



The Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color

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Pennsylvania Legislative Black Caucus, Health Equity and Justice Subcommittee

Pennsylvania House Democratic Policy Committee

Loree D. Jones, Chief Executive Officer

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Good morning, members of the Pennsylvania Black Caucus' Health and Justice Subcommittee and the House Democratic Policy Committee. Thank you for having me today to speak about the impact of COVID-19 on communities of color, particularly as it pertains to food access.

I am Loree Jones, Chief Executive Officer of Philabundance, a hunger relief organization serving five counties in Pennsylvania and four counties in New Jersey. We are part of the Feeding America national network of over 200 food banks and the Feeding Pennsylvania network which is comprised of nine food bank partners in the state. At Philabundance, our mission is to alleviate hunger today while we work to end hunger for good. We are dedicated not only to meeting the immediate need through emergency food provision, but also to addressing the root causes of hunger. We understand that emergency food is not going to solve hunger, poverty, or racial disparities, but it is one piece of a much larger puzzle. Philabundance is committed to reducing hunger and the reliance on emergency food.

Philabundance has seen firsthand how the need for emergency food has grown during the pandemic, with hunger continuing to disproportionately afflict people of color in our service area and across the country. For example, nationally **nearly 4 in 10** Black households with children are struggling to feed their families during the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly double the number of white households with children. Meaning more people, and especially people of color, have to line up at their local pantries or wait in long car lines to be able to have something to feed their families.

COVID-19 did not create, but rather exposed at heightened levels, the inequities we can see so clearly today. Structural racism is the foundation on which many of our country's policies and programs were built. If you were not a white male who owned land, then you were not afforded equal status at the very founding of this country. Many of us here today were not given equal footing on paper until laws and amendments were passed. However, the ripple effects of the **words** in our founding documents still exist and are seen in the discrimination faced by Black, Indigenous, and other people of color in many aspects of daily life today.

We need to start at the foundation in order to promote true racial equity and ensure that people do not need services like Philabundance in the future.

Philabundance Background

At Philabundance we strive to ensure equitable and broader access to nutritious food and resources to help all our neighbors lead healthy, active lives. Philabundance was founded in 1984 with the simple belief that no man, woman, or child should go hungry while healthy food goes to waste. Our mission is to drive hunger from our communities today and to end hunger for good. In addition to food distribution, we strive to reduce food waste, increase accessibility to nutritious meals, and tackle the root causes of hunger through programs such as the Philabundance Community Kitchen. In partnership with more than 350 agencies, we provide nutritious food to those in need in our service area, which includes Philadelphia, Montgomery, Bucks, Chester, and Delaware counties in Pennsylvania. Our work stretches from the streets of



A Philabundance agency partner picking up free product at an Agency Hub event.

Kensington in Philadelphia to the countryside in Chester County. In no area, no county, do we not see a need – and an increased need at this time.

Philabundance operates by primarily distributing donated, purchased, and rescued product. This allows our food to be distributed without any barriers. To receive our non-government food, the people we serve do not need to prove they are poor or in need. They simply show up and can be provided nutritious food.

In addition to our work to relieve hunger today, Philabundance has made a commitment to ending hunger for good. Our goal is to pair food with other social determinants of health, like housing and education, to collaboratively and holistically improve overall health in our communities. We know that the majority (over 70 percent) of what determines a person’s health and lifespan has less to do with genetics and direct healthcare and more to do with the social and economic conditions in which they live. Necessities like food, housing, education and access to primary and preventive healthcare are intertwined. Hunger doesn’t happen in a silo. By partnering with other organizations that provide these types of interventions, Philabundance can be part of a movement to increase stability and long-term food security in the communities we serve.

We have already seen success with this work through our Philabundance Community Kitchen (PCK), which is a culinary arts and life skills training program. PCK trains people who are low- to no-income in a 16-week culinary vocational training program with the goal of helping people transform their lives. When we began PCK, we were committed to making it as accessible as possible, so the program has very low barriers to entry. Students are held to high standards and are required to be at class on time and prepared, but any student facing challenges will receive staff support to give them the best chance to be successful. The PCK team has built a program that truly meets people where they are today to help them move forward.

Food Insecurity

The reason Philabundance, PCK, and other programs are necessary is because of incredibly high rates of food insecurity. Defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as a lack of access to enough food for a healthy and active life, food insecurity is a pervasive issue that impacts the health, well-being, and success of those who face it. At its core, food insecurity is hunger; it’s when people are not able to afford the food they need.

Before the pandemic, there was a sweeping epidemic of hunger in this country. In Pennsylvania, over 1.4 million people faced food insecurity during 2018. That’s nearly 11 percent of Pennsylvanians. In a country, and especially a state, with so much farming, agriculture, and resources, we still could not ensure the residents of Pennsylvania were fed.

For decades the research has shown that households headed by people of color face hunger at higher rates than white households. Before the pandemic, USDA data showed that Black and Hispanic people faced hunger at double the rate of white people. While the rate of food

USDA National Food Insecurity Rates by Race				
Year	All	White	Black	Hispanic
2015	12.7%	10%	21.5%	19.1%
2016	12.3%	9.3%	22.5%	18.5%
2017	11.8%	8.8%	21.8%	18%
2018	11.1%	8.1%	21.2%	16.2%
2019	10.5%	7.9%	19.1%	15.6%

insecurity has certainly increased due to COVID-19, statistics showing this level of disparity are unfortunately nothing new. Even as overall food insecurity rates declined prior to the pandemic, race-based disparities persisted.

We know that the high rates of hunger are directly linked to high rates of poverty. Hunger is an issue of resources and access, worsened by the many existing obstacles people face: low-wage jobs, part-time hours, transportation challenges, the high cost of childcare and housing, and language barriers. When wages are too low or jobs are hard to find, it becomes impossible for families to meet the ever-rising costs and put food on the table.

COVID-19

Then came a global pandemic. COVID-19 had an immediate and devastating effect on the communities we serve. Food insecurity in our service area rose sharply, with agencies in our network reporting a 60 percent increase in the number of clients they served – 40 percent of which were people using the emergency food system for the first time. Feeding America is projecting that nationally more than 50 million people, including 17 million children, may experience food insecurity due to COVID-19.

Increasing hunger is being seen across the entire state. This ranges from a high of 21.8 percent in Philadelphia County to a low of 9.8 percent in Chester County.¹ When the best we are doing is a rate of nearly 10 percent of the population being food insecure, there is a huge problem. From urban to rural counties in Pennsylvania, each one is seeing massive increases in hunger. Most counties saw a 4 percent increase in hunger, like Lackawanna County that went from 12 percent of people experiencing food insecurity in 2019 to a projected 16.7 percent in 2020.²

Please see the chart attached to this testimony that has the food insecurity rates for every county in the Pennsylvania, including rates of households with children.

Hunger is of course impacted by the loss of jobs brought on by the pandemic. At Philabundance we are seeing people in need of our services because so many have lost their jobs or had their hours

BLACK AMERICANS AND HUNGER

- The poverty rate for Black Pennsylvanians is **27 percent**. The overall poverty rate for PA is 13 percent.
- **Nearly 4 in 10** Black households with children are struggling to feed their families during the COVID-19 pandemic – almost double the amount of white households with children.
- **14 percent** more Black households with children have faced food insecurity since the pandemic began
- More than **12 percent** of Black Pennsylvanians are unemployed while the overall unemployment rate is 6 percent.
- **31 percent** of Black Americans are served by food banks each year.
- Black Pennsylvanians are **3 times** as likely to receive food assistance than white, non-Hispanic Pennsylvanians.
- Only **8 percent** of Black Americans have a grocery store in their Census Area

Source: Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

¹ Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2020 Projected Overall Food Insecurity Rate, <https://www.feedingamericaaction.org/the-impact-of-coronavirus-on-food-insecurity/>

² Id.



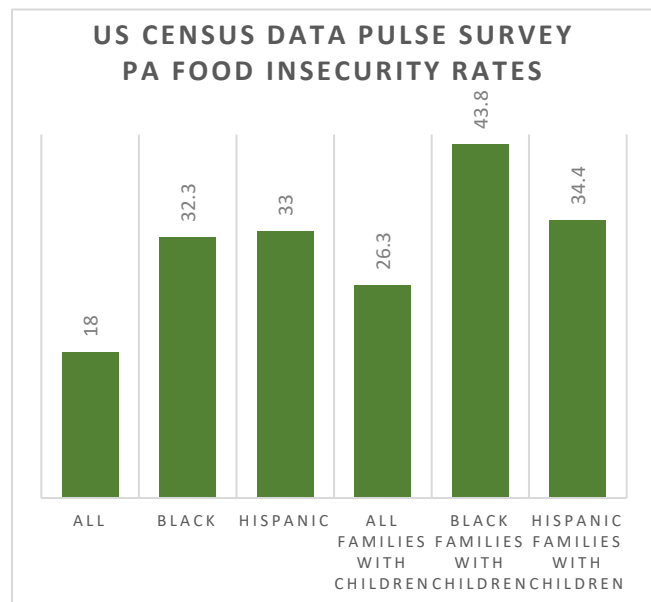
A line of cars awaiting a food distribution.

reduced. COVID-19 has increased unemployment overall and its economic fallout has been widespread, but Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Immigrant households have been disproportionately impacted. This is largely due to the fact that people of color did not start out on equal footing when the pandemic began. Black workers currently face an unemployment rate more than double that of white workers.³ This disparity has existed since the unemployment rate began being measured. Researchers say the only explanation for the ongoing disparity is discrimination.

In April of 2020 the Census Bureau launched a Household Pulse Survey. This provides real-time weekly data on how the pandemic is affecting the country. This data shows that tens of millions of people are out of work and struggling to make ends meet.⁴

For the month of January in Pennsylvania, 627,000 adults reported that their household sometimes or often did not have enough to eat in the last seven days.⁵ This represents 8 percent of all adults in the Commonwealth. In addition, 578,000 adults living with children reported that the children were not eating enough because the adults could not afford enough food. This represents 20 percent of adults living with children in Pennsylvania. Nationally, 1 in 3 adults report having difficulty covering their usual household expenses. In Pennsylvania, 2.6 million adults have reported this difficulty, meaning almost 30 percent of adults in the state struggle to make ends meet. The state's current unemployment rate of 7 percent, or close to 1 million people, is certainly a big part of the issue.⁶

The national analysis of the Pulse Survey found that Black and Latino adults were roughly three times as likely as white adults to report that their household did not have enough to eat. The numbers were 21 percent for Black households, 20 percent for Latino households, and 7 percent for white households. Indigenous



³ Lena V. Groeger, "What Coronavirus Job Losses Reveal about Racism in America," ProPublica <https://projects.propublica.org/coronavirus-unemployment/>

⁴ United States Census, Household Pulse Survey Data Tables, <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/household-pulse-survey/data.html>

⁵ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Tracking the COVID-19 Recession's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships, Feb 18, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/poverty-and-inequality/tracking-the-covid-19-recessions-effects-on-food-housing-and>

⁶ Id.

adults were more than twice as likely, at 18 percent, as white adults to report the same for their household.⁷

Feast of Justice, a Philabundance agency partner in Northeast Philadelphia, has dramatically increased their food distribution during COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19, Feast of Justice provided food to approximately 285 households. At the height of the pandemic that number increased to 1,500 households. Today they serve approximately 825 households a week. The demographics of the people they serve has changed with the increase in clients. In 2019, 8 percent of Feast of Justice's clients were Asian. That number has increased to 48 percent in the last year.



A line of clients picking up food outside Feast of Justice.

