



MAZON NEWS™

FALL 2023

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LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

Dear friends,

As summer winds to a close and we anticipate fall and the High Holy Days, we are mindful of the many beginnings that are the hallmark of fall in America — school starts again, Congress returns to Washington, and MAZON renews its commitment to the vital work ahead in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable. This year, we mark an additional new and exciting beginning: MAZON has acquired an incredible program — Challah for Hunger. You will read more in the coming pages about our excitement to engage with a bright and ever-growing cohort of college students emerging as leaders in meeting the challenges of campus hunger. We are also eager to bring this program to the greater MAZON community, making it a vital part of the work we do with synagogues across the United States. And of course, we are dreaming of all the challah we will be baking and eating.

In reflecting on what MAZON can share and learn in this process, the complexities and purpose of leadership are among the most significant. For over 19 years, Challah for Hunger has fostered community on college campuses around the country, and from that, leaders rise. Leaders who have a vision of how their community can engage, who bend that to the cause of challenging hunger, and who find themselves on a path through college and beyond that's dedicated to social justice. We are proud to have been a central part of the initial years of Challah for Hunger's work, and to again bring our experience as leaders in the social justice community to the remarkable program that is Challah for Hunger.

This is why MAZON is deeply involved in capacity-building — we are building the capacity of individuals, of organizations, and of the anti-hunger movement itself. It is MAZON's great honor to engage a wide array of leaders — from the students we educate, to the volunteers we mobilize, to the clergy we advocate alongside, to the partners we uplift. You will also find some of their stories in these pages.

All of this is built on the foundation of MAZON's thought leadership — our work, our vision, our strengths that we bring to the needs and barriers identified in the field. This is what drives our community forward as a powerful force of change.

Building our capacity to act is vital because these needs remain significant and wide-ranging. We continue to fight for universal school meals — which we began years ago in Minnesota, and, as of this writing, just passed in Massachusetts, marking eight states where public school students will receive free breakfast and lunch. We address the inequitable food safety net for our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories. We carry the torch to shine light on our country's stunning disservice to food insecure military service members and their families.

We know we are on the right path when what was perceived as outrageous becomes normalized. When we have made it safe for other advocates to add their voices to our efforts. And we have your stalwart support to thank for it. As ever, together, we will transform *how it is*, into **how it should be**.

Sincerely,



Abby J. Leibman
MAZON PRESIDENT & CEO



Rabbi Joel Pitkowsky
MAZON BOARD CHAIR



Q&A

Back to School Means Fighting for Universal School Meals

School meals are a critical source of nutrition for the 1 in 8 children facing food insecurity in America. Yet, many students are cut off from this support because of cost and stigma barriers. Learn about how MAZON is fighting for universal school meals from three of the people leading this work — Samuel Chu, Paul Sherman, and Lauren Banister.

How did MAZON start advocating against lunch shaming and for universal school meals?



SAMUEL: In 2014, MAZON was working closely with Mid-Minnesota Legal Aid, which surfaced a significant problem of “lunch shaming” in schools — this occurs when students are unable to pay for school meals and are denied food. When MAZON and our partners

brought this to the attention of schools and elected officials, we were met with resistance — many claimed it was impossible to fix because “then everyone would stop paying and the school would go bankrupt.”

MAZON, with our synagogue partners, built political pressure on school officials and elected leaders until it was politically untenable for anyone to continue to ignore the issue of lunch shaming. It quickly became clear that when school meals are free for all students, it removes the possibility of lunch shaming while also eliminating stigma and various eligibility issues.

How has the fight for universal school meals changed in recent years?



PAUL: When the National School Lunch Program started in the 1940s, many Americans felt that fighting childhood hunger was crucial to national defense. It was designed to be a universal program, but from the beginning, some communities faced barriers to accessing

the program. A lot of power rests with state governments, and unfortunately, ensuring equity has been an uphill battle in many states.

For years, MAZON has been working with local partners to advance legislation to combat this shameful phenomenon. And in 2019, we proudly stood next to lawmakers in Washington, DC as they introduced federal lunch shaming legislation for the first time.

Then during COVID-19, various government relief packages included free school meals for every public school student in the country, providing essential support to millions of families. When the federal mandate ended in 2021, MAZON jumped into action to codify these policies alongside advocates nationwide. Most notably, in coalition with incredible partners, we secured a monumental victory in Colorado to fund Healthy School Meals for All. Engaging our Jewish community partners in this work was, and will continue to be, crucial in MAZON's efforts to raise awareness about initiatives like this.

How can the Jewish community continue to expand universal school meals across the country?



LAUREN: As part of MAZON's mission, we aim to build capacity in the anti-hunger and Jewish communities. We will not win alone — we need to build the momentum so everyone can realize their political power.

To date, only 8 states have permanent universal school meals legislation — California, Colorado, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, and Vermont. MAZON is working with the North Carolina Alliance for Health to mobilize Jewish communities in North Carolina to get School Meals for All included in their state's budget. It's invigorating to ride this wave of policy change and investment around school meals alongside our Jewish communal partners, as together we ensure our nutrition safety net reaches everyone who needs it.

