

## President's Corner



## Food Insecurity is an Economic Issue

I recently had the opportunity to testify before the National Commission on Hunger. It was an opportunity to consider Schuyler's work on family economic security and public health in light of hunger and food insecurity.

At the most basic level, in the United States, people experience food insecurity because they are poor. It would be hard to argue that there is any other primary reason than poverty or low-income for food insecurity.

Food insecurity has a public health impact because of the physical impact of poor nutrition on children and adults, and because of the impact the stress of insecurity has on families' social, emotional, and physical well-being. So, while it is essential that we ensure that children have optimal nutrition to set them on a strong health and developmental path in life, it is imperative that we also address the needs of and stressors that affect their parents. Food insecurity is integrally tied to health and family economic security.

The policy solutions to address hunger and food insecurity and to reduce the need for government nutrition programs cut across sectors and include: increasing the minimum wage; enacting paid family leave; expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit; ensuring adequate and robust income supports; expanding access to high-quality and affordable child care; and ensuring robust, accessible nutrition programs.

While income supports can help to prevent food insecurity, it is essential that we protect and enhance access to food and nutrition for children, adults, seniors, and families in need. There is evidence that programs such as SNAP, WIC, Child and Adult Care Food Program, school meal programs, and summer food programs improve food security, family economic security, and health.

To better support families through these programs, some policy changes should be considered. More families could have access to programs if enrollment were streamlined and coordinated across Medicaid and SNAP. And more families could benefit from participation in Afterschool and Summer Food Programs, School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs, and The National School Lunch and Child and Adult Care Food Programs, through strengthening direct certification and increasing participation in the community eligibility provision that allows high-poverty schools to offer free meals to all students.

Perhaps mostly importantly, we could fix the cliffs that result in reduced or lost benefits and contribute to family instability. In SNAP, as in other programs, a modest increase in income, from an increase in hours worked or hourly wages, can result in a significant reduction in, or loss of, benefits.

Our solutions need to address the big picture and overarching problem of poverty as well as the nitty gritty details of making programs work better for more people. There are no silver bullets. Addressing food insecurity and improving nutrition requires crosscutting policies and the political will to implement them.

Read my full testimony before the National Commission on Hunger [here](#).