ADVOCACY IN ACTION

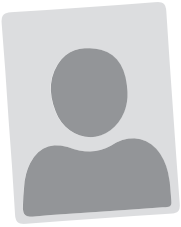
CHARACTER PACKET

JEWISH COMMUNITY

INSIDE:

- Character Info/Background
- Legislation Draft: Healthy Eating, Here at Home
- SNAP Backgrounder
- Op-ed: It's Never Been More Important to Donate to Hunger Relief Charities

MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger



JEWISH COMMUNITY

BACKGROUND

You are members of the congregation led by the Rabbi, and also active in the greater Jewish community in your state. The Social Action Committees of your synagogue has been working with the Calissouri Food Bank to start a food pantry. This initiative began when two years ago when the Rabbi held a series of hunger and SNAP themed Shabbat services in partnership with MAZON. These events mobilized the Jewish Community and spurred them to action.

After several meetings, the Social Action Committee decided that they wanted to focus on helping their own community, and determined that the best way to do that would be to start a food pantry. For the last two years, the Social Action Committee has been putting in overtime to hammer out the details of the partnership, from securing Board funding to finding parking for the Food Bank's trucks. You are now in the final stages of planning, but still need to put in a lot more work before you are able to open the pantry.

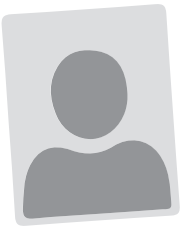
The Rabbi has been extremely supportive of this project, but now is more interested in trying to pass the "Healthy Eating Here at Home" Bill. However, you have put a lot of work into this project. Additionally, you have not thought about taking an advocacy approach to hunger and would need some convincing to put the food pantry on hold to advocate for this bill.

POSITION ON THE BILL

You do not care about the bill, and believe that the best way to fight hunger is through direct service, such as food banks and food pantries. Other characters may try to convince you to take a stance on the bill, but it is your choice whether or not to listen to them.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- You are led by the Rabbi and trust them but will push back if you disagree with what they say.
- You have a friendly relationship with the farmers market owner because many Jewish Community members shop at their market.
- You have no relationships with any of the Senators, though Senators A and B were elected partly with your support and so will place weight on what you have to say.



JEWISH COMMUNITY

ADDITIONAL GOALS

- Convince the farmer's market owner that they'd lose (your) business if the bill passes.
- Try to use your relationship with Senator A to convince them to vote against the Bill, or at least to vote against Amendment 1.

STATE OF CALISSOURI SENATE

Eighty-Ninth Session **S.B. No. 47**

TITLE OF BILL:

Healthy Eating, Here at Home

BE IT ENACTED BY LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF CALISSOURI

SECTION 1: BILL DETAILS

SNAP recipients are able to receive dollar for dollar matching vouchers for SNAP benefits they spend at farmers markets, up to $10 per week. There is no cap on the number of vouchers farmers markets may give out.

Farmers market EBT booths will have tokens that SNAP recipients may exchange for EBT dollars.

Farmers markets will keep logs of how many people use the tokens, and will apply for reimbursement at the end of each month. They may also apply for grants to advertise the voucher program and to pay for the extra administrative cost of running the program.

Only people already on SNAP can participate in this program.

The program will be run by End Hunger Now, who will be responsible for administration, outreach, and evaluation.

SECTION 2: FUNDING

The program will receive annual funding of $500,000 from the Calissouri's budget. This funding goes to a non-profit (End Hunger Now), who will run the program. The money may be spent on:

- Directly reimbursing farmers markets for vouchers.
- Advertising/outreach and administration (additional staffing, bookkeeping, etc.) grants.

The money may NOT be spent on:

- Helping farmers markets to set up booths that except EBT cards (credit cards on which SNAP money is loaded).
- Administration of farmers market EBT booths not directly related to the vouchers program.

The funding is guaranteed for two years, after which End Hunger Now and the State legislature will evaluate the program and determine if it is successful and worth continuing to fund.

SECTION 3: POTENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment 1: Double the yearly funding, and raise the voucher amount to $25 / week.

Amendment 2: Instead of a set $500,000 yearly sum, pay for the bill through 5% sales tax increase (which is calculated by the Calissouri State Budget Office to yield about the same amount of revenue).

Amendment 3: Reinstate work requirements: Unemployed adults without children may only stay on SNAP for 3 months at a time unless they find work.