 Breaking News!

MAZON IS THE NEW HOME OF CHALLAH FOR HUNGER



If you visited a college campus on a Friday in recent years, it's possible you had the opportunity to buy challah from students. The delight of fresh challah only grew when you learned you would be donating to end hunger with your purchase. "Challah for Hunger" indeed.

For over 19 years, Challah for Hunger chapters across the country have offered college students the opportunity to come together around the tradition of baking challah and directing the proceeds of those bakes to anti-hunger organizations locally and nationally.

After nearly two decades of engaging thousands of college students, raising over \$2 million for anti-hunger organizations, and helping to build important visibility for the issue of college hunger across the United States, the organization Nazun — which has operated the Challah for Hunger program — is closing its doors.

MAZON is proud to announce that we now have the honor and privilege of carrying on the Challah for Hunger program as a part of our work. We have much to learn from this cohort of students, alumni, and others, and we are excited to share MAZON's deep roster of resources to bolster their knowledge about anti-hunger

policies, enhancing and expanding their advocacy efforts. We heartily believe that the Challah for Hunger program can and will continue to foster a pipeline of incredible anti-hunger leaders in the Jewish community and beyond.



How can I get involved?

- **Start a chapter** at your synagogue, on your college campus, or at your school to host regular bakes and challah sales. It's not just for college students!
- **Post your favorite challah recipes on social media, tag us @MAZONusa**, and share with us why challah baking is meaningful to you, or how this ritual inspires you to take action.
- **Organize a challah bake in your community**, and we'll happily provide resources to grow your event into an opportunity for volunteerism, community building, public education, and advocacy.

To get started with these ideas and more, contact Paul Sherman at ps Sherman@mazon.org.

Where have we been, and where are we going with college hunger advocacy?

In recent years, hundreds of food pantries have sprung up on college campuses around the country. These pantries alone cannot provide meaningful stability and food security for college students, yet many students are unable to access support from programs like SNAP. For years, organizations like MAZON and Challah for Hunger have been working to expose this unacceptable problem and advance policy solutions. We will continue to fight for comprehensive solutions, because the last thing college students should worry about is if they will have enough food to eat.

July 2017: California passes legislation to notify students of SNAP eligibility and increase SNAP access on college campuses.

August 2017: Massachusetts increases outreach to 52,000 low-income students potentially eligible for SNAP.

December 2017: MAZON organizes and co-hosts the first-ever congressional briefing on college hunger in Washington, DC.

January 2018: Pennsylvania Department of Human Services expands community college student eligibility to receive SNAP.

January 2019: The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) publishes a staggering report, which found that nearly 40% of undergraduate students in the country were facing hunger, marking the first time that the federal government acknowledged the scope of this problem.

March 2020: Advocates secure \$7 billion in the pandemic-era CARES Act for the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund and the U.S. Department of Agriculture relaxes SNAP requirements for some college students. An estimated 3 million college students receive life-saving SNAP benefits during the pandemic.

May 2023: Advocates warn that college students and other SNAP recipients will face a “hunger cliff” when the

U.S. government’s public health emergency declarations end and emergency allotments and flexibilities for SNAP expire.

Future: MAZON is now undertaking an environmental scan of college student hunger policies and opportunities, and we will work with the Challah for Hunger community to surface local and state opportunities.



39%
of four-year
students
are affected
by hunger
annually

HOW CAN I SUPPORT THIS PROGRAM?

Join our monthly donor program to support college student leaders fighting hunger.

Your monthly donation will provide critical, empowering support to college students across the country in becoming anti-hunger leaders in their communities. You will not only help sustain current Challah for Hunger chapters, but you will also help MAZON expand our reach to new student leaders and further build the national response to hunger.

Your gift of \$18/month can support the cost of challah ingredients for one campus chapter, ensuring student leaders have the resources they need to host bake sales so they can focus on fighting hunger.

Your gift of \$36/month can support an alumni adviser for an entire school year. These dedicated individuals provide guidance, mentorship, and valuable expertise to student leaders, helping them develop their skills and maximize their impact.

Your gift of \$42/month can provide a grant to student leaders to lead anti-hunger advocacy projects in their communities and combat campus hunger. Your

contribution will ignite change and create a ripple effect that extends far beyond a single college campus.

Your gift of \$85/month can provide a travel stipend for a Challah for Hunger leader to attend an in-person leadership convening. These gatherings bring together passionate advocates from across the country, fostering collaboration, networking, and personal growth.

Your gift of \$150/month can support the investment required to create a new Challah for Hunger chapter. By establishing new chapters, we can expand our reach and empower more college students to take a stand against hunger.

To sign up as a monthly donor, visit mazon.org/SupportCfH or contact Rebecca Ward at rward@mazon.org or (424) 208-7203.

