



**National Commission on Hunger Public Hearing
Public 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: To provide testimony, I can do it without the mic, too. Those of you who are here to provide testimony personally, you have a maximum of 5 minutes and there's no question and answer. It's just straight up testimony and when you come up to the mic, I'll remind you again, please do speak into the mic, so that, because we, everything that we're doing today and have done today is being recorded and will be available on our public Web site. So are we ready to roll with the videos? Okay, so we'll watch the videos together?

[Watch videos.]

Commissioner: They had to be able to get back to their other obligations but just because there are three of us here doesn't mean that we are not representing the entire Commission. If you have one Commissioner here listening to you and tuning in, we are representing the entire Commission. So again, this session is being recorded. It will be transcribed and made available to the public on our public-facing Web site and again, each of you has a maximum of 5 minutes. If you haven't had a chance, I have the sign-up sheet right here, if you haven't had a chance to sign in, please, signal someone over here in the corner, as well. It would be, those of you who would like to submit any type of written testimony or, as you can see, we'll take the video testimony, if you would like to do that, can she just give a, write it down on a piece of paper.

Unidentified: Just use your other sign-in sheet.

Commissioner: Yeah, if you would like to submit that, please, look to the RTI Web site, it's called the HungerCommission.rti and find the e-mail address for Andrea Anater. You can submit it directly to her or you could also submit it through our Web site that we have a little button there, where it says *Submit Comments*, right?

Unidentified: Yeah.

Commissioner: So if you think about something today you didn't have a chance to submit it to us or say it to us, we are still open for comment and suggestions. So I'm



going to go down through my list. Andrea Anater from RTI, who is our staff, is going to be keeping time and she'll give a—

Anater: 3 minute and 1 minute warning.

Commissioner: —3-minute and a 1-minute warning and then the stop talking warning, [Laughter] time is up warning. Okay, so I'm just going to go straight down my list, Jean Terranova, Diane Sullivan, Patricia Baker. [Laughter]

Unidentified: Fancy meeting you here.

Commissioner: I'm sorry. There are two people who have a time constraint, okay.

Unidentified: Yeah.

Commissioner: Thank you. Hello and welcome, please, make sure you do speak straight into the mic so we can get a great recording.

Baker: Sure, good afternoon.

Commissioner: Good afternoon.

Baker: And thank you Commissioners for hosting this event and for letting us testify. I'm Patricia Baker with the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. We're a legal services support center in Massachusetts. I chair the Massachusetts SNAP Food Stamp Coalition since 2002. We work very closely with both USDA and state agency to address, identify and address the causes of hunger and food insecurity in Massachusetts and how SNAP can be more responsive to that. I have submitted written testimony. I was just fiddling with the Wi-Fi a few minutes ago. I think it went through, so you should have that.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Baker: I'm going to just touch on a few points, some of which have been mentioned earlier but I think it's important in looking at Maine to recognize some of the characteristics which also are throughout New England and Massachusetts is representative of that. Not only our, you know, 11.4% of our population in poverty but we have a number of areas of the state of great food insecurity and a lot of that is really seasonal and fickle with the economy itself. We have double unemployment on Cape Cod during the winter months compared to the state average. We have seasonal employment throughout the state based on the farming industry. We have lost jobs in the fishing industry. I live in Gloucester. We have seen the decimation of the fishing industry because of the closing of George's Bank and the no-catch restrictions. We see poverty throughout the state from time to time because of the delicate



infrastructure and economy and because people may rely temporarily on the employment from tourism, which people love Cape Cod and western Mass but in the winter months, those are harsh places to live and anticipating that winter or seasonal poverty is very hard for families to then set aside money in the anticipation of having to use it in the winter months. They barely catch up. We've also experienced as have other states in New England our share of natural disasters and the SNAP Program each time has been instrumental in responding to the seasonal employment, to the part-time employment, to the natural disasters of Hurricane Juno, Hurricane Sandy, the tornadoes in 2011, even this past winter, we had areas of terrible winter, as you know, but areas of power outages where the emergency SNAP benefits, replacement benefits were issued. It has been a critical program in addressing food security in the commonwealth. So I urge you in your deliberations to think not just about very low food insecurity but why SNAP has to be responsive to seasonal and periodic times of food insecurity. My sister was laid off last year and she is on Food Stamps right now, aggressively looking for work in her 60s and still having to rely on this program because her unemployment has run out and the jobs for older workers dry up. It's a reality we live with, even at the Massachusetts minimum wage of \$9 an hour, a family of three still qualifies for SNAP because their income is below 75% gross income of the poverty level. Now that doesn't count the Earned Income Tax Credit, I understand that, which does use, help families catch up on other utility and emergency needs but the costs of even earning that minimum wage job take a huge chunk out of money that's available for families to then buy food. I wanted to address some of the issues that were discussed earlier about employment and training and work requirements in the SNAP Program and I think Faye Conte and others have made an excellent point about what's happened in Maine when the state implemented the end of the, basically, end to implement to the 3-month time limit for the able-bodied without dependents. It is certainly our experience in Massachusetts that the individuals who are ABAWDs are disproportionately veterans, disproportionately homeless, disproportionately people who have significant and often undiagnosed barriers to employment, have often lack of transportation, dental issues, which unfortunately in our society can be a show stopper for many families. They have a hard time marketing themselves, no less having the technology available, the phones available to even get the job offers or into the businesses and now, to the extent the Commission is looking at expanding the work requirements in the program, we think that is misguided. I was struck by some of the testimony that Commissioner Mayhew and the Senator referred to earlier about the TANF Program work requirements in some of the harder labor, harder unemployed areas of the state and I think it's worth looking closely at that data because I would venture to bet that just like in Massachusetts, our TANF caseload has gone way down and the only families who are actually even getting that cash assistance are the ones who have been able to comply with the work requirements. I don't think that's a meaningful measurement to look at the SNAP Program and the high incidence of unemployment throughout the country. There's a number of things that I think should be looked at in coming up with some meaningful employment and training options. One is whether or not there's an actual meaningful assessment of someone's barriers to



employment. People are often not connected with medical facilities, not connected with doctors. Second, is looking at what kinds of supports they need. Transportation is a huge issue in parts of our state. We don't have public transportation. Even the cost of a T-pass is expensive—\$9 each way from Gloucester to Boston. I ride the train every day. I know what it's like to get around. A lot of organizations can't offer even work opportunities in terms of volunteer activity because of the administrative costs and until we have meaningful certificate degree in education programs, any of the work programs that we've seen so far around the country have not made a lasting dent in people's employability. If the goal is to get people out of poverty, the goal has to be ensuring that they get the skills they need for a job that meets not the minimum wage but meets their ability to really get out of poverty in a meaningful way at a much higher level and we also need to recognize there will always be families and individuals who will never get out of poverty because they're elderly, because they're disabled. We have 45% of our own population in Massachusetts on SNAP who are elder or disabled. I do not see them working their way out of poverty and the benefits need to meet that need. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Baker: I didn't breathe. [Laughter]

Commissioner: Delene Perley? Hi, welcome.

Perley: Hi, thank you very much. Thank you for your work on this Commission and for taking the time to listen to my thoughts on hunger and food insecurity. My name is Delene Perley and in retirement I voluntarily coordinate a food pantry, Project Feed, here in Portland, Maine. As well, I volunteer at the soup kitchen on a monthly basis. A number of ideas come to mind as I contemplate this question or problem. First, I'm reminded of the many people who come to our pantry because of medical problems they've had. How do medical problems lead them to come for food? Well, they had a job. They were unable to work and because of their medical issue, lost their job, health insurance, many lost their homes and certainly any savings that they may have had. They're renting or are living with family or relatives and getting help with food allows them to use whatever money they do have for their heat, rent, gas for the car. By the way, our highest month for food need is August and I am concluding that that's because the kids are home, so that's one of the things that connects with [what] other people have been saying. I keep thinking, "What if we had something like Medicare for everybody, a universal health care and Happy Birthday Medicare, 50th this year." [Laughter] Then medical costs wouldn't wipe out a person's finances. This doesn't happen in any other first-world country. Others who come to us have disabilities or they have mental health issues. Our son as Asperger's Syndrome, a high form of functioning, high-functioning autism. Through dogged efforts on my husband's part, he has SSDI, which is Social Security Disability and therefore he has Medicare, even though he's in his 40s. Although he has a college degree, he cannot interview appropriately for a



job but with a caseworker's assistance, he does have a part-time job and with our help for housing, he is living independently. How many of our pantry clients have similar resources to assist them? We need more people employed to provide job finding and job coaching assistance and transportation services for those capable in need of a help, helping hand people. The universal medical insurance about which I spoke, it should include mental health assistance, as well. It's clear to me as I assist people at the pantry that many could never hold a job as they have trouble deciding between peaches and pears, corn and peas. Dental coverage is needed. People say to me, "Don't give me anything I have to chew, I have no teeth." How do they get a job? We also have been asked for pop-top cans because people have no can openers. We've managed to get a few in supply in case they ask that again. Some of the people who come to the pantry are waiting for their SNAP benefits to start or they've run out. Their month is still, their next time they're going to get it is coming up. Have you tried to buy healthy groceries for the amount of food of the amount of money that you get for SNAP? Just the other day I was at the farmers market and one beet cost me \$1.25. A wonderful young man at the University of New England made a recipe book for healthy meals for one month, limiting his spending to SNAP benefits. There are a lot of rice and beans in that book but it should be widely distributed. That would be a great idea and how do they get that recipe book now? Only online and you heard the people comment about they don't have access. We get grants for the pantry so that we can get fresh farm produce during the summer from local farms and it's wonderful but the winter does not bring such bounty. We're back to can veggies and soups and Save A Lot or Food Rescue. Winter farm produce grants and availability is another idea. Some of our clients are working to find it difficult, are working but find it difficult to afford to feed their families. Income disparity in this country is a crime. We are asked for specific proposals. Job coaches, transportation, recipe book printing and distribution, can openers, and winter farm produce grants are the small things. Universal health care, a living wage for workers, and policies that do something about income inequality is what is really needed. Soup kitchens, food pantries, SNAP benefits, general assistance, food rescue efforts by wonderful organizations like Wayside. These are bandages and stop-gap measures. We need a country that believes that everyone should have a chance for a life with a living wage, affordable housing and medical care. I've attached a graph that shows how the United States compares with other countries in income growth over the years from 1975, ironically when our pantry began. The parallel growth in need is incredibly striking. I don't have figures that go back 40 years but I can tell you in the last 20 that our need has quadrupled. We need more, we need more than another garden plot or a food drive. We need to do something about this economic system that's choking a good segment of our population. Your task is big. I don't envy you, your work but I thank you very much for listening.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Joanna Moore? Michael Brennan? Martha May Fink? Courtney Kennedy? Marissa Parisi?