Another agency partner, the Garces Foundation, primarily serves the immigrant community in South Philadelphia. The Foundation works to connect their clients to health care, education, food, and other supports. Before the pandemic more than a quarter of the population they serve lived below the poverty line, despite a large portion of them working. The Garces Foundation sent the following statement for me to share today:

“The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially devastating to the immigrant community in South Philadelphia, many of whom work in the hard-hit service industry. The Garces Foundation serves families who have difficulty accessing government benefits such as unemployment, healthcare, and rental assistance. In a survey last June of nearly 200 families from our community, only 11 percent had at least one family member working full-time, leaving the remaining 89 percent without the means to pay rent and feed their families. Our community members are plagued with undiagnosed medical conditions; they are twice as likely to contract the virus and require hospitalization. Our community lives in fear of losing their homes and losing their lives to this virus.”

In fear of losing their homes and losing their lives. It is a scary reality when families must put themselves and their loved ones at risk of contracting a potentially fatal virus simply in order to do their work.

That is the case for many of the essential and frontline workers who have most heavily felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. These workers are largely people of color and immigrants. They are packing groceries, driving for rideshare services, caring for our elderly, and providing building maintenance. The Garces Foundation also works with many people in the restaurant industry who saw their means of employment shut down long-term or close their doors for good. When federal benefits largely leave out immigrant populations, there is very little, if any, relief available.

Sustained and substantial relief will be necessary to combat these numbers. Hardships like hunger, eviction, and homelessness will continue to devastate these communities without robust targeted relief to meet the need today. But we also know there needs to be systematic change to ensure more people do not face the hardships in the first place.

⁷ Id.

Health and Food Insecurity

As food insecurity increases, we know it is also often combined with a decline in overall health.

Access to nutritious food is critical for the health of every person. For babies and young children, a lack of nutrition can lead to delays in body and brain development that have lifelong impacts.⁸ As children get older, not having a balanced breakfast or lunch can lead to an inability to focus in school, health consequences, and even an increase in suicidal ideation.⁹ Older adults who are food insecure have a greater likelihood of depression, diabetes, hypertension, and overall report being in poor or fair health.¹⁰ As hunger impacts people of color more often than white people, it is not hard to see how this cycle continues to disproportionately impact people of color.



Philabundance Food Distribution for children.

A child facing food insecurity is not starting life out on equal footing. If food insecurity continues through school age and into adulthood, that person will face severe disadvantages. Lack of access to food -- a basic thing every person needs to survive -- leads to increase costs in hospitalizations, underperformance in school, and a decrease in future earnings. Access to food is a much larger issue that simply addressing hunger, it is about providing people with the nutrients need to have a full, healthy life.

While a virus cannot discriminate, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Immigrant populations has highlighted the effect of longstanding racist policies. According to the COVID-19 Tracking Project, in Pennsylvania Latino people are most likely to contract COVID and Black people were the most likely to have died.¹¹

Again, the numbers do not lie. Nationally, Black people are 2.9 times more likely to be hospitalized and 1.9 times more likely to die from COVID-19 as compared to white people.¹² Hispanic or Latino people are 3.2 times more likely to be hospitalized and 2.3 times more likely to die from COVID-19 as compared to white people. There is something fundamentally unacceptable about these numbers. Race and ethnicity are risk markers for COVID-19 not because of the virus itself, but as a result of the underlying conditions that affect health including poverty, hunger, employment, and housing.

⁸ Children's HealthWatch, Keeping Children's Weight on Track, <https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/CHW-weight-trajectories-web-final.pdf>

⁹ Craig Gunderson and James Ziliak, "Food Insecurity and Health Outcomes," Health Affairs, <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/pdf/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ The COVID Tracking Project, Infection and Mortality by Race, Pennsylvania, <https://covidtracking.com/race/infection-and-mortality-data#PA>.

¹² Center for Disease Control, Risk for COVID-19 Infection, Hospitalization, and Death By Race/Ethnicity, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

Collaboration and Representation

To have any success in combatting hunger and poverty, even before COVID-19, collaboration is key. Hunger, homelessness, unemployment, and other social determinants of health do not occur in a vacuum. Therefore, programs to fight them must work together to be successful.

With Philabundance's Ending Hunger For Good initiative, we are committed to bringing together partners so we can take any challenges head on and together.

