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JEWISH COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC
AFFAIRS

Testimony of the
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Good afternoon. My name is Jill Borak, and I am the Policy Manager at the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA). On behalf of the JCPA, I thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on the critical importance of federal anti-hunger programs.

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA) is the American Jewish community's umbrella agency for multi-issue organizations engaged in public policy and community relations. Our membership includes 16 national organizations and 125 local affiliates known as Jewish Community Relations Councils. We work with government representatives, the media, and a wide array of religious, ethnic, and civic organizations to address a broad range of public policy concerns and share the Jewish community's consensus perspectives.

Hunger is a problem that affects people of all ages. It reduces productivity, increases costly absenteeism and illness, diminishes our GDP, and burdens our economic system. Those who are hungry often are not productive learners and workers in our society. Malnutrition during early childhood impairs proper development of the nervous system and causes lasting emotional and cognitive problems. Poor nutrition at any age has adverse effects on cognitive abilities including problem-solving, concentration, and organizing memories. For the elderly, malnutrition contributes to the onset of illness and spread of disease in typically compromised immune systems.

Jewish tradition teaches us that we must feed the hungry. "When you reap the harvest of your land,

you shall not reap all the way to the edges ... you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger.” (Lev. 23:22) The Haggadah, the Passover Seder book that retells the story of our people’s journey from slavery to freedom, enjoins us to open our doors and “[l]et all who are hungry come and eat; let all who are in need come share our Passover.” For where there is hunger there can be no freedom.

The JCPA advocates for hungry and poor people across the country by working to protect funding for domestic nutrition programs that alleviate hunger and help lift American out of poverty, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). SNAP is incredibly responsive in times of need. SNAP has proven to be one of the most effective safety net programs during the recent recession, providing families with a stable source of food during times of unemployment. And perhaps most importantly, SNAP helps the most vulnerable and lifts people out of poverty. SNAP is a critical anti-hunger program, but in recent years has been weakened by reduced funding, restrictions in eligibility, and reduced benefits. These policies lead to more hunger and food insecurity, something our country does not need at this sensitive time of recovery.

The JCPA also supports a robust Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act (CNR). CNR authorizes all of the federal child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast, National School Lunch, Child and Adult Care Food, Summer Food Service, and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Programs and WIC. These programs provide funding to ensure that low-income children have access to healthy and nutritious foods where they live, play, and learn. Child Nutrition Reauthorization is due to expire on September 30th of this year. Reauthorization provides an opportunity to improve and strengthen these programs.

The JCPA’s commitment to the most vulnerable among us remains strong; this is why fighting hunger, particularly among children, remains one of our top priorities. We believe feeding America’s hungry is not a political decision, but a moral one. We applaud the National Hunger Commission’s work in this important area, and urge you to seek out ways to defend and strengthen essential federal anti-hunger programs.