



A Member of America's Second Harvest
450 Woodland Ave, Bloomfield, CT 06002-1342
Phone (860) 286-9999 Fax (860) 286-7860
On the web: <http://www.foodshare.org>

Testimony before the Human Services Committee

Connecticut General Assembly

February 26, 2008

Presented by:

Gloria J. McAdam

President and CEO, Foodshare

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 founding member and past chair of the City of Hartford Food Policy Commission and a founding member of the New Britain Food Security Collaborative.

I welcome this opportunity to comment on the State Supplemental Nutrition Program (SSNAP) and how it supports the work of our local community food pantries.

It's important that we look at the big picture. Hunger is a problem throughout Connecticut. There is now at least one private agency providing food to people in need in every town in the greater Hartford region and over 500 such local agencies around our state.

Last year, Foodshare distributed 10.5 million pounds of food to 400 local organizations that feed hungry people right here in the greater Hartford area. This is about 14 tons of food each and every day of the year, more than a tractor-trailer load of food getting out to people in need every single day!

Some people hear about Foodshare, and think, "Wow, the private sector can take care of the problem of hunger." I'm here to tell you first and foremost -- that is wrong! Yes, 10.5 million pounds of food per year is a lot of food. But through our partner agencies, Foodshare serves 100,000 people in greater Hartford each year. You can do this math in your head. 10.5 million pounds of food divided up among 100,000 people

works out to about 105 pounds of food per person per year. About two pounds of food per week, when most of us eat about a pound of food each and every time we sit down for a meal. Foodshare could double or triple in size and it still would not be enough!

I am NOT suggesting that Foodshare should double or triple in size. I believe that ensuring that everyone has access to enough nutritious food to sustain themselves and lead healthy and productive lives is the responsibility of the entire community – government and charities, individuals and organizations. We in the private, charitable sector need government to do its share if we are to end hunger in Connecticut.

One way the state makes a difference in this effort is with the State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly called SSNAP. SSNAP provides needed dollars for the state's two food banks to purchase high protein foods to supplement the donations received from the food industry. Since the program's inception in 1988, it has operated with an annual budget of about \$400,000. Because of the increasing number of agencies taking part in the program and the rapidly rising cost of food, each soup kitchen or food pantry in the state gets significantly less food from SSNAP than they did ten years ago. This at a time when demand has been rising by 20-25% per year.

While Connecticut has been flat-funding this program for many years, many of our neighboring states are way ahead of us. In Massachusetts, they fund their state program at \$12 million, New York appropriates \$24.5 million, New Jersey \$4 million, and Pennsylvania \$18.75 million.

I propose that the legislature increase the funding for food purchase through the SSNAP program to \$2 million in the coming fiscal year. Remember that every penny of these funds goes directly to the purchase of high-nutrition food for people in need.

In addition, 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 programs. I urge the legislature to 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 to access food stamps and other federal food programs.

Thank you.