



Connecticut Food Bank Testimony in Support of Proposed House Joint Resolution 45 Encouraging the Donation of Excess Food to Nonprofit Organizations to Feed Food-insecure People
Statement of Bernie Beaudreau, CEO, Wednesday, February 15, 2017

Good afternoon, Senate Co-Chairs MacLachlan and Winfield, House Chair Fox and members of the committee. My name is Bernie Beaudreau. I am CEO of the Connecticut Food Bank, headquartered in Wallingford. We provide food products to a network of 650 local hunger relief program in six of Connecticut's counties – Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham. Last year, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed enough food to provide more than 19.6 million meals.

I am here today to express our support for Proposed House Joint Resolution number 45, encouraging the donation of excess food to nonprofit organizations to feed food-insecure people.

This resolution presents an opportunity for the State to lead in both food rescue and waste reduction. Both goals are important. And they intersect directly with our goal of reducing hunger in Connecticut.

The Connecticut Food Bank currently works with food industry partners – growers, retailers and distributors – to salvage large quantities of still nutritious, but unsalable for reasons like cosmetic blemishes or nearness to date code expiration. By collaborating to collect, sort and redistribute this food to local hunger relief partners, we are keeping millions of pounds of fresh produce, frozen meats and nonperishable grocery items out of landfills. When we cull that salvage, we further reduce waste through an agreement with a farm that takes our unusable produce as animal feed. Other organizations in Connecticut, like Community Plates, are already doing leading edge work in getting smaller amounts of surplus food from small-scale vendors, caterers and restaurants and redistributing that food to local organizations, including many of those in our member network. If the State were to join this effort by directing agencies and those contracting with the State to participate in such program, it would set an example for others to follow and help to scale up these efforts, making them more practical. And the need for additional food resources is unquestionable.

Growth of Hunger in Connecticut

The most recent national food security report by the USDA detailed household food security in the U.S. through 2015. The report presents historical state-level food insecurity percentages in three-year averages. In the most recent three-year average, Connecticut slightly lagged improvements in the national average. While the national three-year average for 2013 through 2015 dropped to 13.7 percent from 14.7 percent in the three years prior, Connecticut's food insecurity rate for the same period dropped only three-tenths of a percent, from 13.4 percent to 13.1 percent, a reminder that our recovery has a long way to go.

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But the real indicator of our challenge in Connecticut is to review pre- and post-recession food security figures. Comparing the 2003-2005 average and the 2013-2015 average, Connecticut's food insecurity rate jumped from 8.2 percent (281,503 people) to 13.1 percent (475,685 people), a 67 percent increase. In 2005, Connecticut ranked as the 8th most food secure state in the nation; in 2015, it ranked 23rd. Today, Connecticut has an estimated 194,000 more food insecure people than ten years ago.

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.

The Need for More Nutritious Food Donations

In 2006, the Connecticut Food Bank distributed 12.7 million pounds of food, providing 10.6 million meals. Last year we distributed 23.7 million pounds, providing 19.6 million meals, an 87 percent increase. In 2017, we are projected to distribute 25 million pounds of food, up 5.5 percent over 2016. 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 less than half of the approximately 300,000 food insecure people that research indicates 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 the growing needs. In 2016, 30 percent of our food - 6.4 million pounds - was donated. Our Strategic Action Plan for 2017 through 2020 projects the need for our annual food distribution to grow from 24 million pounds to 30 million pounds by the end of 2020. This projection includes 10 million pounds of donated food. Other sources of food must support this growing need.

While the Connecticut Food Bank does not rescue food from cafeterias or restaurants, we refer such opportunities directly to our network of 650 member programs – food pantries, meal sites, shelters, residential programs - that receive food from the Connecticut Food Bank. This new channel of food that could be provided from many different sites and redistributed locally to programs could be a significant source of nutritious and desirable food that would support hungry Connecticut families and reduce the amount of food ending up in our already over-burdened waste stream. As such, the Connecticut Food Bank heartily endorses the joint resolution encouraging the donation of wholesome excess food directly to agencies serving food insecure populations.