SNAP BACKGROUNDER

WHAT IS SNAP?

The **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program** (SNAP), formerly known food stamps, is a government program that helps low income Americans to purchase healthy food. SNAP recipients receive a monthly stipend loaded onto an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card, which looks like a credit card and can be used at most grocery stores as well as some convenience stores and farmers markets.

SNAP is a federal program, but it is run by states. It is an entitlement program, meaning that any household that is eligible for the program is entitled to receive benefits, and states are not allowed to turn anybody away because they run out of money. Anybody who meets the eligibility requirements is able to access SNAP.

SNAP participants do not fit one single profile, but many of the people who benefit from SNAP are

- Working part-time or low wage jobs
- Unemployed
- Receiving welfare or other public assistance
- Elderly or disabled
- homeless

The size of the benefit depends on each family's income as well as other factors. In 2016 the average monthly benefit for a family of four was $471, which translates to $1.31 per meal per person. SNAP benefits are meant to supplement, rather than replace families' meal budgets.

ELIGIBILITY

Eligibility requirements vary by state, but in general households below 130% the federal poverty line ($31,980 per year for a family of four in 2016) are eligible to receive SNAP based on their income. Certain expenses, such as childcare payments and medical expenses, are subtracted when determining income. Households must also pass a resource test, meaning that the value of their eligible assets must be below a certain amount, which in most states is around $2250, or $3250 for households with a disabled or elderly family member. Home lot values, SSI and TANF (cash based government assistance programs) benefits, and most pension plans do not count as eligible assets.

Certain SNAP users must comply with work requirements in order to continue to receive benefits. Childless, able-bodied adults who are able to work receive SNAP for a maximum of 3 months in a 36 month period unless they (1) are working at least 20 hours a week, (2) are at least a half-time student, or (3) are enrolled in a job training program. During the Great Recession, when unemployment was high, many states obtained waivers to get rid of the work requirement. In recent years many of those states are deciding to reinstate work requirements.

OP-ED REPORTS

It's Never Been More Important to Donate to Hunger Relief Charities

Our increased interest in food has, in some ways, made it harder for some people to get enough to eat

by Amy McCarthy | Nov 11, 2016, 12:30pm EST

Illustrations by Vance Lump

46.5 million Americans — more than the entire populations of New York, Pennsylvania, and Illinois combined — don't have enough food to eat. In the coming years, that number is only going to get bigger, unless people step in to help in a big way. Which people? Primarily those of us who obsessively care about restaurants. Yeah, that means you.

Back in 2008, the Great Recession fundamentally changed the face of hunger. Middle-class Americans struggled to put food on the table as personal wealth dwindled dramatically, homes were foreclosed upon at historically high rates, and millions of jobs across the country were lost, many of them permanently. All these factors coalesced to birth a new generation of food insecure people — laid-off professionals, teachers, former banking industry employees — from all walks of life and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Seven years later, the economy has improved. The stock market is no longer in freefall, the unemployment rate has declined, and many people have recouped their recession losses. Still, despite all this progress, plenty of people across the country were almost entirely left out of the national economic recovery. In January, an analysis found that nearly 93 percent of counties across the United States had still not fully recovered from the recession. Last year, 12.7 percent of U.S. households contended with food insecurity, only a 1.8 percent decline from the peak of the recession.

And now, in the immediate aftermath of this week's election, it's impossible to know how a Donald Trump presidency will impact the millions of hungry people across the country. Many economists postulate that Trump's economic proposals will only expand the growing gulf between the rich and the poor. We now have a president-elect that wants to make the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (more commonly known as food stamps) more vulnerable to budget cuts, a move supported by a majority of the Republican-dominated Congress.

Most troubling, though, is Trump's promise to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Obamacare might not *seem* like it's about hunger, but the program is intimately connected to who gets to eat in America. In 2015, over 66 percent of food bank patrons were forced to choose between purchasing their essential medications and buying enough food to eat. The loss of affordable health insurance, especially in an era when healthcare costs are on the rise, will no doubt result in longer lines at food pantries across the country. At present, there is no real reason to be optimistic that food insecurity will improve under a Trump administration.