In 2020, Philabundance launched Sharswood THRIVE: Community by Design. Sharswood THRIVE seeks to fundamentally change the way people seek and receive services by promoting a comprehensive safety-net system approach that not only provides stability services such as housing and healthcare but also economic mobility empowerment through workforce development, home ownership and financial literacy training. Sharswood THRIVE is a multi-year project carried out in collaboration with partner community organizations.

The overall goal is to create a scalable model combining multiple services to increase the stability and economic mobility of Sharswood community members meaningfully and measurably over a three to five-year period. The collaborative wants to ensure that that existing, returning, and future residents of Sharswood will live peacefully, prosperously, and as a cohesive community for generations to come. Sharswood residents will achieve their life goals and affect sustainable neighborhood change.

Absolutely key to any collaboration is having diverse people and perspectives around the table. Diversity in race, gender, background, socio economic status, viewpoint, etc. People with lived experience with the issues at hand must be at the center of this work. Without their expertise, any solutions will come up short. If we are looking to combat hunger we need to speak with people who have waited in line at food pantries, who know what it is like to fill out a SNAP application, and who have made the impossible choice between paying their rent or putting food on the table. The silence and exclusion of those impacted in the decision-making process is a choice that can no longer be made.

I invite all of the members participating in this hearing to seek out people who are struggling and take the time to learn from them. Volunteer at a pantry in your district and stay for the entire distribution to see what happens when the food runs out. Take the "SNAP Challenge" by committing to live on only \$4.00 a day – not per meal but for the entire day – for a week. Spend an afternoon in a County Assistance Office, when they are open again, to see what it is like to ask for help. Take time to understand these issues at a personal level, if you have not already. We would be happy to help connect you with our partners and help support this work.



Secretary Redding volunteering at a Philabundance Agency Hub

Policy Recommendations

Civil Rights leader and Nobel Laureate Martin Luther King, Jr said "I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of

peace and brotherhood can never become a reality.... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.” We must face the truth of our past, name the things we must change, and move forward together.

Hunger, poverty, and racial inequity continue to exist because of the political choices we have made. This is how our system was built. Fixing this problem is not going to be easy - it's going to require an extraordinary commitment to remedy these historic injustices.

But we know that COVID-19 means less resources not only for households but also for government. During the Great Recession of 2008, states were forced to make major cuts to critical programs due to huge budget shortfalls. Cuts to schools, higher education, and economic supports families needed most were devastating for communities.¹³ Such cuts worsen structural inequities that impact people of color. During the Great Recession, the median Black household lost more than half of its income and the median Hispanic household lost two-thirds.¹⁴ In addition to cuts to schools, the weakening of income supports like unemployment insurance and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program added to the challenges.

Legislators must intentionally work to create an antiracist, equitable, and inclusive recovery plan that extends to all people. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities lists three principles for state policymakers to consider¹⁵:

- Target aid to those most in need due to the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent economic crises.
- Advance antiracist and equitable policies — both short- and long-term — to dismantle persistent racial, gender, and economic inequities and other barriers that non-dominant groups and identities experience.
- Protect state finances to preserve the foundations of long-term economic growth and opportunity.

With these principles in mind, I would like to offer the following recommendations:

Make Funding Nutrition and Other Support Programs a Priority – As the Commonwealth struggles with budget shortfalls they must also consider the households who have their own budget shortfalls. We must provide adequate supports to ensure that families already struggling due to the pandemic are not made worse during the recovery.

- **Increase funding for the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP)** – SFPP is the State’s nutrition program that provides direct funding to food banks and emergency food providers. This program helps organizations purchase food and finances needed infrastructure and

¹³ Michael Lechman and Erica Williams, “Policy Brief: States Can Learn from Great Recession, Adopt Forward-Looking, Anti-racist Policies,” Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/state-budget-and-tax/policy-brief-states-can-learn-from-great-recession-adopt>.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ Id.

transportation. Each county gets a portion of the funding. SFPP has been funded at \$18.1 million for years and hunger advocates are requesting an increase to \$24 million.

