Meet Whitney, Mississippi
mazon.org/whitney
“That’s shocking!” “That can’t be true!” That’s the response we get when we raise our voices about hunger among currently serving military families. Unfortunately, it is true.

For the last several years, we’ve been leading the national effort to address hunger in the military. We’re active on many different fronts: from pushing for better data, to finding policy barriers that contribute to food insecurity and developing strategies to remove those barriers. So far, we’ve worked with the Department of Defense, with the USDA, with the VA, with the White House and now Congress.

On January 12, 2016, MAZON’s President & CEO, Abby J. Leibman, was called before Congress by Representatives Jackie Walorski (R-IN) and Mike Conaway (R-TX) as an expert witness on the topic of hunger among military and veteran families.

This invitation was an immense honor for MAZON and wow, did Abby do us proud! (If you missed the testimony, visit mazon.org to watch.) She delivered a clear and compelling argument to Congress: There are military families struggling with hunger and we won’t let you ignore it any longer.

Based on the focus of the Q&A session, military hunger was of top concern. Abby answered each question with sharp and smart answers, proving MAZON’s deep understanding of the issue and the complexities that come along with it.

Being invited to testify before Congress was a great step for MAZON, and a great example of how important military hunger is. The military is a hard community to reach, so any time our military families are invited to Congress to tell their stories is welcome. But now - finally - hunger in the military is getting some of the attention it deserves.

It happens so frequently that many emergency food providers have developed programs specifically to assist military families.

Our goal is to remove the real and perceived barriers that prevent veterans and currently serving military families from accessing vital food assistance programs.

Testimony before Congress: MAZON’s President and CEO, Abby J. Leibman, was called as an expert witness before the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Nutrition on the topic of food insecurity among currently serving and veteran families. As a result, there has been much bipartisan support for resolving the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) issue. We’ve met with both House and Senate staff to work towards a legislative fix.

VA Webinar: Last June, MAZON’s Director of Government Affairs, Josh Protas, led a national webinar for VA Chaplains raising awareness of veteran food insecurity and the barriers veterans face when accessing benefits. It was so successful that we were asked back to help train other VA professionals! The 2016 webinar, done in partnership with the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, was offered to more than 12,000 VA social workers and dietitians.

MAZON’s 2016 National Hunger Seder: Held at the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center in Washington, D.C., the National Hunger Seder used the symbols and traditions of Passover to call attention to the challenges of military and veteran food insecurity. The bipartisan Congressional Agriculture Committee leadership - Chairman Pat Roberts (R-KS), Ranking Member Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Chairman K. Michael Conaway (R-TX), and Ranking Member Collin Peterson (D-MN) - served as Honorary Co-Hosts for the event, which united Congressional leaders, Administration officials, and national leaders in our effort to address military and veteran hunger.
For years, we’ve been working with food banks across the country to implement nutrition policies that promote the distribution of more nutritious food and discourage the distribution of junk food and soda. Despite the food banks’ impressive efforts, their progress in this area raises a new and unexpected dilemma: what to do about unhealthy and unwanted donations from corporate donors.

I recently received a call from a food bank colleague asking if I had any ideas about how they could dispose of the 1.5 million pounds of donated soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) they receive annually. Their newly approved nutrition policy will soon go into effect, and while they will no longer distribute sugary drinks, they will - at least for now - continue to accept them.

This predicament – accepting unhealthy, unwanted donations like SSBs – is a complex, multifaceted issue. Many food banks fear losing corporate donors if they turn down unhealthy items since the same donors often provide healthy food - as well as funding. And while some food banks are educating their corporate donors and saying ‘no’ to such donations, there are many more who are not yet ready to make that leap. So, these food banks must use their limited funds to handle, store and dispose of SSBs rather than risk damaging these important relationships.

To add to this dilemma, corporate donors receive federal tax deductions for turning over surplus inventory to food banks. Unfortunately, there are no nutrition standards for these donations, so a company receives the same tax deduction whether donating pallets of soda or salmon.

As more food banks are prioritizing and promoting health and nutrition, it’s critical that the public and private sectors work together. MAZON is committed to changing the system to ensure corporations are not rewarded for unhealthy donations at the expense of food banks and the low-income families they serve.

SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES (SSBs)

**definition:** beverages that contain caloric sweeteners

**examples:** sodas/soft drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, bottled tea and coffee drinks

**health implications:** SSBs are the largest source of added sugar in the US diet and are a major contributor to obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other diet-related diseases

**source:** CDC

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MAZON + Grantee Partners: Working together to fight hunger
by Daniel Rosove, Program Director

Through our partnership with grantees around the country and in Israel, we provide leadership on Capitol Hill, advocacy training and financial resources. With this help, our partners work at all levels of government (federal, state, and local) to take on tough fights against burdensome barriers to ensure that those who are hungry can access the food and nutrition benefits they need.

MAZON and our partners are taking on some of the most important issues affecting food-insecure Americans, including:

School meals: School nutrition programs like Breakfast After-The-Bell and summer meals ensure that children receive the nutrition they need to succeed at school. Florida Impact aligned bipartisan support from legislators to sponsor and support a bill to expand the Summer Food Service Program, which will bring more afterschool meals to low-income students in Florida. This year, our effort to protect and strengthen these programs includes a federal focus on Native American child hunger.

SNAP access: SNAP is an effective, short-term program that assists those who need it most AND makes economic sense. Every $5 in SNAP generates $9 in economic activity. Food Bank for New York City worked in coalition with Governor Cuomo’s office and other New York partners to expand SNAP eligibility, which will help 750,000 struggling New Yorkers get SNAP benefits. Through our Solutions to Senior Hunger program, we conduct SNAP outreach, education and application assistance for seniors struggling to access benefits.

SNAP barriers: Confusing applications, language barriers and general lack of resources has left populations like college students in the shadows when it comes to SNAP benefits. In California, Food for People is working with the California State and University of California school systems to improve SNAP outreach and enrollment of low-income college students. Our new project will engage Challah for Hunger chapters around the country to advocate on campus to develop ways that struggling students can access assistance.

MAZON and Grantee Partners: Working together to fight hunger by Daniel Rosove, Program Director

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At your seder, ask THE FIFTH QUESTION
Why is the Department of Defense letting military families struggle to put food on the table?

MAZON has a number of materials available to help you ask The Fifth Question at your Seder. Visit mazon.org for more information.

GET INVOLVED!

We offer many opportunities for you to get involved with MAZON and we’d love to have you join us in the fight against hunger.

LEARN
Join us for our first Donor Webinar, hosted by President & CEO, Abby J. Leibman! Join us April 26 at 11:00 a.m. PT/2:00 p.m. ET for an inside view of what’s happening at MAZON.

ADVOCATE
How will you raise your voice for the vulnerable among us? Send a letter to your elected officials - we make it easy at mazon.org/take-action

FUNDRAISE
Start a birthday fundraiser this year! Email us (hello@mazon.org) and we’ll help you set up a fundraising page!

STAY IN TOUCH
Sign up at mazon.org/email for our monthly eNewsletter and advocacy alerts to stay up to date on our activities!
BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR!

Help us minimize our expenses and fight for more hungry families.
Please call us at (800) 813-0557 to join our monthly giving program today!

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ABOUT MAZON
MAZON is a national nonprofit organization working to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel.