



Statement of Need from the Ecumenical Hunger Program to the Office of Congressman McGovern

The Need

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1 in 9 Americans were food insecure, which equates to over 37 million Americans, including more than 11 million children. These numbers are incredible considering the wealth of resources available in this country. Fast forward to August 2021 and as you can imagine, the numbers have grown significantly worse. The food insecurity rate has increased by 4.1% for the overall population and 4.9% for the child population. This means that 1 in 6 people are food insecure, including 1 in 4 children. And these are national numbers. Places that had relatively higher rates of food insecurity prior to the pandemic have relatively higher rates of food insecurity now. This means that northern California has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in the nation due to the higher cost of living.

Additionally, the exorbitant cost of living in the Bay Area has continued to widen the wealth gap between the richest and poorest families. And not only is California one of the most economically unequal states in the country but the Bay Area has the widest wealth gap in the entire state. And, to add insult to injury, systemic inequities that face communities of color become even more visible during times of crisis.

For EHP families, the picture is bleak. For families already struggling prior to the pandemic, the loss of jobs, illness, and loss of childcare due to the closure of schools, has turned an already desperate situation into a fight for true survival. We do not need to analyze statistics to know that the numbers of families we have been serving are the largest in EHP history. We have seen lines of cars waiting for food, stretching for miles through the city of East Palo Alto. The number of new families reaching out to us for holiday help has more than tripled. And we have seen a significant increase in demand for other critical needs such as funds to help with life-saving prescription medications, assistance with utility bills, rental assistance, and more.

Our Impact

EHP currently provides an array of emergency and monthly food assistance to over 7,500 households annually. During FY 2021 EHP distributed over 32,000 emergency and supplemental food boxes, a 30% increase from the prior fiscal year. As economic conditions have worsened, demand over the last few months has increased from families who are having to turn to EHP more frequently. This increase in requests has occurred at the same time that the Second Harvest Food Bank has experienced unprecedented demand from all their partner agencies, thus reducing the amount and quality of food available for distribution. The economic downturn has also taken place at a time when the impact of poor diet on long term health for children and adults is becoming ever more apparent and documented.

The significance of our program is four-fold and provides for immediate needs as well as long term, innovative solutions:

- a. EHP provides families and individuals in our community with emergency food resources therefore significantly decreasing the level of food insecurity and hunger.
- b. EHP provides NUTRITIOUS and high-quality foods to families and individuals who could otherwise not afford nutrient dense foods along with increased nutritional awareness, education and outreach therefore helping decrease the effects of poor diet on future generations including diabetes, hypertension obesity and other related conditions.
- c. EHP provides additional nutritional resources and added support to those who are already at risk specifically those who are suffering from serious illnesses, children, those with extreme income to debt ratios and those with special nutritional needs.
- d. EHP provides ongoing support and supplemental resources, including financial support (rental assistance, utility bills, etc.) to make sure that results and solutions are long-term instead of short-term fixes.

Although EHP's core mission has not changed in over 40 years, our service delivery methods have changed based on the changing needs of our community and clients. We have been able to create innovative service delivery methods that allow our clients to maintain their dignity, create greater efficiency for our staff and volunteers, and reduce overall waste. These innovative methods include, independent shopping, individualized case management and more. We believe that by allowing for flexibility of care on a case-by-case basis, we are able to provide a more comprehensive level of support for our client families which results in a greater number of our families reaching self-sufficiency, our ultimate goal.

Our Constituents

Throughout the past 46 years, EHP has remained a community-based organization meaning that it has grown and adjusted based upon community needs and trends, surviving on community support without government funding. Although a well-established organization, EHP has held onto its grass roots mentality by continuing to provide personal and customized safety net services to EACH individual and family, regardless of gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or age. It is our goal to provide the best safety net programs available to keep our families in the community they love and call "home".

EHP serves an ethnically diverse community consisting of working families, seniors, people with limited incomes and those who have both emergency and on-going safety-net needs in East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and surrounding communities. 80% of our families are working families with one or more full-time incomes, who are simply having a difficult time managing the high cost of living in the Bay Area. Most of these families are near poverty, at or below poverty level even with more than one income coming in. These families are overwhelmed by the cost of living, and month to month precariously attempt to balance their income with rising outgoing expenses. Many of our families live paycheck to paycheck and are on the verge of homelessness. Many of these families have to make the choice between paying for shelter or food. Needless to say, food insecurity is a major issue in our community and EHP is able to help alleviate this problem.