- **Increase funding for the Pennsylvania Agricultural Surplus System (PASS)** – PASS is a program that supports farmers, reduces food waste, and provides food to food banks. By covering the cost of harvesting food, packing products, and transportation, PASS keeps Pennsylvania produce and dairy from going to waste. This program has been funded at \$1.5 million since 2017 and has shown great results. We request a \$5 million investment to allow PASS to benefit more farmers and create more opportunities for collaboration all while benefiting the charitable food network.
- **Ensure no cuts to other support programs** – Where investments can be made, the Commonwealth should find resources to support housing, education, health care, and other programs. Without ensuring the basic needs of our residents are met we will never move beyond the impact of the pandemic or build a more equitable future.

Draw Down a Maximum of Federal Funds – The process of applying for benefit programs is lengthy and difficult. While many of the requirements are set at the federal level the State should take advantage of every possible flexibility offered to ensure we are drawing down as much federal funding as possible. The Pennsylvania Department of Human Services and Department of Health have been great partners and we ask the State to do the following:

- **Allow for SNAP Flexibilities** – The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the nation’s number one defense against hunger. It provides federal funds directly to families to purchase their own food. Prior to COVID-19, Pennsylvania was already behind in its utilization of the program. More people are eligible for SNAP than are applying largely due to the cumbersome process, not knowing they are eligible, and overall stigma of the program. The State could do more to remove barriers to this program and provide more federal funds into communities who need it. SNAP also is a boost for local economies as for every \$1 invested in SNAP there is a \$1.70 economic benefit.¹⁶ While the state budget is tight, we must all work to bring in as much federal resources as possible.
 - **SNAP Recertification** – During COVID the USDA has provide flexibilities to SNAP and other programs. One flexibility is to waive the recertification period, which is when people need to reapply for the program. Pennsylvania reinstated the recertification process despite not being required to do so by the USDA. We recommend that the Department of Human Service take advantage of every flexibility possible to ensure people are getting the needed federal resources.

¹⁶ Ed Bolen and Elizabeth Wolkomir, “SNAP Boosts Retailers and Local Economies”, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-boosts-retailers-and-local-economies>.

- **County Assistance Offices** – Prior to COVID-19, people would go to their local County Assistance Offices to apply for benefits or seek help with the process. While we greatly appreciate efforts to allow people to apply for benefits remotely, we are also concerned about people who need in-person help with their applications. When it is safe to do so we recommend that the County Assistance Offices reopen and continue to help people without internet access, who have low literacy level, or are simply not comfortable with computers to apply for benefits.
- **Support Innovations in WIC** – The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC) is a critical program for the health and well-being of pregnant women and kids up to the age of six. WIC provides nutrition assistance, health referrals, and other supports that are critical for women and children at a vulnerable time. Similar to SNAP, we recommend that the State work to bring in as much federal funding through this program as possible. This can be done by promoting the program, streamlining the process where possible, and updating our systems. We ask that the Department of Health utilize a portion of any COVID-19 relief funding set aside for WIC to fund system upgrades. This will help create a smoother process for the State but also for their clients with the goals of having more people using those federal dollars.

Release Pandemic EBT Funds Quickly – Now that the USDA has released their regulations about the Pandemic EBT program and Pennsylvania has submitted their plan, we hope the State will move as quickly as possible to get these additional resources to families. The Pandemic EBT program was meant to supplement the cost of school meals that were not being provided at schools yet families have not seen any funds from this program yet this school year. We know school districts did their best to run programs where people could pick up food but they did not reach nearly enough. This extra boost for families will be a lifeline for so many who have had their children at home for almost a year.

Invest in Workforce Development – When the economy begins to reopen we need to have strategic investments in workforce development. Those investments should be in programs that serve low income individuals, have low barriers to access, and have a proven track record. A special emphasis should be on serving people of color. Any program should have a life skills component to ensure the students are fully prepared to be successful in the workforce.

