

Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle
Chair

ASSEMBLY HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
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Assemblywoman Huttle, members of the committee, thank you for giving me time today to speak to you. My name is Diane Riley; I am Director of Advocacy at the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. We are the largest food bank in New Jersey directly serving 11 counties and along with our partner distribution agencies (NORWESCAP and Mercer Street Friends) the Food Bank of Monmouth and Ocean and the FoodBank of South Jersey together we serve about 900,000 people a year at least 1,100 feeding programs. 900,000 unique individuals. In truth close to 8 million times a year, someone in need is fed by one of our partner charities. Last year the Community FoodBank distributed a record **44 million** pounds of food that went a long way towards putting food on the table for many families. The FoodBank's mission from the beginning is simply stated as fighting hunger and poverty and assist those in need to seek long-term solutions. I applaud the committee's focus on poverty. Through our work we have always understood that hunger is a symptom of lack of economic resource. You cannot fight hunger without looking poverty or why people are hungry

Throughout the close to 35 years of our existence the reasons have changed. When we started and for many many years, we filled a gap when someone lost their job, had a health crisis or were "down on their luck"; in short, we filled a gap in an emergency situation. Today this is simply not the case. Every 4 years (since 1993), we participate in a National Study that helps provide the reasons people are coming to our programs and a little about them. I would like to tell you that today people are relying on us less. But In our latest study 60% of our feeding programs saw an increase in the demand for food. 70% of our clients say they plan on getting food assistance on a regular basis. **We are not just for emergencies anymore.**

There is an assumption that people who need to get food from one of our programs is unemployed either by circumstance or (and far too many people believe this) because they are too lazy to get a job. Actually almost half of the people coming to our programs had at least one member of the household working. All others are actively looking for work, retired or disabled. Too often I have heard that people go to food pantries to feed

their families because they have too many children. Not really, families that come to food pantries are small. Almost 70% have 3 or fewer people in them. Staying school will lead to a better future, job security and financial independence. And I really believe that. **But why is it that 3 in 4 adults in families that are supported by charitable feeding programs** have a high school or higher education 1 in 4 have some post high school education and some have attained a college degree.

You don't need a college degree to figure out what would help alleviate hunger. If people can't afford the most basic expenses (rent, transportation, health expenses, utilities) that they need to go to a feeding program then **for those that can work, they need adequate jobs that pay enough to buy food. That is one long term solution. And when there are not adequate jobs that pay enough to buy food and for those that can no longer work (the disabled, our seniors many of whom I will tell you would rather go without than take charity, veterans) you need a safety net that is strong and comprehensive.** Housing, healthcare, childcare, affordable education, food supplements like WIC and SNAP, all of these programs help keep people fed. That is solution number 2. All of these programs keep people healthy; make for a strong future for people living in this state. It is not only the right thing to do but it's the smart and most cost effective thing to do.

The Community FoodBank of New Jersey (CFBNJ) was never meant to make up for a weak and ever eroding safety net, we were meant to supplement the safety net. In fact more than half of the people that come to our programs also receive SNAP. It is not an either or proposition. We continue to help through a combination of assisting them to apply for nutrition assistance benefits that they are entitled to through the federal government and through our charitable feeding distribution system. Every time there is a cut to programs like SNAP coming to us more often is the last resort.

We need the state's commitment and partnership to keep our communities and the people in them thriving. We will continue to faithfully serve as we always do, but for how effective we can be in feeding the hungry we turn to you. Thank you