

## **National Hunger Commission on Hunger**

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Hello Commissioners and thank you for this opportunity to offer recommendations for addressing food security for our country's most vulnerable, and for listening to those of all sectors and perspectives.

Growing up in San Francisco's public schools in the 70's and 80's gave me firsthand experience on how people from all backgrounds and classes get their basic needs met, the choices people make and that we, the people, can make the rules. With an undergraduate degree in Sociology and Political Science that included social work, gov't internships and theoretical education, it was evident to me that a hand-out wasn't the answer and that our society will only advance when all members, at a minimum, have adequate and reliable nutrition, housing, education and healthcare. And, within the framework of capitalism, we can build a thriving economy with a strong safety net for the most vulnerable. I thought I would start by addressing food security, and move on from there.

Over the past 25 years addressing food security and poverty in San Francisco, I have seen how the lack of financial resources and access to nutritious food harmfully affects our disabled children, adults with life-threatening illnesses, seniors wanting to stay safely in their homes, disabled veterans, victims of domestic violence and our severely mentally ill. Americans struggle to navigate of our safety net system, and, instead, skip meals, stretch meals, stand for

hours at first come first served programs or placed on waitlists. The more I've listened, struggled and served, it is evident our safety net needs repair. The safety net was designed to help Americans in emergencies due to unforeseen circumstances, health issues and unemployment— today, Americans are faced with not meeting their basic needs, often due to health care costs, low wages and no pensions to supplement social security.

I have been involved with supporting those living below the poverty line with access to food cooperatives, SNAP, CSFP, community operated food pantries, school food programs, soup kitchens, senior lunch sites, home-delivered meals. I have worked both in the nonprofit and public sectors for the past 25 years. **(Brief overview of professional careers- SHARE, JFCS, FB, HSA, MOWSF.)** I am a member of the SF Board of Supervisors Food Security Task Force since 2005, and the Mayor's Long Term Care Coordinating Council since 2013.

For today's testimony, the definition for Food Security means that all people at all times are able to obtain and consume enough nutritious food to support an active, healthy life. Food *Insecurity* exists when the ability to obtain and prepare nutritious food is uncertain or not possible. Today testimony will focus on the most vulnerable in America.

**Food Security Rests on Three Pillars** - The following three elements, adapted from the World Health Organization's pillars of food security, are used as a framework for evaluating food security in San Francisco.

- **Food Resources** - Sufficient *financial resources* to purchase enough nutritious food (CalFresh, WIC, SSI)
- **Food Access** - *Access to affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate foods* (from food pantries, meal programs, food retail)
- **Food Consumption** - *Ability to prepare healthy meals* and the knowledge of basic nutrition, safety and cooking (usable kitchens, nutrition/cooking education)

**1 in 4 San Francisco residents** (28%) are at risk of food insecurity due to low income (below 200% of poverty-\$3,300/month for a family of 3), and may struggle to attain and prepare enough nutritious food to support basic physical and mental health.

- 12% at or below the federal poverty line.
- 38% of seniors (65+) below 200% of federal poverty line.
- 7% unemployment rate.
- 51,000 CalFresh recipients.
- 32,000 students eligible for free/price reduced lunch.
- 96,000 food pantry recipients.
- Over 3,000 SDA lunches.
- 4,200 HDM
- 7,300 homeless

The remaining part of my testimony is to share the following recommendations of effective ways with innovative reforms of existing programs and funding allocations to eliminate hunger and food insecurity in America.

Last year, the SF Board of Supervisors passed a resolution committing to a Food Secure and Hunger Free San Francisco by 2020. Key Recommendations were:

1. Maximizing enrollment in SNAP.
2. Ensuring food security for vulnerable seniors and adults with disabilities by:
  - a. Instituting a policy committing to a maximum waitlist of no more than 30 days for home delivered meals; in emergencies, wait shall be no more than 2-5 days.
  - b. Increasing funding to grow home delivered grocery program into citywide program.
3. Increasing meals during out of school time (after school & summer time). Promoting existing summer lunch and after school programs.
4. New Initiative: Healthy Food Purchasing Supplement: To boost nutrition for lowest income San Franciscans with Healthy Food Purchasing Supplement.
5. Food security in SROs, shelter meals, planning, public data.

Additionally, I would like to recommend:

First: Bring all programs into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to increase access for households by using funding for services instead of administration. We can follow the lead of the private sector and health care industry on the increase in customer services and cost/benefit analyses to develop policies

on the maximum ratio of administrative oversight costs to the actual benefit to the household. We need to address the digital divide amongst socio-economic classes' access to the internet, social services and healthcare.

Second: We need USDA FNS to collect and share data with the goal of evaluating the unmet need at the local level so that communities can provide innovative solutions for reaching the most vulnerable. Included with my written testimony will be a copy of San Francisco's Food Security Task Force Report 2013. The data was time consuming and challenging to acquire, but with this report, we have a shared understanding of the services, gaps and recommendations.

Third: We must use public/private partnerships to build an effective safety net. We can stimulate the local economies and promote healthy communities by creating innovative ways for the private sector to match federal household benefits such as SNAP, WIC and other healthy eating voucher programs.

Fourth: We must eliminate barriers for young children to access nutrition programs by allowing caregivers and parents of young children to access out of school time food programs, such as summer lunch.

I am also pleased to share the following recommendation from Meals On Wheels America, the oldest and largest national organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based senior nutrition programs.

The OLDER AMERICANS ACT (OAA) NUTRITION PROGRAMS have been the primary piece of federal legislation supporting social and nutrition services to Americans age 60 and older since 1965. Yet, year after year, the gap between the number of seniors struggling with hunger and those receiving nutritious meals through programs continues to widen and waiting lists for services are mounting in every state. This growing gap is due to declining public funding through federal and state grants; stagnant private funding; rising food and operational costs. At a minimum, we must stave off this continuous decline not only for the health of our seniors, but our nation as a whole.

#1. Pass a bipartisan reauthorization of the OAA, legislation that has been unauthorized since 2011 and underfunded for decades.

#2. Consolidate Titles III C-1 (congregate nutrition) and C-2 (home-delivered nutrition) into one Title III C, giving localities more flexibility to meet the growing need and improve program efficiency.

#3. Develop policies for adequate funding levels for local OAA Nutrition Programs so that seniors are not turned away at lunch sites and food pantries, or are placed on a waitlist with no maximum wait time.

#4. Senior nutrition programs need to rely on volunteers to deliver nutritious meals, friendly visits and safety checks so that our seniors can live with independence and dignity. Set the charitable mileage deduction (in 2015, \$0.14/mile) to the same level as those at the business rate (\$0.57.5/mile)

#5. Permanently expand the enhanced food donation tax credits, allowing local farmers to donate food to senior nutrition programs and accept a nominal, voluntary contribution donation for food used in prepared meals.

#6. We need to maximize voluntary contributions for meals via SNAP, by supporting mobile point of sale devices for senior nutrition programs and at farmers markets. Less than 40% of eligible seniors nationwide are enrolled in SNAP.

**In closing, thank you for your commitment to our nation and the millions of Americans struggling with hunger and food insecurity. This is a nationwide issue that is best addressed with bi-partisan solutions.**