More Intentional Work to Address the Root Causes of Hunger – As I said in my testimony – hunger is about resources. Hunger is about people not having enough money to purchase food. When passing any legislation or creating any policies you must consider how to best address the deep poverty and hunger throughout the Commonwealth. As recovery from the pandemic begins we know that those hit hardest by the economic crisis will be the slowest to recover. Any policies considered must be reviewed with that in mind.

Our diversity is our greatest strength. The fact that we all have different experiences, backgrounds, and cultures makes us all the richer. However, for too long, being different has meant being treated as less.

Having less wages, limited education, and diminished opportunities. Policies at the local, state, and national levels can and must change this.

Conclusion

Thirty-five years ago, Philabundance began because one woman saw a problem in her community and wanted to do something about it. She saw food going to waste while people struggled with hunger. She did not ignore the problem or wait for someone else to take care of it but stepped up herself. She took excess food from restaurants and retailers and brought it to pantries, shelters, and other places where people came for food. With this one act she started something. She began building toward an organization that today feeds hundreds of thousands of people and moves millions of pounds of food.

I bring this up today not to simply to tout Philabundance's founder, Pam Rainey Lawler, but to say that this type of work is needed to address the problems we face today. We need to name the issues when we see them and then work together to find solutions. It may mean starting small but each step forward will lead us to a better future. No longer can we simply wait for someone else to step up – we must start with tangible change today and I stand ready to work with each of you to a brighter future.

We need to step up like Desiree Lamar Murphy did in her community. Having faced homelessness after a fire and needing emergency food, Desiree thought people deserved better. Out of the trunk of her car she began distributing bread collected from local markets in the parking lot of her church. Murphy's Giving Market is now a Philabundance partner providing food to several schools and child care centers.

In a letter to President Biden, Desiree shared that "I think that we both agree that we must, without reservation, eliminate barriers that continue to oppress underserved communities and give them access to the same opportunities as wealthier communities. This starts by establishing and funding programs that support these communities and provide healthy food and eliminate food deserts. We know that you will work to rebuild strong communities by securing access to food as well as educational opportunities, fair wages, and employment opportunities."

Desiree wrote that letter to then President -elect Biden on the occasion of his visit to Philabundance on the Martin Luther King Day of Service. His visit on a national holiday honoring one of our country's greatest citizens allowed a moment of reflection. Our great country was founded in this state. In Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, the founding fathers gathered to develop a democracy like no other. As proud as we are of the American experiment with ideals that all men are created equal and that promote the pursuit of happiness, we must also acknowledge that their work was imperfect and incomplete.

As we strive to build what our founding fathers called a more perfect union, we must work to ensure all people within our borders indeed have access to the proverbial America dream. Some would say that the system that has left so many Americans food insecure during this pandemic is not broken. Some would say based on the historical reality that the system was intentionally built this way; that it was built to be unequal.

Today, you have asked me to highlight *racial* disparities related to food insecurity. I believe I have done that. I do think it is important to note that food insecurity touches every county and people of all backgrounds across our Commonwealth. I include at the end of my testimony a chart noting the insecurity rates by county in 2018 and then in 2020. The chart demonstrates that there have be alarming

increases in the number of people who are food insecure in Pennsylvania regardless of racial and ethnic background.

I stand with you ready to work toward that more perfect union, and I hope you consider some of the recommendations I laid out today. But more importantly I hope we can all commit to working together – non-profit, private entities, government, and individuals – to do the hard work, to bring together diverse groups, collaborate, and come up with big ideas to move Pennsylvania to a brighter future for all of its residents.

I want to thank you for considering my testimony today. I along with my colleagues from Philabundance and the other organizations I mentioned today are available for questions today and at any time. We are committed to working with the State to find solutions to end hunger for everyone in Pennsylvania.