CHALLAH FOR HUNGER™
A project of MAZON



Spotlight: Community Leaders Working to End Hunger

MAZON is honored to be joined by leaders whose partnership is critical in advancing our shared goal of ending hunger. We are grateful for the leaders below and so many others — dedicated clergy, community leaders, government officials, and emerging young advocates — who empower and inspire us each day.

Ray Russolillo

MAZON Volunteer and Community Advocate, Weaverville, NC

Ray has a long history of working with MAZON to successfully organize the Jewish community in Asheville, North Carolina to fight against hunger locally and nationally. This summer, Ray introduced his community to The Hunger Museum and helped lead a statewide lobby day as part of MAZON's Hunger Action Month. Further, he has been integral in our campaign to achieve universal school meals in the state.

"Hunger and food insecurity are social justice issues that have always fascinated and perplexed me... I am trying to do my part to move the needle a little bit by engaging in advocacy efforts with MAZON. In the past, I talked the talk; today, I am trying to walk the walk — food insecurity in these United States is just plain morally unacceptable!"



Samantha Joseph

Director, Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Boston, MA

As the first Jewish woman to lead a federal Center for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, Samantha leads by example, putting faith into action to end hunger for all people. MAZON was honored to work with Samantha to co-host USDA's first-ever Jewish American Heritage Month celebration in May.

"It is very meaningful for me to put my Jewish values into practice every day through my work at USDA. As a Rabbi's daughter and the first Jewish woman [in this role], spending every day mobilizing faith and community leaders to increase access to healthy, nutritious food and fight hunger is truly an honor."

Rabbi Iah Pillsbury

Rabbi, Temple Beit Torah
Colorado Springs, CO

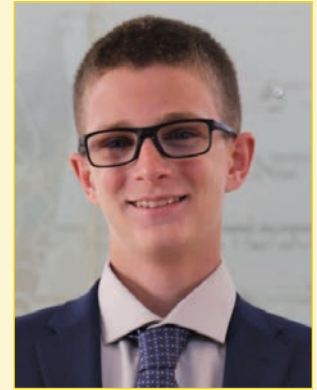
Rabbi Pillsbury first engaged with MAZON as part of the 2020 Jewish Clergy Justice Mission and since then, they have been a crucial partner in MAZON's organizing in Colorado. Recently, Rabbi Pillsbury rallied the Temple Beit Torah community around advocacy efforts to pass Healthy School Meals for All — thanks to this and other advocacy efforts around the state, all students in Colorado public schools will now have access to free, nutritious school meals. Rabbi Pillsbury is organizing their community to meet with Senator Michael Bennet to further advocate for policies that will end hunger.

“Every person deserves to have reliable, stress-free access to healthy food. We live in one of the richest nations in the world — this shouldn't be a difficult thing to accomplish! And yet we all know that far too many people go hungry every day, or stress about where their next meal is coming from. Pirkei Avot 3:17 teaches, ‘If there is no flour, there is no Torah. If there is no Torah, there is no flour.’ Judaism commands us to feed the hungry. We literally don't have Torah if we don't have sustenance! I am so grateful to partner with MAZON to help build a world where no one goes hungry.”



Steven Dunbar

Bar Mitzvah Student
and MAZON Volunteer
Lincoln, CA



Steven Dunbar and his family came to MAZON in search of a meaningful way to engage around hunger for his bar mitzvah.

MAZON staff worked with Steven to educate his community about the reality and complexity of hunger in America. Not willing to stop at simply discussing food insecurity in his drosh (sermon), Steven also asked members of his community to join him in the fight against hunger by conducting a paper plate campaign. Together, Steven and his guests filled empty plates with their hopes — and support for essential nutrition benefits for people facing hunger. Steven collected 50 anti-hunger advocacy messages, and he plans to schedule a congressional meeting to personally deliver these messages to his local representatives.

“I first became aware of food insecurity and what that actually meant when our school announced it had collected more than 200 bags of food for people facing food insecurity within my middle school. I was confused because until then I had always associated food insecurity with homelessness. Like most food-secure kids, until then it hadn't occurred to me that there could be kids sitting next to me in class who didn't have enough to eat on a regular basis. I wanted to understand more. When it was time to look for a Mitzvah project for my Bar Mitzvah, I knew I needed to do something to positively impact this situation. This search led me to MAZON.

“I am lucky to be part of such a supportive and giving congregation. My community really got into this project, asking great questions and participating in the advocacy. This inspires me to continue to learn more and find more ways to get involved in the future.”

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Sherman Oaks, CA 91403
mazon.org



Please note our new address

BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR!

Invest in the fight to end hunger. Please call us at (800) 813-0557 or visit mazon.org to join our monthly giving program today!

LEGACY GIVING AND GIFT PLANNING

Find out about giving through your will, life-income gifts, or other creative ways to support MAZON. Please contact Rebecca Ward at rward@mazon.org or by phone at (424) 208-7203.

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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