



A Member of America's Second Harvest
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Testimony before the Human Services Committee
SB 1381, AAC Appropriations to the Departments of Social Services and
Agriculture
Connecticut General Assembly
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Presented by:
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Good afternoon. My name is Gloria McAdam and I am the President and CEO of Foodshare, the regional food bank serving the greater Hartford area, a position I have held since 1984. I have also been involved in the hunger issue and food banking on a regional and national level. I served for two years on the national Board of Directors of America's Second Harvest: The Nation's Food Bank Network and the country's largest charitable food program. In addition, I served two years each as secretary and then chair of the Eastern Region Association of Food Banks, which extends from Maine to Florida. I am a founding member and former chair of the Connecticut Food Policy Council. I am also a founding member and current chair of End Hunger Connecticut! as well as a member and past chair of the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission.

I welcome this opportunity to comment on **S. B. No. 1381 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING APPROPRIATIONS TO THE DEPARTMENTS OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND AGRICULTURE.**

The State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SSNAP) was created in the 1980's to purchase high protein foods for food pantries and soup kitchens. Unfortunately, because the funding for this important program has been cut over the years, even as the needs were growing and inflation was increasing the cost of food, the program has much less impact today than when it was conceived.

Hunger is a problem throughout Connecticut. There is now at least one private agency providing food to people in need in greater Hartford in every town in the greater Hartford region and over 500 such local agencies around our state, with about one out of ten of our neighbors around the state relying on such programs for part of their groceries.

Funding in the current fiscal year for SSNAP is at \$365,000 from the general fund. By comparison, some of our neighboring states are way ahead of us. In

Massachusetts, they fund their state program at \$12 million, New York appropriates \$22.5 million, New Jersey \$4-million, and Pennsylvania \$18.75 million. Through SB 1381, the legislature can and should increase the funding for food purchase through the SSNAP program to \$2 million in the coming fiscal year.

In addition to providing direct services like the distribution of food through local food pantries and community kitchens, it's important that we look at the big picture. Food pantries cannot solve the problem of hunger in the state. Private charities do not have enough food, money or volunteers to meet all of the needs. In fact, 94% of the food distributed to low-income people in Connecticut comes from federal programs and only 6% comes from the private charities. Yet only 60% of the people who are eligible for federal food stamps in Connecticut actually receive them. A little effort to get more people signed up for food stamps would have far more impact than more food pantries.

Consider this. Foodshare distributes about 10 million pounds of food a year in greater Hartford – that equals more than a tractor-trailer load of food each and every day, 365 days per year. Yet, if we could increase food stamp usage by just 5%, that would be more food than Foodshare distributes in a year! And, it would allow people in need to go to the supermarket and pick out their own food, rather than having to accept whatever happens to be available that day. In addition, I'm certain it would be much cheaper for us to increase food stamp participation by 5% than for Foodshare to double in size!

So how do we bring these two big picture items – food pantries in every town and the need to increase food stamps – together in a way that makes sense and that the legislature can act on? This could also be done through the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SSNAP) program.

Food pantries often need support to increase food distribution capacity and to do the outreach work necessary to sign people up for food stamps and other food assistance program. I propose that the legislature also appropriate another \$2 million in one-time funding to build the capacity of local food pantries and soup kitchens around the state. Since many of these organizations are small, with limited administrative capacity, these funds could be administered by the state's two regional food banks to ensure that every food pantry and soup kitchen has fair and reasonable access to them. In addition to facilities and equipment like coolers and freezers, these funds could be used to equip organizations with computer equipment and other tools which would help them help their clients access food stamps and other federal food programs.

As the Human Services Committee considers how to best end hunger in Connecticut, I urge you to focus on these types of long-term efforts. We grew up in a world where food pantries did not exist. Our children are growing up in a world where food pantries are the norm. Let's ensure that our grandchildren can once again live in a world where food pantries are not needed because we wisely chose comprehensive solutions to the problem of hunger.

Thank you.