ADVOCACY IN ACTION

CHARACTER PACKET

MAZON ORGANIZER

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MAZON | A Jewish Response To Hunger

MAZON ORGANIZER

BACKGROUND

You are a synagogue organizer with MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, an organization that engages in advocacy to end hunger. MAZON is a national organization but has taken on many state level campaigns. You are working with the Jewish community in in the state as well as End Hunger Now to advocate for this bill. You will argue for the bill from a policy and economic perspective, but will also bring in personal stories of people affected by food insecurity who have been helped by SNAP.

POSITION ON THE BILL

You support the bill in its current form but want it to be as progressive as possible.

- You will push for Amendment 1.
- You do not want Amendment 2 but it is your choice whether that is a deal breaker.
- You cannot support the bill if it contains Amendment 3.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER ACTORS

- You work closely with End Hunger Now and the Rabbi on this bill.
- You are also working with Jobs With Justice, though you and End Hunger Now want to focus your energy on meeting with Senators while JWJ wants to hold a protest. You understand it could be effective but are worried about losing your relationship with Senator B (who does not like JWJ), and it is your choice whether or not to agree to attend a protest.
- You don't know any of the Senators personally, but they all have heard of you know that you are working with End Hunger Now (Senators A and B are generally friendly with EHM, while Senator C is not).

ADDITIONAL GOALS

- Bring the Jewish / religious perspective on this bill when meeting with elected officials (Senator B in particular) and other stakeholders, use facts about SNAP to argue your position but also try to bring up points that a non-religious organization would not be able to (for example, the moral imperative to help those who are hungry).
- Help the Rabbi to bring the Jewish community into the fight.

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.

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SNAP Series #3: Three Common Myths about SNAP

April 05, 2017 | By Abby J. Leibman

Attacks on SNAP – the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, our nation's frontline defense against hunger – are often couched in terms that play upon pervasive myths about SNAP and the people in our nation who struggle with hunger.

Let's take a moment to identify and understand the truth behind three common myths about SNAP.

MYTH ONE: SNAP RECIPIENTS ARE LAZY MOOCHERS

Detractors like to accuse those who rely on SNAP of being "just after a free lunch." In reality, the majority of SNAP recipients (75% (https://www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/snap/ABAWD-Info13.pdf)) who can work, do so. Those who are employed, often at multiple jobs, simply cannot always earn enough to cover their costs and afford the nutrition necessary for themselves and their family. And many of those who are not employed want to work (http://admin.ohiofoodbanks.org/uploads/news/ABAWD_Report_2014-2015-v3.pdf), if only jobs were available to them. It's also important to know that the overwhelming majority (64%) of those on SNAP are senior citizens, people with disabilities, or children, and working is simply not an option for them.

MYTH TWO: ONLY CERTAIN PEOPLE DESERVE FOOD ASSISTANCE

Some opponents to SNAP like to bang a drum about ABAWDs (https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/able-bodied-adults-without-dependents-abawds)–Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents. These are individuals who are between 18 and 49 who, according to critics, "should be able to work;" as such, they are subject to strict time limits, allowing them to receive SNAP benefits for only 90 days in three years. The ABAWD classification, however, covers a wide range of individuals and circumstances, not all of whom fit neatly into a simplified paradigm. ABAWDs include single parents of children over the age of 18. They are college students, and veterans, and people with undiagnosed disabilities. They are homeless people who struggle to find employment and 19 year-olds who have aged out of foster care and have no family on whom to rely.

MYTH THREE: FOOD INSECURITY ISN'T THE GOVERNMENT'S PROBLEM

me policymakers like to point to charity as a better answer to addressing hunger in our nation. But the math simply doesn't support their theory. According to The National Center for Charitable Statistics (http://nccs.urban.org/) (NCCS), in December 2015 there were 3,073 public charities that provided food to hungry people as identified in their Form 990 with the IRS. In total, their 2015 revenues totaled $11.47 billion. Total federal spending just on SNAP in 2015 was $75 billion. For these charities to replace SNAP, they would have to increase their annual revenues by more than 650%.

Please listen carefully to our nation's policymakers when they talk about SNAP and the people who rely upon it. We hope this information helps you discern at least a few facts from myths. You can find answers for dispelling more common myths here. Don't hesitate to reach out to us if you have questions we can answer.

