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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMONWEALTH *of* PENNSYLVANIA

House Democratic Policy Committee Hearing

Food Insecurity

Tuesday, August 19, 2025 | 2:00 p.m.

Representative Amen Brown

OPENING REMARKS

2:00 p.m. Rep. Amen Brown, D-Philadelphia

PANEL ONE

2:05 p.m. Wendy Hutchison
Philadelphia, PA

Daaiyah Iqbal
Philadelphia, PA

Johndi Harrell
Philadelphia, PA

Q & A with Legislators

PANEL TWO

2:35 p.m. George Matysik, Executive Director
Share Food Program

Vincent Schiavone, Chair and Chief Executive Officer
Caring for Friends

Loree Jones Brown, Chief Executive Officer
Philabundance Food Bank

Q & A with Legislators

My name is Vince Schiavone, and I serve as CEO and Chair of Caring for Friends.

Today, we are here to discuss what is often referred to as food insecurity. Let me be clear: the people we serve are not “insecure” about food. They are hungry. They are experiencing food deprivation. In a state as rich in resources as Pennsylvania, that is unacceptable.

Every week, I look into the faces of seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, children, and working families who simply do not have enough to eat. These aren’t abstract numbers or statistics. They aren’t wondering if they might miss a meal—they already have. They aren’t unsure whether they may run short—they already have. For some of them, hunger isn’t just a rare occurrence, it is a constant, unrelenting reality.

Imagine, for a moment, a mother who skips meals so that her children can eat. A senior citizen whose only meal of the day is the one we deliver. These are not exceptions; they are situations we see every day. The people we serve are your neighbors, your coworkers, the veterans who served our country, and the children in our local schools.

This issue isn’t about a vague sense of “insecurity.” It’s about hunger. It’s about malnutrition. It’s about the toll that hunger takes on people’s health, their dignity, and their lives. For seniors, hunger can lead to higher risks of chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, congestive heart failure, depression, gum disease, and asthma. In children, hunger can result in slower development, difficulty learning, and a lifetime of health challenges. This is not just a matter of missing a meal, this is about quality of life, potential, and overall well-being.

But there is also a more insidious aspect of hunger that doesn’t get discussed enough: the emotional toll. Social isolation is a real issue for so many of the people we serve. Many of them live alone, and a meal is more than just sustenance, it’s connection. It’s a moment of community, of shared care. When you don’t know where your next meal will come from, it’s easy to feel disconnected, invisible, and abandoned.

At Caring for Friends, we’ve been fighting hunger and social isolation for 50 years. We were founded in 1974 by my mother, Rita Ungaro-Schiavone, with a simple belief: No one should be hungry or alone in a world full of caring people. That belief is our north star and inspires our work to this day.

What began as a small operation in her home has grown into one of the largest independent food charities in the region. We serve five counties: Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware, and Montgomery. We are more than just a food bank. We are a lifeline for over 300,000 neighbors, a point of connection for people who would otherwise be isolated. We are here not just to provide food but to ensure that no one is alone in a world of caring people.

Last year, we distributed 3 million ready-made meals made with 8 million pounds of donated food to over 300,000 people. This effort was made possible by the tireless work of 10,000 volunteers, 500 community partners, and more than 100 food donors. We don't rely on federal programs. We are powered by the generosity and compassion of the private donors, food producers, and everyday people who donate their resources, their food, and their time to help their neighbors. Our donors and volunteers are truly our superpower. Caring for Friends is known for doing a lot with a little. Imagine the possibilities if we had more support.

Pennsylvania already has the resources to solve this problem. The solutions are available to us; what we lack is coordinated leadership to bring the pieces together effectively. Hunger is not a far-off problem. It is happening right here, in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our communities. It is time to act with urgency and recognize that ending hunger in Pennsylvania is possible and necessary.

That's where you, our elected leaders, come in.

I am asking you for three specific actions that will make a real difference right now:

1. **Extend the state Charitable Food Program tax credit within the Neighborhood Assistance Program.** This 55% PA tax credit has been a powerful incentive for private food donations. Extending and expanding it will help move more surplus food out of warehouses and into kitchens, where it belongs. Reopen the application period so more farmers, manufacturers, and food producers can donate food, and everyone will benefit.
2. **Implore state agencies to work with independent organizations like Caring for Friends.** Agencies such as Agriculture, Education, Aging, Environmental Protection, Transportation, and Revenue all have roles to play. You can help break down the silos and connect these agencies directly with community-based organizations and the private sector to increase food donations, move food faster, and reach more neighbors in need. Today, not years from now.
3. **Provide operational funding for independent, grassroots organizations like Caring for Friends.** We are in desperate need of operational, programming, and direct service funding. We move quickly when we can, but we need your help to move as quickly as the need is increasing. Today, we have 450 seniors and people with disabilities waiting for food in your districts. We have mounting requests to supply food pantries because they've been cut off from suppliers reliant on government programs. Without the necessary operational funding, the gap between those who need help and those we can serve continues to grow.

