

MAZON NEWS™

SPRING 2020



**EXTRAORDINARY ACTS OF KINDNESS
DURING EXTRAORDINARY TIMES**

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TO COVID-19**

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

When we first planned this newsletter, its contents and even this letter were very different from what you are holding in your hands today. Like so many of you, the COVID-19 pandemic has indelibly changed our lives, our communities, and our work. At MAZON, it has shaped much more than just this newsletter — it has shaped the priorities for our work, how we undertake our work, and even where we are doing that work.

The pandemic has thrown into high relief several stark realities: just how vulnerable so many Americans are to food insecurity, how impossible it would be for charity alone to provide them with enough to eat, how critical our government's nutrition safety net is to hungry Americans, and frankly, how damaged that safety net has become. It has shown us in very dramatic fashion how vital the safety net is and how imperative MAZON's work is to repair it, improve access to it, and ensure that the federal benefits are enough to truly help.

We at MAZON are sadly not surprised that millions more Americans are applying for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) as COVID-19 wreaks havoc on the job market in the United States. We also know that food pantries are overwhelmed by the need, and that only our Federal government has the resources to respond to the stunning number of Americans facing hunger.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed to all Americans the challenges facing those who are food insecure: the stringent eligibility requirements for SNAP, the barriers erected by cumbersome applications, the shockingly low benefit amount, and the harsh limitations on how long people can receive benefits. These challenges are the result of persistent attacks by some policymakers on the poor and the programs that help them. Now we are further dismayed to see that these same policymakers seem to be scrambling to double down on harmful policies even as it becomes evident why SNAP is so essential to our country.

We look to our policymakers to lead with wisdom and compassion in this current crisis. The Jewish values and teachings that inform all we do at MAZON inspire us to support our leaders in demonstrating both qualities. We have been engaged with leaders across the political spectrum in Congress, the Administration, and the states to provide guidance on what changes must be made to ensure SNAP is accessible and meaningful. We have underscored the unique value of SNAP in providing support without judgment, showing recipients both dignity and respect, and providing live-saving benefits that keep Americans healthy, safe, and well-nourished.

These are unprecedented times — difficult and fraught for so many, including perhaps some of us and you. It is also a time when we have seen extraordinary acts of kindness, support, and humanity by leaders, corporations, and ordinary Americans. It gives us hope and serves as a valued reminder that we are not helpless because we are not hopeless.

Stay safe and well,

Liz Kanter Groskind

Liz Kanter Groskind
BOARD CHAIR



Abby J. Leibman

Abby J. Leibman
PRESIDENT & CEO



Extraordinary Acts of Kindness During Extraordinary Times

All of us at MAZON are so grateful that, during this difficult time, we are surrounded by our community of anti-hunger advocates, Jewish institutions, and partners like you. The extraordinary acts of kindness and community that we have seen energize us for the important work ahead.

Young Leaders in Service

In early March, Jewish teens from around the world were gearing up for J-Serve, the International Day of Jewish Youth Service, but stay-at-home orders forced them to pivot away from their planned day of volunteering and philanthropy. BBYO and The Jewish Teen Funders Network, working closely with other partners and their teen leaders, launched a new event in a matter of weeks — featuring organizations responding to pressing needs in the context of the pandemic — including MAZON. On March 29, after a day of at-home service projects, over 300 teens gathered in front of their computers to reflect, celebrate, mobilize, and direct the thousands of dollars they raised for COVID-19 relief efforts. Naama Haviv, MAZON's Director of Community Engagement, spoke with the teens about our work to create a just, robust, and responsive safety net. "I was proud to witness the teens' dedication and activism," Naama said. "All of us at MAZON are moved that their efforts would ultimately help people feed themselves and their families with dignity. We send them our thanks, and a hearty *kol hakavod!*"



Our Hero in Healthcare

When Shirley Davidoff graduated from the University of Texas' School of Nursing, she was given a pin with the Latin phrase "Quo Ducat Officium," which translates to "Wherever Duty Leads." Little did she know that she would find herself providing critical frontline medical services during a global pandemic. As a family nurse practitioner, Shirley is still seeing patients at her cardiology clinic and in several hospitals in the Dallas area. "I just love my job," she recently said. "I have never wavered, because I need to know that there is somebody there to take care of sick people. If, God forbid, everybody was too afraid to work in clinics and hospitals, then where would we be?" As our past Board Chair, Shirley represents the most immediate front line worker in the MAZON family. We are proud of her heroic work and we know there are so many more in our greater MAZON family. We are grateful to Shirley and all those who are providing essential services to their communities — truly, following their duties' calling in extraordinary ways.