Unidentified: Courtney's here.



Commissioner: Oh, sorry, I'm so sorry.

Kennedy: I'm here. I'm here.

**Commissioner: Sorry, I was getting into a rhythm of just reading off names.
[Laughter] Welcome, you may begin.**

Kennedy: Thank you, good afternoon. My name is Courtney Kennedy and I'm the Nutrition and Education Manager at Good Shepherd Food Bank. Over the course of my professional career, the issues of hunger and poverty have been present. First, as an educator, I work to support students who are challenged to be successful but I never thought to ask the kids if they had anything to eat that day. I now realize and look back that that simple question was the root to many of the behaviors and lack of success of those children with so many other safety nets that were in place. Food insecurity and hunger has consequences to our education system, our health care system, as well as to our economy. In Maine, one in four children face food insecurity. No child should have to worry about where their next meal is going to come from. A hungry student has difficulty getting to school, focusing in school, and offer, and often has higher rates of behavior issues. If a child is malnourished or lacking nutrition, a child's brain lacks development and doesn't develop properly. We must address hunger to ensure that our future generation is functioning adults and that children are prepared to learn, that they stay in school, they get jobs and be self-sufficient supporting our long-term economy. Undernourished children and adults also have increased issues with illness and both physical and mental illness and of course, higher rates of obesity, which are related to increased costs of health care. As a Nutrition and Education Manager at Good Shepherd Food Bank, I spend much of my time supporting the Cooking Matters Program here in Maine. We target behavior change, providing families with resources and knowledge to do what most low-income families want to do and that is provide healthy meals for their children. In a recent study by Share Our Strength, the It's Dinner Time Report, shares the encouraging statistic that 85% of low-income parents say that eating healthy meals is important to them but the biggest barrier is the cost and what I love about Cooking Matters is that we provide that opportunity to break that barrier and give parents and families the tools to be able and techniques to save money for their families while eating healthy. I'm reminded daily of the impact of Cooking Matters has on families when I walk into a class each day and a caregiver thanks me for the groceries that are provided at the end of the class because she didn't know where the next meal was coming from or an adult participant who shares that they have lost 30 pounds over the course of 6 weeks because they've cut added sugars from their diet. These stories are endless. In Maine, we cannot do this work without Maine SNAP Ed, who uses Cooking Matters signature course series and Cooking Matters at the Store tours as part of their deliverables to provide nutrition education to low income families. Cooking Matters and SNAP Ed reach spans generations reaching kids all the way to elderly. Without this partnership, the work of Good Shepherd Food Bank would be concentrated to such a small geographical area, only



reaching small numbers. With the help of Maine SNAP Ed, Cooking Matters is reaching families statewide and is having large success with providing essential nutrition and food skills education to families in need. SNAP Ed is key to the fight in ending hunger. Our work to provide well-rounded course series and impact education is supported by our local grocer, as well, who is Hannaford Supermarkets. Hannaford provides essential funding where Good Shepherd Food Bank and Maine SNAP Ed are unable for groceries in both, for in class and take home, which reinforce the lessons that are learned in class. This unique partnership between a nonprofit with a mission to end hunger, a government program focused on providing nutrition education and a large-scale business committed to healthy communities focuses allows for collaboration in the fight to end hunger is unique but it is clear that this private, that this funding, the private funding of Good Shepherd Food Bank could not, we could not do this work on our own. We need the partnership of Maine SNAP Ed and Hannaford to be able to have such deep reach within our communities. As I reflect on hunger in Maine, I think that there is no real answer to the burning question, “How do we end hunger,” because this is just too complex for me to personally wrap my head around. What I know and is proven is that Cooking Matters is providing essential food and nutrition and literacy skill education to low income families to support their SNAP benefits. There are people who are making healthy food choices with SNAP benefits because of the education that they’re receiving through Maine SNAP Ed. This could not be done without the many partnerships that exist in Maine. My recommendations include ensure that SNAP Ed funding is preserved to provide essential nutrition education to low-income families with the skills and knowledge to stretch their food dollar and make healthy choices to reduce long-term health care issues, enact policy changes through the Child Nutrition Reauthorization to give states and communities more options to serve summer meals ensuring kids in rural and urban areas and suburban communities have access to critical nutrition in the summer months. For those who work for minimum wage, ensure that SNAP benefits meet appropriate levels and then also, finally, expand federal funding for both breakfast and lunch programs to support alternative breakfast models, like breakfast in the classroom, which have drastic impacts on participation rates to ensure that students are able to learn properly with good nutrition. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Marissa Parisi? While Marisa is coming up, I’ll call another name, Thomas Ptacek [phonetic], okay, so Thomas, you’re up next. Okay, hi Marissa.

Parisi: Hi.

Commissioner: Welcome, you may begin.

Parisi: Thank you. Thanks for this opportunity to speak with you. I’m Marissa Parisi. I’m the Executive Director of Hunger Free Vermont, which is an outreach and advocacy organization working to end the injustice of hunger and malnutrition for all Vermonters



but we, while we're based in Vermont, we do a lot of partnership work on a regional basis and with national partners around the country and it was a pleasure to share a lunch with many of you today because what I really want to hone in on is a very specific topic and that is the restorative power of lunch because there's some really good work that we're particularly excited about in Vermont that's going really well. And it's the use of the community eligibility provision, which allows qualifying schools to provide universal school meals, free school meals, to all children regardless of their families' incomes. And advancing universal school meals has been a key strategy for Hunger Free Vermont because we've continuously seen families struggle with food insecurity, yet have incomes that don't qualify their children for participation in the free or reduced price meal program. And it is also continuously disheartening for us, as advocates, to see families who qualify for free school meals but refuse to fill out the application and in small rural communities like Vermont, the reason that is a lot of the time is that you've grown up with the school secretary and you just don't want to go tell them that you're struggling, even though you might be eligible. So in our schools today the lunch line is the only place we're separating children by socioeconomic class. Even though the USDA and schools have implemented safeguards such as PIN numbers. In one rural Vermont school, they use popsicle sticks with your name on it that you put in a bucket if you eat that day to anonymize the program, you know, what to, anonymize the category you might be in. Kids tell us all the time that they know the grownups have a system in place and what category they fall into. So as much as we're working to keep children, you know, out of that knowledge, they still know and it still impacts them. So the kids at the lower end of the scale are still experiencing the same shame and stigma we're trying to prevent. It happens every day. So in our 20-year history we have frequently found ourselves in the position of helping schools manage their financial plan in their school meal programs and food service directors deal with the daily frustration of making school meal finances work, particularly because they see hungry children coming through their lines without money and in that moment, it just doesn't matter if the kids are reduced or pay, they're just feeding them anyway. And then this is creating debt in the programs, which takes a lot of resources for the schools to collect. So it might take as many as 10 calls home to the family to collect \$10. So I'd like to just take a quick moment, too, to share what we're seeing as a change in the financial picture for Vermont families, which causes the dynamic of the debt of the reduced and the pay kids. So Vermont's Joint Fiscal Office calculates the cost of living for a Vermont family of four every year, which includes only very basic needs of housing, food, transportation, utilities, and child and health care. The current estimate of the cost of living for a family of four in Vermont is over \$4,200.00 per month. If there are two full-time workers in the home, each making Vermont's minimum wage, the family is only taking home about half that. Just to break even two workers in the family would need to make about \$13.50 per hour and still would not have enough money left over for savings or things like clothing or, you know, kids' field trips cost a fortune that you have to send money to. So I mean, there's all kinds of things that families need money for over and above that. So what, uh-oh, [Laughter] so what I want to tell you about quickly then is that the way we're doing school meals, the way



we're paying for them right now is just not working and Hunger Free Vermont helped the state of Vermont remove the reduced price category with two pieces of legislation and that increased participation among those kids by as much as 79% just not having to pay the little copays that they were paying. So when CEP became available to us to provide universal meals to all kids, we really helped as many schools as possible go for it and in the last year we had 32 schools using the Community Eligibility Provision and it skyrocketed participation. Our principals, our parents, our teachers are telling us that universal meals is changing the landscape of their school. It's becoming a welcoming place. It's becoming a place for nutrition education. It's becoming a place kids want to be every day. It's taking pressure off of the family food budget. This one simple little program is changing so much for our families. So our recommendation to, that we hope the commission will share is broad expansion of the Community Eligibility Provision, so all schools in our country can offer universal school meals. That might mean changing the multiplier, you know, to increase reimbursement so more schools can do it. It might mean don't just have 40% direct certification schools, have all schools be able to do it and allow municipalities or businesses or philanthropy cover the rest of the cost. But it's really working. I know you're cutting me off, aren't you?