Want to help us protect SNAP? Sign our petition now (http://thisishunger.org/take-action/protect-snap-2/)!

Links to "dig in deeper"

- Eight Myths About Hunger (/the-reality-of-hunger/hunger-myths/)

Read all the posts in this series:

- SNAP Series #1: We Cannot Stand Idly By... (/inside-mazon/snap-series-1/)
- SNAP Series #2: The Facts (/inside-mazon/snap-series-2/)
- SNAP Series #4: The Federal Response (/inside-mazon/snap-series-4/)

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http://mazon.org/inside-mazon/snap-series-3-three-common-myths-about-snap/ (http://mazon.org/inside-mazon/snap-series-3-three-common-myths-about-snap/)

Blanca's Story from THIS IS HUNGER

"My childhood was very beautiful. We had a two-bedroom house in Country Club Gardens. It wasn't the best house, but it was ours. If we wanted McDonald's, we'd go to McDonalds. We had toys. We used to be really spoiled.

Four years ago, when I was 10, my dad left us. He didn't help us at all. We were okay for a while because my mom made good money cleaning houses and working banquets at a big hotel. Everything started going downhill when construction dried up here. It affected everyone. People started cleaning their own houses and my mom lost lots of work. Then my mom had an operation and things got worse. She couldn't work for a while and became late with the mortgage and struggled to get us food. The bank took away our house and we got placed in public housing.

Food is very important in our culture. We went from having really, really big dinners with all kinds of things to making the best of whatever we had in the refrigerator – mostly eggs and tortillas. At first, my mom would say 'we don't have groceries today, but I promise we'll go buy them tomorrow.' Then tomorrow came and we'd ask about buying groceries and she'd say 'we don't have money for food.'

This made my mom cry a lot. She didn't do it in front of us, but I knew she was crying. I had to be strong for my mom and sisters.

We are doing way, way, way better now. My mom works, but still doesn't have a steady job. We get food stamps and once a week we get extra groceries and dinner at our school. It's hard to make our food stamps last a whole month with three kids – kids eat a lot. At first we made lots of mistakes with our food stamps and used them up before the month was over. But we've learned how to budget ourselves and I use self-control not to eat a lot. My mom doesn't tell me not to take food, but I ask myself 'am I really that hungry?' I worry about food, but I know it is harder for my sisters —they are kids. For them, not having enough food sucks really bad.

Going from a very comfortable life to a struggling life made me think that there's lots of injustice in the world. It made me want to go to law school – to Georgetown because it is one of the best. When I am a lawyer, I want to give back to the community because it is where I learned what I learned – where I matured. I believe that change starts by one person and I want to be that little change in the world."

Blanca, Santa Fe, New Mexico

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Marilyn's Story from THIS IS HUNGER

"My life as a senior citizen is probably harder than any other time in my life: harder than raising our children, harder than all those years of working. Living on a fixed income from Social Security, my husband and I have had to adjust from what we used to have to what we have now. It has gotten even harder, since Social Security hasn't gone up in three years, yet everything else is going up all the time. We live very simply now – extra stuff is not to be.

My priority is to pay for meds for my husband and myself because we need them to keep alive. That leaves very little money to buy food. I'm not happy that we have to give up nourishment for medicine, but we just try to do the best we can with the food we acquire.

Our son used to send us $100 a month to help us buy food. But the oil company he worked for shut down. And since he has been unemployed, he no longer sends us money. That means that just about everything we eat comes from the reservation's commodities and the senior lunch programs. Without these programs, I don't know what we would do. When I go to the commodities house, I get flour, oatmeal, cream of wheat, canned milk, powdered milk, vegetables and some hamburger meat. I always try to get the things that you can use to stretch a meal.

The problem is that the things you can stretch aren't really good for me because I am diabetic, have high blood pressure and fibromyalgia, so I am not supposed to eat a lot of starch. It makes a person feel depressed. I'm not fixing meals that are nourishing to the extent I'd like. I wish I could afford roast pork or pork chops. It would be such a treat.

It's a sad situation when you don't have the money to buy fresh food to cook up for your meal. I recently bought a few tomatoes for $2.89. I just wanted some taste to add to the lettuce we got at the commodities house. I cut them up real small and used a bit at a time. Usually, we just don't consume vegetables unless they are out of a can.