For 50 years, Caring for Friends has shown what's possible when a caring community comes together. With your leadership, we can take that to the next level. We can ensure that in Pennsylvania, no one goes to bed hungry. Let's stop talking about "insecurity" and start ending hunger. Together, we can solve this. The crisis is real, it's now, and it's our responsibility.

Testimony for Rep. Amen Brown

August 19, 2025

George Matysik, Executive Director, Share Food Program

In our five-county region today, 1 in 5 individuals lives below the poverty line. 1 in 4 kids do not have enough to eat. In the last three years, Share Food Program has seen more than a 120% increase in vulnerable neighbors turning to us for help.

But food insecurity in Philadelphia is not just a statistic—it's an everyday reality and nightmare for hundreds of thousands of individuals in our region, especially children and seniors.

We know the factors that lead to food insecurity are vast and interconnected, including systemic inequality, poverty, unemployment, education and housing gaps, inflation, and policy failures.

We know the consequences of hunger are myriad – malnutrition, impaired physical and cognitive development within children, chronic disease and mental health issues, economic instability, isolation, and a perpetuated cycle of harm that leads to deeper and longer-lasting poverty for many.

We also know that hunger is entirely preventable and solvable, given adequate resources—for families and food banks alike—compassion, action, and support, especially from our local and federal lawmakers.

In the last few months, Share Food Program has been met with steadily increasing rates of hunger while grappling with millions of dollars in federal funding cuts and the termination of the LFPA (Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement Program) and TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) reductions. More than that, around 50,000 neighbors in the areas we serve are at risk of losing vital SNAP assistance because of a devastating spending bill that has come down from the White House.

Social safety net organizations and hardworking families alike can only stretch dollars so far and the continued, reckless divestment in our community's nourishment only promises a future full of catastrophic consequences for generations to come.

In the face of rampant hunger, Share Food Program remains committed to fighting harder than ever to keep neighbors fed and alive, to care for one another the way we should, and to provide dignity and opportunity to Philadelphians from all walks of life.

We cannot do this alone, however, and we shouldn't have to. We call on our representatives to address a growing hunger plague head on.

To mitigate the growing hunger crisis, we need a state budget that prioritizes funding for state programs like the Pennsylvania Ag Surplus System and the State Food Purchasing Program—both of which have been proven to strengthen local food networks and economic activity.

We need our lawmakers to defend SNAP, to find ways to expand, not limit, eligibility. We need support for holistic, community-based solutions, including urban agriculture, community fridges, and food justice education. We need philanthropy and individual donors to join our cause. And we need lawmakers to consider and tackle the root causes of hunger: poverty and social inequity.

Food is a human right. Keeping our neighbors fed is not optional. Letting children go to sleep hungry is not acceptable. Ensuring our communities have nutritious, accessible meals each day is a public health imperative. It is a moral imperative.

About Share Food Program

Share Food Program is the leading hunger relief organization in the Greater Philadelphia region, working to eradicate food insecurity through food distribution, education, and advocacy. Through partnerships with nearly 800 schools in 70 school districts and 400 community-based organizations and partner pantries, Share Food Program feeds hundreds of thousands of neighbors in need each month.

To learn more and get involved, visit www.sharefoodprogram.org, or follow us on Facebook @sharefood and X and Instagram @sharefoodphilly.

Good afternoon Chairman Bizzarro, Representative Brown, and members of the House Democratic Policy Committee, and thank you for inviting me here to speak with you about the reality of hunger in our communities. My name is Loree Jones Brown, and I have the privilege of serving as Chief Executive Officer of Philabundance, a hunger relief organization serving Southeastern Pennsylvania – including Philadelphia, Bucks, Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties, as well as Southern New Jersey, and a member of the Feeding America national network of food banks. Last year, we distributed 41.5 million pounds of food – the equivalent of 35 million meals – through a network of 340 community partners – food pantries, faith-based institutions, schools, shelters, and social service agencies – throughout our service area.

I joined Philabundance as CEO in June 2020 – as the COVID-19 pandemic was raging, the need for food assistance was soaring, and the government and generous donors responded to the hunger crisis by making unprecedented investments in public programs and the charitable food network. During that time, Philabundance doubled our impact, and we’ve been serving our communities at a heightened level ever since. Now, five years later, we’re facing a very different hunger crisis – an avoidable crisis caused largely by the federal government’s historic disinvestment in our nation’s social safety net.