Commissioner: I am.

Parisi: Okay, well, thank you very much to the Commission [Laughter] and Vermont will be the first state in the nation to offer universal school meals, as soon as it's available to all of us.

Commissioner: Sounds great.

Commissioner: Great, thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Thomas?

Ptacek: And if I can, I'd like to let Madonna go in front of me because she needs to get going, if that's possible.

Commissioner: Come on up. Madonna Sactomah? No? Yes? You'll correct us when you come up. Hello and welcome.

Sactomah: Thank you. Good afternoon Dr. Chilton, Mr. Doar, no Mr. Doar, and members of the National Commission on Hunger. My name is Madonna Sactomah and I'm a member of the Peskotomuhkati Tribe, better known as the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sebec in Washington County, Maine. I was born and raised in the Sebec reservation. My first language is Passamaquoddy. I attended Saint Anne's Catholic School, where I learned English. You probably can tell that by now. I have worked for many years within my



community. I have worked as a Health Center Administrator at the Pleasant Point and Indian Township Health Centers. We have two reservations in Washington County 50 miles apart. I have also worked on projects near and dear to my heart such as teaching the Passamaquoddy language. I am a grandmother of seven, a mother of five. We adopted two additional children. I was also a foster parent. I am 72 years old. I was the former Passamaquoddy Tribal Representative to the Maine State Legislator, also a veteran of the United States Navy Medical Corps. On the Reservation we were dependent on USDA programs to supplement our subsistent way of living as Native Americans. We were able to hunt and fish for our food but the USDA programs had to supplement our diet due to the changing way of life on the reservations. Programs like food commodities and milk from the Indian agent, excuse me.

Commissioner: It's okay, take your time.

Sactomah: In coming to testify my hesitation was in that I would have to relive my childhood and it is very difficult to talk about these things. When basic things like food depended, depended not by how you can get your own resources but by another person who did not understand our culture. So programs like food commodities and milk from the Indian agent were the only thing that kept up from going hungry. I, like others, went to school to learn and because there were resources available like hot food daily. One had access to resources if you did what you were told. The Indian agent looked favorably at those who went to school. I went to the reservation on school 'til the eighth grade. Due to the political turmoil within the tribe, the state suggested in resolving the intertribal dispute that part of membership moved to our winter hunting ground and the others stayed at the summer fishing area, know as Sebec, which is where I was raised. This affected the easy access to our food resources where the tribe traveled and wintered, where the hunting was prevalent and in the summer, in the summer place, where fishing was prevalent. I was on the summer reservation, so in the winter, which was hard for us, we had to depend on the USDA food subsidies to sustain us through the hard winters in Maine. When there was legislation about the need for summer food program sites in Maine, it was presented to the Education Committee on which I served. Needless to say, I was shocked. I asked to testify and share with the Committee the sadness that I felt hearing that thousands of Maine children were going hungry in the summer. I thought that was only peculiar in Native communities. I don't think I can finish that in 1 minute.

Commissioner: It's okay, you can have extra time.

Sactomah: Thank you. I was shocked. I asked to testify and share with the committee the sadness that I felt hearing that thousands of Maine children were going hungry in the summer. I told them that I never thought I'd see the day when things were better on the reservation and what was happening outside of it. Because of the USDA programs available to children on the reservations, we always could eat. Every child in our country should



have that right. I was moved to tears during that testimony. Children should never experience hunger. So I ask you to recommend to Congress to strengthen all the child, children nutrition programs and all the feeding programs in our country. They help children learn and be successful. They helped me, the person, to be the person I am today. This is a step toward building a great America. We need a great America in these times. We need to build strong communities and we need to ensure that everybody has equal access to food. It is necessary as to the air we breathe. Food is important and you should have it when you're young so you can develop. You can't learn unless you have access to good nutritional food. When I heard public comment that the summer programs would be too much to administer in the school system, I was appalled. Too much to administer to feed hungry children so they can learn? What is our priority? Children need to be nourished, also pregnant mothers. Children's learning is affected. Access to food should not be a political issue. It is a human responsibility. On the reservation once graduated from the eighth grade, you have to go to school in another town and once potato season started, children would travel north with their families to pick potatoes to sustain them through the winter months. Education was a luxury. When they returned, they were so behind academically they could not catch up and ended up dropping out of school. This created perpetual poverty on the reservation. Today we still have 60% unemployment rate on my reservations. Chronic illnesses are higher than national averages. Hunger impacts education and jobs. Workers can't do good work if they're distracted by not having the basic needs met. The working poor need to be able to afford good food for their family. How can human beings regulate food? I don't understand that. SNAP should not be conditional. If a state qualifies for a waiver because of high unemployment, then they should be granted one. Maine has the responsibility to get food to those in need and to feed all its citizens. I ask you and the U.S. Congress to continually, to continue fully investing in all U.S. citizens by protecting and enhancing vital nutritional programs, such as SNAP and children nutrition programs like the summer meal programs. It is unconscionable for anyone in the United States to be in a position without food. If we were the type of country that we profess we are then we should not experience hunger in the great United States. I ask you, Commissioners, to bring back to Congress the important message that we need jobs in our local area, invest in the surrounding regions where we leave, and stimulate commercial development that will sustain long-term economic growth. Until we have that in place, we need SNAP Programs that are not conditional upon finding a job, nutrition programs that feed children year round and more SNAP to our elders, who often have to be on special diets. Thank you, I thank you for the extra time you gave me. Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. [applause] Tom, Thomas, how do you say your last name?

Ptacek: Patazik.



Commissioner: Ptacek?

Ptacek: Excuse me, I always know it's me when there's a pause at the last name. [Laughter] Czechoslovakian names trick people up, so.

Commissioner: I'm glad I'm not alone.

Ptacek: Dr. Chilton, members of the National Commission on Hunger, my name is Thomas Ptacek. I am a veteran, also a Navy Corpsman, so and a former recipient of the SNAP Program and I can assure you I never thought I would be. Prior to spending a year at the Oxford Street Shelter here in Portland, I didn't know the first thing about social service programs, except for who I thought they were for and that it wasn't me. I had never even filed for unemployment in my life. But even without addiction issues or serious mental health issues, I found myself in a situation that just a few years before was unimaginable. To explain what it's like to be homeless for a year is difficult but it involves words like "anxiety," "depression," "fear" and "hopelessness." During my year of homelessness, I experienced a disconnection with the world around me that left me capable of clearly defining the word "vulnerable." My physical health was the worst it's ever been. I gained close to 100 pounds, high-starch diet, high-carb diet, usually at soup kitchens. Depression didn't help. [Laughter] My mental health was the worst it's ever been, depressed and hopeless is not the foundation for success. I've used the word "hopeless" a couple of times and let me be clear about this, when I was in the Navy, I worked on an inpatient psychiatric ward. The only thing I didn't really understand wasn't psychosis or the intricacies of personality disorders, it was this idea that someone could be completely without hope. Sadness to the point of contemplating suicide, I got it. I understood that but hopelessness, I just couldn't really imagine that that was the proper word but it is. I understand that now. Even with mental health treatment, you don't just bounce back. Without the treatment, it is a long and arduous road at best. It was not a quick and easy road back for me and the SNAP Program was a big part of my success in returning to a more fulfilling life. To me, the most beneficial aspect of the SNAP Program is that it allows for choice in the purchase of food that can be prepared in the home. I would like to go beyond nutrition and talk about what this really means and just what it is that the SNAP Program provides that soup kitchens and food pantries cannot. This extra piece that I personally benefited from greatly is the sense of normalcy and stability that comes from going to the grocery store and choosing your food. Waiting in a soup kitchen line isn't normal. Going to a food pantry doesn't feel stable. When I first got out of the Oxford Street Shelter, it was through a VASH voucher, which is essentially Section 8 specifically for veterans. I was very grateful to be back in a place of my own and I didn't dare ask for anything else, so I continued to go to soup kitchens and food pantries. Consequently, I continued to feel less than and stuck. When I finally applied for SNAP, it was because I was ready and looking to move my life forward. Having that very important aspect of my life stabilized allowed me to let go of that daily crisis and focus on other aspects of my life. It may sound strange but going to the grocery store, planning and



