

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee

February 11, 2016

By Paul O'Leary, Interim CEO, the Connecticut Food Bank

Good afternoon chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Paul O'Leary and I am the Interim CEO of the Connecticut Food Bank. Our mission is to provide nutritious food to people in need. We accomplish this through a network of community-based hunger relief programs including food pantries, soup kitchens, emergency shelters, and day programs for low-income adults and children, as well as through our Mobile Pantry, Grocery on Wheels and Kids' BackPack programs. These programs provide immediate assistance to individuals experiencing food insecurity and last year we distributed enough food to provide for over 18 million meals.

I am here today to add our voice to those urging that the State of Connecticut find ways to reduce the impact of budget cuts on safety net programs.

Continued cuts to the safety net for our most vulnerable citizens will make it more difficult to meet basic human needs for many Connecticut residents.

45% of the people using Connecticut Food Bank member programs are above the threshold to receive federal or state benefits. Each year the number of Connecticut residents in need, and dependent on the safety net provided by food banks, grows and resources remain limited. Many residents are not realizing the benefits of an improving economy (*according to the Feeding America Hunger in America 2014 study*).

Reducing the ability of people to receive the benefits of hunger assistance programs would force them to seek charitably donated food, further straining the human service safety net of nonprofits that work with both the SNAP-eligible population and people not eligible for that help. The net result is to reduce access to nutritious food for people in need.

Recognizing we face difficult financial decisions here in Connecticut and being grateful for the support we receive, we respectfully urge the Governor and Legislature to work diligently to find ways to return some of this vital safety net funding.

I would invite each of you to visit us in Wallingford to see our distribution center and talk with our staff and volunteers that are providing food to more than 300,000 people in six counties.

Thank you for your time and your consideration today.