All of
YOU!

At MAZON, we are eternally grateful for individuals and families who have made the fight against hunger such an important part of their lives. During these turbulent and uncertain times, the steadfast support and messages of encouragement and solidarity we receive from this amazing community have become increasingly meaningful.

"We are so appreciative of the work you are doing especially in this difficult time." — TURI

"My thoughts are with you and all of MAZON's partners as you continue your sacred work in these distressing times." — JOSH & DEBRA

"May the day come when your wonderful work is no longer needed." — ELLEN

"Thanks for your good work throughout the year, but especially now as COVID-19 ravages the landscape for those unable to feed themselves."
— RABBI SUSAN & BRUCE



Responding to Unprecedented Hunger Due to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a national health emergency — it is a time of urgent concern for those who are most vulnerable in our country. Before the pandemic, nearly 40 million Americans were facing food insecurity. Now, with skyrocketing unemployment and a declining economy, millions more are struggling to feed themselves and their families. For populations that have long been overlooked and ignored, the crisis is exacerbating hunger and hardship even further.



VETERANS, who are struggling with hunger, illness, economic hardship, and mental health issues due to COVID-19 are not receiving the immediate assistance from the federal government that they deserve.



NATIVE AMERICANS are at greater risk for COVID-19 and they are not getting the help they need. They face unique challenges due to immense inequities and ongoing disparities like limited access to health care, high unemployment, and diminished access to healthy and traditional foods.



SENIORS, who are at higher risk for COVID-19, are more likely to be adversely affected by this crisis. Those who struggle with food insecurity have few resources to help them weather a crisis — particularly one that by its nature requires isolation.



With a stunning 40% of **SINGLE MOTHERS** in the U.S. struggling to afford food for their families, these women now face new pressure to keep their children safe and fed in the wake of school closures, limited childcare options, income loss, and other challenges.



COLLEGE STUDENTS have lost access to employment and various support systems due to campus closures. This includes access to the hundreds of campus food pantries that have cropped up in recent years around the country.



RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES often have fewer grocery stores with healthy food, reduced opportunity for well-paying jobs, and limited options for essential needs like healthcare.

The most meaningful and effective way to help millions of Americans facing food insecurity is to strengthen SNAP (formerly food stamps), our nation's most effective defense against hunger. Expanding SNAP and increasing benefits will ensure that people can access the food they need, with dignity and choice, and without exposing themselves to further danger by waiting in long lines at food pantries or putting their dietary or nutritional needs to the side. Boosting SNAP will also stimulate the economy and contribute to a faster national recovery.

Food pantries and distribution sites are clearly a vital resource for families that struggle with food insecurity in America, but they cannot address the full scope of hunger, now more than ever.

MAZON has been firing on all cylinders to respond to this unprecedented crisis:

- In early March, MAZON created a **50-State Hunger Resource Guide**, which was sent to all policymakers at the state and federal level, as well as our community partners. We continue to update the materials to serve as an information clearinghouse for all those in need of assistance.



- Also in March, MAZON and the National Council of Jewish Women coordinated and delivered a **petition signed by over 1,500 people** in nearly every state, urging our nation's Governors to expand federal nutrition assistance for all those who need it.

Just two weeks later, the asks in our petition were echoed in a bipartisan letter to Congress from the National Governors Association. This success underscores the influence our community has when we speak up for the most vulnerable among us, who we know will bear the brunt of the current crisis.

- In April, MAZON's President & CEO Abby J. Leibman's Letter to the Editor was published in the **New York Times**, demanding that the federal government expand SNAP to address unprecedented food insecurity. We have been featured in various other media outlets including **Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Ms. Magazine, Jewish Journal, Military.com, Arizona Jewish Post, New York Jewish Week**, and **Baltimore Jewish Times**.
- Also in April, MAZON partnered with Bread for the World to host an **Interfaith Webinar on Hunger in the Age of COVID-19**, which addressed federal and state advocacy efforts and offered ways for faith communities to weigh in with policymakers about the importance of SNAP. MAZON's policy experts have presented on numerous webinars and online events hosted by a variety of organizations like the **COVID-19 Military Support Initiative, Epicurious**, and **National Council of Jewish Women**.