County	Food Insecurity Rate 2020	Food Insecurity Rate 2018	Child Food Insecurity 2020	Child Food Insecurity 2018
Adams	12.0%	8.2%	19.7%	12.3%
Allegheny	15.0%	10.6%	23.1%	14.3%
Armstrong	16.2%	11.7%	27.0%	18.1%
Beaver	15.6%	10.7%	25.9%	16.1%
Bedford	15.7%	11.2%	25.9%	17.2%
Berks	14.1%	9.6%	22.6%	13.7%
Blair	16.4%	12.0%	26.1%	17.6%
Bradford	14.4%	10.7%	23.4%	16.3%
Bucks	11.4%	7.1%	17.8%	9.4%
Butler	12.4%	8.3%	19.5%	11.6%
Cambria	17.4%	12.8%	29.4%	20.4%
Cameron	18.5%	12.6%	30.5%	18.9%
Carbon	16.0%	11.2%	27.6%	18.3%
Centre	11.9%	8.8%	16.9%	10.9%
Chester	9.8%	6.3%	14.7%	7.9%
Clarion	16.3%	12.3%	26.0%	18.1%
Clearfield	16.9%	12.6%	28.9%	20.5%
Clinton	16.9%	12.8%	27.4%	19.6%
Columbia	14.5%	10.5%	23.6%	15.9%
Crawford	16.4%	12.0%	26.6%	18.0%
Cumberland	11.4%	7.9%	18.0%	11.1%
Dauphin	14.9%	10.6%	23.5%	15.0%
Delaware	13.9%	9.4%	21.3%	12.5%
Elk	15.9%	9.9%	27.2%	15.3%
Erie	17.1%	12.3%	27.6%	18.3%
Fayette	19.4%	14.2%	32.7%	22.3%
Forest	19.3%	14.7%	36.7%	27.6%
Franklin	13.6%	9.7%	21.8%	14.2%
Fulton	15.5%	10.4%	25.7%	15.6%
Greene	16.9%	12.5%	27.4%	18.7%
Huntingdon	16.5%	11.8%	28.1%	18.8%
Indiana	16.1%	11.8%	26.1%	17.6%
Jefferson	15.8%	11.5%	26.2%	18.0%
Juniata	13.8%	10.1%	22.7%	15.6%
Lackawanna	16.7%	12.0%	26.5%	17.1%
Lancaster	12.7%	8.7%	19.8%	12.1%
Lawrence	17.1%	12.3%	28.0%	18.7%
Lebanon	13.1%	9.1%	20.9%	13.1%
Lehigh	14.8%	10.1%	22.9%	13.7%
Luzerne	17.1%	11.9%	28.8%	18.6%

Lycoming	16.2%	11.8%	26.6%	18.0%
McKean	17.8%	13.0%	30.2%	21.0%
Mercer	16.7%	12.1%	28.6%	19.4%
Mifflin	16.0%	12.0%	27.0%	19.2%
Monroe	15.8%	10.2%	26.0%	14.8%
Montgomery	11.1%	7.0%	16.6%	8.8%
Montour	13.2%	10.0%	20.8%	14.7%
Northampton	13.2%	8.7%	21.5%	12.6%
Northumberland	16.5%	12.1%	26.8%	18.2%
Perry	12.2%	8.7%	19.8%	13.0%
Philadelphia	21.8%	16.3%	32.8%	22.0%
Pike	15.2%	10.1%	26.3%	16.1%
Potter	16.8%	12.7%	27.6%	19.6%
Schuylkill	16.1%	11.7%	26.3%	17.6%
Snyder	13.3%	9.4%	22.3%	14.8%
Somerset	15.8%	11.3%	27.2%	18.5%
Sullivan	15.9%	11.9%	26.4%	18.7%
Susquehanna	14.4%	10.8%	23.8%	16.9%
Tioga	16.3%	12.1%	26.7%	18.5%
Union	13.1%	9.5%	20.5%	13.4%
Venango	16.5%	12.3%	27.2%	19.1%
Warren	15.2%	11.3%	26.0%	18.5%
Washington	14.1%	9.6%	22.5%	13.6%
Wayne	15.4%	10.9%	25.5%	16.6%
Westmoreland	14.4%	9.9%	23.6%	14.8%
Wyoming	13.8%	9.7%	23.3%	15.2%
York	13.3%	9.1%	21.5%	13.5%

Source: Feeding America, Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity