requests for waivers that would limit food purchases in unhealthy areas and try and promote more healthy purchases. Of course, the USDA puts out a food pyramid. First Lady Michelle Obama has food, healthy food consumption a major issue of her own and yet, USDA, as you two are aware, but maybe others are not, has a very strong opposition to attempt by states to steer a healthy food consumption through the



regulation of what can be purchased. I think that's a mistake. I think this Commission could make an important contribution by making that point and I can say from in my position as Executive Director of the Secretaries Innovation Group, that we will have, we would have many states that would move in the direction of trying to encourage healthy eating.

Commissioner: Jason, I have one question. As you know, the history of the SNAP Program in New York City, it dropped and then it went up quite significantly and one of the reasons was because the Administration that I was part of believed strongly, as I did, that it could be a work support, that for low-income households with working adults in them at wages that might be too low to allow them to afford all that they need, Food Stamp benefits could top up that wage and for some, that did work. But your chart indicates that if you sell a program as a work support and it's going to households where there's nonwork who are able-bodied and under 55, it may not be quite what it's sold as. Is that your, is that part of what you're saying is that you may have tried to make it a work support but for too many households it wasn't?

Turner: Yes, I think that's completely accurate. I think the Food and Nutrition Service has discouraged states from ending the waiver for the able-bodied without dependents. You're aware of that from New York City, as I am and from six states. And in addition to that, I would say many states themselves, I would say even as I represent these states, that they haven't done enough themselves to—

Commissioner: But let me ask it another way. Would you object to the idea that it did support low-wage work by topping up wages as Food Stamp benefits as a true work support for a working household to make those wages go further? Is that an issue for you?

Turner: Well, I think that there's many, when you have earned income, you have the Earned Income Tax Credit. You have so many different federal benefits and keeping in mind that Food Stamps is only one of what, a dozen different food programs. I don't think it really serves the purpose of adding to the nutritional value of these working households all that much.

Commissioner: Commissioner?

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. I have one and a half questions. I'll ask you the half question first.

Turner: Okay. [Laughter]

Commissioner: Could you just quickly define for me how, what is your definition of dependency and how do you measure that?



Turner: Well, dependency is on a continuum, isn't it, with the most, the least dependent free of all means tested benefits that would include Medicaid.

Commissioner: Okay, so—

Turner: However, it doesn't, it's a mixture, of course.

Commissioner: you mean by dependency, you mean participating in any kind of public assistance program?

Turner: Means tested public assistance.

Commissioner: Means tested? Okay, thanks. My real question is thinking about the future and if we can help figure out how to encourage more work for SNAP recipients. I know that your group, the Secretaries Innovation Group, has started to consider such issues as two generation approaches, dealing with adversity and toxic stress and also given the increase in incarceration for so many men, especially, what kinds of special programming might you be interested to consider to help states encourage work and support work for people who have experienced trauma, major depression problems, and also, for families with young children that need extra support in child care?

Turner: Well, you're quite right. Our organization has been interested in all of those topics. I think with adverse childhood experiences, we just had a long session with our members in Chicago on that topic. It's very, it's prevalent, 20% according to the researchers have four or more adverse childhood experiences. We also know that that's a very difficult population to help because they're not tractable. They're oppositional personality many times. So we're just at the beginning of the stage of trying to figure out what separate kinds of interventions might work better for that group than the standard work programs.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you very much Commissioner Turner.

Turner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thanks.



**MICHAEL F. BRENNAN
MAYOR OF PORTLAND, MAINE**

Commissioner: And are we ready for the Mayor? Okay, and we're right on schedule. I would like to complement our team for keeping us on schedule and our next witness is Mayor Michael F. Brennan of the Mayor of City of Portland and Mayor, I want to tell you how pleased and happy we are to be in your lovely town. Thank you for having us.

Brennan: Thank you for being here.

Commissioner: Nice to see you.

Brennan: Very pleased to meet you.

Commissioner: Thanks, Mayor.

Brennan: Nice to meet you. And I'm sorry for, I thought I was supposed to be here at 9:35 and I thought—

Commissioner: It's all right.

Brennan: No, I thought for the first time I was going to be on time this week and it didn't quite work out this way. But the first thing I will say is I'm delighted to have you here. Thank you very much for coming here and on a positive note, you know, Portland, per capita, we have more restaurants than any other city in the United States and I hope that before you leave or either last night or before you leave you have an opportunity to at least go to one of our outstanding restaurants that we have here in the city. And if you want any recommendations, I'd be more than happy to give you something for either lunch or dinner, depending on how long you might be here. So again, thank you very much for being here. It's great to have you in the city of Portland and you'll probably hear a number of different comments today about Portland, about the region, and about the state in regards to hunger and food security. 44 years ago I was 18 years old May of 1971 and 20 of my friends got up on a Saturday morning in Miami, Florida and we walked 30 miles to end hunger in the city of Miami. And I was at the back of the pack and I ended up walking with Lawton Chiles, who became the U.S. Senator from Florida and then became the Governor of Florida and became famous as Walking Lawton Chiles. And I had an opportunity to talk to him while he was walking with us and while he was walking and about hunger and many of us at the time, being 18 years old had a very narrow understanding of what we thought about hunger but we thought it was a good thing to try to walk 30 miles in Miami to end hunger and I've had the opportunity over the last several years working in the legislature to address issues related to food security and to hunger but in 2010 I worked here at the Muskie School and



we convened, we got a small amount of money from TD Bank and we convened a task force to look at food and hunger issues within Cumberland County. And I have to say I was surprised to find out at the time and I know the numbers have changed but at the time, we ranked, the state of Maine ranked second in the country in hunger and we're in top 10 in food insecurity and we faced a number of different challenges in Cumberland County in terms of people having access to Food Stamps and access to food pantries and just access to hunger. Based on that initiative there were a number of different recommendations. There was actually some state legislation that came out of that initiative that Senator Alford and I worked on and hopefully, he'll talk about that when he's here a little bit later. But when I became Mayor in 2011 one of the first things I wanted to do is to address food issues within the city of Portland. So as you can see from the handout, we have a Mayor's Initiative for Healthy and Sustainable Food Systems and I want to focus on three or four of the things we're trying to do here in the city of Portland to address food issues, food sustainability issues, which obviously, impact food security issues but one of the things and I'm sure you know this, the state of Maine close to 80% to 85% of all our food is imported. That would be similar to New Hampshire. It'd be similar to Vermont but anything that happens in any place else in the country in food systems, the ripple effect into the state of Maine is fairly profound and the more that we can become sustainable ourselves within the state, within the city of Portland, we reduce our reliance on what might happen to the food system throughout the country but it also grows our economy and also allows us to have access to healthy food locally. So one of the first things that we've been working on is that by next year we want 50% of all the food in our school system to be locally grown. We're at 35%, including milk, and we've gone up about 5% in the last 2 years and we hope to get close to 50% within the next year and again, you can immediately see the positive benefits of that, that it supports local farmers, supports the local economy and at the same time, it provides healthy food to people, to students within our school system. As part of that, one of the things that we have focused on and made huge strides in the last 2 years through Portland Connect Ed, through the Maine Hunger Initiative and Partners within Portland, we have dramatically ramped up our summer feeding program and we've almost doubled the number of students now that are participating in the summer feeding program but what we've done is one step further. We just got a grant last year from the National League of Cities that allowed us not only to expand our summer feeding program but also to expand the educational opportunities combined with that. So we now have a summer learning program within the city of Portland. And if you look at the last page of the handout, it's a flyer from one of the first programs that we had this summer and we had literally hundreds of children in Deering Oaks, which is just across the street here, participating in summer feeding program and at the same time we also have a circus school here in Portland that did performance. We had the book mobile and a number of other educational programs and what we're trying to do is to really address that summer slide issue, where particularly children that come from disadvantaged backgrounds during the summer lose academically, as well as nutritionally. And so we think in the city of Portland, again, we've almost doubled the number of students on a daily basis that are participating in that summer feeding



program, as well as the education program and we think that's a key way for us to address that summer slide. And one of the other reasons that we're doing that is that over 55% of the students in the Portland School System qualify for free and reduced lunch and in 2009 that was 47% and we've seen that grow to 55%. And we have some schools in the city of Portland that 80% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunch. So even though the city of Portland itself is a fairly prosperous community, our unemployment rate is about 3.7%, we have significant portions of our population that do struggle to meet basic necessities and I am proud to say the Portland City Council last month voted to increase the minimum wage in Portland to \$10.10 in 2016 and \$10.68 next year and in 2017. We're the first city on the East Coast, other than Washington, DC, to establish our own minimum wage and one of the reasons, thank you, one of the reasons that we did that is that we clearly want to address the fact that we, and understand the fact that we have people in our city that are struggling and increasing the minimum wage will allow people to not only to have affordable housing or access to housing but access to food. So since I have 3 minutes let me move very quickly. Another major initiative we have through the Mayor's effort is that we are looking at our ground fish industry as an opportunity to create a new market for institutions within the greater Portland area. So we're looking at USM, UNE, hospitals, nursing homes, schools, and we're looking at fish that is available other than cod and haddock, that we will, that we'll make available to institutional buyers within the Portland area. We think it'll create a new market for fish and create more food opportunities for people in the area. The last two things I think that I would focus on very quickly and I'll tell you this story and tell you this that you won't hear if you go to virtually any other city, any other state in the country. We have thousands of people that live in the city of Portland that are asylum seekers that are refugees, immigrants from other countries. Due to changes in Augusta, due to changes by the most previous administration, the beginning of July we had 900 people that were on the verge of being homeless and without food. The city did step in and make up the difference and we now have a program for \$2.6 million that will provide housing for people from July 1 through the next year but we don't have enough money for food and that's almost \$1 million in our general assistance program that had been allocated the last year for people that were seeking asylum, for people that were refugees, that no longer are going to qualify for either the city's program or state program for food. So we have to turn to pantries, thank you, to other places to make up that difference. So we are faced with a very real and serious situation of 800 people in our city starting August 1 that will not have access to food in the same way that they have at this point. And that's been compounded by an administration in Augusta, both the Governor, Department of Health and Human Services, that has pursued a strategy of restricting SNAP, Food Stamps, and other federal programs to citizens in the state of Maine and we now have thousands of people that previously had access to Food Stamps that don't and in addition to that, combined with the reduction in Food Stamps, there will now be hundreds of people that had access to the general assistance program that won't starting August 1 and again, we are going to have to rely on faith-based community and other nonprofits within the community to step up and to address that issue. So before I get the final time is up, [Laughter] I will



conclude my remarks and again, thank you very much for being here and thank you very much for listening to very difficult circumstances, not only in the state of Maine but I'm sure, as you go across the country you hear stories that are very difficult and I guess the last thing I'd say is I never thought 44 years ago when I walked with Lawton Chiles that I'd be sitting here today recognizing that 44 years ago I only walked the first mile and we still have many miles to walk before we end hunger here in the United States. So, again, thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Questions?

Commissioner: I do.

Brennan: Go ahead.

Commissioner: I have only one. I'm very interested in the local school issue and I see the economic development benefits of local jobs but I wondered did you have, has anyone done an analysis on whether that, did it increase or decrease costs?

Brennan: It has increased cost and, again, I don't want to get into the whole wheats of this but this is a very interesting approach we had. We actually got a grant from a foundation last, 2 years ago. We did a marketing study to find out why students and families were not purchasing school lunch and what we found out is if we could increase the number of students who weren't buying their lunch by 15% that that would cover the cost of the additional—

Commissioner: [inaudible], yeah.

Brennan: that's right, so it would turn into a break even proposition for us if we increased market share by 15%. That would give us additional revenue to purchase the local food, meaning there would be no additional cost to the school system. Obviously, the other thing, I mean, one of the things that we found is that there's now a national trend where school lunch participation has actually dropped and that's largely because of the new nutrition requirements and people getting used to the fact that healthy food sometimes tastes a little bit differently but one of the things that has really helped us, we've increased our cold storage capacity. So now we're able to purchase blueberries in the summer and freeze them and have them available in January and February where before it was just seasonal. But we are pursuing a strategy of increasing the number of people participating and as a result of that, we're hopeful that it will reduce our overall cost because, obviously, there is at least an incremental increase by purchasing locally but as you also know, the better we get at this institutional buying and being able to buy in bulk, our costs will be reduced over time.



Commissioner: Thank you Mayor. I appreciate it very much. A question I've been pressed by the summer food efforts—

Brennan: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: do you have a sense of within the city at least or even statewide with what percentage of children who are eligible are actually receiving summer meals?

Brennan: Yeah, I have an old sense and again, back in 2010 when I worked on the legislation with Senator Alford, I think the number we used at that time is that 85% of students that were eligible did not have a site and were not able to participate. That number may have changed. There has been legislation since then that has been, that is stronger and that has gotten better and there has been a renewed effort and somebody else will be here that will be able to give you that number that is closer but back in 2010, it was almost 85% that were eligible did not have access to a summer feeding site. We have over 18 sites just in the city of Portland and again, we've expanded the sites and we've doubled the number of students that are participating.

Commissioner: That's great. We hear a lot about summer food everywhere we've gone and USDA had a pilot program where they added to the Food Stamp EBT benefit for the summer and it seemed to have some promise, so it's one of the areas we've been at least discussing.

Brennan: Yeah, well, earlier in January in my State of the City Address, I announced that we were going to have summer school in Portland because we were going to be able to combine the food and the summer learning. And I was quickly corrected that we no longer talk about summer school because that has such a negative connotation to it and instead, I now talk about summer learning. So we have a summer learning program in the city of Portland, not summer school.

Commissioner: So, yeah, just two questions. One is to stay on that, Mayor, and thanks for your testimony.

Brennan: Yeah.

Commissioner: It's great to meet somebody with your pedigree on the hunger issue. As Rus mentioned, we've talked as a, in general, about are there ways to provide cities and states more flexibility around summer—

Brennan: Uh-huh [yes].



Commissioner: whether it has to do with easing the congregate feeding requirement or summer EBT and as I'm just wondering if that's something that you've looked at specifically to continue to increase summer and then I have one other question.

Brennan: Well, those are good questions and we have a whole committee that's looking at those things. I think at this point what we're focused on is increasing participation because we know that even at, we have 7,000 students in our school system. So the rough math would tell you if 55% qualify for free and reduced lunch, that's 3,000. We're serving about 500 to 800 a day. So we still have a big gap to close just on the participation side and our effort really over the last 2 years is how do we increase, how do we increase the sites? How do we increase the participation? And how do we build in those learning opportunities to go along with it? So the more flexibility that we have to maybe do breakfast programs, do lunch programs, combine with summer, with evening programs, with those educational opportunities, we would welcome those opportunities.

Commissioner: Got it. Thank you, and my other question is you mentioned the families and individuals who had come off of Food Stamps because of Food Stamp cuts were going to need to be provided for by local nonprofit organizations—

Brennan: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: and others and my question to you is, is your assessment that those organizations can fill that gap or if they can't, what needs to be done?

Brennan: Well, that's the easiest and most definitive answer I can give is no that we have struggled mightily and again, there will be other people that will be here to testify with more detail. The Food Stamps, I mean, the food pantries in this city have struggled over the last 5 years with the economic recession that we've had and with unemployment being high. We've seen a, you know, a spike in the demand at soup kitchens, food pantries, and for Food Stamps and we're still not ahead of the curve. So we continue to look at ways that we can expand food pantries. You know, quite frankly, I don't like food pantries. I think it's a, not a, we live in the wealthiest country in the world and for us to be sending people to food pantries, one of the issues with food pantries, as you probably know, everybody's got different regulations. There are different standards, access, all those type of things and, you know, I hate to go back to this issue but by increasing people's wage, by increasing the income that they have, we're going to do more to provide access and to reduce hunger than increasing the number of food pantries that we have in the city of Portland. So my effort is to look at ways that we can reduce the cost of housing, reduce the cost of health care, reduce and increase people's wage because ultimately, that's the best strategy to end hunger and I got to say and again, I don't want to keep bragging all the time but the state of Maine, we ranked in the top five states in the country in signing people up for the Affordable Health Care Act and the city of Portland led the way of that, of making sure that



people had access to health care and signing up for that because we recognize that the more people that have access to health care, the healthier community that we end up having. So I think it's a strategy. I appreciate and I welcome having food pantries within the city of Portland but my long-term goal is to create the jobs, create the affordable housing and create the access to health care that people have because then I'm much, much in a better place in making sure that we're then addressing hunger issues.

Commissioner: Just a quick follow-up to the wage issue you brought up.

Brennan: Yeah.

Commissioner: Are you planning to study over time whether there actually is a correlation between the increase in the minimum wage and whether there's a reduced need for pantry usage and food and a reduction in food insecurity?