Even before the recent federal changes, hunger has been on the rise in our communities, across the state, and across the country over the past few years due to high food inflation, increased cost of living, and the end of pandemic era government supports that previously kept people afloat – such as SNAP Emergency Allotments and the Expanded Child Tax Credit. The latest data shows that in Philabundance’s service area, over 700,000 people are food insecure – that’s a 44% increase over two years. Here in Philadelphia, 1 in 6 people – including *1 in 3 children* – face food insecurity. The numbers are going in the wrong direction. Food insecurity is higher now than it was during the pandemic, and with the recent federal funding cuts to food banks and upcoming cuts to SNAP, we fear it will continue to grow.

Philabundance’s food pantry partners are already reporting serving more families with children, seniors living on fixed incomes, and even dual income households. They’re seeing people who have never needed their services before. Families are increasingly forced to make impossible trade-offs between basic needs like utilities, medication, and food. We anticipate this will only get worse amid SNAP cuts, Medicaid cuts, and economic uncertainties.

Our communities are facing a hunger crisis, and food banks like ours are left with less resources to fight it. In addition to private funding and food rescue, food banks count on government programs to keep our shelves stocked. Earlier this year, two of the largest federal supports for food banks were cut by the USDA: The Emergency Food Assistance Program’s Commodity Credit Corporation program (TEFAP CCC) and the Local Food Purchase Assistance program (LFPA). Prior to this year’s cuts, Philabundance received over 3 million pounds of food last year from TEFAP CCC. This funding stream was discontinued this fiscal year, which is about 2.5 million less meals for our neighbors in need. Additionally, we lost \$1.5 million this fiscal year due to the elimination of LFPA – an 18% hit to our food purchasing budget. LFPA allowed food banks like us to procure local, fresh, nutrient dense food that would otherwise be out of reach. In addition to harming food banks and the people we serve, this loss hurts Pennsylvania’s agricultural economy, as LFPA dollars were exclusively spent with local farmers.

These past few months, we've already seen the sobering impacts of demand outpacing resources. Our pantry partners throughout the region are reporting empty shelves. Proteins, dairy, produce – the fresh, healthy foods our neighbors want most – are increasingly unattainable. Our partners are doing what they can to stretch their food farther – cutting back on quality, distributing less per person – to try to ensure there's something for everyone who comes to their doors.

If this isn't distressing enough as-is, Congress' recently passed budget reconciliation bill makes historic cuts to our nation's number one defense against hunger: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. For every 1 meal food banks provide, SNAP provides 9. Instead of investing in proven programs that reduce hunger, our federal government made a 20% cut to SNAP. Philabundance is incredibly concerned about the devastating effects this bill will have on our neighbors.

The first impact this bill will have on our neighbors' food security is through expanded SNAP work requirements – more accurately called *paperwork* requirements, which will begin to take effect as soon as next month. An estimated 140,000 Pennsylvanians, including over 45,000 Philadelphians, will fully lose their SNAP benefits as a direct result of these new work requirements. That number doesn't even include all those who will lose SNAP benefits as a result of the bill's many other harmful provisions, such as the state cost share.

According to Feeding America, these SNAP cuts will take away nearly 400 million meals per year from Pennsylvanians. For reference, the entire Feeding Pennsylvania network of food banks (of which Philabundance is a part) distributed 188 million meals last year. We would need to somehow triple our efforts to fill the gap left by SNAP cuts. We know that when SNAP is cut, more people turn to food banks for help. Despite our best efforts, food banks cannot possibly make up for a benefits loss of this magnitude – especially as we are already stretched thin struggling to keep up with rising demand, all while losing federal funding ourselves.

Food banks are scrappy. In the face of these cuts, Philabundance is steadfast in our commitment to our neighbors. We are doing everything we can to meet the need through private dollars and strategic partnerships, but the reality is we can't do it alone. Government and nonprofits must work hand-in-hand to alleviate food insecurity. In addition to our federal advocacy efforts, we ask that our state government help protect our neighbors from the harm happening at the federal level by investing in proven state programs that support food banks like the State Food Purchase Program and the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System. We hope to see the Governor's proposed increases to these critical programs make it into the final FY 2025-2026 budget, helping to backfill the federal funding loss.

Not only does Philabundance believe that no one should go hungry; we *know* it's possible. We know because we saw the national food insecurity rate *decrease* during the pandemic. Even as the need for food assistance reached record highs, *less people went hungry* as a direct result of unprecedented federal investments in the social safety net and the charitable food network. And when those pandemic-era supports came to an end, we saw food insecurity rates soar right back up, fully erasing the gains made. This tells us loud and clear: Hunger is a policy choice. We now find ourselves in a critical moment, as our federal government chose to further exacerbate hunger through historic cuts to food assistance. I look forward to collaborating with all of you to meet the moment, fight back against today's threats to food security, and forge a better, more equitable path forward. Thank you.