then preparing a meal gave me a sense of peace and accomplishment each and every day. For the first several months, I was still getting healthy. Spending a year in the shelter leaves you more than a little unsure of yourself. My confidence and self-esteem took a big hit. At this point I was still very overwhelmed. Each day still brought on anxiety, confusion, and yes, hopelessness. It's worth noting that this point, with long-term stayer initiatives and housing first programs gaining more and more support on the federal level, all services that people rely on in their struggle to rise above poverty are going to have to make adjustments in how their services are administered in order to meet the actual needs and not serve as a deterrent to an individual's progress. Because I was fortunate enough to have my SNAP benefit for long enough, it carried me through to a place where I was comfortable and could move forward without the fear of winding back up in the shelter. To this day, over 5 years removed from my homelessness, not a single day goes by that the thought and anxiety of how devastating it would be to return to homelessness doesn't enter my mind. The steps in my return to full-time employment and self-sustainability that the SNAP Program played a major part in was the stabilization and control of a very important aspect of my life. The success of that led to the confidence and self-worth to venture back into employment, even if initially on a part-time basis. The success of that led to my recognition of the need for some mental health care. Through that I found the ability to invest in myself. One major way I did this was through diet and making major changes in my diet, which were only possible because I had the ability to go to the store and choose. Today I don't get a SNAP benefit. I'm over income but I remember right up to the very end, even though I was a few years removed from my time at Oxford Street Shelter, I would still have moments where I would open the freezer, even though I didn't need anything right then, just to look in the freezer and be happy with what I see in the freezer, knowing that I have food, knowing that I'm going to eat. So SNAP is not, I'm finishing, so SNAP is not just about food, it's about allowing someone to feel normal and stable. SNAP is an investment in a human being. Several years ago that investment was made in me. Now that investment is paying off. My job, which involves a fair amount of travel, requires a good reliable car, so I had to buy a car. I register that car, insure that car, put gas in that car. Target's got a ton of my money because I literally got to a place where I had nothing. I needed everything. So concerning the investment in me, the car alone, if viewed as a capital expenditure, means that I've already put back twice what I've received in SNAP. Any way you look at it, I'm putting money into the economy and I am in a place in my life that I would not have been without SNAP. If I had to make a recommendation to the Commission, it would be simple. Do what achieves your desired goal, don't do what makes realizing that goal improbable. If you ask yourself what is the best, most efficient way to ensure that those living in poverty have enough food and the system through which they obtain the food does not serve to keep them in poverty or in any way block their path out of poverty, the answer is obvious, a healthy, robust accessible SNAP Program. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. [applause]



Ptacek: Do I need to give copies to someone?

Unidentified: Yeah.

Commissioner: Shannon McCabe?

Anater: Anybody that has copies of their testimony, public or ones to share, just hand them to me.

Commissioner: You're going to hand your testimony, have you given your testimony? Does someone else have it? Okay. Hi Shannon, welcome, you may begin.

McCabe: Members of the National Commission on Hunger, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. My name is Shannon McCabe and I am a student at Boden College in Brunswick, majoring in Sociology and Environmental Studies. This summer I am a fellow at the Maine Hunger Initiative here in Portland. As I approached my fellowship this summer at the Maine Hunger Initiative, I was excited to be a part of the efforts I am so passionate about, reducing poverty and food insecurity. However, it soon became clear to me that efforts to reduce poverty and hunger are not happening. They're not happening because organizations and individuals dedicated to these issues are being forced to play defense right now, rather than offense. Working to help people simply maintain their benefits in the current political climate is a full-time job for organizations like MHI. We are spending our time preventing legislation, like those proposing food choice restrictions or splitting SNAP from passing. Rather than lifting people out of poverty, we are simply trying to keep life manageable for those living in it and even that is an uphill battle. The very fact that this Commission was formed and that you are all here today gives me hope as I look toward the future. I ask that you seriously and sincerely consider the impacts of what your recommendations to Congress could mean for our country's next generation. As you know very well, a generation with so many hungry children means a generation of kids that are distracted from learning, lower in stamina, and have impaired mental and physical development. Put simply, "Hungry children cannot learn as capably as their well-nourished peers." In a time when the conversation in our country revolves around inequality and its effects, it is crucial that we even the playing field, especially when it comes to the basic human right of access to food. Reliable access to food is not a privilege for those who can afford it. Preventing people's access to food is not a way to cut costs or to further restrict the lives of those living in poverty and it is most certainly not a way to motivate people out of poverty. No one wants, thank you, no one wants to feed their families with chips and soda but when that's the cheapest available food that will make their children full the longest, that's a hard choice that some people have to make. Furthermore, SNAP purchasing patterns mirror that of the average American. To restrict only SNAP recipients is just another way of shaming the poor. The USDA agrees that incentivizing healthy choices and making these choices more affordable is a far better alternative to imposing additional food



restrictions for SNAP. A comprehensive study of the potential impact of such restrictions conducted by the Illinois Public Health Association supports USDA's opinion. The study asked and answered perhaps the most important question related to this approach, would the proposed restriction have a desired effect of reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages? These researchers found that such a restriction would have limited impact on these purchases for two reasons. First, SNAP recipients spend both SNAP and out-of-pocket dollars to make grocery purchases. Thus wages or other cash would likely be substituted for SNAP to make these purchases. Second and most importantly, they determined that there is population-wide lack of understanding of the health harms of these products. Given that overconsumption of these products are not limited to SNAP recipients but are a society-wide problem, a universal approach would be far more effective, would be a far more effective approach to curb these purchases. Making it harder to buy less nutritious food doesn't make it easier to purchase fresh produce. Rather than restricting food choices, we should expand people's ability to buy healthy food. Recently in Maine we received a FINI Grant to increase access to fruits and vegetables for the food insecure at farmers markets across the state. While also supporting small and midsize farmers. The FINI Grant as a federally funded nutrition incentive program is a major game changer, not only because it's the first of its kind but also because of the volume of funding and the connections it allows among states in the nation. Thank you. The incentive funds are allowing families to use their EBT cards to purchase twice as many fruits and vegetables from their local farmers markets. For every \$1 spent on produce, they earn \$1 to spend on produce. This incentive is bringing more federal dollars into our state and directly to our dedicated farmers. This model can be spread to farmers markets in other states, as well, as well as to traditional grocery stores. People provide, providing people with more money that can be spent only on produce promotes healthy choices without increasing restrictions. Food choice restrictions, work requirements, and funding SNAP through a block grant are all examples of taking two steps back in the fight against poverty. I am hopeful that by the time I join the workforce, we will be able once again to take steps forward. Today we can do that by recommending that Congress continue SNAP as an entitlement program, mandate that states eligible for a geographic waiver apply for it, increase the minimum wage and expand the one-for-one SNAP incentive for purchasing produce. Thank you for your time and attention and I look forward to hearing the outcomes of this Commission.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. There's another person that needs to leave early. I only have two. Oh, we did two.

Anater: Oh, we did?

Commissioner: Yes, we did. Representative Scott Hamann?

Hamann: Yes, Hamann.



Commissioner: Hamann.

Hamann: I only have a few copies. Can I give you these?

Commissioner: Oh, sure, absolutely.

Hamann: Appreciate it.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Hamann: This one?

Commissioner: Whichever one you prefer. Thank you very much. You may begin.

Hamann: Thank you. Good afternoon, my name is Scott Hamann. I'm a State Representative, representing the people of South Portland and Cape Elizabeth and I also work at Maine Statewide Food Bank, Good Shepherd Food Bank as part of a team ending hunger here in our state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your engagement on this critical issue. I approach hunger relief from two perspectives. In my day job, I manage a rural food access program called Cupboard Collective, building partnerships between the food bank, our rural pantries, and their municipal governments to ensure consistent access to sufficient quantities of food and nutritious produce. Twice a month we deliver food to our, on our large refrigerated trucks to communities that have chosen to partner with us. We're able to dramatically increase the volume of food and the proportion of produce available to pantry patrons. I also focus on improving food security in my role as a State Representative and a member of the Health and Human Services Committee. I didn't run for office specifically to fight hunger. In fact, I ran for office to fight for economic opportunity, to improve education, and to support access to health care. How naïve I was to think that we could have any of these things until we first eradicate hunger in our state. I quickly learned that you can't say we have equal access to education if 25% of Maine children are not only hungry but lacking the nutrition their developing brains need to grow and learn in healthy ways. Our state should double, our state could double its education budget but that doesn't mean a thing for a child who's experiencing chronic hunger or whose diet is so nutrient poor that her brain can't process the material appropriately. The structural foundation for cognitive functioning is built in early childhood and one-fourth of our future leaders will have to overcome the adverse childhood experience of hunger just to keep pace with their peers. That's not opportunity, so let's fix that. What kind of economic future are we building if 25% of the people who will be doing the work in our society have been unnecessarily handicapped by hunger? We know the cost of remedial job training is exponentially higher for an adult than for a child, so let's just get it right in the first place. Why wouldn't we invest in the most vital component of education, nutrition, for the sake of our most vital



assets, our children and our future workforce? Let's make sure that the recommendations that come out of this Commission's work guarantee at minimum that every child in America never has to worry about where their next nutritious meal will come from 365 days a year. I'm getting the flag, so I'm going to jump forward.

Commissioner: It said, "3 minutes," you're alright.

Hamann: Okay.

