

My name is Mary L. Sanders and I'm the Director of the Spanish Speaking Center of New Britain. I'm hear to speak on **HB 5666 regarding Food Pantry funding** for New Britain, and in favor of any other bills to meet the basic needs of our citizens.

The Spanish Speaking Center has been providing for the basic needs of thousands of low income New Britain area residents. Food has been the constant until last year, when we made the difficult but necessary decision to close while we sought funding for this much needed service. Between 2004 – 2006 we served 2,500 different families. Many only passed through while experiencing temporary setbacks, other come in every 2 weeks, month after month, as they live on fixed incomes and many of their situations will not change. Every Wednesday the truck came in from Foodshare and filled our rooms with food to distribute. On those days we would serve 125 – 150 families. On Mondays and Fridays we usually would see 50 – 75 families, totally between 900 – 1,000 visits monthly. Three years ago our numbers were only 500 – 600 visits monthly, but New Britain is experiencing some of the highest rents and lowest employments levels in the state.

DSS officials told us months ago that they would see if they could find the \$40 - \$50,000 we needed or at least some of it. They needed to wait and see if any unspent funds were returned first. Our families in New Britain are going without the proper nutritional resources they need for their families. Food stamp eligible households usually run out of resources midmonth. There are half dozen churches distributing food, but you can only go once monthly and transportation is a big problem. Our Center is the hub of Social Service and Education and Training for the Latino community and hundreds of other low income and or limited English families. We get people into training and jobs – but you need to make sure people have the proper nutritional resources, adequate housing, healthcare, and other support services in order to work towards self-sufficiency.

I could tell you about all the studies on the effects of poor nutrition including learning disabilities, socially and developmentally delayed youngsters, juvenile delinquency, low-weight babies, unhealthy and obese or diabetic adults. A study in CT regarding food insecurity shows New Britain in almost last place, couple this with the high unemployment rate, lack of affordable housing, and many other barriers, and we hope you will see how critical it is to fund these services.

The Spanish Speaking Center's plan will develop a **Food Hotline, and Referral Network** will ensure that no one will fall through the cracks, while documenting all food cases through a shared database. Half dozen churches including Sal. Army distribute once monthly but there is no safety net. Assessment and case management services, eligibility screening for WIC, food stamps and referrals for other services, training and job development will round out the services.

We have a proven success rate with our numerous education and training services. Let us work together to make sure the lowest income people in one of the wealthiest states do not have to skip meals or send their kids to school or to bed on empty stomachs or make seniors choose between food and medications. It's happening right now, every day. Please help us meet the basic needs of the residents of New Britain. I have a full proposal ready if anyone wants more information please contact me at 224-2651.

Thank you and God bless you all for your work on behalf of our citizens.