Getting the senior lunches makes all the difference to us since we can no longer afford a nutritious breakfast, like eggs and bacon. There are days when we don't feel up to driving to the lunch program, so it's such a blessing that they also deliver to our home.

I wish we would get more commodities for the month. Whoever can help protect these programs, please do, because while we are just two people, I know there are a whole lot of other people out there who are also hungry."

Marilyn, Pine Ridge Reservation , South Dakota

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Dylan's Story from THIS IS HUNGER

"It was the best time, when my mom had a job. I actually enjoyed life. I used to get to do whatever. Now, I get up in the morning and put on my shoes like anybody else, but when I get to school, I think about losing our house.

My mom got laid off four years ago from her job at the school district. It really gets to me, it really does, that they let her go. She'd been there 20 years and is more qualified than a lot of teachers, but it seems that getting full time work around here is all political now. The only work my mom can get these days is substitute teaching. It's part time and not enough to pay for the basics. The fact that my 84-year-old grandpa is keeping us from losing our house, pretty much gets to me. Before I go to bed at night, I actually pray that we won't.

I have a lot of weight on my shoulders for a 14-year-old. I can't stand our situation. I've had to sacrifice a lot since my mom lost her job. I'm actually wearing my mom's pants right now because we can't afford to buy me clothes. I can't take the college classes I qualified for because we can't afford them. My mom doesn't know it, but I quit baseball so she wouldn't have to spend money on my uniform. It's not a good feeling when you're sitting in the house eating chips and potted meat as your friends are off playing ball and going to steakhouses when they win. It's not a good feeling at all.

Our food stamps have gone from $300 to $200 a month for my mom and me. We're not able to afford healthy foods that some people can. It's usually chips, bologna sandwiches and all that. We've had to open up canned foods from the pantry that's probably older than me. Eating like this and knowing that your friends are eating regular food makes me feel like I'm not normal. We run out of food some months and I go to bed hungry. I've gone days without sleep because of hunger. The next day, I'll go through class pinching myself, doing stuff to stay awake.

Being hungry affects your appearance, how you act. When I'm hungry, I'm not in the mood for anything. I'm depressed. Then, my mom picks me up and I continue to work as hard as I can in school. I've wanted to become a surgeon since the fourth grade. I keep reminding myself that if I work hard in life, I can get to where I'm fine. Then I can buy my mom a new house.

It's not fair that we have to go through this. It's not fair for anybody to have to go through this. You shouldn't have to worry about where your next meal is gonna come from – especially people with kids."

Dylan, Tyner, Kentucky

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Quick Facts About Hunger in America

What is "food insecurity?"

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as **a lack of access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life.**

Who is food insecure in America?

41.2 million Americans struggle to put enough nutritious food on the table.

- that's 12.9 million children and 9.8 million seniors
- 12.3% of all American households - that's more than 1 in 8
- more food insecure Americans than the entire population of Canada (36.3 million)

What resources are available for food insecure people?

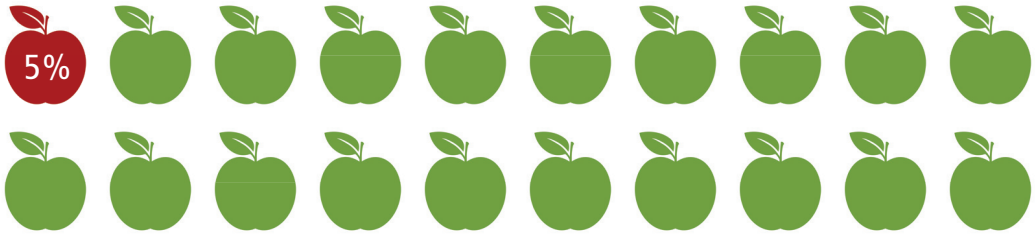
They rely on help, primarily from two sources:

Government Programs

The USDA has 15 distinct food and nutrition assistance programs to combat domestic hunger. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the most widely used of these programs and has over 44 million participants.

Private Charity

Charitable organizations were not conceived to feed entire communities, but to help alleviate what was thought to be a temporary or emergency situation. While these organizations play a vital role in addressing hunger, they struggle to keep up with the need.

Why isn't private charity the answer?

The charitable response could never fill the gap if government programs continue to erode. The overwhelming majority of food assistance in this country comes from federal programs. **Only about 5% is provided by the charitable sector.**