



Creating a hunger-free community

September 6, 2011

The Honorable John F. Kerry
United States Senate
304 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Kerry:

As the Worcester County Hunger-Free Network, we write to urge you to protect federal nutrition assistance programs from budget cuts and harmful policy proposals as Congress considers ways to reduce the federal deficit and implements the Budget Control Act of 2011. We ask you to work with your colleagues to pass a budget that addresses the deficit while safeguarding programs that invest in low-income households.

Food is one of our most basic and important needs, yet families are struggling to put food on the table. The demand for food assistance has increased significantly during the recession, and the Worcester County Food Bank and its network of partner agencies (food pantries, community meal sites, and shelters) are working hard to keep up with requests for assistance. In addition to emergency feeding, many of us operate or support federal nutrition programs, like afterschool snacks or summer feeding programs to nourish local children when they are out of school. We also work to connect eligible clients with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) when they are in need of more than the short-term, emergency food assistance we provide.

Proposed cuts to federal nutrition programs would weaken the safety net for vulnerable families. In 2011, the Worcester County Food Bank and its 95 local partner agencies assisted a total of 424,235 people, an increase of 12 percent since 2008. Any loss in federal nutrition assistance for households will result in a gap for nutritious food that will be difficult for our network to fill.

While the recession resulted in unprecedented need for food assistance, it also demonstrated the effectiveness of the federal nutrition programs. Between 2008 and 2011 as unemployment grew, participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) increased five percent, from 23,000 individuals in Worcester County to 44,000. With an unemployment level of 8.5 percent for Worcester County, the need for food assistance remains high.

Our Network could not provide current levels of food assistance without support from TEFAP, nor could we meet added demand if participants were cut from SNAP, WIC, or child nutrition programs. Federal nutrition programs provide a lifeline for low income families struggling to make ends meet, and cutting the nutrition safety net is the wrong way to balance the budget.

Congress must keep the nutritional safety net strong – the health of our communities depends on it.

- **The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP/USDA)** provides the backbone of the emergency food system by ensuring a steady flow of nutritious commodities for distribution through food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens. TEFAP commodities account for approximately 28 percent of the food distributed by the Worcester County Food Bank and its network of partner agencies.
- The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)** is the cornerstone of the nutrition safety net, responding quickly to changes in need in the recent recession. Efforts to block grant SNAP would prevent the program from being able to expand and contract in response to fluctuations in need, and any reductions in benefit levels or participation would make it harder for millions of low-income families to get back on their feet.
- The **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)** reduces the incidence of low birth weight and associated health costs. In fact, every dollar spent on pregnant women enrolled in WIC saves \$3.50 in health care costs, helping to reduce the amount the government spends on Medicaid, which covers a large share of medical care costs for low-income infants
- **Child Nutrition Programs** provide nutritious meals and snacks to children in school and child care settings, as well as after school and during the summer. Children are more susceptible the consequences of hunger and poor nutrition, and critical child nutrition programs are targeted to protect this vulnerable population in places where they live, learn, and play.

We invite you and your staff to visit the Worcester County Food Bank and the emergency feeding programs in your district to learn more about the need for food assistance among your constituents and local efforts to end hunger. Please visit www.foodbank.org for a list of feeding programs in Worcester County. Enclosed is your copy of the advocacy resource book from the *Worcester County Forum on Hunger: A Call to Action* that the Hunger-Free Network convened on June 14, 2011.

We are committed to working with you and your colleagues as Congress tackles the challenges facing our nation and ask you to remember the tens of thousands of families in Worcester County and Massachusetts who are facing hunger and the important role that nutrition programs play in their health and well-being, especially for vulnerable children and seniors.

Sincerely,



Jean G. McMurray
Executive Director
Worcester County Food Bank

Worcester County Hunger-Free Network Representatives

Athol

- Foursquare Church Lighthouse Food Pantry and Our Father's Table

Clinton

- WHEAT Community Services

Fitchburg

- CARE Services
- Gardner Visiting Nurse Association Community Services
- Highland Baptist Church Food Pantry
- Montachusett Opportunity Council
- Our Father's House
- Our Father's Table, Inc.

Gardner

- Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, Inc.

Gilbertville

- Tri-Parish Ecumenical Food Pantry

Holden

- Wachusett Food Pantry

Lancaster

- Seventh Day Adventist Community Services

Leicester

- Leicester Food Pantry

Leominster

- First Baptist Church, Community Food Cupboard
- Spanish American Center

Milford

- Daily Bread Food Pantry

Millbury

- Friends of Millbury Seniors, Inc.

North Brookfield

- North Brookfield Food Pantry, Joseph's Church

Rutland

- Rutland Food Pantry

Shrewsbury

- St. Anne's Human Services

Southborough

- Southborough Food Pantry

Southbridge

- Blessed John Paul II Saint Vincent de Paul Society Food Pantry
- Southbridge Food Share, Inc.

Spencer

- Mary Queen of the Rosary

West Boylston

- West Boylston Food Pantry

West Brookfield

- Sharing Cupboard Food Pantry

Whitinsville

- Northbridge Association of Churches Food Pantry

Worcester

- Catholic Charities Worcester County
- Jeremiah's Inn Food Pantry
- Lighthouse Mission Food Pantry
- St. Paul's Outreach
- Saint Vincent de Paul Society - St. Anthony's Pantry, Sacred Heart Church
- Wesley United Methodist Church, Carty Cupboard