Commissioner: That was—

Hamann: But simply fighting hunger is not enough. Food insecurity is often a symptom of the condition of poverty. If we're ever going to eradicate hunger in our country, we have to dismantle the systemic causes of generational poverty and income inequality and build up a system that provides economic stability for every man, woman, child, senior, student, immigrant, and citizen in America. This means living wages. This means leveling the playing field in the classroom. This means supporting policies that support people who don't have a place at the table and rejecting policies that punish people for the crime of being poor or economically disempowered. If we empower people who are hungry, we'll no longer have hungry people. And when it comes to health care, ensuring every person has regular access to adequate nutrition, so they can lead a healthy life should be a basic human right in America and the premise of any national health care initiatives. We can save health care costs if we invest in reliable access to nutrition for those at risk of or experiencing food insecurity. I'll give you an example. In Maine 15% of our Maine Care costs, one of the state's largest expenses are due to higher prevalence of diabetes in our Maine Care population. We know that food insecurity drastically increases the chance a person is going to be obese and we know that obesity increases the likelihood a person will develop Type II Diabetes. Why then wouldn't we proactively invest resources to alleviate hunger and increase nutrition if we know that the cost of doing nothing is more expensive in the long run? The reason is that we've dismissed food insecurity as a simple welfare issue instead of the public health issue that in fact is. When we start thinking about hunger as a public health issue, we acknowledge that we have skin in the game to keep our neighbors healthy and we start to make some very important connections. Most notably, we understand that ensuring access to education is a wise investment. The most efficient health care we can provide is health care that's not needed because someone avoided illness with consistent nutrition. Taking the public health perspective, look at the science. We know that Type II Diabetes is primarily caused by obesity and obesity is primarily caused by food insecurity but it's not just the content of what they're eating, the calorie-dense, nutrient-poor diet. It's also cycles of deprivation that cause metabolic stagnation and cause blood sugar levels to dip and spike at unhealthy levels. So we should fix that by making produce and nutritious food more available. I ask the Commission to prioritize programs that not only reduce hunger but increase access to nutrition. If that means doubling the value of a family's Food Stamps



when they purchase fruits and vegetables, that's a policy we ought to support. If that means setting up farm stands in food deserts, then that's a policy we ought to support. If that means engaging the agricultural sector to grow produce for pantries, then that's a policy we ought to support. In Maine we have a program called Mainers Feeding Mainers, where the food bank contracts with Maine farmers ahead of the growing season to grow produce for the state's food pantries. This is less expensive than paying to truck emergency food donations to the state. The produce has more nutritional value and the money that funds the program goes to Maine farmers, growing our economy and creating jobs. This innovative model of social entrepreneurship could be replicated in other states that have a strong agricultural sector like Maine. If we want to end hunger, improve nutrition, decrease health care costs, grow the economy, and create jobs, we should support these kinds of solutions throughout the country. Thank you, again, for the opportunity to discuss how we can reduce hunger in America.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Jennifer Johnson? And then the next person I'm going to call, just make sure you know you're up next, would be Sarah Grow, okay.

Johnson: Good afternoon.

Commissioner: Good afternoon.

Johnson: I am Jennifer Johnson and I wanted to talk with you about some of the experiences that I've seen here in Maine dealing with hunger. I was, I served for 2 years as the President of the George Day Mitchell School PTO up in Waterville, Maine and we have a pretty high poverty rate up there in the school. There were 73% of the kids were on free and reduced and as a PTO we went into the school and said, "What do you need? What would you like us to do for you?" And the answer they were giving us across the board was, "We need these kids fed. If they're not eating and they're coming to school hungry, they're not as able to learn," and my eyes were just thrown open, as I'm sure everyone has that moment, everyone in this room because you don't do this unless you see it for yourself and for me, it was volunteering in a first grade classroom and a girl came in that was developmentally delayed. She was not even at a kindergarten level yet and she couldn't go and join her classmates for group review of math because she was eating three school-provided breakfasts because she was starving because she hadn't eaten since her school lunch the day before. And I was shocked because you hear statistics like one in four Maine children is hungry but you don't think they're here. They're all around us. They're in our communities. They're our children's friends. They are the kids you see in the playground. They're the ones you see walking around while you're driving in town. They're everywhere and so we set about to do something about that. And what we did was we started in-school food pantries and we set about the task of raising funding to be able to do that and we were very effective in communicating with our town, not only that there was a need but this is the



need, this is what you can do to help because just communicating a message of need isn't enough. It'll tug at people's heartstrings and it'll let them know that there's a problem but without a direct path to this is what you can do, it is something that's quickly forgotten about and in the course of about 9 months, we raised \$70,000 in our very poverty-stricken community and we put food pantries in our Edu-care Program, both of our elementary schools and our junior high. So children in our community were from birth through about age 13 had food if they needed it. We have the federally funded school breakfast and we also have the fruits and veggies programs in the classroom but our staff were saying that wasn't enough, that they were still buying food and, with their own salaries and keeping it in their desks to feed these children. So we brought in food, thank you, and the difference was dramatic. We could, you'd bring a child to the food pantry and let them bring food home and you can hear them going, "My mom is going to be so happy to get all of this food." And you'd have the grandmother coming in saying, "I have custody of my grandchildren because of," whatever situation might have been happening with their parents and she said, "I couldn't let them become wards of the state but I don't make enough money to properly provide for them and this is a huge blessing because truly it's a much lower cost tax dollar-wise to provide some food in the school and let the children live with a family member than it is to try to find a foster home, try to find an alternate housing solution for them. Now what, sorry, excuse me, other things that we had done to try to address this in our community was a Wal-Mart was able to provide their surplus food to our local food bank but our local food bank had, as is I think the case in a lot of them, most of their volunteers were retired persons because those are the ones that have a little more free time during the day to be able to do things like that. So the average age of our volunteer was 71 and they were picking up tens of thousands of pounds of food at no cost but that's a very difficult thing to do. So funds were raised in the amount of about \$30,000 to buy a van for them and so they're now able to pick up the food, deliver it to all of the schools, deliver it to our local food bank, evening sandwich programs, homeless shelters and just that little bit of infrastructural help is making it much easier for the food to be distributed. We've had a couple of people here from Good Shepherd Food Bank and we've collaborated with them, as well, with their SNAP Programs, with their Cupboard Collective Programs and all of this collaboration and working with different agencies and different groups has made a tremendous difference and it can't be dependent on the nonprofit sector alone because raising funds, raising awareness, is a tremendously huge job and that's in addition to the job of actually providing for the needs in your community and we need the government's help and we can do some on our own but we can't do everything and we need kind of a central, I guess, location of aid, where we can look and say, "What can we do? How can you help us and let us go from there?"

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Sarah Grow? And Joan Ingram, you'll be up next. Are you here, Joan? Okay.

Grow: Thank you very much.



Commissioner: Hi.

Grow: Can you hear?

Commissioner: Yes.

Grow: Thank you very much. My name is Sarah Grow and I'm the Director of Advocacy and Development at the Open Door. We are a community food resource center and we're based in Gloucester in Massachusetts. We serve Gloucester, Rockport, Manchester, Essex, and Ipswich residents and our mission is to alleviate the impact of hunger in our community. We have more than 13 different free hunger-relief programs and last year we served 6,225 unduplicated people, including one in six Gloucester residents. Using a prevention-based approach grounded in nutrition education and public health and community development, we provide those in need with access to nutrition in a socially acceptable environment but our biggest challenge continues to be meeting the community's need for food assistance, while making sure there's consistent access to healthy, fresh, nutrient dense, and then, of course, more expensive food. And nutrition-based programs have been strategically placed in areas of greatest need that include our food deserts, in poverty and medically underserved census tracts and the prevalence of hunger in Gloucester are six times the state average, according to Project Bread and we have a higher unemployment rate than the statewide average. Our community needs assessment highlighted access to food assistance and 44% of our children have, are eligible for free and reduced price lunch with two schools at 60% and 70%. 12% of our food pantry clients are fishing families and now it's not just the crew that come but it's the boat owners and the lumpers and everybody else that works with them. Women heads of households make up 40% of our food pantry households. Along with our traditional food hunger relief programs, that include our food pantry community meals, hot holiday meals, a senior soup and salad and food rescue. Our innovative programs include a mobile market, prescription food bag program that we collaborate with our local hospital, good food boxes, and we collaborate with governmental agencies to provide summer meals, after summer school programs, and SNAP outreach. More than 1,000 volunteers help us to connect people to good food every year. I'm trying to paint you a picture about how we're just not one program. Since the economic downturn in 2008, we have had a 96% increase in the number of requests for food assistance. And while we keep hearing that the economy is getting better, to be perfectly honest with you, it hasn't come down to our clients. Our numbers are not going down. Many, many are struggling with less, with less money, less work hours, and less Food Stamps. And what we are seeing, quite frankly at the Open Door is a new landscape of need. The face of those that come into the food pantry include working families who are underemployed, those working multiple jobs, working minimum wage and fast food wages, they're underemployed, they work in banks, in grocery stores, and restaurants, and nursing facilities, and schools, and on buses, and on boats, and in dental/veterinary offices. Those are the kinds of people that are coming to our food pantry now. We've continued to meet



this increased need and at the same time, we've provided healthier food, almost a million pounds of food last year. More than 70% of our clients are already on WIC and, I'm sorry, on SNAP and WIC and the National School Lunch Program and while the clients can come to our food pantry every week, many try not to. Many just leave it 'til the end of the month when their SNAP runs out. Bread for the World says that if all the hunger relief programs in the U.S. were in 24 grocery bags, only one bag, only one bag would represent all the charity work that happens in the U.S. The need, everybody else, the Federal Nutrition Programs provide the other 23 bags. I guess we say this because the hunger relief charities, we really cannot pick up the slack if these programs go away. SNAP, WIC, TFAP, the National School Lunch Program, the summer food service program, all these need to be strengthened. As governmental agencies race towards modernization and 21st Century practices, churning has increased, access is not consistent. For 62-year-old veteran SNAP means keeping him alive. "Without SNAP I get fearful I'll get homeless," he says. "With SNAP, I feel I don't have nothing to worry about, not food, not shelter, I don't think about suicide." For our mothers, they say that SNAP is the best gift they could have. In Gloucester, which is the birthplace of the American fishing industry, we're the nation's oldest working poor, they say, "Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime," but for us, it no longer rings true. For Len, he says he'd go more hungry than he is if he didn't have Food Stamps and without the food pantry, he'd be in trouble. For 73-year-old Carol, she hides the fact that she's on SNAP from her son when he comes to visit. Before SNAP, he'd open up her fridge and he'd say, "Where did you get this garbage? Where did you get this garbage that is in your fridge?" She didn't like to tell him that she'd been buying out-of-date food, that's what she'd been surviving on but now with SNAP, she gets to buy chicken and fish. She still hides her card and she's afraid that when she dies that he'll find out that she's been on SNAP. Our summer meals program went from 11 to 21 sites this summer. We are now servicing 180 homeless families and 320 children that live there. Like the pied piper, the children follow our staff. We have an intern here today, Taylor, who helps distribute those meals and they run after her when they're delivering food. Last week a child hugged her and the mom at the same time said it was the end of the month and the family SNAP had run out. This family was relying on the summer food summer breakfast that we were providing and lunches, along with our weekly distribution for our free mobile market. It would be the only food available to them. With SNAP, this veterans, they not only get to eat but they get, they don't think about suicide. The fishermen, for SNAP is a lifeline. For seniors, like Carol, they not only eat well and healthy but they don't have to eat food that others consider garbage. When we have discussions that talk about eliminating our Federal Food Assistance Programs, what we're really talking about is actually taking food away from our neighbors. Gloucester's past is steeped in providing food for the nation. The fish we caught and the freezing technology that we developed ship food all over the world. It wasn't that long ago. Today one in six of our residents uses our services to feed their families and Federal Food Assistance Programs are this country's best health safety net. They need to be strengthened because they work. Community organizations like us at the Open Door cannot make up the difference alone because our one bag is already overflowing. Thank you.



Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Joan Ingram? I have three after this, okay, yeah. Hi, welcome.

Ingram: Hi, good afternoon members of the Commission. Thank you for having this opportunity today. My name is Joan Ingram and I manage the SNAP Ed Program out of the University of New England, which is based in Portland, Maine. You've heard a lot today about the links between poverty, food insecurity, and obesity in presentations thus far and now you have a better picture of the challenges faced in Maine. Today I'd like to spend a few minutes to share with you a local perspective on a successful federal program that works to address some of these challenges. Specifically, I'll be speaking about the Maine SNAP Ed Program and how it helps Mainers eat healthier on a limited budget. As you are all probably aware, SNAP Ed is a nutrition education and obesity prevention arm of USDA's SNAP Ed, SNAP Program. It addresses the N in SNAP. The goal of the national SNAP Ed Program is to improve the likelihood that persons eligible for SNAP will make healthy choices within a limited budget and choose active lifestyles consistent with the current dietary guidelines for Americans in My Plate. People eligible for SNAP include SNAP recipients as well as those up to 185% of the federal poverty level. We know that food insecurity is a major public health challenge, as are malnutrition and obesity. These challenges lead to poor health outcomes and increase medical cost. SNAP Ed is a multifaceted program with the aim of addressing food insecurity, as well as obesity. SNAP Ed helps participants maximize their snap benefits and use them more wisely for better health and it helps people develop the skills to shop, cook, and eat healthy food on a limited budget by combining nutrition education, social marketing, and environmental support to low income families. In Maine SNAP Ed is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services and then implemented statewide by the University of New England through contracts with local public health coalitions called Healthy Maine Partnerships. We have approximately 40 Nutrition Educators working statewide on SNAP Ed initiatives. They reach all corners of the state, accessing rural Maine families as far north as Fort Kent, as well as in our urban centers and our cities with pockets of immigrant populations, where educators adapt programming to address the unique language and cultural challenges to eating healthy in a new environment. Last year the Maine SNAP Ed Program delivered nutrition education programming to over 32,000 low-income youth and adults. Approximately 25% of the participants were adults and 75% youth. In order to maximize impact in reach Maine SNAP Ed classes are conducted across the state in locations that pose the fewest challenges and barriers to attendance. For instance, we conducted classes in over 300 schools and other youth education sites. We're about two-thirds of those schools eligible for SNAP Ed programming, thanks, over 100 child care centers, 80 public housing sites, 32 public or community health centers, 95 community centers and over 50 emergency food assistance centers. We also deliver programming in partnership with many of the other partners that have spoke today. We deliver at summer meal sites, grocery stores, farmers markets, senior centers, DHHS offices. And really, the programming is made possible through these partnerships, so that we can reach our participants with the



lowest, fewest barriers to attendance. Maine SNAP Ed utilizes seven evidence-based and practice-based curricula to teach individuals and families across the entire age spectrum about healthy eating and stretching the food dollars and one of our most popular and successful programs you heard a little bit about today, as well, is Share Our Strength's Cooking Matters Program, that's provided in partnership with Good Shepherd and Hannaford Supermarkets. The lessons and the curricula are engaging and involve hands on learning opportunities and often incorporate a cooking exercise or food sampling. They also provide take-home materials with healthy recipes and tips and tricks for shopping, cooking, eating healthy on a budget. Our programs for adults are skills based and focus on simple tips to shop for and prepare healthy foods, even through our cold Maine winters. And so for Maine SNAP Ed has seen some promising results in the last 3 years that we've been managing the program. We've seen preschools, preschool children enrolled in our classes have shown statistically significant increase in vegetable consumption upon completing the classes, self-report, parental report. Youth participating in the elementary curriculum have shown a significant increase in food preference for three of the five vegetables that were proposed and taught about over the course of the year. Adults enrolled in the Cooking Matters Program report a significant increase in using the nutrition facts labels on foods, eating food from each food group every day, and cooking meals from scratch and also report a significant increase in the typical consumption of fruits, green salad, and non-fried vegetables but SNAP Ed is not just about direct nutrition education. Over the past several years there's been a greater emphasis placed on integrating social marketing, as well as policy systems environmental change strategies. In Maine we work with teachers on the implementation of wellness policies. We help establish and promote community and school gardens and we also encourage participation strategically in the Federal Food Assistance Programs, including free and reduced lunch, as well as school meals. Our educators collaborate with other federal assistance programs in schools to maximize impact. For instance, we work with schools to synchronize efforts and teach about the vegetables being proposed as part of, or being used with the fresh fruit and vegetable program or with the new meal standards. We work with food service directors to make sure we're teaching what they're trying to teach, as well. And then we have a social marketing campaign and seeing that I'm running out of time, you have a sample material but basically, we boil things down to three simple concepts, shop, cook, eat healthy on a budget and with that, we deliver messages through media, social media, as well as print media and through our classes. We have mailings that go out for the population that still likes to get stuff in the mail and we also reach people online. And I just would end with a quote from as part of an independent evaluation that was conducted of SNAP Ed, several partners were interviewed and one partner said, "For our lowest income kids, just the idea of empowerment, that they can make their own foods, that they can make healthy choices to eat, choices to eat healthy, to eat regularly, and how to find the best food choices when they go shopping." I think that was really, really important for some of our kids and then a SNAP participant was interviewed and stated, "I learned not just the recipes but the way you use food. You learn little things that stick in your head." So Maine SNAP Ed is certainly



not the only solution to the complex problems and challenges explored today but it's an important piece of the puzzle and an integral part of the SNAP Program. Thank you very much for your time.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Jeanne Reilly? Am I saying that right? After Jeanne, I'm going to call Jim Hanna. Okay, hi, welcome.

Reilly: Good afternoon and thank you so much for the opportunity to join in this discussion today. My name is Jeanne Reilly and I'm the Director of School Nutrition for RSU 14, which is the Windham and Raymond School Department. I am also the Vice President of the Maine School Nutrition Association. School nutrition programs are obviously at the forefront of this war on childhood hunger. Nationwide 16 million children don't have an adequate food supply. The figure, that figure represents one out of every five children and as you've heard today, in the state of Maine, it's actually one out of every four children don't have nutritious food in their home. Our own state ranks fifth for very low food security and it ranks number one in New England. Last year of the 180,000 school-aged children in the state of Maine, nearly half of them qualify for free and reduced meal benefits. Teachers report that as many as three out of every four children come to school on a regular basis without food in their stomachs. And research shows that experiencing food insecurity, children experiencing food insecurity have more difficulty paying attention in school, have more attendance problems, and increased disciplinary problems. [Laughter] Think about it, when who can focus on learning when your stomach is growling or when your head is hurting from lack of food or when your primary focus is on where your next meal is going to come from? In my own district, RSU 14, during the past school year, we served over 200,000 meals to students who qualify for free or reduced price meals. Additionally, over the course of the school year, we sent home nearly 5,000 backpacks of weekend food to students who, to ensure that they have access to nutritious and accessible food over the weekend. School nutrition programs are making a dent in the hunger problem and yet, many families who might qualify for meal benefits do not even fill out the application. Of the students who actually do qualify for meal benefits, as many as 40% do not regularly access these benefits. Weekends and summers pose additional problems. Currently Maine is serving only 16% of students eligible to receive a free meal in the summer. Similar figures are reported across our country. Students who are able to access a healthy breakfast and lunch during the school year often struggle throughout the summer. They are more likely [Laughter] to fall behind their peers academically than students who are well-nourished over the summer. They also are more to likely to experience the long-term health consequences associated with hunger than students who have access to a summer meals program. Even though summer meals programs on the rise, the need is very great. In my own district, we have struggled to find an accessible and federally qualifying site in spite of significant need in both of our communities. Some recent successes that we've had in our district as we strive to combat student hunger have been in the increase of students, particularly students who qualify for free or reduced meals eating breakfast at school. Through several different



