

CONNECTICUT FOOD BANK

Connecticut Food Bank Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on the Governor's Proposed Budget Testimony of Bernie Beaudreau, CEO, Wednesday, February 21, 2018

Thank you, Senate Co-Chairs Formica and Osten, House Co-Chair Walker and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak today. I am Bernie Beaudreau, CEO of the Connecticut Food Bank, headquartered in Wallingford. We provide food products to a network of 650 local hunger relief programs in six of Connecticut's counties – Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham. Last year, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed 25.2 million pounds of food - enough to provide more than 21 million meals.

I am here today to share information about the pressing challenge of hunger in Connecticut and to urge continued funding to keep pace with needs in the state. We strongly encourage the Governor and Legislature to fully fund the state's annual financial contribution, through CTNAP, for needed food supplies for its two major food banks, Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare, to alleviate hunger in our state.

Approximately 75% of the food we distribute is sourced through food and financial donations. But donated food is only part of the story. The remaining 25% of our food response is provided by a combination of Federal and State resources.

Those government resources include a current State allocation of approximately \$1.2 million over a two-year period ending in October 2019 to support CTNAP services provided by the Connecticut Food Bank and by our colleagues at Foodshare, located in the Hartford area and serving Hartford and Tolland Counties. The proposed cut of \$93,944 to that funding would severely hamper our ability to provide the food assistance we currently offer. The foods we provide through CTNAP are high protein foods, including meats, poultry, tuna, and peanut butter. The state provides funds for foods, which are sourced within Connecticut. The food banks bear all administrative costs, making this truly a public-private partnership.

We are providing a significant value for the state's investment. In 2017, those funds were converted to 623,708 pounds of food – enough to provide 519,757 meals. Both the Connecticut Food Bank and Foodshare distributed that food to a total of 264,019 people.

While the food is vitally important to the needy families we serve, the CTNAP program also provides an economic benefit to Connecticut, as our contract specifies that all foods are to be purchased from Connecticut vendors. The quality foods we are providing are thus helping Connecticut businesses employ Connecticut workers. In short, this is a program that has multiple benefits for the people of Connecticut.

U.S. through 2016. The report presents historical state-level food insecurity percentages in three-year averages. In the most recent three-year average, Connecticut saw a slight drop in overall food insecurity over the prior period. We are currently at 12.3%, representing about 437,000 Connecticut residents who struggle with hunger.

While the overall drop in the food insecurity rate is good news, it is still four percentage points above the pre-recession period. In the three-year average covered from 2004 to 2006, Connecticut's overall food insecurity rate was 8.4%. We are deeply concerned, however, about the upward trend of USDA's most hungry measure which is the "very low food security" rate within the overall food insecure population. In the past three years, Connecticut has seen this rate increase from 5% to 6.4%. Connecticut's relative high positive national ranking in this rate dropped dramatically from a high of 6th best in the country ten years ago to 43rd today.

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The post-recession recovery has yet to reach food insecure households at the bottom of the income spectrum. Data from the Congressional Budget Office show that households in the lowest 25 percent on the income scale have lost financial ground over pre-recession levels. The same report indicates enormous growth in debt among these households.

The challenge lies in reaching and serving all those in need. We are particularly concerned about the growing elderly low-income population, children and undocumented families and workers.

In 2006, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed 12.7 million pounds of food, providing 10.6 million meals. Last year we distributed 25.2 million pounds, providing 21 million meals, doubling our distribution in a period of 11 years. In 2018, we are projected to distribute 26 million pounds of food, up 4 percent over 2017. We are grateful for the public and private funds and food programs that have enabled this growth in capacity, yet it is estimated that our network reaches only half of the 288,000 food insecure people that USDA data tells us are living in our six-county service area. The challenge every year for the Connecticut Food Bank is to raise enough funding to buy or secure enough donated food to meet growing needs.

We recognize there are difficult choices to be made to achieve financial stability and a robust economy in Connecticut but achieving savings at the expense of people already struggling to put food on their tables and meet basic needs is the wrong place to look.

Consider the investment our neighboring states make in feeding their food insecure residents:

State Funding of Food Banks in Northeast			
State	State \$\$	Food Insecure Households	\$\$/Household
MA	17,195,491	286,958	\$59.92
ME	2,985,000	94,628	\$31.54
NY	27,925,749	977,375	\$28.57
VT	188,906	26,260	\$ 7.19
RI	195,000	55,440	\$ 3.52
CT	600,000	176,505	\$ 3.40
Source: Feeding America 2017 Network Activity Report			

We urge the Governor and the Legislature to consider the importance of food security to the health and development of Connecticut residents and to fully fund CTNAP and other food assistance programs. Access to food is a basic building block for maintaining an educated, work-ready, and healthy population. We are committed to working with you to achieve this. I will look forward to continuing this conversation throughout the budget process.