Now that the election is over, many of us are licking our wounds while trying to figure out what to do next. With regard to hunger, the answer is beyond simple: give your money to food banks. We may not be able to do anything about who sits in the Oval Office — at least not right now — but we can ensure that our neighbors don't go hungry before Trump's proposed policies ever come to fruition.

Food banks are uniquely qualified to address America's hunger crisis. They've long accomplished the boots-on-the-ground work, despite years of crippling cuts to food assistance programs on both a state-by-state and national level. Food banks receive federal funding and

corporate gifts, but donations from individuals make up the majority of the budget used to feed people at soup kitchens, food pantries, and meal programs across the country.

Hunger statistics in America

- **69%** of food bank patrons were forced to choose between paying for food and utilities
- **44%** of SNAP (food stamp) recipients are children
- **40%** of food bank patrons report watering down food and drink to make it last longer
- Each week, Feeding America food banks distribute food to more than **5 million** people
- Only **18%** of students on federal meal assistance programs have access to summer meals
- In 2015, **2.8 billion pounds** of produce were rescued by food banks and donated to people in need
- **20%** of households that receive food assistance have at least one veteran in the family

Source: Feeding America's 2014 Hunger in America report

These food banks have finely honed the science of fighting hunger, deftly targeting those most in need. They've created programs to ensure that senior citizens can access nutritionally-sound meals that keep them both satiated and help prevent illnesses like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes. Feeding America's BackPack program distributes nearly half a million parcels of shelf-stable, easy-to-prepare snacks and meals to children that keep them fed on the weekends, when school meal programs aren't accessible.

It isn't as simple as just picking up a few cans of food and dropping them off at a pantry. You have to give money — as much as you can afford, and frequently. Because food banks buy in bulk, they wield a great deal more purchasing power than an individual person at a grocery store. Depending on your location, food banks can provide between two to eight meals to people in need with a single dollar, the same amount of money you'd spend on two cans of beans.

With individual donations, food banks can pair your 10 or 15 bucks with corporate grants, federal aid dollars, and negotiated pricing on food items to squeeze the most out of every single dollar. Canned goods can't purchase the trucks, gasoline, and manpower required to pack and ship the thousands of pounds of food distributed each month, but cash can. When you give money, you maximize your impact.

Plenty of people view donating to food banks (or any other charity) as a way to dispose of their unwanted garbage. Donating the decades-old canned goods from your pantry isn't just a dick move that lacks respect for the people you're supposedly trying to help, it also costs food banks — who are responsible for sorting and disposing of items they can't use — time and money.

These "gifts" can also have negative unintended effects, like when food bank patrons receive food that is moldy, infested with worms, or riddled with bacteria.

As people with a vested interest in food culture, it's important to balance our appetites for pricey food and coveted restaurant reservations with an equally passionate commitment to food justice. In recent years, the economic outlook has stabilized enough, at least for now, for us to drop $15 on a single cocktail or $300 at a fancy special occasion dinner. If you don't bat an eye at those dollar amounts, it should be easy to toss a couple of bucks every month in the direction of hunger relief charities.

We also have to consider our own role in the hunger crisis. For better or worse, foodie culture is now popular culture, and that's come with a whole lot of negative unintended consequences. Restaurants have played a huge role in the gentrification of countless neighborhoods, forcing families and long-established small businesses alike out of their homes as the hip, moneyed crowds moved into Bushwick, Austin, Nashville, and Charleston. Sometimes, those in poverty live just steps away from the county's buzziest restaurants. And foods that were once cheap — tacos, hot chicken, and collard greens — have transformed into luxury items, driving up their price.

Put simply, our increased interest in food has, in some ways, made it harder for some people to get enough to eat. It's our responsibility to help close the gap. Thanks to the wonders of technology, it is now ridiculously easy to give money to a food bank that serves your local community. Most accept online donations, and many offer the ability to set up a recurring donation automatically drafted from your bank account or credit card every month. If you want to further maximize your impact, many corporate employers offer charitable donation matching (up to a percentage) that doesn't cost you a dime.

This time of year, just before Thanksgiving and Christmas, is when hunger generally comes into focus, evidenced by the canned food drives and turkey giveaways that will crop up over the coming weeks. Donations to food banks peak in November and December, and they are necessary, but hunger is a year-round problem that requires constant attention.

But you don't have to schlep boxes from the grocery store or set up a canned food drive. Just figure out how much you spend at restaurants, take a percentage you can comfortably afford, and give.