INSIDER BRIEFING CALL

In April, hundreds of supporters joined MAZON for a special Insider Briefing Call to discuss our concerns about surging food insecurity in the wake of COVID-19. MAZON experts outlined urgent policy priorities, and we were thrilled to welcome a special guest: **Congresswoman Marcia L. Fudge (OH-11)**, Chair of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations.

Chairwoman Fudge shared key insights on how the pandemic is impacting struggling Americans across the U.S. "Food banks are overrun by the needs of people in their communities," said Chairwoman Fudge. "We are at a point in time where those who have been the most vulnerable are even more so, and those who have not, are looking at what to do next."

Thanks to allies like Chairwoman Fudge, MAZON and our partners have a fighting chance to alleviate hunger in America — both for those who were already struggling before the pandemic, and for those who are newly experiencing food insecurity.

“ I’m doing all I can and serving my country, and I have to worry about how I’m going to buy food?

I don’t think the government protects military families enough because so many of us need to go to food distribution sites run by outside groups.

We are protecting the Constitution of the United States, so shouldn’t the government make sure we can properly feed our families? ”

This Is Hunger: Gabriel’s Story

For nearly a decade, MAZON has made it a priority to understand, explore, and address the unique circumstances facing military families who struggle with food insecurity. We have learned that low ranking and junior enlisted service members are shut out of accessing SNAP and other food assistance programs, too often because of laws and regulations that have long been unaddressed by policymakers. Shamefully, tens of thousands of military families are quietly turning in desperation to food pantries that operate on or near every military base in this country.

For people like Gabriel, a Marine based out of Camp Pendleton in San Diego, the situation is dire.

After graduating from college and becoming a financial planner, Gabriel made the decision to serve his country in the Marines. His military income of \$2,000 a month was not enough to feed him, his wife, and his young

daughter, and when he sought help from his superiors, they sent him to a course on budgeting — which was insulting given his background as a financial planner.

As with all Americans, the COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating the financial challenges of military families — more military spouses are facing unemployment and underemployment, there are fewer affordable childcare options, and school closures mean that children in military families who rely on free or reduced-price school meals must find that food elsewhere.

America’s men and women in uniform fight for our freedom; MAZON is fighting to ensure they have freedom from hunger.

Read more stories like Gabriel’s at mazon.org/this-is-hunger and learn about MAZON’s work to address military hunger at mazon.org/military.

THIS IS HUNGER is a powerful, immersive digital video experience that explores who struggles with hunger in America and why. Available for your group and individual viewing with accompanying curriculum. Watch at mazon.org/this-is-hunger.

SUPPORT MAZON'S COVID-19 RESPONSE



The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the gaping holes in our nation's safety net into stark relief. Nearly 40 million Americans struggled with hunger before the pandemic hit. With skyrocketing unemployment, millions more now need support.



MAZON's COVID-19 Response Fund underwrites our critical efforts to address rising hunger in the wake of the pandemic. To make a gift dedicated to this vital work, visit give.mazon.org/response or call our office at **(800) 813-0557**.



Your support is both a commitment to protecting and strengthening immediate assistance for those facing hunger and to future action to protect the most vulnerable among us.



If you would like to make a gift via electronic funds transfer, sale of appreciated assets, or IRA rollover, please call our office or email Sarah Pratter, spratter@mazon.org.



Justice in Kentucky

MAZON's Quick Reaction Fund was created in 2017 to allow us and our partners to take rapid-response action against programs or policies that may threaten access to food assistance across the country.

Just before entering quarantine, the Kentucky state legislature positioned itself to pass HB 1, a bill that would have had a devastating impact on people in Kentucky who need to access public assistance programs.

With support from MAZON, the Kentucky Equal Justice Center succeeded in beating back

this terrible proposal. They developed a digital campaign, aimed at Kentucky legislators, to spotlight the grim potential impact of the bill on Kentuckians. Just as this advocacy campaign was ending, the Kentucky legislature called an impromptu press conference announcing the failure of HB 1. MAZON and our partners in Kentucky have a long road ahead to fully address food insecurity in a state where such a large percentage of the population is vulnerable — but this was an important victory along that road.

For more information about MAZON's Quick Reaction Fund, please visit www.mazon.org/qrf.



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to join our monthly giving program today!

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Find out about life-income gifts, giving through your will, or other creative ways to support MAZON.
Please contact Sarah Pratter at spratler@mazon.org or by phone at (424) 208-7228.

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WHO IS MAZON?

Inspired by Jewish values and ideals, MAZON is a national advocacy organization working to end hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds in the United States and Israel.

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