approaches, including extended hours breakfast, a room service breakfast cart, and grab-and-go breakfasts, we have been able to increase the number of students accessing breakfast at school by 30%. Our own privately funded backpack program was started when a couple of school administrators were concerned that the students in their school did not have access to food over the weekend at home. From those humble beginnings of just a few backpacks per week, we have grown to providing 152 backpacks every single week throughout the school year. In our yearly surveys of our backpack recipient families, we frequently receive comments from parents and children about how beneficial the program is. A sample quote is that, from a parent is this, "This is a new experience for us to need help. I have learned a great deal about the programs offered. This can be a very humbling experience and your program has made it a positive, fun, and informative experience for all of us. All that was provided to our children was utilized and enjoyed and I would thank you sincerely. We are extremely grateful for your help and support and I hope in the near future when established, to be able to repay and help individuals like your program is doing." The school nutrition professionals know that the meals they provide are often the best and most nutritious meals a child may receive. We recognize how important these meals are to the health and academic success of America's children and we know that we are at the forefront waging a war against childhood hunger and yet, this fight is an uphill battle but we can win this. In 2012 Astronaut Buzz Aldren said that if we can conquer space, we can conquer childhood hunger. The time is now. The problem is solvable and the infrastructures already exist. We can utilize school meal programs, utilize SNAP, utilize food pantries, WIC, faith-based initiatives and some suggestions that I have thought about are that in districts where school meals, a summer meals program is maybe not accessible or too rural, summer EBT cards for school aged children who qualify for free and reduced meal benefits. Aligning summer meal programs with enrichment programs through local recreation departments and lowering the threshold of area eligibility from 50% free and reduced to 40%. Increasing awareness surrounding school meal programs, eligibility requirements, and the anonymity requirements of the school meal programs, so that families are fully aware of the benefits that they receive or that they are eligible to receive. And making sure that families who receive SNAP also know that they are qualify for school meals. That is one thing that we see regularly that families who are on SNAP benefits have no idea that they also qualify for free school meals and additional support through, for the school nutrition program in the form of equipment assistance to support the production of fresh, nutritious food, increased meal subsidy for school meals, grants for fruits and vegetables, backpack programs, nutrition education, and grants with lower eligibility requirements so that schools with medium levels of free and reduced percentages can still qualify for these grants. And obviously, the pie in the sky would be universal meals for all children. The Dalia Lama has said that is not enough to be compassionate, you must act. And it's not enough for us to listen today and hear about hunger, the time to solve hunger is now and we need to act. Thank you so much.



Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony. Jim Hanna? Am I saying that right?

Hanna: Yeah.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you. After Jim, I'm going to be calling up Jennifer Johnson or did I already do that? She already, that sounds so familiar. She did sign up. We're getting close. There are two more people after this, one more. Okay, Ali Avery will be next. Okay, hi, welcome.

Hanna: Thank you and thank you Commissioners for your work. This is very important and I'm grateful for the opportunity to be part of it. I do want to say before I jump into my testimony that the Witness to Hunger Project was a breakthrough for hunger advocates all over the country and it was critical to help me reclaim my humanity, so thank you for bringing the voice of hungry people into this process.

Commissioner: Thank you. Thank you for recognizing that.

Hanna: My name is Jim Hanna. I'm Executive Director of the Cumberland County Food Security Council. I also am the Chair of the Food Security Subcommittee of the Portland Mayor Michael Brennan's Initiative for Healthy and Sustainable Food System. Yesterday my grandson James turned 1. Two weeks ago my grandson Max turned 3, his brother. In a few short years, these boys will be in the Portland School System and this is a school system you heard from Mayor Brennan today that features 35% of its food from local sources with a goal of 50% by the time Max is in kindergarten. So we really value the economic aspect of local food and also the significant nutritional benefits of local food for our children in Portland. It's also a school system that over the past few years has hovered right around 50% of children eligible for free meals. So that is family of four, for example, making no more than \$30,000 a year and usually, quite a lot less, which I don't know how they do it in Portland because Portland has been significantly rising in the cost of living compared to cities all over the country. It's been, seen one of the sharpest increases in the rise of cost of living, so it has a significant impact on our education. I provide that context having worked in Maine's food system for more than 20 years with a focus on solving hunger. I did have many friends and collaborators in the room, many of whom have left at this point but we've been working together for a long time to address this problem. I'm proud of the work that's been done in Maine and I'm also somewhat embarrassed that we've been doing this for 20 years and we can't really show significant progress. We can't measure our progress. We're grateful for the USDA's efforts to measure food security that began in the mid '90s and yet, we don't have a direct connection between that measure and how we, the efforts we make in measuring that progress, so one of my recommendations is going to be around helping us set some benchmarks as a National Commission, where we are and how our projects are working to solve this problem. One of the facts that emerged in the most recent food



security release by USDA was that Maine has seen the largest increase in very low food security of any state in the nation, except for Missouri over the past 10 years. So we're really stuck in a rut with our poorest people around food insecurity. Our collaboration of the Food Security Council is committed to increasing food security and we recognize that it is not a food issue, as much as an economic issue and that people are struggling to put food on their table because they don't have jobs. So one of the big points that we advocate around is a fair economy and we've been supportive of the increases in minimum wage in Portland, in the state, nationally. We do recognize even though we've had success with that, it's coming down the road, there are other elements of the economy, as well, like the Earned Income Tax Credit, like providing child care for families that's affordable, that have a significant impact on people's ability to participate in our economic system. Our collaboration also realizes that we cannot solve hunger at a single organization's or isolated individuals but it takes all of us working together. And I think this Commission has been convened out of that recognition, as well, that, you know, the government can't solve the problem, the private sector can't solve the problem. We really got to work together and be strategic about how we address these problems. So in light of that, I ask your Commission's help in the following areas, to educate and advocate the role of a fair economy in solving hunger. You've heard a lot about that today. To maintain the federal nutrition standards, especially with the Federal Child Nutrition Programs, which are about to be reconsidered with the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. I would like the major burden of those nutrition standards being on the food manufacturers, not on individual's food choices. I think food manufacturers, we see the health consequences of a lot of the food that's put into our system, so that's something we can't really deal with at the city level, the county level but at your level, I think you can make some recommendations around making those corporations accountable for the food they put into the food system and making sure that kids are protected from that unhealthy food because we see the health consequences of too much sugar, too much fat, too much salt, et cetera, in our diets, so. And then, as I mentioned earlier, establish some shared goals, unify our efforts and set baselines on which we can work together to measure our progress, you know. As I've said, we recognize there's adequate food for every person in this country and in our county. If we agree on the goal to solve hunger, then we can reorganize the communities in new ways so food insecurity doesn't happen. And the food safety net is essential in the meantime until we establish that fairness economy and I mentioned some of those elements of that earlier. I guess just we've heard a lot about accountability today at the individual level but I think that there's, the accountability needs to happen at the systemic level and, you know, we need to again hold those corporations accountable for the food that gets put into our food system and the cost to all of us for that unhealthy food. And only a Commission of your stature has the ability to really raise that issue and to make that visible. Those shared goals, I think, we've also seen a little bit of partisanship at the table today and that's been one of the, I think one of the big issues, one of the big struggles is that we can't come to agreement. We agree there's a problem but we can't agree on how to solve it. I think it's important that, you know, if we agree on some shared goals at a level of the National Commission then we can strategize



together on how to get to those goals but we have to have that shared vision first and starting there we can establish benchmarks and work together on the various pieces that will be a national project on solving hunger. So as you can see, I take hunger personally. I could pretend that my grandsons will be immune to the effects of hunger but if they're in a classroom with friends who are vulnerable to the health, education, and physical development stresses that come with inadequate nutrition, it impacts them and everyone in our community and we all have to bear the cost of that. So please, consider me and our council as allies in the struggle and we're at your service as you work to end hunger in our communities.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you very much, Jim.

Commissioner: Ali Avery? I'm just going to call out the names of people, you can come on down, Ali. While you're coming down, do we have Joanna Moore, Michael Brennan, Martha May Fink? No, okay. Allie, you are the last person.

Avery: So I'm the last one?

Commissioner: Yes.

Avery: Nice, okay.

Commissioner: You have 5 minutes. [Laughter]

Avery: Okay, great. Good afternoon.

Commissioner: Welcome.

Avery: Thank you. My name is Ali Avery and I am a graduate student who has been assisting the Maine Hunger Initiative with the summer food service program sites in South Portland, Portland, and Freeport this summer. I want to thank the Commission for holding this hearing and for offering the opportunity to testify. The summer food service program, also known as the summer meals for kids program, focuses specifically on combating child hunger at various meal sites throughout the state. Families with children who receive free and reduced meals at school during the year must often stretch budgets and seek additional food assistance during the summer vacation months. For a family with two children who qualify for a school breakfast and lunch, summer can mean the cost of 20 extra meals added to a weekly family budget that is already tight. The summer meals food service program is an effective response to childhood and teenage hunger. I have spent the summer working for the summer meals program and I can attest that the level of food



