



**Testimony Submitted for the Washington, D.C. Public Hearing
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Paula Reichel, D.C. Regional Director
preichel@capitalareafoodbank.org, 202-644-9827

Good afternoon members of the Commission. My name is Paula Reichel and I am the D.C. Regional Director at the Capital Area Food Bank. The Capital Area Food Bank is the largest hunger relief organization in the D.C. region, serving Washington, D.C. and its suburban counties in Maryland and Virginia. Last year over 540,000 individuals at risk of hunger, 12% of the region's total population, received food through the food bank's network of 469 non-profit partner agencies and its direct service programs.

Hunger is growing in and around Washington. The food bank's 2014 Hunger Study showed an 11% increase in the number of individuals served from 2010. Hunger is on the rise among the working poor, families with children, and the elderly. People who struggle with hunger live in every single neighborhood in our region and the Capital Area Food Bank has adopted a targeted, data-driven approach to identifying and addressing pockets of unmet need.

The federal nutrition programs are critical to the food bank's ability to end hunger in the Washington metro area. Programs like the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, Summer Food Service Program, and Child and Adult Care Food Program greatly enhance our ability to serve the populations most likely to suffer hunger's ill effects, while The Emergency Food Assistance Program empowers our partners to expand their capacity to provide healthy food to the community.

The effects of hunger are pervasive and costly to society. Hunger undermines health, education, and employment for individuals at all levels of food insecurity. The root cause of hunger is poverty, therefore to address hunger in a way that is sustainable, policies which further economic security must be considered in tandem with federal nutrition policies. In Washington, D.C., this year policymakers increased the minimum wage, while also funding the food bank's Joyful Food Markets, school-based pantries which provide healthy food to families in high need areas. The food bank endorses this coordinated approach which promotes self-sufficiency.

To mitigate the most damaging effects of hunger, the Capital Area Food Bank recommends that the Commission consider aligning resources to ensure that senior citizens, immigrants, and children and their families are better connected to food resources.

The Commodity Supplemental Food Program serves 5,300 low-income seniors in the District of Columbia for whom poor nutrition increases the risk of chronic disease and hospitalization while decreasing the likelihood of aging well in place. This program is available in nearly all states, but is not currently operating in Montgomery or Prince George's County Maryland or the state of Virginia. As the baby boom generation ages, it is estimated that 10,000 individuals will turn 65 each day for the next twenty years. Seniors, especially young seniors not yet eligible for Medicare and Social Security, face decreased earnings and increased healthcare costs. It is imperative that our federal nutrition programs are primed to meet this need.

Steps must also be taken to increase seniors' access to and enrollment in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. The D.C. Council recently allocated local funds to raise the minimum SNAP benefit to \$30 as a way to incentivize senior participation. Although the impact of this change is not yet known, this policy could prove effective enough to scale nationally. The federal government should also consider expanding seniors' ability to redeem SNAP benefits by increasing access to low cost transportation and enhancing the ability of grocery delivery programs to accept EBT as payment. All of these practices help adapt the program to meet the needs of a population often facing barriers as a result of isolation and restricted mobility.

To improve service to the large number of Spanish speaking immigrants we serve, the Capital Area Food Bank is working to have culturally appropriate foods be consistently available and urges the federal government to consider ways to integrate culturally appropriate foods into nutrition programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program and to better promote programs to Spanish speakers.

Finally, the Capital Area Food Bank strongly endorses the strengthening of both the summer and afterschool meal programs which play a critical role in decreasing learning gaps and supporting working families. As a sponsor of both programs in three separate jurisdictions, the food bank faces a heavy administrative burden. A single application process would allow year round sponsors like the food bank to focus more time and energy into improving the quality and expanding the reach of the meal programs. Many of our summer sites also run all-day programming and must expend their limited resources to provide a third, non-reimbursable meal to participants. Allowing sponsors to be reimbursed for three meals would put summer meal service in alignment with programs available during the school year and help support quality summer programming.

From the Capital Area Food Bank, its partner agencies, and the people we serve in the Washington Metro Area I thank you for the opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.