



Connecticut Food Bank Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
on the Governor's Proposed Budget
Testimony of Bernie Beaudreau, CEO, Thursday, February 16, 2017

Good afternoon, Senate Co-Chairs Formica and Walker, House Co-Chair Walker 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 programs 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 share information about the pressing challenge of hunger in Connecticut and to urge continued funding to keep pace with needs in the state.

The Connecticut Food Bank currently works with food industry partners – growers, retailers and distributors – to salvage large quantities of still nutritious food that is 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 can provide millions of pounds of nutritious food to locally based organizations helping Connecticut residents in need. But donated food is only part of the story.

On average, government provided food and funds represent approximately 25% of the food assistance we distribute. That includes a current State allocation of approximately \$1.2 million over the next two years to support CTNAP services provided by the Connecticut Food Bank and our colleagues at Foodshare, located in the Hartford area and serving Hartford and Tolland Counties. Cuts in that funding would hamper our ability to provide the food assistance we currently offer by reducing our capacity to source, store, transport and distribute food to the network of programs that rely on us for a significant amount of the food they need to serve their communities.

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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Testimony of Connecticut Food Bank CEO Bernie Beaudreau, page 2

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. But state funds, as well as federal funds and commodity foods, must be part of that equation to support this growing need.

We recognize there are difficult choices to be made to achieve financial stability and a robust economy in Connecticut. We appreciate that the Governor's current budget recognizes the importance of food assistance programs. We were pleased that additional funds are allocated to expand the number of schools participating in the Healthy Food at School grants program.

We urge the Governor and the Legislature to consider the importance of food security to the health and development of Connecticut residents. It 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.