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## Testimony before the Select Committee on Children

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 food bank serving the greater Hartford area. I'm in my twenty-sixth year at Foodshare and I have never seen growth in the numbers of families needing help with basic necessities like food as has happened in this past year. Local food pantries report a 20% increase in the number of families coming in looking for help. Not a week goes by but that I hear about a new head of household in a line at a food pantry or the Mobile Foodshare truck who says something like, "I used to donate to this program, and I never thought I would be here needing help. But I need to feed my children, so here I am."

I appreciate the challenges of the current state budget situation, but there are steps we can take that will help ensure that hungry children are fed and bring more federal dollars into the state, without costing the state significantly more. It is estimated that we could bring an additional nine million federal dollars into Connecticut simply by bringing participation in all the federal child nutrition programs up to the national averages! We are, in essence, leaving that money on the table right now, and we should be going after it with everything we have, in order to make sure that our children come through this recession with the proper nutrition that leads to good health.

Raised Bill 5360, An Act Concerning Children in the Recession, includes the following important child nutrition components that will help bring these federal dollars into the state:

- Establishment of an in-classroom breakfast program -- Our grandmothers always told us that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Without breakfast it can be hard for anyone, children or adults, to focus and it only makes sense that hungry children cannot learn. Ask most any public school teacher, they will certainly affirm that common sense assumption! And yet, Connecticut is last in the nation for the number of schools that offer school breakfast and our student participation is way below that of most other states. Providing breakfast in the classroom (or as a part of the school day) significantly increases a student's likelihood of accessing the program and its benefits. It's not that difficult to do and there are federal funds to support the program. In Bloomfield this past year, a "grab and go" breakfast program was established that allows students to pick up what's essentially a "brown bag breakfast" on their way into school. Let's make sure that all children from low-income families have the option of breakfast at school.

- Establishing an outreach program for Child Nutrition Programs within the State Department of Education to ensure more programs and children participate in school breakfast, summer food, after school snacks, and day care/child care meals. These federal Child Nutrition Programs are designed to ensure children have the nutrition they need to grow and succeed; however, our participation rates are very low, again meaning that we are leaving money on the table. We need to act to increase awareness of and access to these crucial programs.
- Coordinating outreach and reducing response times for families applying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps). We can best feed children by feeding families and currently Connecticut only enrolls about two-thirds of those families eligible for this important nutrition assistance in SNAP. With Department of Social Services eligibility workers having caseloads that exceed 1,500 clients, approval of complete applications is often taking as long as two months, twice the amount of time required by USDA regulations. I appreciate the challenges of the state budget, but as someone who runs a successful nonprofit business, I also know that organizations need to adapt to changing times and emerging needs. Applications from Connecticut families for SNAP benefits are up 30% in the past year. DSS needs to consider how to meet this increased demand and get these benefits to people in a more timely fashion by reorganizing the workload, reassigning workers, making better use of technology, or simplifying the application process. When a family needs food, they need it now, and waiting two months can mean they are truly going hungry. We need to fix these administrative snafus, not only because it's the right thing to do for hungry families, but because SNAP dollars have been demonstrated to be the most effective economic stimulus available to us. Every dollar of SNAP benefits provided to a family returns \$1.73 in economic activity to the local community. This is definitely a win-win!

Of course, my primary work is in the private sector of emergency food assistance and let me assure you that we are upholding our roles and responsibilities, too. Last year, Foodshare distributed 12 million pounds of food to more than 300 local organizations that feed hungry people right here in the greater Hartford area. This is about 16 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, 12 million pounds of food per year is a lot of food. But through our partner agencies, Foodshare serves 128,000 people, including 50,000 children, in greater Hartford each year. 12 million pounds of food divided up among 128,000 people works out to less than 100 pounds of food per person per year. Less than 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.

The steps outlined in this important legislation will go a long way toward upholding state government's obligation to make sure that our children have proper nutrition so they can grow, learn, and prosper.

Thank you.