



**A Member of Feeding America**  
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**Testimony before the Human Services Sub-Committee  
Of the Appropriations Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
February 18, 2009**

Presented by:  
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Volunteer Coordinator, Foodshare

Good afternoon. My name is Krista Ostaszewski. I am the Volunteer Coordinator of SNAP outreach at Foodshare. As you may know, Foodshare is the regional food bank in Connecticut. We distribute about 15 tons of food a day to nearly 400 different agencies to help feed our hungry neighbors.

With that being said, I can honestly state that food banks cannot meet the need of hungry people in our area by distributing food alone.

The answer to meeting this need lies in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP. Just a 5% increase in SNAP participation rates would exceed what Foodshare distributes in food for a whole year.

SNAP is one of the most efficient, effective and direct ways to end hunger in America, and it should be funded to do just that in Connecticut. I am here today to ask the budget committee to support the SNAP eligibility income increase to 185% of the federal poverty level as proposed by Governor Jodi Rell.

The increase will prove to be a quick and effective way to boost the state economy. Research shows that for every \$1 of SNAP benefit spent in our state, it results in nearly \$2 worth of local economic activity. Last year alone, SNAP was responsible for putting over \$253 million dollars into Connecticut's economy. It can be estimated that the proposed increase would result in an extra 8 million dollars of federal funds flowing into the state's local economy!

While I strongly support the increase I want to express my concern for the state's ability to handle such an adjustment, if the proposal is passed. As the coordinator for Foodshare's SNAP outreach program, I often work with the Department of Social Services. In my opinion, DSS workers have hit their capacity. The state's latest figures report that caseloads are about 1,300 to 1,500 cases per worker! Unfortunately these high case loads are taking their toll on both the workers and the ability for clients to receive the help they need.

Back in November I worked with a single mother of two to complete and hand in a SNAP application. I spoke with the woman at the end of January and she still had not heard a thing about her benefits. It took over two months for the application to be processed. The worker assigned to the case explained to me that she had piles of applications on her desk and that my client's application had simply just gotten mixed up in the mess. This is not an uncommon story.

Federal law states that SNAP applications have to be processed within 30 days, and emergency applications within 7 days. On average I see applications taking a month and a half to be processed and emergency applications taking at least 2-3 weeks. This is unacceptable. With a proposed increase, it is vital that the state looks at how DSS can improve its effectiveness, particularly by modernizing their system. Paper trails of applications are counter-productive for workers, especially when caseloads reach over a thousand. More advanced systems that include online applications, e-faxing and scanning applications so records of data can be stored should be looked at for consideration. Without looking into ways DSS can modernize their system and finding a way to support the proposed new 19,000 eligible households, the proposed increase could actually have the potential to hinder the state.

In conclusion I urge you to support the proposed increase to 185% of the federal poverty level for SNAP income eligibly, while also looking into ways to modernize the Department of Social Services system to better accommodate our neighbors in need.

Thank you.