insecurity for children in our community is far greater than meets the eye. One of the meal sites where I've spent a lot of time is Brick Hill in South Portland. Brick Hill offers a breakfast meal program for the kids 18 and under, usually feeding between 46 and 63 kids per day. This site has been fairly successful overall, primarily due to its accessibility. Brick Hill is a neighborhood community, so the majority, if not all, of the children and teens coming for breakfast every day live in the neighborhood and can walk to the meal site. The Red Bank meal site in South Portland, which offers dinner for kids 18 and under, as well, during the week has also been successful due to easy accessibility. Unfortunately, this isn't the case for every community. One of my coworkers in Naples mentioned once that accessibility was an enormous factors inhibiting attendance to the local summer meals site in her community. Families who live farther out or out on Route 302, for example, have struggled to get to the meal site due to lack of transportation. In rural areas like the Lakes region, a mobile meal site would be ideal. The problem is that the sponsor does not have the funds to purchase a van or bus that can be used as a mobile meal site. Many kids have confessed to the site coordinator of the Moore Park and South Paris sites that the summer lunch offered at the site is the only full meal they receive each day. Inefficient nutritional intake can have a serious impact on a child's physical and psychological development. The brain structure is the most vulnerable to nutritional insults early in development. Young children in food insecure households are 40% more likely to score at developmental and behavioral risk than other low income children. A recent FRAC-sponsored studies have illuminated that food insecure children suffer two to four times as many health problems as other children within the same income level. Common health issues resulting from food insecurity for children are stomachaches, headaches, ear infections, higher hospitalization rates, iron deficiency anemia, decreased bone mineral density, more susceptible to lead poisoning and poor oral health, just to name a few. Outreach has been another challenging part of my position with the summer food service program. The summer meals lunch program at Kaylor Elementary School in South Portland, for example, has consistently struggled with low attendance. During the weeks in which summer school was offered, Kaylor feeds anywhere between 109 and 154 kids lunch per day. However, when the kids that are enrolled in camps, summer classes, or various other summer programs leave, hardly any of the neighborhood children are attending the lunch program. I visited Kaylor numerous times throughout the summer to witness this firsthand and the highest number I saw for neighborhood attendance was once 11 children out of the 142 who had been fed lunch that day. Even with a big summer splash event, which included a dance performance, arts and crafts, and face painting, I was really only able to bring in half a dozen neighborhood kids at best. If the site sponsor has more money for outreach, marketing and promotion, and programming, we could offer more robust programming after the summer school and camps come to an end. I am reaching out to you today to stress the need for increased USDA funding that can be used for programming, outreach, and transportation. So let me close by summarizing my recommendations. USDA should increase the federal reimbursement rate for programming, permitting reimbursements for things like educational materials, such as books, pens, and paper and such are things to encourage



physical activity, games, balls, and Frisbees, things, simple things like that in order to increase attendance rates and make sure every kid in the area is food secure. Currently reimbursements only cover the cost of meals themselves but my work in the field has taught me that it isn't enough to simply provide meals. Many kids demonstrate a sense of shame in having to come to government-sponsored meals, which has consistently been an enormous roadblock to increasing attendance at meal sites. Allowing reimbursements for educational and physical activities will help advocacy programs like MHI to establish fun environments for the kids at the meal sites, so that they can feel comfortable, safe, and willing to come get a free nutritious meal. In addition, it would be helpful if these reimbursements rates could also pay for sponsors to hire part-time volunteer coordinators for meal sites. Part of my job this summer was volunteer coordinating but it was incredibly challenging to do this amongst multiple other programming and event planning focuses. Thus, hiring part-time volunteers to solely focus on volunteer coordinating would be especially helpful in making sure every site has enough volunteer coverage, as well as making sure that those focusing on programming are able to put their full attention on it. Finally, there should be more funding put into mobile meal sites in order to address food insecurity resulting from lack of transportation. Mobile meal sites have proved successful in addressing inaccessibility issues to the summer meals program sites in rural areas by going directly into neighborhoods offering meals to make sure kids are eating and then leaving afterwards. These mobile meal sites have been critical in addressing food insecurity of families who cannot access their community meal sites. As these Meals on Wheels programs can be expensive to facilitate, local government should allot more funding towards mobile sites. Congress should require states to apply for funding for the USDA Demonstration Project and to develop necessary collaborations with each region. States should be required to submit a proposal to USDA and to establish a comprehensive plan around implementation. Thank you for your time.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: This concludes our time for our public hearing. Rus, do you have some closing words for those that have stuck it out to the end.

Commissioner: Well, no, it's just always a pleasure. I think when we count our two DC hearings and all the other ones we've done, this is the eighth, I think, of final, and we learn something every time and I know Mariana would agree with this, so we have a deadline of a final report by the end of October and hopefully, everyone who has been at any of our hearings will be able to get a copy of that when it's done.

Commissioner: Absolutely. Dr. Frank?



Commissioner: Thank all of you.

Commissioner: Do you want to say anything?

Frank: I'm impressed by Mainers. Thank you. [Laughter]

Commissioner: Thanks to everyone. Our report is not the final, it's the final end product of the Commission but it certainly is not the end product of our work. So please, keep the conversation going. Please keep speaking out. Thanks for being here.

Unidentified: Is there a deadline for written testimony?

Commissioner: Yes, today. [Laughter] August 15th. Thank you all.

Commissioner: Thank you all very much.



VIDEO TESTIMONY

Ann A. Sawtelle: When we started out, it was 16 families. Then we grew to 350 families a month. We do offer a lunch here every month. People can come in and we serve hot and cold food from 11:00 in the morning until 6:00 at night. People can take a plate of food home and it's nice because a lot of seniors will come in. They'll sit down and have a lunch and socialize with people. Then they'll fix a plate of food or a container. Some ladies have little plastic containers they take home soup or something and they'll have the [inaudible] and not the meal. A lot of the barriers where we are here in Waning [phonetic] is the distance. People—

Leann M. Farley: I have been here for 8 years. I came here because we needed food and after we got straightened around, my husband says, "Now what are we going to do to help out?" because he worked every day and I said, "Well, maybe I can volunteer." Work has gone downhill. I've been in the area. I've lived here for 53 years. I've seen businesses go more so than businesses come in. If a business does come in, it may stay a couple of years and it's gone. The construction work is even gone downhill, the construction companies don't have that much work. I've even seen a processing plant for salmon go out of business. That's the one that my husband works for. They have a career center in Calais that they go to but you got to have transportation to get there. There's no public transportation other than the taxi from Calais and that's pretty expensive to come to Dennysville to get you. There is a career center in [inaudible] you can go to. It seems to be in the area that everything has to go through computer. A lot of people doesn't have computers. They can't afford the Internet, so they have to go to these places to get the applications filled out or whatever. We do have an older vehicle. It's a 2006 Pontiac Grand Prix. It does need work but that's my transportation. The nearest store that I have to go to, to get like a loaf of bread, dozen eggs, gallon of milk is 6 miles either way. It's a little convenience store. If I want to go to Wal-Mart, if I want to go to Shop and Save it takes probably a half-hour to 45 minutes either way. If we could only get work in here, some type of work that people could do, if there was work I'm sure the food pantries would see less people going to them and SNAP Program with that, if you don't have a child now they're using their SNAP, so therefore those people are going hungry. And SNAP Program with that, if you don't have a child now, it's not easy. There's no place that I know of, not even the food pantry to volunteer. And most the young people and so forth are leaving.

Stan Carter: It is isolated. Major services and hospital services are 98 to 130 miles away one way and when you can't drive 15 miles to go to the food pantry, that's an issue.

Nikki Carter: Well, I know that for many people there just isn't enough employment opportunity. The new requirement for Food Stamps is to be employed or to volunteer is hard.



Unidentified: It's hard.

Nikki Carter: We are having difficulty finding places for people to volunteer.

Unidentified: Volunteer.

Nikki Carter: And certainly not a lot of opportunity for employment. People work seasonally in this area. They harvest blueberries in the summer.

Pam DeCoteau: My name is Pam DeCoteau [phonetic] and I live in South Paris, Maine. I do the free summer lunch program in Moore Park. I have two children, both who are actually adults now. I worked three jobs for many jobs and then I was diagnosed with Lupus. I've had to work really hard to, I'm sorry, I've had to work really hard to figure out how to work on a budget, how to live on a budget, how to live off of SNAP. I absolutely see in our community how hard it is for people who are receiving the SNAP benefits to make them work, because the SNAP benefits just, they're not even close to being an actual supplement. I know for me and just my daughter, alone, we can spend anywhere from \$500 to \$600 a month on groceries and \$48 of SNAP benefits isn't really a supplement. Can you guys imagine what it's like for a family of six to try to do the same thing on such minimal assistance? When I give them a summer lunch program meal, it's, sometimes it's the only meal those children are going to get that day and it's just devastating to know that these working families, hardworking families have to rely on our program alone because their Food Stamp, their supplement isn't enough. On a daily basis I serve, I'm going to say, between 55 and 65 children on a day that we have concerts, I can serve anywhere from 120 to when Rick Charette's here, 270. If the children could take the meals offsite, that would be a big help to a lot. There's so many single moms here who work or, and single dads. We have single dads, too, that work and, you know, they get to come for 2 or 3 minutes. Their kids gobble down the meals and leave.

Cheyenne Pollard: Having free lunch at school has helped a lot. Having everyone have free lunch would kind of, I think, make feel, make everyone feel a lot more equal and would make it a lot easier for students to say, "Oh, yeah, I get free lunch." It doesn't make them feel like they're, I don't know, I've heard the word "charity case" a lot and I know that it really, that can hurt a lot of kids. When I found out about the summer lunch program opening in the park, I was really excited because I was 15 at the time and then I was starting to realize a little bit of my family's financial issues and knowing that there would be a place that we could go to get lunch and my mom wouldn't have to worry about what she was going to feed us that day helped a lot. When I was in middle school, I knew someone who she would eat, like she would fill her tray up with a lot of stuff from the salad bar and then a lot of kids would pick on her and stuff because she didn't have enough to eat at home. So things like Food Stamps and stuff help a lot but the lunch program has helped a lot because it offers a



healthier option and we also don't have to worry about whether or not we're going to eat or not. It also helped a lot because my mom was able to buy more things, more of a variety of things for us for breakfasts and dinners. I mean, once the lunch program started, we got to have taco night and stuff like that, just because she had the money to not have to worry about buying lunches as much.