



**Catholic
Social
Service**

Catholic Charities Guam

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July 20, 2021

The Honorable James P. McGovern
Congressman
U.S. House of Representatives
370 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Food Insecurity – Guam USA

Dear Congressman McGovern and Members of the House Rules Committee:

Buenas yan Hafa Adai. Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Agana, commonly known as Catholic Social Service (CSS), is privileged to provide this testimony relative to concerns and issues of food insecurity on our island territory of Guam.

As background, CSS is a large non-profit organization that administers eighteen programs at twenty sites and in the community, providing services and shelter to elderly, individuals with disabilities and those terminally ill, victims of child abuse, domestic violence and sexual assault, and the homeless. On average, CSS interacts with approximately 500 individuals monthly, with approximately 200 individuals within the direct care of CSS on a daily basis through our shelters and affordable housing. Our primary focus is on the provision of basic needs of food, clothing and safe housing as we work with individuals to address barriers to housing stability and hunger insecurity. We are an administrative unit within the Archdiocese of Hagatna and a member under the umbrella of Catholic Charities USA.

CSS operates a food pantry which is open five days a week, Monday through Friday, from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Pre-COVID, we averaged five to ten walk-in requests per day for food. During COVID, the number increased to an average twenty per day with food drop-offs added to elderly households, households with individuals with disabilities, and families with young children who lacked transportation. CSS' operations evolved during COVID to a food bank site for USDA commodities, boxed food items, and corporate bulk donations, and extended to coordinating with other non-profit organizations and government social services for distribution and delivery to shut-ins and isolated households.



"Respecting The Dignity Of The Human Person Through Service"



Pre-COVID, CSS' target populations were those vulnerable populations of victims and unsheltered homeless who have the highest risk for experiencing hunger and food insecurity. During COVID, as most government services and private sector operations were suspended and employees were furloughed without pay, and prior to the onset of federal COVID financial assistance, there was an increase in the intake for food assistance and requests for food delivery.

Although federal COVID assistance is implemented and currently on-going, most households remain on the pantry rolls due to other issues and barriers which are outlined herein.

1. Housing instability is the most critical factor leading to hunger and food insecurity with unsheltered homeless experiencing the highest level of food insecurity. Despite being eligible and/or receiving SNAP benefits, most of our clients lose assistance due to failure to recertify their assistance, or who lose their card which then results in dormancy and eventual termination.
 - a. Unemployment is a key factor to housing instability and eventual homelessness. Mainstream cash assistance is subsistence level and wholly insufficient to cover market rent.
 - b. Overcrowded households, often consisting of multi-generational households, are a result of unemployment of its younger members or inability to pay fair market rent amounts. Such economic impact extends to the high cost for non-food supplies, including children and adult diapers and nutritional supplements.
 - c. Availability of natural supports is challenged as the island shifts or has shifted from an extended family system to a more nuclear family system. Stress and conflicts among family members, resulting in estranged relationships, further limit the capacity to maintain and strengthen supports. Most individuals and families look to government services to meet this resource and often demand exceeds available resources.
 - d. Emergency homeless shelters are maximized and at full occupancy, with a wait-list that may be greater than 30 days for admissions.
2. Lack of transportation results in failed appointments and if gainfully employed, results in tardiness to work resulting in adverse action. Despite the island size of approximately 35 miles long, transportation from point to point is not helpful in its current design and time availability. Although there are new transportation strategies being implemented at the public mass transit level, it is far from providing a reliable resource if a household is not able to afford purchase of its own vehicle.
3. Undiagnosed and untreated mental health issues and substance use disorders is a growing factor leading to both food insecurity and housing instability, especially in households with young children.

4. Reliance on imported food products and fast food meals contribute to incidences of multiple chronic medical conditions which affect the wellness of individuals, especially those who comprise the main workforce population. Specifically, the serious effects of diabetes that result in multiple amputations impact the individual's capacity to obtain or maintain gainful employment. Additionally, there is no incentive for individuals and households to sustain themselves with small gardens or raising livestock.
5. Lastly, the effects of the compact treaty entered in to between the United States and the former Trust Territory nations in 1986 has added to the numbers of those with high risk of food insecurity, particularly among citizens of the State of Chuuk. These citizens comprise the majority population in mainstream benefits, child welfare services, homeless shelters and correctional institutions. Unemployment and high alcohol use are common characteristics among this population receiving various social services, including among women, and are hard-to-serve cases that often require multiple agency intervention. Although in-migration was effective since 1986, it is not clear why these individuals are not able to adapt and adjust to a new environment and become self-reliant.

We hope that our information provides a snapshot of the challenges we experience 'on the ground,' and look forward to improving actions that strengthen individuals and families' capacity to be self-sustaining and self-reliant in the most dignified manner.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.

Put Respetu,

Diana Calvo

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