Brennan: Right, [Laughter] well, you know, you ask any elected official if they're going to study anything, you know. Sometimes we only have 2-year terms or 4-year terms, so our ability to study much of anything is not that great but thank you for bringing that up and we're sitting here at Muskie, that would be a great research project for somebody here at the Muskie School in the Public Policy Program to study and we'll follow up with that and see if there is a correlation because, again, most of the research that I've looked at, that there's a direct correlation between income and access to food and other support services.

Commissioner: Dr. Frank?

Commissioner: Yeah, I think all Mayors should have social service training. I was very impressed by your testimony. In Massachusetts one of our big issues is what we call Heat or Eat.

Brennan: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: And I didn't, partly because we heat with oil, which is cash on the barrel head. I don't, I didn't know, you mentioned housing and health care, which we find, too, what about energy costs in Maine? Is that not such a problem?

Brennan: Well, yes, I mean, we have, the percentage of people in the state of Maine that rely on oil is one of the highest in the country.

Commissioner: Oh, so like us?

Brennan: It's 70% or 80%, so energy costs are clearly an issue. In Portland, I wouldn't say it's the most dominant issue. We, and this is good and bad, 60% of people in Portland rent.



We have a zero vacancy rate in the city of Portland right now, 0% to 1% because people are moving to Portland. We just got rated the fifth best place in the country for young people to move to. So we have, and we also have thousands of people living here from Rwanda, from Somali, from Sudan, and from Burundi, as well as the Congo. So our demand for housing right now is actually a bigger problem in the city than energy costs might be but certainly, energy costs for people at fixed incomes or marginal incomes that, you know, that's clearly an issue.

Commissioner: I guess the follow-up question to that is do you know the self-sufficiency wage for Portland? I mean, you said you're going up to \$10-something and what is the self-sufficiency wage? I know you're trying. I'm not trying to knock it.

Brennan: No, no.

Commissioner: I'm just curious.

Brennan: I've spent an awful lot of time on this issue.

Commissioner: I figured.

Brennan: And issues I spend a lot of time in, I get to the weeds of trying to describe it to you. One of the things that we've looked at is economists recommend that the minimum wage, not a living wage, but a minimum wage should be 50% to 60% of the median income—

Commissioner: Uh-huh [yes].

Brennan: —I mean, median wage, median wage in Portland is about \$17, so that's why we've gotten to \$10.10 on the minimum income. We are very clear about the fact that we're talking about a minimum wage, not a living wage. There will be a referendum this fall in Portland to increase the wage to \$15 an hour and that has been primarily proposed by the Green Party within the city and they would move to \$15 an hour. There's also a Citizens Initiative that's being proposed that would move the state minimum wage to \$12 an hour over the next 4 years. I'm supportive of that effort to move to \$12 an hour because it dovetails nicely with what we're trying to do within the city of Portland. But we've looked at MIT calculators. We looked at other living wage calculators and that number for a living wage could run anywhere from \$15 to \$21 for the city of Portland. We have high housing costs within the city of Portland and it's a supply and demand issue but, you know, across the country rental housing, the demand for rental housing has gone up significantly because a lot of people went under water between 2008 and 2012 who previously owned houses. They're now in the rental market but nothing was built between 2008 and 2012. So we have a huge amount of development and construction in the city of Portland but we're



still behind the curve in terms of housing that is available to us but part of it has to do with the fact of the market but the other part is that fortunately we've become a very popular place for people to come to and live and, which is well-deserved.

Commissioner: Yeah.

Commissioner: Sounds like it. [Laughter]

Commissioner: Mayor Brennan, thank you very much. I want to especially thank you for with your remark about blueberries, reminding me of my favorite child story, which is one of the greats of all time, so that made my day and thank you very much.

Brennan: Well, hopefully, you'll, Becky's Diner has great blueberry pie and [Laughter] that you'll have an opportunity to try it but again, thank you very much. I appreciate the work that you're doing and going around the country and listening to people and all the work that you've done over the years on this issue and hopefully, we'll continue to make progress.

Commissioner: Great.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you Mayor.

Commissioner: Thank you.



**IAN YAFFE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF MANO EN MANO**

Commissioner: Our next witness is Ian Yaffe, too, and Rich Livingston. Ian Yaffe is the Executive Director of Mano en Mano and Rich Livingston is the State President of the AARP here in Maine.

Commissioner: And Ian, you'll go ahead first.

Yaffe: Yes, great.

Commissioner: Okay, so you'll both give your own testimony. We will wait, we will hold our questions until you are both finished and then we'll have a discussion with everyone.

Yaffe: Okay, that sounds great.

Commissioner: Carry on, yeah.

Yaffe: Thank you. So thank you, good morning. I want to thank you for the opportunity to be here today and to share my thoughts about hunger in Maine and the United States as it relates to immigrant and farm worker communities. My name is Ian Yaffe and I'm here representing Mano en Mano, Hand in Hand. We are a nonprofit social services and educational organization based in Washington County. Office is about 3 hours away from here, down on the coast, down east. And our mission is to build a stronger and more inclusive down east Maine by working with diverse populations to provide affordable housing and educational opportunities, remove barriers to health care and other social services and advocate for social justice. We currently serve an estimated 250 to 350 immigrants who now call the Mill Ridge, Maine area home. I don't think that it's the case anymore but back in 2000, Mill Ridge was the third most diverse town in the state of Maine by percentage behind Portland and Lewiston, but it's a fact that not that many people know. And we have over 300 migrant students and an estimated 2,000 migrant workers who are arriving in Washington County right now as we prepare for Maine's wild blueberry harvest. So Mano en Mano's primary programs include a partnership with the Maine Migrant Education Program to provide regular school year and summer services to migrant children across the county, scholarships for English language learners, drop-in resource center for immigrants to get referrals to employment, housing, and social services and a multifamily affordable housing project for farm workers in collaboration with USDA Rural Development. We're deeply committed to the social justice roots of our mission and as so, we hope that the services we provide will ultimately challenge the reasons why those services are needed in the first place. Some day we hope to work ourselves out of a job. We provide testimony today about the impacts of hunger on immigrant and farm worker



communities in Maine, as well as recommendations on how to help minimize those effects in the future. Overall, we approach those recommendations from the standpoint that hunger is not caused by a shortage of food at the national level but rather, by inefficient or ineffective delivery of resources, such as food, money, or public benefits. I previously lived in the Washington, DC area and from my experience on the Board of DC Central Kitchen as a volunteer there. I know that you can't solve hunger with food alone and that you can't address economic insecurity and hunger at the same time and that often that's really the only way that you can make a long-term impact on the root causes of hunger. So while the purpose of this testimony is to focus on hunger in Maine, believe that it's important to start by looking at the farm worker community nationally and how hunger affects them. Many of the families that we serve are highly mobile, so we don't have as much data on them because they will arrive and depart Maine in, sometimes in little as 10 days. Hunger among farm worker communities is difficult to quantify as a result but we do know that during the 2014 blueberry harvest nearly 50% of the estimated 2,000 migrant farm workers in Washington County were served by a food pantry at the Raker Center, which is a one-stop service center set up annually by the Maine Migrant Health Program and its partners. Even though Maine's wild blueberry harvest is among the highest paid cash crops in the nation, families still arrive hungry and without sufficient resources to provide for their families until they receive their first paycheck. According to a 2013 study by the University of Southern Maine's Professor of Economics, Vishali Mangain, blueberry rakers spend a considerable amount of their money on food during the Maine harvest. Their median food expenditure per month is \$500 per person, which is nearly twice as much as what they spend in their home states when they're not on the move. She cites reasons such as the, just the rural nature and how far it is to get to grocery stores and that people don't have time or access to facilities to prepare their own food and estimates that Hispanic workers alone spent an estimated \$285,000 on food in the short time that they were here in Maine, generating \$17,500 in state tax revenues. So in general, we find that farm workers and immigrants are more explicitly excluded from public benefits and protections than most other groups of people in the United States despite the critical role that both communities play in our economy and our food system. Farm workers lack significant protections offered by the National Labor Relations Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Social Security Act. Therefore, they've been, they have historically been and continue to be excluded from such protections as the minimum wage, overtime pay, and the right to organize. Many public benefits either explicitly restrict access to immigrant communities or make it more difficult for those communities to receive benefits through complicated forms, a lack of effective interpretation systems, and transportation barriers. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, for example, restricts immigrants in their first 5 years. Undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers have an even tougher time. So according to Farm Worker Justice, a national advocacy group in Washington, DC, most farm workers do not receive any public benefits. In 2011 to 2012 only 15% of farm workers nationally receive Food Stamps, 16% receive WIC, and 34% receive Medicaid. The Department of Labor's National Agricultural Workers Survey shows that from 1999 to



2010 there was an 18% increase in the number of farm workers receiving all forms of public assistance while the number of families receiving only need base assistance decreased from 15% to 12%. Finally, in the Hands that Feed Us Report the Food Chain Workers Alliance found that ironically, of all forms of public assistance, food system workers used Food Stamps at the highest rate. In particular, almost 14% of food system workers use Food Stamps, more than 150% the rate of use by all other employed frontline workers in the United States. This means that despite being actively employed, food system workers are half as able to put food on their own table as other U.S. workers. Taxpayers, thus, bear the cost of low wages and food insecurity among workers in the food system. In our opinion, food insecurity in the farm worker and immigrant communities here in Maine is closely and obviously related to economic insecurity and exists despite a clear presence of both these communities in the labor force. Rather than focus on ways to exclude farm workers and immigrants from public assistance programs in Maine, we should focus on improving their economic security so that families do not need to depend on these programs as much. Individuals should stop receiving Food Stamps because they no longer need them, not because they can't find a job. We can't ignore the immediate need that hunger presents in our communities but we also can't continue to ignore the difficulty that low-income families face while working tirelessly to improve their economic security. Improving the minimum wage, granting farm workers the right to organize and eliminating farm worker exemptions from the Fair Labor Standards Act would have powerful effects on the economic security of farm worker families and therefore, reduce food insecurity and the need for public assistance programs in the first place. So Mano en Mano plays a unique role as both a provider of school meals through our Blueberry Harvest School, which opens on Monday and as an agency that helps families apply for those benefits during the regular school year. I have to say as a food service provider for 3 weeks and we're not a school district, we're a nonprofit, we find the program to be really complicated to get started and that there's a lot more emphasis placed on some of the documentation requirements than providing healthy meals that teachers would actually serve to their own children. Due to the rural nature of our program and the fact that we only operate for 3 weeks and serve 100 kids, all of whom are eligible for the summer food program by nature of their migrant education status, the reimbursement rate currently only provides us with about one-third our total food service budget and so that represents a challenge to expanding the food service program in rural parts of the state. Mayor Brennan talked about a lot of the great things that the city of Portland is doing with their summer feeding program and in the rural parts of the state, we just lack the economy of scale and the access to distributors and vendors and the ability to achieve some of these things on our own. We also lack sufficient sites to prepare the meals, as most districts shut down in the summer and it's very difficult for nonprofits or for businesses to set up their own meal program because so much institutional knowledge has to be acquired just to be able to know how to run the program and to not get in trouble for not following the rules despite providing healthy food. So we would recommend that the reimbursement rates be looked at, particularly in the rural areas and also that more emphasis be placed on less processed and fresh foods in general,



which can typically only be paid for through higher costs. So in moving to conclude here, I'd like to continue to say that addressing economic insecurity as the underlying cause of hunger will have a far greater effect on reducing hunger among immigrant and farm worker communities in Maine than focusing on reforming existing public assistance programs alone. We believe that children and families should not go hungry in a country with as much resources as ours and that we cannot continue to all enjoy cheap food at the expense of the hardworking farm workers who then go hungry themselves because they aren't paid a living wage and can't effectively organize to change that. Organizations like the Coalition of Amakoli Workers in Florida offer us hope and demonstrate that paying as little as 1¢ more per pound of tomatoes at the grocery store can have dramatic effects on tomato pickers. So I'd like to thank you for having me here again today and I look forward to hearing your questions after Rich gives you his testimony.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.



**RICH LIVINGSTON
STATE PRESIDENT OF AARP OF MAINE**

Commissioner: Mr. Livingston?

Livingston: Thank you. Thanks for being here and thanks for the opportunity. My name is Rich Livingston. I'm the State President of AARP of Maine. We have about 230,000 members here in Maine, so we're the largest social mission membership organization in the state and nationwide, of course, we have about 38 million members and we're the largest social mission membership organization in the world. Maine is the oldest state in the nation and we also have the highest rate of very low food security among seniors in the country. We're, our seniors are disproportionately impacted by limited access to adequate nutrition. The sharpest increase in food insecurity is among older Mainers who are experiencing one of the following conditions. They may be younger than 70. They may have income just above the poverty line. They are probably living alone. They may have a disability. They may be divorced, unemployed or have grandchildren living in the home. About between 8% and 14% of Maine seniors have some degree of food insecurity but Feeding America predicts that number will increase by 50% in the next 10 years. Big numbers of older Mainers rely on Food Stamps, Commodity Food Supplement Program, Meals on Wheels and the emergency system of local food pantries. The number of Mainers using SNAP did increase by 32% in the course of the recession and Maine seniors now account for 12% of all SNAP recipients in the state but 70% of Maine seniors eligible for Food Stamps are not enrolled. So the number of possible, the need exceeds the number of people who are participating. Over 2,900 Maine seniors receive food from the Supplemental Food Program but an additional 1,200, nearly half again as many are on a waiting list. Area agencies on aging provide the Meals on Wheels Program, which delivers over 529,000 meals to over 5,000 Mainers but this spring a waiting list was started for only the second time in the program's history due to unexpected federal cuts and we narrowly averted some additional state cuts, which were rejected by the legislature. Last year, the largest food bank in the state provided 21 million pounds of food to food pantries in all 16 counties of the state. Seniors also play a critical role in the distribution of food at those local food pantries. Many or most pantries statewide are run by older volunteers and many of those volunteers are also recipients. The aging nature of the volunteer leadership of those pantries is worrisome in terms of the fragility of the system going forward. Some areas in the state are just inaccessible, either to seniors or even to Meals on Wheels. Up north in the rural most remote corners of the state in Aroostook County, there's a novel grass roots solution that's being developed there where, called the Friends of Aroostook. A generous philanthropist named Dale Flewelling has helped deliver 200,000 pounds of fresh produce directly from farms to seniors' tables. Local farmers don't eat or inexpensively lease acreage to Dale and he and a dedicated team of volunteers and staff grow and harvest fruits and vegetables to donate to local food pantries and to Meals on Wheels for farm equipment and supply companies matches their purchases dollar-for-dollar and they provide a new



greenhouse when the current structure was at capacity. The local sheriff's department and the Maine Department of Corrections provide meaningful community service for carefully screened minimum security inmates to work on the farm and AARP Maine has supported that initiative, which culminated in an award winning documentary film that has helped increase awareness of this really novel program. Today's the 50th Anniversary of Medicare and Medicaid and without those programs, we wouldn't be talking about hunger today. Many of us, including me, simply wouldn't be here, wouldn't be alive. The financial secure insecurity of older Mainers contributes to food insecurity. Our housing stock is old. It is expensive to heat. We are very dependent on oil. It's almost impossible to renovate and make more energy efficient. Health care costs are high. Lack of Medicaid expansion left Mainers who are below the poverty line and between 50 and 64 years old without health insurance options. Retirement income of older Mainers is often inadequate to meet all their financial needs, including food. We're ranked 40th in the country for average retirement savings. Fewer than half of Maine workers have an employer provided retirement savings option and those who are not saving at work have saved only about \$3,000 for their retirement. One in three main seniors relies entirely on Social Security, from an average monthly benefit of about \$1,1100. The Senior Nutrition Program is the largest of the Older Americans Act, the OAA services and we believe that better coordination of that program with other federal, state, and local programs holds great promise and merits the support of the Commission, the Administration, and Congress. Helping people grow older in their own communities with independence and dignity is a key part of AARP's mission. Too often advancing age and increased frailty threaten the ability of older people to remain healthy, nutritionally secure and independent in their own homes. The fear of having to enter a nursing home due to vulnerabilities aggravated by nutritional risks is scary to older people and their families. We're open to potential new initiatives that complement existing caregiver and service programs that expand the access to nutrition through an evolving network of home and community-based services. New nutrition initiatives often require that additional funds be provided through the OAA Appropriations Process. When we urge that no OAA nutrition or other core services be sacrificed, no existing services be sacrificed to pay for new services. This would, of course, require real commitment and creativity given federal budget constraints. We know that. Successful state delivery strategies that AARP could support might include better coordination of federal and state nutrition program funding, such as state only funded programs, USDA nutrition programs, public/private nutrition initiatives, again, with the existing network of OAA services, streamlining administrative operations, adopting nutrition assessment and eligibility management practices that allow targeting of resources to the people most in need. The Administration on Aging has improved its ability to collect participant data in recent years but there's still not adequate measures of the unmet need for services. Broadening the data collection for Title III Nutrition Programs could help demonstrate their impact on special populations. AARP continues to be concerned about the potentially harmful effect of mandatory cost sharing because we simply don't know the impact on food security and nutritionally at risk elders. So once again, we thank you for coming to Maine. We thank you



for hearing from us. We do represent the oldest population in the country and we are getting older. Our access to nutrition is complicated not just by income challenges but by logistical challenges. We see, many of our seniors simply don't have access to adequate nutrition and we're trying, along with Dale Flewelling's program and others trying to find novel ways to address that but it's not easy and given the remote nature of the state and the community it's challenging and we appreciate your interest and support. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you. Question, Rus?

Commissioner: Yes, thank you both of you, very enlightening, I appreciate it. I have a question for you, Mr. Livingston. One thing we heard elsewhere that I thought was rather novel is the notion that Meals on Wheels could become, and I know Dr. Frank is interested in this, too, that Meals on Wheels could become a prescribed service under Medicare. What would you think of something like that for people who have not reached age 65 or 60?

Livingston: Well, Medicare is only available beginning at age 65. Do you mean Medicare or Medicaid?

Commissioner: Well, we were talking about Medicare, actually.

Livingston: So this would apply to people over the age of 65?

Commissioner: It would be apply, it would be a change to Medicare that it would apply to people under the age of 65, over the age of 50.

Commissioner: Well, I think my thought would be that given the stress on readmission prevention, that if Medicare was required to fund Meals on Wheels at least for people on Medicare that would be very helpful. Conversely, we heard testimony from people who were disabled but not yet 65—

Livingston: Oh, okay.

Commissioner: —and there it would have to be a physician prescription thing on Medicaid but I don't know if anyone has done the estimate but it seems to me that, you know, food is the cheapest medicine.

Livingston: Sure.



Commissioner: And we have what we call in Massachusetts the Hit the Floor Syndrome, where an elderly person living alone, nobody notices until they hit the floor and the people downstairs hear it that—

Livingston: Right, so AARP generally is in favor of expanding Medicare services and provisions in all sorts of ways and I respect the distinction between Medicaid and Medicare. We've got other Medicaid issues here in the state where we were unable to expand access to Medicaid and so we've got additional challenges in terms of health care, anyway. So but we also believe in preserving as much state flexibility and independence as we can build into the system because not all states have the same kinds of needs or the same kind of utilization patterns and even within the state, you heard Mayor Brennan talk about the fact that Portland is full and housing is expensive here and heating costs are a challenge. Elsewhere in the state of Maine the conditions are very different, so flexibility is an important consideration.

Commissioner: Mr. Yaffe, I wanted to ask about the migrant workers and farm workers.

Yaffe: Sure.

Commissioner: Do you, have you ever studied or do you know the percent of workers who return to Maine for the blueberry harvest from one year to the next?

Yaffe: I don't have the particular number but it's very high. Maine's wild blueberry harvest is actually, there are a number of different groups that are involved. There are folks coming up from Florida on the eastern stream and I think that's where you tend to see the most turnover but even among those crews from Florida, this is the highest paid crop on the East Coast. So it's pretty valuable to get in. Additionally, there are Native Americans and First Nation folks from the eastern part of Maine and Canada who are coming down as almost part of a cultural rite of passage and so there's a tremendous number of repeat visitors. At our school we'll have kids, for example, at least half of our kids at the summer school we will have seen the year before.

Commissioner: So very high numbers of returnees?

Yaffe: Yeah.

Commissioner: And when you say that, there's been a lot of talk about the compensation. What is it on a weekly basis or can you give us a sense of what the compensation is for the average worker?

Yaffe: Yes, it's quite, quite good when you, all things considered. The Professor Maignan and her economic impact study found that the median daily wage was \$158 per day, so if you do some simple math, you're looking at several thousand dollars per month. The caveat is that for some people the harvest is as short as 10 days and they will spend as much as \$4,000 to get here.

Commissioner: But if the, I notice you mentioned something about the timing between the first paycheck and, but if you are earning that kind of compensation for work and you want to save it and preserve it, you might look for other resources to add to your household or reduce your budget, your need for, to purchase food. You do this work. You work really hard.

Yaffe: Right.

Commissioner: You don't want to, you want to save.

Yaffe: Yeah, most families are here. This is an investment and this, you know, this 4 weeks of income carries them.

Commissioner: It is a big deal.

Yaffe: It could be as much of one-third or one-half of their total annual income.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Yaffe: Thank you.

Commissioner: Mr. Yaffe, you said something that I was trying to decode.

Yaffe: Sure.

Commissioner: You said that the food purchases of your migrants generated X-amount in tax income. Is this like because they bought at Burger King or because, or is food taxed in Maine?

Yaffe: It's, no, it's processed, prepared foods, so either from fast food—

Commissioner: Fast food?

Yaffe: Yeah.

Commissioner: Okay.



Commissioner: Mr. Livingston, 70% of Maine’s seniors who are eligible for SNAP but are not enrolled, is the solution to that public policy issue? Is it a private issue? Is it some combination or what should we think about that?

Livingston: I think likely a combination. We did have an initiative that we were, we had a Vista volunteer on our staff for 2 years, who discovered that some of it is lack of knowledge, lack of information and some of it is, a big chunk of it in Maine is resistance on the part of old Yankees who just don’t want to ask for help even when they need it desperately. So part of the education process has to be an effort to explain to people that it’s not a sin. It’s not, you have, through a lifetime of contribution, you have earned the right to get a handout and a hand-up when you need it.

Commissioner: So more of that issue than barriers that are hard for them to overcome? I mean, that’s a significant barrier in itself.

Livingston: Well, there’s logistical barriers, also, just because of the lack of transportation, the lack of reliable communication even in some parts of the state. The rural character, unlike what the Mayor was talking about earlier, the rural character of Maine is rural and remote is really significant in terms of impacting people’s ability to access programs.

Commissioner: What’s the source of that 70% figure?

Livingston: AARP Policy Walks in Washington.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you both very much.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you.



**JUSTIN ALFOND
STATE SENATOR, THE 8TH DISTRICT**

Commissioner: The next people providing testimony are Justin Alfond, State Senator from the 8th District and Deborah Sanderson, the State Representative from the 88th District. Thank you so much for being here, welcome. You'll both go back-to-back and then we'll open it up for a dialogue and questions and so Mr. Alfond, you'll go first but please, both sit together. Morning, how are you Justin?

Alfond: Good.

Commissioner: Go ahead Mr. Alfond.

Alfond: Dr. Chilton, Mr. Doar, members of the National Commission on Hunger, good morning. We're here today discussing something that has become an epidemic in America and Maine is no exception, hunger, particularly, childhood hunger. What is unusual about this epidemic compared to other sweeping issues facing us is that it's not easily seen. Who among us can point to a quote hungry child unquote? I think about when I was growing up in Dexter, Maine. It was 1984. I was 9 years old and I had a friend in my class named Tom. Back then everyone knew Tom as that kid. He was that kid who got called down to the principal's office. He was that kid who stayed in during recess. He was also that kid who missed a lot of school. Later, what I realized as an adult is that Tom was that kid whose family, although they worked hard, didn't have enough money to make sure Tom got enough food. He was hungry. I tell this story a lot about childhood hunger because not only does it show that hunger is all around us, it underscores how easy it can be to miss the signs. Childhood hunger is one of the most hidden challenges facing our state. Maine ranks second in New England and eighteenth in the nation in terms of food insecurity. Maine has the fifth highest rate of very low food insecurity in the nation. In Maine, and you're going to hear this number a lot today, 86,473 children are food insecure. That's nearly 50% of all school-aged children in Maine who are hungry. And what often shocks Mainers is that no matter where you live, no matter how wealthy or poor your community is, there are children in your town who are food insecure. They are hungry. As the former Chair of the State's Education Committee, one thing I learned is the strong corollary between underperforming students in schools and schools with high percentages of students eligible for free and reduced lunch. Hunger is a roadblock to learning and success and it makes sense. Think about it. If we skip breakfast, if we went an entire workday not eating enough, would you be at your best? Do you think you could be at your best? We know that children who live in poverty are much more likely to be food insecure. 46,645 children in Maine live in poverty, nearly 1 in 5. We know that children who are food insecure cannot reach their full potential and this can have a devastating impact to last a lifetime. Hunger makes a student's journey through life and school incredibly challenging. These children oftentimes underperform in school, are less likely to graduate from high school, or go on to further



their education. Lower educational attainment means lower annual incomes and increasingly, the likelihood that they'll stay in poverty. By not feeding hungry children now, we make it more likely they will end up in poverty later in life. With all of these challenges, it's surprising to me there exists a broad lack of awareness to the hunger crisis facing our state. In 2011, I introduced my first bill around childhood food insecurity. This bill addressed the low enrollment rates for eligible schools in the summer meals program. We know that hunger does not end when school lets out. Summertime, vacations, and even snow days create huge problems for children who are hungry. Access to food diminishes and often times they remain hungry. In Maine our summer food program only touches 18% of the children who eat during the school year. My bill addressed the low participation rate by asking the elected adults in any community where over 50% of the students were eligible for free and reduced lunch to have a public conversation about establishing a summer food program. This legislation has led to more summer food programs in Maine. Hunger allies and I continued working on particular issues regarding food insecurity but came to realize that our one-bill approach was not addressing all the challenges and opportunities around childhood food insecurity. After some research, we realized that the state of Maine had no plan to address Maine's childhood food insecurity. To remedy this, we created the Task Force to End Student Hunger. The Task Force to End Student Hunger spent 7 months looking at food insecurity from every angle. The findings and more importantly, the creation of a 5-year action plan to end student hunger is the roadmap our state lacked. Instead of going through our recommendations, I have copies for each of you. However, I will spend a quick second sharing the most perplexing finding of the Task Force to End Student Hunger. Maine is leaving \$50 million of federal funding on the table each year. That's money that could be used to feed hungry children. On the good news front, we learned that, fortunately, there are many people in organizations outside of government that have stepped up to fill this gap and are doing superb work. The Maine Credit Union League has run a program for 25 years dedicated to ending hunger in Maine. In 2014, 58 credit unions and 8 chapters raised \$552,000 for ending hunger. These funds go toward local food programs, as well as hunger initiatives that have a statewide impact, including a \$75,000, 3-year contribution to expand the backpack program and pantry programs with Good Shepherd Food Bank. In 2014, Hannaford Brothers Grocery Stores donated 14.6 million pounds of food to food relief partners across the northeast, including 9.7 million pounds in Maine. Hannaford has also been working with regional food banks and pantries to further improve systems for recovering harder to handle fresh items, making sure that there can be regular pickups and assuring they have the protocol and equipment to handle that food safely. Over the past 10 years, John Woods, a Maine resident, has volunteered his time working to end child hunger with Share Our Strength's No Kid Hungry campaign. During that time, John built a strong network of chefs, businesses, civic groups, nonprofits and politicians to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for hunger each year. So what's the problem then? We have interest across the state. We grow a lot of food here in the state of Maine. We have churches, nonprofits, and businesses all working on food insecurity issues, strong advocates, and seemingly it's a noncontroversial and nonpartisan issue. So



why haven't Maine, we, solved the problem that at face value seems doable? First, there's a real lack of coordination between the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. For example, today even after the Task Force, we still have no idea how many child care centers offer food programs, who gets served, and who we're missing. State government is making improvements but we must work better at connecting the dots between government programs, supporting education, and eliminating poverty. Second, there's a lack of leadership and political will in state government. Some in the legislature on both sides of the aisle are leading on food issues but there are nowhere near enough lawmakers rallying for the cause. Sadly, it is far too easy for some politicians to talk a good game when it comes to feeding children but still vote against those interests at every turn. And perhaps most insidiously is this administration's coordinated effort of shaming the poor, embarrassing and stigmatizing the very people who are trying to get back on their feet. There seems to be a belief from this administration that public shame is the missing motivator of moving people out of poverty to self-sufficiency. So what are we doing right? In addition to the Task Force and its spinoff, Full Plates, Full Potential, we have great things happening in our communities. In Skowhegan, Laura Pineo, the Food Director of Skowhegan's schools has led her district in implementing community eligibility provision. After implementing CEP, participation in the school lunch increased from 59% in 2013 to 81% in 2014, while participation in the school breakfast increased by 27%. She is feeding hundreds of more, of children each day without increasing her staff size. In York County several food and poverty advocates, including the United Way of York County, Yore County Community Action, and Healthy Maine Partnerships have created a group called Partners for a Hunger Free York County. Their priorities are to increase access to healthy foods and improve education on integrating these foods into every day diets and they have done incredible work. In 2012 York County saw 49,000 summer meals served to students in need. Through concentrated work and collaboration Hunger Free York County was able to increase that amount to over 70,000 summer meals served in 2014, a 45% increase in just 2 years. Finally, here in Portland a single mom and a top-notch waitress heard from her daughter that many of her classmates did not have snacks at the East End School. So she created the Locker Project, the first of its kind in the district. The Locker Project's signature program is a snack pantry where students, teachers, and even parents visit to get food. Last year the snack pantry regularly fed more than a dozen new kindergarten students who were living in a difficult home situations and coming to school hungry every day with no prospect of having enough food at home in the evening. They happily selected snacks every morning and went home with a bag of snacks at the end of every day. These are just a few examples of communities recognizing the problem of childhood hunger and coming together to solve it. But this is just not a problem for schools and it's just not a family problem. This is a community problem. It's our problem. We have a responsibility to help those in need among us and it will take each of us working together and in partnership with the state of Maine and the federal government to ensure that no child goes hungry in Maine. Thank you very much.



Commissioner: Thank you.



**DEBORAH SANDERSON
STATE REPRESENTATIVE, 88TH DISTRICT**

Commissioner: Ms. Sanderson?

Sanderson: Thank you. Members of the Commission, good morning and thank you for the invitation to participate in this public hearing and share my thoughts and concerns regarding SNAP and how it relates to food insecurity. My name is Deb Sanderson. I'm currently serving my third term in the Maine legislature. I've been a member of the Health and Human Services Committee for 5 years, the last 3 serving as the ranking minority member. The state of Maine has been proactive in helping SNAP recipients access healthy foods. You've heard much of it from my colleague, Senator Alfond, here. We accept SNAP benefits at farmer markets. We have a year-round lunch program in many of our schools and the backpack program, designed to reach low-income students over the weekends. There's no question, no question there are adults and children in poverty who are hungry and programs to help our vital services deserving of support. However, without checks and balances of accountability and efficiencies, assurances that guidelines are being followed and tools offered to help individuals pull themselves up and out of poverty, a vicious cycle of generational poverty and dependence can and has occurred in Maine. So what has Maine been doing? We've offered some tools. In order to combat poverty in Maine, the Department of Health and Human Services has partnered with the Department of Labor and the Department of Education to take a unified approach to assessing and determining work readiness of individuals seeking welfare assistance benefits. This program has been highly successful in transitioning individuals directly into the workforce or if necessary, if the assessment shows a disparity in readiness, providing pathways into necessary education and/or training. It would be my recommendation that this Commission take a careful look at the three-pronged unified approach our state has implemented and perhaps create a model or suggest a model be created for others to follow. The best way out of poverty is a job, not more handouts. Guidelines are now being followed. Last year Maine declined to renew our federal waiver allowing ABAWDs, the able-bodied adults without dependents, to continue receiving benefits without compliance with federal work requirements. ABAWDs were required to work 20 hours per week, volunteer 24 hours per month, or receive job and vocational training. The Department offered, when these guidelines changed, a 3-month window for individuals to become compliant with the guidelines. Maine's SNAP participation enrollment for ABAWDs was reduced by approximately 80%. Experience in the last 5 years has shown that any attempts to reform or create greater accountability with Maine's public welfare system has met with strong resistance and an instant initiative to reinstate as before is always brought forth. The SNAP waiver for ABAWDs was no different. In this past session one of my Democratic lawmaker colleagues attempted to legislatively roll back the guidelines for what we refer to as our rim counties, our more eastern and northern counties, where an elevated job, a rate of joblessness and poverty compared to more they have an elevated rate of joblessness and

poverty compared to more urban areas. What I found interesting in that is that in spite of the economic challenges, the eastern rim counties of Maine had some of the highest rates of compliance with the federal work requirements. That tells me there is initiative out there on the part of individuals who actually need these benefits. They are looking to find their way out of poverty and off public assistance. While one would assume the Commission's focus is on hunger from lack of sustenance as a whole, I would suggest that the scope needs to include nutritional hunger and the lack of nutritious foods in one's diet. Obesity and diabetes in juveniles is on the rise and while diet alone cannot attribute to one being a diabetic, we all know well it certainly plays a significant role in the health and well-being of someone who is. Individuals both juvenile and adult who utilize SNAP benefits suffer from a higher rate of obesity than income-eligible nonparticipants. The USDA's Diet Quality of Americans by SNAP Participation Status data from the National Health and Nutritional Examination Survey of 2010 and 2007 to 2010 summary indicates and I quote, "SNAP participants were more likely than income-eligible and higher income nonparticipants to be obese, 40% versus 32% and 30% respectively." It also states that young children who received WIC and NSLP benefits had higher eating index 2005 scores, suggesting perhaps that participation in both programs provide added dietary benefit. While the document contained on the USDA SNAP Web site contains 10 pages of excuses why restricting SNAP benefits would be a burden, clearly the summary referenced above mentions that restrictive programs as WIC enhanced healthy eating through limited choice. This does not suggest that SNAP benefits should be subject to the same narrow restrictions, however, the word "nutritional" needs and must start to become a major player in our food assistance programs. SNAP Ed dollars, of which Maine receives approximately \$5 million a year, intended to educate SNAP participants about healthy choices and how to shop on a budget only go so far. Human behavior has provided evidence to the contrary, that healthy responsible choices are being made. The pictures below and that is by both consumers and retail stores, the pictures below are ones that I personally took at my local pharmacy, a well-known national chain, and these were taken on October 2011. As you can see, the signs spaced every 3 feet are down a bulk candy aisle, advertising that we purchase, that they accept SNAP benefits. This is a highly inappropriate message to be sending. In light of the increasing rates of obesity and the rising costs of health care associated with it, not only is it shocking that a national chain of this caliber would advertise the use of taxpayer-funded supplemental nutritional, emphasis added, assistance program benefit dollars on the purchases of bulk candy but that it's even allowable under federal standards. An individual who worked at the store also shared at the time while I was there taking these pictures, after the holidays are over and bulk candy goes on sale for half-price. It is not uncommon to have participants come in and quote fill the cart and pay with Food Stamps. The SNAP Program may be better served via block grant model, leaving the states to implement nutritional standards and controls if the federal government finds it too burdensome to ensure quality and efficiency in the program. I understand the grocery and food producer lobbies are often an obstacle in getting legislation passed to prohibit junk food purchases with SNAP and this is a hurdle this Commission should call attention to in



its public report back to Congress. Regardless of whether benefits are supported by funding at the federal or state level, hard choices are being made as resources become more difficult to stretch across areas of significant need. Maine is an aging state. We've heard that this morning and many of our seniors living under or near the poverty level line and many utilize several programs. LHEAP for fuel assistance, DEL and MSP for health care and medications, along with Medicare, Medicaid, home visiting services, Meals on Wheels and of course, SNAP benefits. Each biennium states struggle to balance budgets and resources and for state and community-funded assistance programs, they're have a hard time keeping up with the levels of need. In several cases, we aren't. The federal government trillions of dollars in debt is not immune. All of our public welfare programs, not just ones addressing food security, must have measures of accountability and proven efficacy to ensure that limited resources we have are being spent appropriately and as intended. While my testimony so far has discussed that the need for nutritional controls and inappropriate use of SNAP, these actions are not illegal. Unfortunately, the abuse of taxpayer-funded public welfare benefits doesn't stop there. In Maine we've seen a troubling trend in the number of EBT cards loaded with SNAP benefits and other benefits being trafficked for drugs or traded for cash, \$0.50 on \$1. It is also not uncommon for someone to purchase food for a nonqualified friend or family member and being reimbursed in cash. This is indeed illegal. To combat the illegal activities Maine has begun putting photos on EBT cards on a voluntary basis. While not a panacea to stop all illegal activity and inappropriate use, it does provide a tool toward greater accountability. The Federal Nutrition Service pushback against Maine doing this measure, however, the Maine DHHS continued on this initiative. I question why the federal government would actively engage in efforts to make it difficult for Maine and other states seeking to bring greater accountability to federally funded programs in an effort to save resources and reduce the cost of programming. Not only could it reduce the cost of programming, it could also provide for the broadening of programs, which could effectively address the topic we're here to discuss, hunger. Every dollar being used inappropriately or illegally is a dollar that didn't go toward feeding a hungry child or a hungry senior. In your report back to Congress I respectfully ask this Commission to consider a strong recommendation that federal government adopt a partnership policy, rather than the top-down policy in place now. Under such partnerships each state department in charge of administering SNAP and other programs, which receive federal funding, could achieve the benefit of greater accountability as well as more fluidity to best meet the needs of their vulnerable citizens while implementing measures to protect scarce resources. Without these measures we cannot ensure resources are reaching the intended recipient and being used for the intended purpose, to support nutritional needs for someone in poverty. I'd like to go back really quickly and address these photos for Walgreens.

Unidentified: Just so you know, your time is up.

Sanderson: Oh, okay, perhaps, that'll be questioned.



Commissioner: They speak for themselves.

Unidentified: I'm sorry.

Sanderson: Yeah.

Commissioner: Thank you both. Questions?

Commissioner: I don't know if you're aware, Representative, sorry, I should've raised my hand.

Unidentified: That's all right. I was about to say, "Dr. Frank."

Commissioner: Yeah, that Commissioner Sykes and Tom Foley have suggested that—

Unidentified: Farley.

Commissioner: —Farley, his name was? Okay, sorry.

Unidentified: That's okay.

Commissioner: Senior moment.

Unidentified: Excuse me.

Commissioner: Who was the Commissioner of New York have suggested an alternate model that would reduce the risk of obesity for everybody, as you just pointed out, it's not just SNAP recipients and we can get into the ice cream and gun problem we talked about before or murder problem but we can, let's stick on that, suggested that stores that take SNAP be restricted in the amount of space they can give to soda and required to increase the amount they give to fresh fruits and vegetables or healthful food. This would get around the shaming the poor problem that Senator Alford brought out so beautifully and benefit all of public health. What are your thoughts about that approach? Also, what is your evidence that photo IDs decrease misuse of SNAP? I, in Massachusetts it was very, cost \$1 million and I'm not sure it did anything but.

Sanderson: I have read that report that you mentioned regarding the shelf space for particular products. I did a lot of research after being invited to speak before you today and a lot of reading to understand many different points of view. Regardless of how much shelf space is attributed to any given product, I think what we need to worry about is the



nutritional substance. Reducing shelf space is not going to stop the purchase of these products on taxpayers' public benefits, okay.

Commissioner: Well, as you point out, they're heavily advertised.

Sanderson: Yes, they are but reducing the shelf space is not going to prohibit it and so reducing shelf space, I'm not sure is the answer to that. Whether or not putting photos on the cards has a huge impact or not, it's at least a tool, a potential tool that we can use in help identifying individuals who may not be using these cards appropriately. One of the conversations I had with a Bangor police officer and in full disclosure he is my son, David Farrah. [Laughter] Okay.

Commissioner: Fair enough.

Sanderson: Yes, he called me and just to share a story one day because he knows that we discuss these issues quite often at length within the Maine state legislature and there was a gentleman that they had brought into custody. He was in possession of two SNAP benefit cards, Maine EBT benefit cards. One was his. Another was not his. When asked why did he have this other gentleman's card, he was told that, "Oh, I'm just picking up some groceries for him," which, of course, as you well know under the program, you do, you can assign somebody else to do this for you. Unfortunately, the gentleman whose card he had, had been incarcerated 3 months before and these are some of the issues that we deal with under these cards. Maybe the photo wouldn't have answered that question—

Commissioner: Okay.

Sanderson: —but there needs to be stronger measures of accountability and efficiency in these programs.

Commissioner: So we're going to go to Billy and then Rus.

Commissioner: Okay, just two questions, one, one of the things our Co-chair, Robert Doar, is always pushing us on is to figure out the balance between anecdotes and data and so your, of course, stories are very compelling and advocates on both sides tend to have compelling stories. Is there any sense you can give us, because one of the things we're trying to tease out is how prevalent are these issues, how prevalent are the purchases of candy with SNAP cards? How prevalent is the trafficking of EBT cards? Do you have sense of that that we can take back with us?

Sanderson: I believe if you, we can provide you with information on how many cards have been involved in, have been seized in the possession of individuals who have been arrested for drug trafficking and dealing. A lot of the information is anecdotal. However, if you stay,



if you stand at a convenience store checkout for any length of time, you'll see personally that it's not as, it is quite prevalent. It is quite prevalent and I—

Commissioner: Well, if we can get the data that you suggested, even on the EBT cards that would be helpful.

Sanderson: We will make sure that we can send forward that to the Commission and I will get that information from the Department for you.

Commissioner: Thank you, and then Senator Alfond, you made a very provocative statement, I thought, about the administration shaming and stigmatizing those who are poor and one of the things I'm wondering if you could address is as we think about things that most of us would agree need to be done in terms of making programs more accountable, making sure that able-bodied are taking advantage of employment opportunities, how do we do that in a way that the children who are the most vulnerable and the least responsible for the situation they're in don't suffer?

Alfond: Sure, and it doesn't lend itself to a black and white answer or a nice tagline, which this administration seems to love to just do, you know, the headlines. What you need to do is have a holistic view of what we're doing around poverty, around education, around ensuring that we have social net programs that do provide for people that are accountable. There's no one in the main legislature that doesn't want accountability but throwing people off programs is not accountability. Renewing programs with the federal government that have \$0 to the cost to the state and not allowing more SNAP benefits to our rural communities, that is not more accountability. That's just ideology and misguided and terribly devastating to young children, so I mean, I would be glad to work with this administration and my colleagues across the aisle. When we talk about real accountability, it's providing programs to get people out of poverty, not throwing people off of programs.

Commissioner: Rus?

Commissioner: First, I have a question for each of you. Thank you, but I want to clarify something my dear colleague Dr. Frank said, the piece that I wrote with Tom Farley about shelf space was not meant to be a substitute for changes in the SNAP allowable food package. It was meant to be a companion piece. I'm wholly supportive of at least dealing with sugar-sweetened beverages. Mr. Alfond, a question for you. You reference in your statement that the state of Maine is leaving 50-some significant amount of money on the table in federal dollars, can you tell me what's the basis for that?

Alfond: So in the report I gave you and during the 7 months that we looked at the four USDA programs, we looked at the participation rates and right now breakfast is at 40%



across the state of Maine. You take that 100% minus 40% you look at the average daily loss for the state that gives you a number. You go to lunch, where it's 61%, take that, again, difference. Go to summer foods, we're at 18%, and then sadly, and this is where I was kind of referencing a little bit about the departments needing to work smarter together and more effective is that child and adult care food programs, we don't even have a number, a percent, because we have no data to support how well our programs are doing, where our programs are, how many children are being fed and I just find that to be hard to accept this day and age.

Commissioner: So it's not a SNAP figure? Its child nutrition dollars? Thank you, I appreciate that.

Alfond: All four USDA programs.

Commissioner: Because Maine has a very high participation rate in SNAP and so I was curious about that. Thank you. I would like to ask both of you to comment on this. On the ABAWD issue of the work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, it seems to me, from everything we've heard from you and from Mary Mayhew earlier that there was a fairly large window provided to people educationally and otherwise of 3 months to sign up and it was fairly clear to all those people, I believe, that by not doing so when slots were available the alternative was the loss of their benefits. Why do you think 80% of people took no advantage of that and rather chose to lose their benefits? Do you think they had other income? What do you think the issue is?

Alfond: Go ahead, Deb, you seem to—

Sanderson: I'd be happy to.

Alfond: Yeah.

Sanderson: Some people had other income. We do have individuals who work under the table in our state and especially if they are in seasonal industries, per se. Others it's hard to tell why. Maybe they, it's hard to tell why they didn't do that but certainly, requiring someone to either, I mean, even if you couldn't find a job for 20 hours a week, a volunteer for 24 hours a month, or participate in a job training program, you know, that certainly is much easier to accomplish in our more urban areas and that's why, you know, when we wanted to try and it was proposed to try and roll back these new guidelines in the rim counties, where those kind of programs would be less prevalent, you would think. I found it interesting that we actually had the higher rate of compliance versus in our more urban areas.



Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Mariana?

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimonies. Representative Sanderson, I was wondering if you could, I was very delighted to talk, to hear you talk about accountability, something that I feel very strongly about. I would like you to define for us what you mean by that, accountability for whom and by whom and could you talk about state accountability for reducing what we were, we're very interested in as a Commission is where's the accountability to reduce very low food security? Can you talk about the accountability for the state of Maine to reduce its very high food insecurity, very low food security rate? And how you might be able to look at that in terms of SNAP?

Sanderson: Well, I—

Commissioner: And then I have a question for Senator Alford.

Sanderson: You're very right and as Senator Alford stated, we have a tremendous, I mean, he went through a myriad of different initiatives as well as so did the gentleman, Mr. Livingston, from AARP, of food programs that have been initiated and are being done either on a state, local, or benefactory basis here across our state. When I talk about accountability for the state and the federal government, I think we are charge of the taxpayer funds, which are supporting these benefits to help individuals who are truly in need and truly vulnerable. No one wants to see a child go hungry or a senior go hungry or anybody for that matter but if we do not have measures and guidelines in these programs to make sure, make sure that these benefits are used appropriately, that they're not trafficked for drugs, that they're not sold for \$0.50 on \$1, that they're not used to purchase a myriad of non-nutritious foods which helps contribute to the high cost of health care in our country. Then we're failing the individuals who actually do access and any savings that we achieve, I think it's the responsibility of both the federal government and the state government to then take those programs, take those saved resources and invest in programs that we know have an efficacy. The Meals on Wheels Program, this is food directly delivered to seniors, food. There's no opportunity for misuse and we're doing what we should be doing by supporting our seniors in their home, keeping them as healthy as possible, so they can remain home as long as possible and not have to utilize our institutions across the state at a much higher level of cost. Its money well spent but if it's not money that we have available to us because it's being used inappropriately in other areas then you're fighting a losing battle.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Sanderson: You're welcome.



Commissioner: And Senator Alford, I'd like to follow up again on Commissioner Shore's question about this very strong statement about the administration's coordinated effort at shaming the poor. What do you mean by a coordinated effort and what is the shaming that's occurring in Maine?

Alford: Well, you would just have to go to either the Governor's Web site or Commissioner Mayhew's Web site to just see the press releases that daily attack poor people and it's coordinated to the point where all of a sudden facts don't matter. Anecdotes take the day and every time we try to get to the core facts, they aren't there. I mean, we spent an enormous amount of time, in fact, a lot of money, \$1 million bringing in this consultant. This consultant—

Commissioner: Gary Alexander from Pennsylvania. Yes, I'm familiar.

Alford: —exactly, yes, yeah, Mr. Alexander, right. So if we want to talk about taxpayer money being used appropriately, I think what we found with Mr. Alexander's report is that we found, you know, plagiarism, facts that weren't supported, things that were taken from other pieces of reports but more importantly, the, where, what Deb and the administration and Mary all want to do is they want to point to fraud and—

Commissioner: The light's going off.

Alford: Yes, yeah.

Commissioner: —means absolutely not. [Laughter]

Unidentified: We're done. [Laughter]

Alford: No, I'm just getting started, Deb. Don't worry. Don't worry. So I just but this idea of fraud. No one in the state of Maine will tolerate fraud, zero tolerance for fraud. That being said, the fraud that the Administration and Commissioner Mayhew and some of my colleagues across the aisle bring to our attention, you know, yes, there are some. There's no doubt about it but we're not talking about, you know, 80%, 90%. We're talking, you know, what one stat showed us was 000% of fraud in the state on a program and they make hay out of this and it's unfortunate and it's, and really what it does is it, you know, where Deb and I think can agree is those people who mostly, who need it the most, seniors, children, people who are working hard who need support, you know, they're the ones that I think are now being afraid to go forward.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thanks very much for your testimonies.



Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: We're going to take a break and be back at—

Commissioner: At 11:15.

Commissioner: —11:15.

Commissioner: Thanks very much.

Sanderson: Justin, you know those numbers were from before we actually started looking at it.

Alfond: Oh, geez, Deb, come on.

[Off-topic conversation.]



DEE CLARK

Commissioner: Okay, we're going to come back into session. Our next witness and our first witness for the second part of our testimony this morning is Ms. dee Clarke. Is dee Clarke here? There she is. That's her. Welcome.

Commissioner: Welcome, have a seat.

Commissioner: Have a seat and, oh, and I'm sorry, and we also have Kristin—

Miale: Miale [phonetic].

Commissioner: Maley, Kristin Miale, welcome, and have a seat.

Commissioner: So Ms. Clarke, we'll start with you. We'll hear both testimonies first and then we'll break into question and answer, okay.

Clark: Well, good afternoon and thank you Commissioners that I have an opportunity to share my experience of being in poverty and using EBT cards but first of all, so I'm dee Clarke. I must say I don't care for the term "food insecurity." It's really about chronic poverty, rather you are a working poor person without children or working poor person with children or a person without a job. It's all about poverty. So really addressing poverty is what needs to be talked about. My experience with poverty is from childhood 'til today, that whole generational thing. As a child, I remember food lines and blocks of cheese and canned chicken. As an adult, I've been in the shelter with my children. I have raised three children successfully. I've had jobs, all sorts, and for the past 15 years, I've pretty much maintained a part-time job always but I've also had full-time jobs with office, clerical, theater, data entry, temp jobs, consultant jobs. I also have not worked, rather I was home with the children or due to mental health. Sometimes I had federal Food Stamps assistance and sometimes it was only my paycheck. I presently have an EBT card without my picture on it. When my children were younger, we had times when we were living on Monjo [phonetic] Hill that we would walk down to the church and eat at their soup kitchen. Though, it was gentle and quaint atmosphere, the ladies were always nice to us and sat us with older people. I remember my daughter laughing at the big spoons and my son looking at people's ears but in the meantime I wanted to make the best of it because I felt shamed. How I found the soup kitchen was because at that time we had no food. During that time I was miserable and scared. My worse memory was when we shared a potato and a piece of meat, a pork chop between three. So I was feeling desperate and I told my daughter's school and they told me about the soup kitchen and then through that, I eventually, still with no food, depending on the soup kitchen. Still with, then with that I learned about Portland's general assistance and that was a lifesaver, a real to goodness lifesaver. I was granted these little paper Food Stamp monies and it was exactly what I needed. I could go

to the grocery store and fill my fridge and cook meals and eat them at home and feel like I was doing right by my children. Growing up in extreme poverty and wishing to not do the same with my children was too bad because they did grow up in chronic poverty. I was an active mom, libraries, playgrounds, school plays. Everywhere I went, library, school plays, the doctor's office, I saw this poster back then. It was five a day and it was about fruits and vegetables. Everything my pediatric said was the right healthy way to raise my children, I did. I strived to feed their brains and their little bodies because maybe if their brains were fed well and their bellies were fed well and I pushed and coached and cheered them on to college, they would have careers and not end up like me in chronic poverty. They saw me suffer in the indignities of having to be poor and having to beg for food. I believe that I learned about nutrition and the importance of filling my children's belly from them. It was hard and degrading begging and it's like failing then when I couldn't fill them. Energy into collecting data and building infrastructure to distribute food boxes and run soup kitchens, creating ways to get kids to want to come eat some of the meals in the parks and close by, that's a lot of work. It's a lot of planning. It's a lot of organizing and its great intelligence. Yet, doing so does not assist anyone out of poverty and/or increase their accessibility to be part of mainstream community. It keeps us in line waiting for the box. It takes the focus off the real issue, poverty. All that energy and intelligence could be part, put into organizing people accessing food or food via cash or EBT. Though all good intentions of creating food programs are about helping people access nutritional food, it takes the focus off of poverty. So as a mother who raised children and during those times often did not have an appropriate amount of food to put on the table for my children but dang gone it, I did try really hard. I worked hard to do that and those good intentions of food boxes and soup kitchens still need it but if people had access to going to the grocery store themselves, those lines would dwindle. Also, when I hear about summer meals programs, for me, personally, it's insulting and hurtful. It's saying, "Your kids are hungry. Mothers, send them over here and we'll feed them." I believe that if someone really, really wants to help raise a good community, a healthy inclusive community with healthy children, when those children's moms don't have access to enough money to purchase food, then put the energy into helping that mother access the money or EBT card so that moms, like me, can go to the grocery store and pick out their food and feed their children at their own table, not teach them how to depend on meals outside of the home. Again, I'm not talking about hunger. We're talking about chronic poverty. Let's look at that child living in poverty. Being invited to go outside of their home, away from their table to eat a meal. It's almost prepping them, learning to depend on meals away from the home. Many children living in chronic poverty will grow up and continue to live in poverty. Many of the teens presently who grew up in poverty will not have careers in a job that pays at least a livable wage and will continue to live in poverty as adults, continue generational poverty. And having grown up, sorry, and having grown up these children and teens with the language of food insecurity while living at home with a family who depended on food boxes and may have sent kids to a table away from their home at a summer program, now have been conditioned that the situation isn't about poverty, how to increase income. The situation is to get a food box. These teens

whose mom had to go to the food pantry and so now they will, too, after all they have been conditioned to do that, this is what we're doing about hunger, taking the focus off of poverty. All three of my children were in afterschool program that I bartered for them to be able to participate, karate, dancing, theater. My son during high school became very athletic and he was a wrestler. He competed. The diet requirements of exerting that much energy from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00, 7:00, 8:00 at night was incredible and it was really hard. I remember crying because I had to find ways to make sure he had all the food he needed. I remember begging. I remember having to disclose just how hard my life was and I'm working at the same time. I had to disclose how hard my life was to get people to help and assist to make sure he was able to have the food he needed daily besides what I could feed him and put in a little bag and send him off to school with, which was always very little. I confided in his coach at school and from that day, he always ate well. It's humiliating. I should've been able to go purchase the food and fill his bag myself but people were more interested in food pantries and soup kitchens. We must face the reality of poverty. We must help by ending poverty. The answer isn't to go to a food pantry and get some food or go tell my son's teacher. The answer was being able to go to the store and buy all the food that was necessary to send my children off with enough food for that day. When I hear children are hungry or food insecure, it's an insult to me because this is what I'm hearing, "Moms are not doing their best." This is what I'm hearing, "You can live in poverty. You can stay in forever. You can die in poverty but we'll feed you on the way." That's just not okay. If community, city, state, nation really truly wants to build and create foster an inclusive community with healthy adults and children, then all of us need access to be able to go buy our own food and feed ourselves rather it is with Food Stamps or cash at our own tables. Separating us poor people, keeping us out of mainstream by putting us in lines at food pantries and soup kitchens is not the answer. It separates us. It makes us different. It makes our children different. We are not a part of the larger group. That's insulting and that's difficult and that's teaching kids about food insecurity, not poverty and what do you do to end poverty, you increase your income. How do you care about hunger without calling it what it is? How do you put all this energy into gathering data about poverty and result in food insecurity? I was born in poverty and I've tried forever to create a life of wholesome community integration and neighborly love. I work. I play a little bit but I'm poor and I will die poor in poverty but people will be sure I have food on the way.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Clarke: Thank you.



KRISTIN MIALE

Miale: Thank you Commissioners for this opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Kristin Miale. I've worked for Good Shepherd Food Bank for the past 5 years and have served as its President for the past 3 years. I became involved in this work after working for over 10 years in the financial sector. I started as a volunteer and was immediately drawn to this work after seeing two things in particular. One, the magnitude of the problem and the amount of unhealthy food being distributed to people who clearly had vulnerable health systems and also with little to no access to health care. I wanted to be part of the solution, knowing that there are many people in our state and many people in our country who believe that hunger is solvable and surely with a nation that has the resources that we have, we can end hunger. Since then I've worked with my colleagues at Good Shepherd Food Bank to change the role of the food bank beyond just distributing empty calories and committing ourselves to improving access to healthy food for Mainers in need. Good Shepherd Food Bank is a statewide hunger relief organization. We're the only food bank that serves the state of Maine. We work with over 400 ending hunger partners across the state, including food pantries, meal sites, homeless shelters, schools, and community centers serving 178,000 unique individuals every year, including over 50,000 children. We're also the warehousing partner for the TFAP and CSSP Programs, the USDA, and we sponsor five summer feeding sites. Over the past 12 months the food bank and our network of hunger relief partners distributed over 23 million pounds of food to people in need. More than one-third of this food is fresh produce. In response to the high rates of food insecurity in our state, we have doubled our distribution over the past 5 years and we're focusing more of our resources on sourcing and distributing nutritious food because we know that our clients will be much better off if they're consuming foods that nourish their bodies and minds instead of foods that contribute to poor health and just serve to perpetuate the cycle of poverty. Well, I want to be very clear that I am very proud of the work that we do and the work of our dedicated hunger relief partners. I also want to be very clear that food banks cannot and should not be the solution to hunger in America. The charitable network should not be viewed as the vehicle for feeding the millions of Americans who experience food insecurity every month. Food is a basic human need and something that all families should have access to at all times without having to rely on charity. We will not solve this problem by simply having more canned food drives. Good Shepherd Food Bank's network serves clients of all demographics, 54% of the people we serve are children or seniors. Families facing food insecurity in Maine are facing excruciating decisions every single day. Do I heat my home or do I buy food? Do I pay the electric bill or do I buy food? Do I buy the shoes that my son needs or do I buy food? The daily stress caused by these trade-offs contributes to the ongoing nature of poverty and food insecurity and the barriers to financial stability are insurmountable for too many families. We know from recent research that our network's patrons make nearly 2 million visits to their local hunger relief agencies every year, which means they're visiting their food pantry about once a month. This is not emergency food relief. This is a chronic need



for access to healthy food. Beyond the numbers, I want to share with you some things that I have seen and heard during my brief time doing this work. I've heard seniors at a food pantry discussing how if you put cat food on a saltine it's easier to get it down. I've seen mothers put soda in baby bottles and sippy cups because they cannot afford milk and crying and water does not make the crying stop. I've heard from dentists that they see children whose new teeth come in already in decay. And I've heard clients tell us that if it were not for their food pantry, they would never have fresh vegetables. We have staff who've witnessed a mother coming three times to a food pantry only to stop at the door and turn around and finally, on the fourth try, able to swallow her pride and open the door. I am frequently asked by people, "How do you know that the people you serve really need the help?" And my response is always, "Have you ever been to a food pantry?" Our network is comprised mainly of small programs operating in borrowed space with a dedicated but aging volunteer force. Each year we see pantries within our network scramble to fill a void when free or shared space is no longer available or when a key volunteer moves, retires, or dies. In addition, volunteering across the food pantry network is much more episodic now. It's very difficult to find a volunteer who's able and willing to dedicate the hours a week leading a program and completing the many tasks necessary to run a food pantry. The system is extremely susceptible to sudden changes that can influence the food security of an entire community. We have grown too reliant on a vulnerable model of hunger relief to address a problem that is only growing in size and complexity. Even well-staffed, well-supported food pantries are not the solution to ending hunger. The best food pantries in our network strive to make the experiences positive as possible for patrons and trying to make the variety of the food better for the people they serve and a more enjoyable experience but regardless the system requires people to put aside their shame and embarrassment and sit down with a stranger to answer questions to justify their need for food assistance. The process of seeking help from a food pantry, even the best pantry, inherently deprives people of their dignity. We feel no one should have to stand in line with an empty box waiting to receive charity food. The food bank and our network of partners are doing what we can. We're sourcing more food and more healthy food than ever before and it's just not enough. The Feeding America Network of Food Banks has continued to grow and invest in programs to improve our impact. As I've said, Good Shepherd, we've doubled our impact in just the past five years and yet food insecurity remains a significant of a problem as it's ever been. If the charitable food network was going to solve hunger, we would have. We will not food bank our way out of this crisis. We are the safety net underneath the safety net of the government response to poverty. When it comes to fighting hunger, the most vital federal programs are SNAP and the school nutrition programs. Every time gaps are created in these programs, we feel it. When these programs are cut and enrollment numbers go down, these people are not all of a sudden suddenly food secure. They're in our lines at the food pantries. The Charitable Food Network cannot begin to replace what SNAP does, both in the magnitude of resources, as well as the quality of service. At its root, hunger in America is a symptom of poverty. With stable employment, adequate income, and access to needed resources, a family will be food secure. Therefore,



the question should not be how do we address hunger. The question should be how are we addressing poverty, and the answer must lie with helping families achieve long-term financial stability, so they can provide for their families. We believe this needs to be done holistically and systemically. The solution needs to encompass living wages, affordable housing, affordable child care, access to a quality health care and education and nutritious food. We need policymakers to put the health of our children ahead of the influence of food companies and we need a farm Bill that supports a \$0.99 salad rather than a \$0.99 hamburger and a \$0.79 liter of soda. There is no silver bullet here. There's no single program that will solve hunger in America. As a nation, we must dedicate ourselves to ending poverty and until we do that, children across our country will continue to go to bed hungry. I'd like to touch briefly on a gap in knowledge that we feel should be addressed by this Commission. While the USDA conducts a yearly survey on household food security, this data is not as useful as it could be. The methodology depends on people self-identifying themselves as experiencing food insecurity, which makes the results subject and likely underestimates the problem. It also doesn't differentiate between whether a household is food secure through their own resources or because of support from a hunger relief program or support from government assistance. It's impossible to know what progress is being made because we don't even know what the baseline is. Another gap is the lack of longitudinal data on how hunger impacts someone's physical, mental, and emotional health. If we cannot measure the problem, how are we going to fix it? And lastly, what we need more than anything is compassion for the poor and have leadership and the political will to recognize and commit ourselves to solving the problem of poverty. We are the only developed nation that blames poverty on the poor. We need to stop wasting resources on trying to determine if someone is worthy of receiving help and instead, focus on finding the real solutions to the problem. Thank you very much for your time and look forward to any questions you may have.

Commissioner: Thank you both very much for your testimonies.

Commissioner: Any questions?

Commissioner: Ms. Clarke, I was, I don't know if you were here to hear people talking about restricting what people can buy on SNAP.

Clarke: Right.

Commissioner: I observe what Ms. [inaudible] says, which is people buy soda because fills kids' stomach and it's cheap. What are your thoughts about that?

Clarke: Well, personally, I like to be inclusive, so if we want to talk about how and what people should eat, then it has to be everybody, not just poor people because then it's again, blaming poor people and yes, you do make different choices when you have limited money,

you know. It's not always about transportation or getting to a better store. It's what can you get out of that store that's going to last a week or 2 weeks or 3 weeks or 4 weeks, a month, a school lunch, whatever, that's what it is and having to learn to do that on a budget does mean you don't always eat the best of foods, so some of us moms, I did, I did that and I did go to the food pantry. I did both but most moms have all intentions, no matter how young they were when they started, whatever, of wanting to feed their kid the best food. It's sometimes what's available but then other times, it's the culture. So my kids grew up and saw cartoons. "I want this. Buy me this. I need that. Can I have this?" You know, so that is very influential. I think marketing really tells all of America what to buy, eat, wear, and so forth.

Commissioner: Mariana?

Commissioner: Yeah, thank you both very much for your testimonies. Ms. Clarke, I'd like to hear you talk a little bit more about what some of us call summer feeding, this idea that kids can go to a camp or to a summer enrichment program and receive lunch there and you said that that's potentially exclusive or it's not an inclusive community. Can you, we're very interested also in the summer EBT, which basically increases the amount that a family would have on their EBT card rather than send their kid to a camp to get free food there then actually it allows a family to purchase their own food. So can you talk a little bit more? What does it mean to be an inclusive community? What are you talking about there? Can you explain?

Clarke: Well, it wasn't a camp. It's there are summer meals program with, again, good intentions based on data that these kids went to school and they had free/reduced lunch, so they must not have any food in the summer, so let's feed them. So if they know that, then why ain't they helping the mom? Because, instead, they set up a food program somewhere and invite the kids to come eat this food and over time they've gotten more enticing because kids didn't show up. In my personal opinion, too, is two things, one, help the mom feed her children at home. Two, let's just keep helping this child learn the answer to this is all about food insecurity and you can go somewhere and eat and pretty soon you'll be in a line for a soup kitchen and pretty soon you'll be getting a food box as soon as life doesn't work because no one talked about and raised that child with the community's assistance in school about poverty. No one talks about poverty. So when will that child notice they're living in poverty as now a teenager, a young person, really, and the answer be, "Oh, I have to increase my income. What can I do to increase my income?" No, I go to the food pantry and get a food box. So for me, it's two things, one, you take the child out of their home, instead of helping the mom feed the child at home, go on a picnic but don't say, "Come here and eat," and, and that is exclusive. That isn't inclusive. And I believe when children have to depend on that because mom is now buying into that and because there's no other solution and that, also, that mom is having to depend on food pantries that just helps that child think their answer is that.



Commissioner: Are you suggesting that they should be, people to feed programs while we work out poverty?

Clarke: Well, I think I've been watching and becoming more aware of my situation and so forth for at least 8 years with some good knowledge and stuff and poverty hasn't been worked out, you know. It's just new words.

Commissioner: But you still have to eat, right?

Clarke: Yes, people still have to eat but poverty hasn't been worked and people aren't accessing food because they can't go to the store and buy it. So excluding people who don't have a place to cook because they're homeless, that's different but people who can go to the store and buy the food and come home and eat it, that's who I'm talking about. If they don't have access to money because of a livable wage and/or Food Stamps and I've done it both ways. I've worked where I no longer qualified for Food Stamps and I've worked where I still qualified for Food Stamps and I was just one of the LIHEAP people, I went and applied for LIHEAP and they gave me a \$21 check. Now they're going to increase my Food Stamps. My friend, who has just as many disabilities and is living, he has a harder life. He works with me and he's probably going to get his foot amputated and he has to volunteer for his Food Stamps. It's just crazy.

Commissioner: Russell?

Commissioner: I find both of your testimonies very interesting. I do have to make a couple of comments and ask what you think of these, I mean, because I know we've heard a lot today about shaming the poor and so forth. That's never been my desire in life. I've done this work for over 40 years but there are some incontrovertible facts, including if you're a single parent, including if you're not working, you're far more likely to be food insecure and I haven't heard any discussion today about what role the individual plays in their own situation and I'm just curious if you'd both comment on that.

Miale: You go right ahead, please.

Clarke: Well, we are individuals, however, most people born into poverty probably lack a lot of skills, education. I remember walking in front of the old vocational rehabilitation center when it was on Forest Ave at where DHS was and there was a guy there and I says, "Oh, what's that," and he starts explaining it to me and I says, "Oh, I need that," because I didn't know how to work. I didn't know how to have a job and I think I was like 20 and he starts explaining what they do and in the end he says, "No, it's for like, it's more like people in a wheelchair or blind." So I walked off but I, I don't know why I felt like I could be honest and tell him how I never had a job. I don't know how to work and I want to work but it was

true. At age 20 I had not experienced that. I experienced poverty all my life. Lived in housing projects and watched my mother go through the soup kitchen, the food pantries, and then came here, I end up having my children and having to turn to the same. In between that, there were programs like because I qualified for back then it was called AFDC, which is now TANF, Aspire and things like that and during that, thank goodness those people didn't give up on me. That's when we discovered I have a hard time learning. I don't read well. I can read but there was a lot of problems, answered some but I still didn't gather a particular skill that I could work. However, I started doing advocacy work and the more I did that, I started learning more about poverty and that's the answer. It's poverty. It's poverty. It's classism. It's lack of access, you know. So if people can't access, if kids can't access and they're growing up in poverty, another way to think, another way to look, another way to, you know, aspire to something, then they're going to grow up and be poor, too, you know. They can have great teachers but there has to be aspiration and a path and like when I grew up, it's still like that. The path is, "Oh, I want to be him. I want to be her," but there was no path and then eventually it was all about, well, look like that person, even if I can't be that person. It's still like that.

Commissioner: Any other questions?

Commissioner: Would you care to comment?

Commissioner: Well, I think she was going to answer.

Miale: Oh, I was just going to add that I think your testimony is probably the most helpful testimony I've heard all day and I think it speaks to that there has, obviously, the individual needs to be involved in helping to stabilize their own life but I think what tends to happen too often is when we see somebody who seemingly is not doing everything they can to lift themselves out of poverty, we view them through our lens and assign a motivation, without finding out the why behind the behavior and I think we tend to move too quickly and assume that the motivation is immediately laziness or not, or an unwillingness as opposed to recognizing that I have yet to come across a person who wants to be poor [Laughter] and chooses to live a very stressful life and instead, just the barriers are significant and I've heard this from so many people who've grown up in poverty, there's this wall of this is my life and this is the life of people who aren't poor and somehow getting over that wall just feels impossible and it's because nobody has explained to them, "Here's the first step you need to take."

Clarke: Yeah, that's what I'm talking about. Where's the path? [Laughter]

Miale: Or, "How can we help you?" I once heard a woman share a story about how there was an opportunity to apply to get a scholarship to a community college and her first question was, "Where's the community college?" And you have to fill out an application and



there's a \$25 fee and immediately, "I can't do that. I don't know how to, I can't, I don't know how to do that." Where if somebody just listened to her and said, "Here, I'll bring you there. I'll show you the application. I'll walk it through with you." That's it. That's all it would've taken.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you both very much.

Miale: Thank you.

Commissioner: Appreciate it.

Commissioner: Ms. Clarke, are you submitting that written testimony to us?

Clarke: It's written really terribly. I can ask someone to edit it and then e-mail it to you.

Commissioner: That would be wonderful.

Clarke: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you.



CHRISTY DAGGETT

Commissioner: Our next witnesses are Christy Daggett and Donna Yellen.

Commissioner: Do you have multiple copies?

Unidentified: Yes.

Commissioner: We will take them.

Commissioner: Then we'll take them.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Then we'll take them.

Commissioner: I guess we'll start with Ms. Daggett and then go—

Daggett: Certainly.

Commissioner: —to Ms. Yellen.

Daggett: Dr. Chilton, Mr. Doar, and members of the National Commission on Hunger, thank you for having me today. I'm Christy Daggett. I'm a Policy Analyst for the Maine Center for Economic Policy and we're a nonpartisan research organization in Augusta and we testify today because hunger is the result of poverty, as you've heard today, and we offer solutions to address this in the broader state and national economic context. Food security is fundamentally linked to economic security. By supporting and expanding federal programs that sustain low-income families and focusing on sustained unemployment and wage depression, we can ensure they have the resources necessary to put food on the table. In Maine's 1st Congressional District using the people living below 185% of poverty as a yardstick for the people who will be eligible for food assistance eligibility, more than 40% of residents are not eligible for SNAP but the overall food insecurity rate is still as high as 14.7%. More alarmingly still in Maine's more rural 2nd District 72% of families could be eligible for SNAP, while the overall food insecurity rate soars to 16.3%. In terms of recommendations, fighting hunger in a meaningful way requires creating and bolstering policies that promote more employment and better wages. In addition to increasing the federal minimum wage and indexing it to inflation, we recommend increasing the funding for and/or removing barriers to several federal programs that lift low income families out of poverty and reduce hunger. These include SNAP, the Earned Income Tax Credit or EITC, the Child Tax Credit, child care subsidies to help more single parents and low-income families work and student meals. First and perhaps foremost, increase the minimum wage



and index it to inflation. Decades of national wage data for all earners reinforce the same discouraging story. Real wages are flat or falling. At the current federal minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour, someone working full-time realizes an annual income of \$15,080 a year. This leaves a family of three, two parents and a child \$5,000 below the federal poverty level. Trapped in poverty, families must choose what expenses to cut and all too often, they can't cover the cost of nutritious food. Increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour would provide food security to approximately 29 million Americans. Next we'd recommend that SNAP be protected and strengthened. Nationwide, according to the USDA in 2013 over 60% of SNAP participants were children, elderly, or had disabilities. About 31% of SNAP households had earnings and nearly 43% of all SNAP participants lived in a household with earnings. For many of the poorest families SNAP is the only income assistance they receive. Temporary assistance for a need family, cash assistance, general assistance, and unemployment insurance are not available to millions of jobless households. In 2013 SNAP kept 4.8 million people out of poverty, including 2.1 million children. By design SNAP costs rose substantially to meet the challenges of the severe economic recession and weak recovery in the past decade. The CBO projects that by 2018 SNAP expenditures will fall back to their 1995 level as a share of the economy. In addition, the CBO projects that SNAP expenditures will grow no faster than the economy in future decades, indicating that SNAP is not a factor contributing to the nation's long-term deficit. In Maine our jobs recovery have been inconsistent and the stringent SNAP work requirements you've heard about mean that 6,500 people in Maine's most economically distressed counties lost their nutrition assistance this winter, even though they are income-eligible and may be full-time job seekers. Though unemployment is declining statewide, thousands of Maine workers still struggle to find a job. Employment recovery in our three largest metropolitan areas, Portland, Lewiston, and Bangor, account for most of the improvement in the state job numbers. In 6 of Maine's 13 rural counties unemployment remains higher than the national average. In terms of the training programs you've heard about to meet the federal work requirement, only 900 new slots were created at the time our new state policy was introduced. 9,000 people have now been affected by this policy to date. Moreover, new slots are only available within a 30-mile radius of Portland, Lewiston, Augusta, and Bangor. As a native of Presque Isle, one of our northernmost cities, I think that's a substantial barrier to rural people in the state of Maine. In terms of other employment data, as many as 30,000 Mainers are working in part-time jobs because they could not find a full-time job. That's up-to-date data despite the veneer of recovery that some media is reporting on. As recently as last fall, Maine's Center for Workforce Research and Information reported that nearly 40% of jobs available were part-time or seasonal. Many of the jobs recovered in Maine are low paying with few benefits and provide insufficient income to support a family. According to the Working Poor Families Project, 42% of poor Maine families have at least one member working and still fall below the federal poverty level. It still takes many job seekers months to find a position. Nationally, 42% of the unemployed population in June of 2015 have been unemployed for 15 weeks or longer. USDA data show the typical individual subject to SNAP's 3-month limit has an



income of 19% of the poverty line. Under many federal programs, Congress allows diligent job search efforts to count toward work requirements, adding this to the SNAP work requirement would ensure that unemployed workers, especially in Maine's rural counties, will not go hungry while they are looking for a job. Next, we'd recommend that the EITC expansion be made permanent because evidence shows the EITC reduces poverty, promotes work, and for children in low-income working families, increases work hours and lifetime earnings. Families in Maine and across the nation rely heavily on the federal EITC to make ends meet. Reforms enacted in 2009 strengthen the EITC to reach more low-income working families. Unless Congress acts three critical provisions will expire at the end of 2017 pushing more than 16,000 children and 34,000 Mainers overall into or deeper into poverty and greatly increasing hunger. As I've seen recommended in a bipartisan basis at the federal level, Congress should also expand the EITC for childless workers. Low income workers not living with and raising minor children currently receive little or no EITC benefit under the sole group that the federal tax system taxes deeper into poverty. Some 64,000 childless workers in Maine are currently ineligible for an EITC and could face hunger issues as a result. Next, we'd recommend that the federal government expand child care supports and make the Child Tax Credit permanent. The Child Care Development Block Grant and the related Child Care Development Fund provide resources to state government to support families who can document they need child care in order to remain working. Recent cuts in federal funding for the program mean that needy families are having trouble finding and affording child care providers. We recommend that Congress provide additional funding for child care subsidies to help parents get to work and to help working parents reduce their costs of daycare so they can buy food for their families. Lastly, we'd recommend that the federal support be continued of student hunger programs. You've heard a good deal about those programs today and their success. More than 46% of all Maine students are eligible for free or reduced meals yet, according to the Task Force to End Student Hunger in Maine every day in our state an average of 51,000 students who are eligible for these meals don't receive them. Barriers to utilization of this program include the necessity of an application to determine eligibility, the potential stigma of participation, and the timing of the program. We applaud Congress for the Community Eligibility Provision. This very important piece of legislation and urge its full implementation. We know that we still have some work to do to implement it in school districts where Maine's neediest students live but we recognize the importance of the program for reducing child hunger. Although increasing participation in student meals programs is important, it is even more crucial to address the reasons these programs are so necessary in Maine. Addressing the underlying causes of hunger and investing and preventing it at the source is absolutely imperative. We believe our recommendations to increase the federal minimum wage, increase access to child care for working families or families who'd like to work, and expanding tax credits for working families and childless adults will improve the economic prospects for Maine families and help make sure they can feed their families. I thank you for your time and your service and I'll be happy to answer your questions later.

Commissioner: Thank you Ms. Daggett.



DONNA YELLEN
SOCIAL WORKER, CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER
PREBLE STREET

Yellen: Thank you Commissioners for coming to Maine on your, to learn about hunger in our nation and hear from people experience it and from those of us who work with people that do. My name is Donna Yellen. I'm a Social Worker and the Chief Program Officer at Preble Street, a nonprofit agency that responds to emergency needs in our community and provides solutions to these problems. This morning over 400 people came to our soup kitchen in Portland for a hot meal. The largest soup kitchen in northern New England, we serve three meals a day every day. In the last 3 years we've seen a 17% growth in serving almost 400,000 meals this past year. We have a weekly food pantry that was serving 115 households in 2010 and which has risen to serving 166 households weekly this year. We've been watching hunger climb steadily in our state for several years. Maine has the fifth highest rate of very low food security in the nation and 22% of our children live in food insecure households. Preble Street provides social services, housing and employment assistance to homeless and low income people throughout Maine. Our Maine Hunger Initiative, MHI, has 13 anti-hunger and opportunity AmeriCorps Vistas working throughout the state to fight hunger. We hear every day loud and clear from all areas of the state that people can't support their families. They can't get food because they can't find decent jobs. The forest industry, the fishing industry, canning, textile, manufacturing are all in distress. Giant mills empty, a major naval air station closed, mill towns have struggling economies. We hear about the problem of people living isolated from job centers in a state with virtually no public transportation or the lack of affordable housing, if people do move to the few job centers. So we fought hard but lost the effort to have our state accept the federal waiver for ABAWDs that Maine qualified for last year. Seeing people every day who must beg for food, helping the struggling veteran try to avoid eviction, locating employment for someone, assisting a young woman escape a human trafficker keeps us committed to maximizing SNAP benefits. It is one important tool we want to provide so they can build a safe healthy future. Punishing people who can't find jobs or volunteer opportunities by withholding food makes no sense to us. Before January 1st there were approximately 12,000 in the ABAWD category but in March of this year 9,000 people lost their food benefits. We know many of these people and also know that there are not enough jobs, job training, or volunteer opportunities to get 9,000 people back on their feet in 3 months. Many live in rural Maine with a lack of options in an enormous state. SNAP is the most effective tool against food insecurity during difficult times. We also know that it is an economic stimulus generating \$9 of economic activity for every \$5 in SNAP. Those 9,000 ABAWDs that no longer can access SNAP mean a \$22 million loss to Maine's economy annually. Recently I met with ten food pantry directors from central rural Maine who are concerned about the increase in need, the many requests to volunteer and their sadness at their inability to say, "Yes." Recommendations to strengthen volunteer opportunities include funding capacity building as such group as these, as well as creating individual



opportunities to assist elderly or disabled neighbors in rural areas. While the SNAP Education and Training goal of gaining employment is positive, there are significant problems. The E&T Program is limited to four cities in Maine as Christy just mentioned and is not accessible to people living in more rural parts of Maine with higher unemployment rates. We recommend that the E&T include robust programming and substantial skills building and stop duplicating the job searches already offered by the private sector at career centers, Goodwill, Preble Street and public libraries. Another problem is that the person may only count a, only 9.75 hours per week can be used for job searching. The remaining 10.25 hours must be filled by employment hours, which can't be found, often can't be found. Volunteering does not count. We recommend that a mix of volunteer hours be allowed with the E&T hours. We also recommend that states who have declined waivers be required to have an annual process that allows the public to make the case for a waiver in the following year. However, the best solution is to prevent making SNAP a political football. If an area qualifies for a USDA waiver because of high unemployment, that area should be waived, regardless of the political party or the ideology of the state's administration. As powerful a tool as the summer food service program is, it was designed for urban communities where people, children congregate in the summer. It is clearly a model that is at best limited and at worst, wasteful to implement in rural communities where it costs much more to drive the child to the site than it cost to feed the child. One recommendation is to replicate the WIC Voucher Program, give vouchers to families during the summer to be redeemed at local farm stands for fresh fruits and vegetables. This has a double benefit of stimulating the local farm economy. The best solution, however, is to increase families' SNAP benefits during the summer months. Ask Congress to implement the USDA's pilot project that provides extra benefits to these families, support the American family value of sitting around the table at home together. Dee spoke about this earlier. Students who eat breakfast, school breakfast perform better on standardized tests and experience fewer hunger symptoms. 90% of Maine's schools offer breakfast, yet only 40% of eligible children participate. Using current best practices, we partnered with the Lakes Region Middle School and by the end of the school year, the number of children eating breakfast had tripled from 69 to 215 children per day. These public/private partnerships are a proven solution. The anti-hunger and opportunity AmeriCorps Vista Program is another example of a public/private partnership that works extremely well and should be expanded. It is important to see private organizations as a partner, not as a replacement. Without SNAP benefits, more Mainers will turn to an unorganized system of local independent charitable efforts that is woefully inadequate to meet the demand. MHI also tested the cost of the USDA's Thrifty Food Plan. We shopped at 21 stores of all sizes in Cumberland County and found out that at all stores the maximum SNAP benefit was insufficient to purchase the USDA's recommended shopping list. The Thrifty Food Plan costs 67% more than the average family of four in Maine receives in SNAP each month. Our finding also explains the chart that was shown earlier by a testifier. The inadequacy of the benefit does not allow households to escape food insecurity. We recommend that Congress use a low food cost plan as the basis for calculating SNAP benefits. SNAP helps households



stretch their food dollars and purchase nutritious foods that are not at food pantries. Benefits are modest at best, about \$1.48 per meal. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP recipients spend over 85% of their benefits on fruit and vegetables, greens, dairy and meat and the purchasing patterns of SNAP households mirror that of other moderate income households. Freedom of choice is a matter of respect and dignity. This is something people living in poverty are all too often denied and SNAP recipients should have the same freedom of choice at the supermarket as any other person. In Maine we have the oldest population in the country. Food choice in SNAP means that seniors can purchase what they need for special diets, even if it is followed with a special treat. Placing food purchasing restrictions on SNAP also causes confusion at grocery store checkout lines, all of which inadvertently cause higher rates of food insecurity. The Department's attempt to implement photo IDs is fraught with problems. It is extremely costly at \$7 a card and has no necessary relationship to stopping Maine's extremely low rate of fraud. Implementing costly measures with no supporting data documents a lack of appropriate accountability. Our country has the ability to provide nourishment for all. We must do it for our children and grandchildren to protect them from the food insecurity that damages health and affects our communities economically and socially. The true solutions to food insecurity as we've heard are strong economy, equal education opportunity, and livable wages for all. In the absences of these things, we are in a crisis mode. From some vantage points, the economy looks robust but it's more like a building that has been gutted and rebuilt without shoring up the foundation. It may look great but there is ample evidence that the foundation is deteriorating. The best we can do when all we can do is help keep our neighbors safe is to ensure the best practices and responses to food insecurity that come from the collaborations of the private and public sector and we are ready to do our part. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimonies.

Commissioner: Okay, I have questions. Can I go first?

Commissioner: Yes, you should.

Commissioner: Okay, I have one for each of you. Ms. Daggett, I can look it up in the citation that you have to a report on from the Center of Budget and Policy Priorities.

Daggett: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: But in your testimony you say that the federal government's Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010 appeared to be the most effective effort to reduce student hunger in decades and by increasing access to student school meals, it had an impact. I know the time period here and nationally, very low food security didn't go down, we haven't seen a downward trend for some time, up and flat for extensive,



do you have some data that I, about that, some finding that that actually reduced very low food security that Act?

Daggett: I'll confess. I saw you shake your head as I testified, Mr. Doar.

Commissioner: I didn't shake my head, I apologize.

Daggett: And I thought, "Oh, I should call an expert," like on that show *How to Be a Millionaire*. [Laughter]

Commissioner: Right.

Daggett: My Associate Director wrote this because I, this section on hunger programs because I confess, I'm more partial to jobs and job training and wages.

Commissioner: Okay.

Daggett: However, I think what she was getting at is that, and I agree, that the 2010, the community eligibility—

Commissioner: Yes.

Daggett: —offers a new innovation to reach more kids.

Commissioner: Right, you were definitely focusing on that and its impact—

Daggett: Yeah.

Commissioner: —on very low food security and we'll follow up on that.

Daggett: All right.

Commissioner: So thank you, and Ms. Yellen, I used to work in Social Services before I became a think tank person, so I ran programs that greeted people who were applying for SNAP and one of the things that we used to say as social services workers would say is that if someone comes in and says they have no earnings but all they want is Food Stamps, they want no other benefit program or no engagement program, no program for employment, and then they say, "I'll just take the SNAP," that's it. That that revealed a potential problem where case management services or engagement activity maybe should take place. Do you acknowledge that that could be possible?



Yellen: I, well, I'm not familiar in the 20-plus years that I've been doing this work of anybody that just wants one thing without, when they're presented with opportunities for other better pieces.

Commissioner: Really?

Yellen: Absolutely, and many times it's how those opportunities are presented. There is so much fear and people's different that people have experienced over the years. If, as a social worker, if someone came in just asking for one thing, it would make me, you know, prod with questions, sort of like you just said—

Commissioner: What's going on?

Yellen: —to engage and say, "Well, let me tell you about other opportunities," and usually, you know, as Kristin beautifully said, "No one wants to be poor."

Commissioner: Right.

Yellen: If there's an opportunity to help with income increasement, education, jobs, you know, or disability income—

Commissioner: Right.

Yellen: —or whatever it may be, that people always want to do better.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Go ahead Rus.

Commissioner: Thank you both. I have a couple of questions and by the way, if you ever still see Kate St. John, please, say, "Hello," for me. We worked together for a number of years back in the day.

Daggett: Certainly.

Commissioner: The EITC, whether we go outside of our scope of addressing very low food security as far and something we grapple with, whether we're going to do context about certain other things, rather than direct recommendations. I'm a strong supporter. I agree with you 100%. The only thing I'd point out, you used the, we never seem to be honest enough, I'm not accusing you being disingenuous but we never seem to add the value of the EITC in when we talk about people's income. So when a minimum wage worker at \$15,800.00 a year, whether they dispute that's



enough or not, we don't add in the fact that from the federal EITC, they could be getting as much as another \$5,000.00 on top of that and I know it comes in a lump sum but nevertheless. So it also is my, you mentioned a family of three and this is my question really because you mentioned two parents and a child but most EITC recipients are a single parent and two-plus children. So their benefit is even higher.

Daggett: Right, I think we were just using a constellation that would make up a family of three to fall, you know, to talk about what the federal poverty guidelines really mean. In terms of the EITC, your question is that it adds to people's incomes.

Commissioner: Right.

Daggett: It's like an invisible subsidy we should talk about when we talk about poverty.

Commissioner: Right.

Daggett: I'll admit my preference is, when we talk about strategies to combat hunger, I would prefer higher wages over an EITC. I was a single parent once myself and I received the EITC, so I know what the EITC is, even for a single parent who is, doesn't have a TV and wants her daughter to have ballet lessons. It's a one-time cash infusion that you can buy a reliable car with, that you can pay off a debt with, you can fill the oil tank with, but in terms of the week-to-week grocery budget, the EITC is not there. Does it increase people's incomes? Absolutely. Is it a critical support? Yes, but in terms of addressing hunger, my money is always on wages and employment.

Commissioner: That's a fair answer. I have one more question but I'd also add that for years, we had the ability, people to claim an advanced EITC through their payroll and less than 9% of people chose that.

Daggett: I didn't know about that.

Commissioner: Yes, it was only recently repealed and so you could've had the EITC added to your check. My question is something you both brought up. It's about job search and it's counting those activities under SNAP. I find that an interesting prospect. Could you just talk a little more about it? I mean, it seems to me that had that been an allowable activity in Maine for the ABAWD decision, you would not have faced as many people losing benefits. Would that be a fairly, so how would you want to implement that and how would you two monitor it for compliance?

Daggett: I'll defer to you Ms. Yellen.



Yellen: Sure, well, for instance, the center actually, so we say we have the E&T Training Center, actually, in Portland. So you think, "Oh, that's not an issue, it's a city." It's actually located in the relocation, the newer location of the Department of Health and Services building, which is actually in South Portland. It's a 45-minute bus ride with multiple stops and then also it needs a bus pass and so people often don't have the money for a bus pass to get out there. And so the location of that E&T office, even within Portland is problematic. It is that whole combination of only using 9, you know, 0.75 hours per week and when you need your 20 hours a week and the other 10.25 hours have to be filled with employment, it's kind of doesn't quite pass the straight face test, right, because if I'm like spending like 10, 9.7 hours a week looking for jobs, it might very well mean that I haven't been able to find one yet and so then to be able to say that I have, am working those other 10 hours. So we've seen people, you know, know that have not been able to do that, right, because, so that hasn't worked and then the whole rural. We, our veterans housing support services, you know, we have offices in Bangor and Lewiston, and we work in all areas of the state with veterans responding to them. Maine has one of the highest levels of post, oh, it's not the—

Commissioner: PTSD.

Commissioner: PTSD.

Yellen: —no, no, that, too, no, the particular wars, the younger veterans, right. We have an unknown usually high number of post-Iraqi kind of war veterans from the Gulf Wars, I think it's post-Gulf Wars and so all the, many of these young men and women, servicewomen are in the rural areas of Maine and so we're, they're struggling. I mean, they're calling us up because we're their case managers and they're saying, "I have to do this volunteer work. I have to," they're looking for jobs, or some of them aren't looking for jobs, they're trying to, they're actually waiting for a disability, a service-related disability to come through, which people may not be aware of it often takes a long time with both the Veterans Administration and the Social Security Administration if you're nonveteran, nonwar-related. So there's those, you know, people that fall into those pockets, too, but it is, it's just, there's just not enough. That number, right, 900 slots for 9,000 people. It just, it was, we're hemorrhaging. We're just hemorrhaging.

Commissioner: As somebody who works in a hospital and has to put up with 27 of us would like to come down and paint a wall and then go. I would like you to reflect a little more on the fact that using volunteers is not free to the cost, to the agencies that use them if there's going to be any useful work done or any fidelity and that just saying, "Go find a volunteer job," may not be helpful to anybody or at least, how would you make it helpful to people?



Yellen: Preble Street, actually, operates, we depend a lot on volunteers. We have 5,000 volunteers a year that come through and it takes a full-time volunteer coordinator to, you know, plus assistant staff to accommodate this. We have people who are utilizing their SNAP volunteer efforts, you know, within Preble Street. However, we also turn many, many people away every day not just the SNAP volunteers because it's a whole infrastructure piece that we just have to fit people in. People who are trying to volunteer for the SNAP benefits, you know, they have to get them in by a certain time and sometimes we're scheduled out down the road. We hear the whole food pantry folks, that's where like the first stop, you know, that lots of people go. They're going there anyway to get food and they're saying, "Oh, my gosh, can I volunteer for you," and as you've heard the demographics earlier by Kristin, many of the food pantries are run by one person or one and a half person, it's mostly volunteer. The place is open 1 day a week and they're using, you know, their kind of cohort of people to get out. They don't have the infrastructure to be able to like, to say, you know, you know, to track all the hours and to be able to process things. It's just, they just need that and so it has been mentioned that if this is going to happen that there be some kind of infrastructure built in and through financial assistance given to those places if that's really what we want is to be able to cultivate those volunteer opportunities.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. We're out of time. Thank you for your testimonies.

Daggett: Thank you.



**FAYE CONTE
ADVOCACY AND EDUCATION DIRECTOR
HUNGER FREE VERMONT**

Commissioner: I'd like to call up our next witnesses. We have Faye Conte. Am I saying that right?

Conte: Conte.

Commissioner: Conte from Hunger Free Vermont and we also have John Hennessy from the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Thank you very much. Thank you, welcome. Ms. Conte, we'll start with you. We'll have both testimonies and then we'll follow up with question and answer.

Conte: Great.

Hennessy: Sure.

Commissioner: Thank you, you may begin.

Conte: I think it's officially afternoon, so good afternoon and thank you all for the opportunity to speak and for adding me in to join our friends from Maine today. My name is Faye Conte. I am the Advocacy and Education Director at Hunger Free Vermont. We are a statewide outreach and advocacy organization that is dedicated to ending the injustice of hunger and malnutrition for all Vermonters and we work in close collaboration with our partners in New England and around the country. I would first like to thank you all for the good work you are doing as a Commission and for taking the time to travel around the country and listen to the public about what they see on the ground as millions of Americans struggle to put healthy food on their tables. Hunger is one of the most universal challenges facing our nation. It appears in nearly every community in the United States, rural and urban. Individuals and families of all shapes and sizes struggle to afford enough food. Access to higher education, owning a home, or even having a job do not protect you from food insecurity. There is no subset of our population, whether it be children, as we've heard, those who are working, veterans, or the elderly, who are safe from hunger. Today I'd like to focus in and take a little bit of time to talk about the able-bodied adults without dependents that we've heard so much about this morning. Vermont reimplemented the work requirements for ABAWDs in November of 2013. We were one of the first states to come back in with the work requirements. Similar to what happened in Maine, the vast majority of ABAWDs lost their food benefits 3 months later because they were not able to meet the requirements for work, volunteering, or job training. During this first year of reimplementation I worked very closely with our state agency partners, our direct service providers and the nonprofit organizations called upon to provide volunteer placements. All

of these partners were dedicated to providing high-quality opportunities for ABAWDs to enroll in so that they may keep their SNAP benefits they greatly need and work into a place of employment to lift themselves out of poverty. What I learned during this time, despite all this dedication, it is not as simple as it sounds for an ABAWD to meet the requirements. The term “able-bodied adults without dependents” implies that this population is made up of young adults who are simply choosing not to work. This could not be further from the truth. The ABAWD population is made up of individuals who are trying their hardest to get by in a tough economy and are struggling to find a job. ABAWDs are individuals who may be able-bodied by the federal government’s definition but who face significant barriers to employment. They may lack the education or literacy levels needed to thrive in today’s workforce. They may be homeless and living out of their car or they may be struggling with an undiagnosed disability. They may also be caring for a child or a sick parent, who’s not technically their dependent and therefore, they are not exempt. In our rural state of Vermont two of the largest barriers we see ABAWDs face is a lack of reliable transportation to get to a job and conditions that lack of access to dental and health care have caused a result in discrimination when they are seeking employment. All of these barriers to full-time employment are also barriers to finding part-time work, to finding a volunteer placement, and to work, participating in workforce training. In particular, finding an appropriate volunteer placement can be extremely challenging. Nonprofits that we’ve been reaching out to, to ask for volunteer placements simply cannot find additional placements that meet the hours required. Food banks and other organizations that rely so heavily on volunteers are already at capacity as they work with the Department of Corrections and other institutions to provide volunteer placements for others. These organizations were flooded with ABAWDs seeking volunteer placements when the rules came into effect. These individuals showed up at the organizations sharing that they’ve been looking for jobs, a job for months, sometimes for years and that they cannot find employment. These organizations, sadly, had to turn many of these ABAWDs away as they could not provide volunteer placements that were appropriate, that met the skill level, the transportation needs, the physical level, ability levels, and more. I know that you are all wary of anecdotes that are substituting for statistics but I would like to share a story with you that simply highlights who many of these ABAWDs are. My younger brother is a veteran of the war in Afghanistan. He served in the 10th Mountain Division as a Forward Observer. This was one of the most dangerous positions in this part of Afghanistan in the years that he was overseas. Thankfully, he made it home with no physical injuries beyond a broken thumb. However, the true cost of his experience has been humbling to him and to our entire family. He struggles with participating in daily life and really struggles to hold down a job. He’s one of the fortunate ones, as my father is able to keep him employed in his small business and allow him the flexibility that he needs to meet his various VA appointments and for the difficult days he often has. He would not be able to hold down a job with a different employer and would fall squarely into that ABAWD category that are not exempt from the work requirements. Unfortunately, many of his friends are not as lucky. They live scattered throughout the country. They pay for their groceries with SNAP and they struggle to find



steady employment as many of them wait for a disability determination from the VA. As the ABAWD work requirements come back into effect throughout the country, many of them will likely lose benefits when they are unable to meet the new work requirements. It is a disservice to these veterans, who gave so much to our country, to take away their SNAP benefits because they are struggling with daily life after returning from war. Surviving on SNAP benefits is not easy for anybody to do. Anyone who has lived on SNAP or who has even taken the SNAP Challenge for a week can tell you that. It does not feel empowering or even good to rely on the federal government to put food on your table. The ABAWD population is no different. As others have said, no one wants to be poor and no one wants to rely on federal assistance, even the ABAWDs. So I encourage states like Maine and others to hold onto their ABAWD waiver as long as possible and to utilize waivers for smaller geographic areas with pockets of high unemployment. I also encourage this Commission to reexamine this rule, to really look at the ability for ABAWDs to meet the work requirements and to determine if this is a rule that is actually helping Americans get back to work and lift themselves out of poverty in a sustainable way. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you.



**JOHN HENNESSY
EPISCOPAL DIOCESE OF MAINE**

Commissioner: Mr. Hennessy?

Hennessy: Good afternoon. On behalf of Bishop Stephen Lane, I am pleased to offer remarks this afternoon for the Episcopal Diocese. My name is John Hennessy and I'm the interim candidate for advocacy and I want to start by thanking you 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 all faith-based sector engagement and initiatives to support government nutrition assistance programs while protecting the safety net for the most vulnerable. 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, to 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 US Department of Agriculture the SNAP Program is the largest program in the domestic hunger safety net and according to the Census Bureau SNAP has lifted 5 million Americans, including 2.2 million children, out of poverty as of 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 must be done to end hunger. Last year in Raleigh, North Carolina, our presiding Bishop, Katherine 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 is especially horrible for children, for it destroys and diminishes their growing bodies and brains. 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 and we know 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 window of opportunity will not last long. She went on to say that we are waging war on the integrity of our planet. We were planted in this garden to care for it, literally, to have dominion over its creatures. Dominion means caring for our home. The faith community and allied nonprofit organizations in Maine are committed to serving all vulnerable populations but we need government action to end hunger and poverty. 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 on the poor, especially as even more previously middle-income families are finding themselves falling into the same straights. 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 equality that afflict our nation. To address the second objective of the Commission, specifically in terms of public/private partnerships, faith-based sector engagement and community initiatives I would offer the following recommendations. First, as I've 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 policymakers 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. I have to say that my ears perked up this morning when Mayor Brennan said that more was going to be expected from the social, excuse me, from the churches with the 900 asylum seekers who are no longer receiving assistance and I appreciated the conversation that ensued to put that, to create a reality check for what that means for the community, the immediate community in Portland. Without going into detail, we support many of the recommendations discussed by others this morning, including an increase in the minimum wage, maintaining SNAP eligibility beyond 3 months for adults who live in areas with significant unemployment and making the Earned Income Tax Credit. We ask you to recommend to the Congress a continuation of all, excuse me, a continuation of federal support for all hunger and poverty reduction policies. Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. We commend your service on this Commission and stand ready to eradicate the scourge of hunger and poverty in our country.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Commissioner: I have a question you raised. You raised an interesting point in the analogy about your brother. You brought us something that I had thought of before but more in reference to TANF than SNAP and that is that in New York at least, when someone had a pending disability claim for SSI or any other issue, we consciously did not put them into our denominator for work purposes because it just didn't make



sense or could jeopardize. You brought up the issue about a VA pending disability. Would it be your recommendation that people who have a pending disability claim, particularly if they've been instructed to apply for those benefits by the state agency, be exempt from the ABAWD requirement?

Conte: Absolutely, and if I can answer in two parts. I think that a pending disability should certainly be, you know, should count as a disability. I also think that there are so many people, veterans and others, who will never qualify for a federal disability but are too disabled to work. With the veteran community, in particular, I think about PTSD and the emotional impact of war that sometimes is not, it doesn't show up in the same way and it's not, people aren't given disability benefits for the same and I do think that the military has gotten much better at that but there's a lot of room to grow and poverty is connected with trauma and growing up in a poor household is connected with trauma. And I think that we aren't reaching far enough into what really impedes you from being able to hold down a job, so I think that that would be a good first step but not all that would fix that issue.

Commissioner: Dr. Frank?

Commissioner: Yeah, thank you both. I want to go back in a circle. I have heard very little about very young children who are too young for school, whose brains are the most vulnerable and I'm not quite sure why, whether you have such an aging population but also, I can tell you that there is research to show that not only if there's a disabled adult but if there was a child with special health care needs, that it's very difficult often, particularly if a child doesn't meet the stringent child SSI requirement for adults to hold down jobs. So I would bring that into the mix, too, that that's a very important issue. I don't know if that's something you've experienced at all in your work, people with very little kids.

Hennessy: Well, we go through about 150 cases of diapers a month—

Commissioner: That's diagnostic.

Hennessy: —at one of our pantries. So I can assure you we're indirectly [Laughter].

Commissioner: Yes, no, that's one of the huge expenses that you can't buy on SNAP.

Hennessy: Uh-huh [yes]. Absolutely.

Conte: And I can share, if I can add that we are struggling with that a lot in Vermont and I think a lot of rural states are, where children 0 to 6 who aren't in school yet don't have access to nutritious meals. SNAP benefits aren't high enough for parents to be able to afford fruits and vegetables and all of the good food that they need for healthy brain development



and in rural areas, the Child and Adult Care Food Program does not always work for child care centers. We, in Vermont, are starting to hit the limit of the number of child care centers who can actually run this program, who qualify for it and there are thousands of children left at child care centers, who don't have access to meals and there is no program that can help these child care providers who are often on snap themselves to figure out how to provide nutritious food for kids.

Commissioner: Why don't they qualify?

Conte: The way that the, part of it is the barriers to actually running the program. So small child care providers will become eligible and that eligibility may rely on one kid. So you have to—

Commissioner: They're set for a week?

Conte: Yeah and you have to, you know, where most programs you reapply once a year. For the child and adult care food program you have to requalify every month. So it's a ton of paperwork and so child care providers going on and off, on and off and the reimbursement rate just isn't high enough and they're reimbursed after the fact. So they've already spent the money and then if they're suddenly not eligible, they don't get the money back. And we do have a lot of private homecare providers who can't run the program.

Commissioner: Other questions?

Commissioner: No.

Commissioner: Thank you both very much for your testimonies.

Commissioner: Thank you.



**ROBYN MERRILL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
MAINE EQUAL JUSTICE PARTNERS**

Commissioner: Our next witness is a Robyn Merrill, Executive Director of Maine Equal Justice Partners.

Merrill: Good afternoon—

Commissioner: Good afternoon.

Merrill: —esteemed members of the Commission on Hunger. My name is Robyn Merrill and I'm the Executive Director at Maine Equal Justice Partners. We're a civil legal aid organization that works with and for people with low incomes, advocating for solutions to poverty through policy, education, and legal representation. First, I would like to commend you all for the time and careful consideration you're putting into identifying and recommending solutions to hunger, as this issue demands our immediate attention. Food insecurity is far too common in this country and its impact is both devastating and far reaching. Before making specific recommendations on ways to improve the nutrition safety net and reduce people's need for assistance, I would like to make an overall point and share some interesting lessons that we learned from people living here in Maine over the last year. While it's clear to us based on our clients' experiences that we must improve the strength of the nutrition safety net so that it is better able to meet the need that's out there. Ultimately, if we are going to end hunger and food insecurity, we must look beyond the nutrition programs to address some of the core causes of hunger. We must increase wages and increase access to affordable housing, health coverage, child care, and services for people with disabilities. In order to end hunger and reduce the need for public food programs like SNAP, jobs must pay enough to enable people to support their families through work. And we're not alone in our belief that strategies to end hunger and reduce poverty must address and improve the economic context in which we live. So last summer we went directly to Maine people and we asked them for their thoughts about what causes poverty and the best strategies to reduce poverty. We utilized two different approaches, both doing a survey of the general public and also a survey of people with low incomes, specifically, who are experiencing poverty. The two groups, the general public and those experiencing poverty, shared strikingly similar ideas about poverty. Both groups agreed that the primary cause of poverty in Maine is an underperforming economy and that the best strategies to reduce poverty involve building bridges to opportunity. By large margins Maine people supported solutions to poverty that include increasing the minimum wage, expanding access to affordable health care, higher education, and child care, and promoting tax credits for working families and reducing Maine's unacceptably high rate of hunger. By a strong margin Mainers agreed that the emphasis of any reform should be on expanding opportunity, not punishing people. And last fall we followed up those surveys with



community forums across the state and had more discussions with people who had responded to the survey who were living with low income. Participants in those discussions were keenly aware of what they were up against and what it would take to improve their circumstances and eliminate food insecurity. The consequences of poverty that families face are shown in the experiences reported by low-income Mainers we surveyed last year. Two in three had to go to a food pantry or soup kitchen, half didn't make enough to pay utility bills, one-third had their car break down with no money to fix it, and one-fourth had to move for financial reasons. Hunger was ever present among these families with 60% responding that they had to skip meals or cut the size of meals because there was just not enough money for food. Preserving and strengthening the federal nutrition safety net programs will also take us a step closer toward ending hunger. Making SNAP benefits more adequate, connecting eligible people with SNAP and other food programs, like WIC and school breakfast and lunch and after school and summer food programs will contribute to the success of an overall plan to end hunger. So you have been charged with the task of reducing need for government nutrition assistance programs. In order to reduce the need for assistance people who are able to work must be able to meet their needs through adequate wages and incomes. Here in Maine our Governor and the Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner Mayhew, who you heard from earlier today, have imposed limits on SNAP that have reduced the number of people receiving assistance but they have not reduced the underlying need for assistance. Maine has the fifth highest rate of very low food security in the nation. We have seen an increase in hunger in Maine over the last 4 years. This is an important distinction that I urge you to keep in mind. Success cannot be measured solely by a smaller program with fewer people receiving assistance. Success must be measured by a reduction in actual need, a reduction in hunger. Maine has seen the largest drop in SNAP enrollment in the nation between January 2014 and January 2015. The Governor has touted this as a success but leading a state with such a high and growing rate of hunger is not something that we should be celebrating. So I want to provide some recommendations related to the SNAP program, in particular. More generally, we recommend applying a hunger reduction standard to all proposals aimed to reform SNAP, asking the question, "Will this proposal help to reduce hunger or will it instead make it more difficult for people to get the food they need in order to survive and stay healthy?" This should be the test of true reform and more specifically, I'd like to make several recommendations with respect to changes to the SNAP Program. One would be to require states to waive the 3-month limit on SNAP benefits in areas of high unemployment. You've heard a lot about this requirement already today. 9,000 Maine people have lost their SNAP benefits and that's because our state is, our administration has chosen not to take up the waiver that we qualify for. This rule applies to people but, you know, as we've talked about ABAWDs, but these are folks who are between 18 and 50 without children at home. And it applies to them even if they can't find a job, get into a training program, or find volunteer position, no matter how hard they're trying. We urge you to require states to take up that waiver in areas where there are significant high unemployment rates. By large margins Maine people supported, oh, excuse me, meant to



flip the page. So we're one of the only, one of only eight states that didn't take up a waiver and we've taken a waiver, until now, we'd always taken waivers particularly for areas of high unemployment in the state. Especially a special rural areas in Maine that we are still struggling to recover from the deepest recession of our lifetimes. Jobs are not available for those, all who need one, neither are training programs or volunteer opportunities. A lack of transportation options in rural communities makes it even harder to meet these requirements. So this policy not only hurts people it also hurts local economies. We're missing out on \$12 million that would be coming into our state because of this change. We fully support efforts to help people find and maintain employment. There is no doubt that a good job or training opportunity is the best hope for getting out of poverty but today in Maine, those aren't always available. Requesting waivers in areas of high unemployment, requiring them would allow individuals who live in parts of the state with high unemployment to continue to receive assistance if they are unable to find work. Another recommendation we would have is to support meaningful education and training programs designed to lift people out of poverty. In addition to being one of our nation's strongest defenses against hunger and poverty SNAP is a critical work support for millions of low income families. And although the majority of SNAP participants are children, seniors, and people with disabilities, 30% of SNAP households have earned income and over 40% of SNAP participants live in households with earnings. Education and training programs are intended to help job ready SNAP participants find work and assist others in gaining skills, training, and experience that would lead to employment and greater self-sufficiency. Changes to SNAP E&T policy in recent years have increased these opportunities but there is more that could be done. Moreover the Maine Department of Labor makes clear that jobs that do not require education beyond high school are way down. Growth has been concentrated in occupations that require postsecondary education. Many job seekers do not qualify for openings in growing fields of work and this is a serious impediment to growth here in Maine. It is clear that skills are a critical component of economic success both today and in the future. Yet according to the data compiled by the American Community Survey, 32%, nearly one out of three of all nonworking SNAP participants do not even have a high school diploma. Only 24% had some college and 7% had achieved a Bachelor's Degree or higher. SNAP participants who are working are most often employed in low-wage insecure jobs. SNAP households are more than twice as likely to be employed in the low wage service sector of the economy and are significantly more likely to work night shifts than other working adults. For many, if not most of these individuals, gaining skills that will both increase and their employability and their wage earning capacity is the single most important need that must be met. Simply offering job search training does not address this far more significant underlying need. Based on these findings as well as our own experience working with SNAP households, we strongly urge you to continue to promote meaningful E&T opportunities for people receiving SNAP. So it's important that we also acknowledge the difficulties that many people have in accessing training opportunities and provide supports necessary to ensure that they're able to participate, including assistance with transportation and technology. I want to make a very an



important point about E&T Programs in that they should be voluntary and not mandatory. Maine's program has long [inaudible] program, has long been a voluntary program for good reason. Voluntary programs allow people the opportunity to participate in activities that are helpful to them without fear of losing benefits. And mandatory programs are far less likely to result in constructive engagement with positive results. So the E&T, well, I guess I'll just make the general point that the programs offered need to be meaningful and that they need to really help get people the skills, the training that they need. And I wanted, I know I'm out of time, I just wanted to make one quick point about the fraud issue that came up earlier. And you can, you have my testimony, I knew it was too long and I wouldn't get to all of it.

Commissioner: Do we have it?

Commissioner: We have the report.

Commissioner: We have this.

Unidentified: Do you have the testimony?

Merrill: Okay, so I have copies that I can get to you.

Commissioner: Okay.

Commissioner: Okay, great.

Merrill: Because there was more. I had more to say about food restrictions and whatnot and I didn't get to that but just a quick point about fraud. In 2000, I have a number, looking for data, in 2013 the amount of fraud established as a percentage of total benefits issued in that year represented .0009% of benefit claims, so considerably less than 1%. That's the number here for Maine and I wanted to share that and also we would agree with others that have said that putting photos on EBT cards isn't shown to be a way to actually get at fraud. In fact it's created a lot of confusion here in our state and created a lot of problems, so thank.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Questions?

Commissioner: I do. I always have to ask at least one question. I agree with your upfront part of your report on it's the economy [inaudible] ask you a threshold question. You said the economy's failing to produce enough jobs to pay decent wages and that's what your respondents, whether they were general public or low-income people, themselves, agreed with. Why do you think that is?

Merrill: That they agreed with that?



Commissioner: No, why do you think the economy is not producing enough jobs that pay decent wages?

Merrill: I mean, I think that there are a lot of ways that question could be answered. I mean, I think that there's, and I think there's a shift now, I think, nationally to address the minimum wage and that it's far, it's inadequate and there's, I mean, that's a long, long answer, I think, and like why the economy is out of balance that I'd love to kind of, it's hard to kind of come up with a succinct answer, I think, off the cuff. I mean, there, it's pretty, it's a convoluted response. There are a number of reasons for it.

Commissioner: I think Maine must have the problem that we also have, which is seasonality of employment, like people are more hungry when the Red Sox don't go to the postseason. I'm dead serious because it doesn't generate jobs in the hospitality industry as much and I don't know, how do you think, has people given any thought in economies that are so seasonal, yours even more than ours, how to deal with that?

Merrill: So that came up earlier, too, the idea about increasing SNAP benefits during the summer months. I mean, so that's one way is to—

Commissioner: But summer is when you have employment, right?

Merrill: Yes.

Commissioner: Summer's when people have jobs.

Merrill: So depending on what the issue is but to look at kind of the programs that do exist and the different, and to have the flexibility to respond to changes that do take place in the economy accordingly but I think that that, you raise a good question that's definitely worth consideration is how do you respond to those, the influx and the shifts that do take place because there's no doubt about it, that's something we face in Maine.

Commissioner: So that must be a huge challenge in Maine, yeah.

Merrill: Yes, indeed.

Commissioner: I'll just follow up on the fraud. Where did you get this?

Merrill: So that comes from the, did we get that from the USDA? I think there's—

Commissioner: [inaudible].

Merrill: Yes, yes.



Commissioner: Sometimes if you don't look for fraud, you don't find it.

Merrill: So yeah, and my understanding is that's based on, you know, people who, you know, lie on their applications or I think earlier it was raised trafficking of EBT cards. I mean, I would also raise, I'd just raise the point, too, that I think there's sometimes misunderstanding about, it was brought up that there have been cards that have been drug dealers and they find an EBT card that's there. I mean, so that just, I think that raises questions, too, as to, that doesn't necessarily mean that the recipient, the participant who was getting SNAP did anything wrong. I mean, people could have their card taken and I'd be interested to see what those numbers are and how common that actually is but based on the data we do have available, it's limited and that's not to say that, you know, where it does exist we want to root that out but let's, I'd say, focus our attention based on kind of the proportion of the issue and how serious it is.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Commissioner: Thanks Robyn.

Merrill: Thank you.

Unidentified: We're going to have a break now and we'll be coming back at 2:00.

Commissioner: Please, if you want to sign up for public testimony, there's still a signup outside and please, do come back even if you aren't providing testimony and listen in. Thank you all for being here.