

March 23, 2022

Dear Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole, and Congressman Garamendi,

On behalf of the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano, I am writing to express our **support of the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health** and share how this conference would address the ongoing food insecurity needs that we are working to meet in our community.

We had the honor of **hosting both Chairman McGovern and Congressman Garamendi on-site at our Fairfield, California Food Bank warehouse in August of 2021**, at this time we shared the specific root causes of food insecurity in our two-county service area and the additional support we offer to the 16 counties north of us in California, through our Feeding America affiliation. The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano serves over **250,000 individuals every single month**, a number that has increased from 178,000 individuals monthly prior to COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, we've had some months where we serve 300,000 people; overall we're experiencing a **record-high need in our two Bay Area Counties and anticipate this increased client base to become our new baseline for years to come**.

Additionally, **California, unfortunately, experiences a wildfire season which creates a demographic of people in immediate and sometimes ongoing need of emergency and supplemental food**. The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano has aimed to best meet this need by implementing Kitchen-Free Boxes, each box containing one day's worth of snacks, two meals for one person, an N95 mask, water, hand wipes, utensils, and all of the food can be prepared without kitchen access. These boxes cost us \$8 per box and **we distributed over 30,000 Kitchen-Free Boxes throughout our territory during the 2021 wildfire season**. The New York Times wrote about the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's wildfire response and captures one of our client's experiences as a wildfire victim who lost their home - [you can read that NYT article here](#).

As we discussed when we met in person last August, food banks have historically been seen as community emergency providers; yet even outside of public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, and natural and climate disasters, like the California wildfires, **food insecurity exists and can be mitigated through legislative action**. During the first, and only, White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health over 50 years ago, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the National School Lunch Program were expanded to best meet the needs of the food-insecure population in 1969. **As we look to the future, we are confident that through legislative action and partnership with members such as yourselves, we are able to achieve meaningful change in the fight to end hunger**. We fully support the White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health and believe this can provide an effective forum for America's food security champions to collectively re-direct and enhance our response to hunger in this nation.

Additionally, we are pleased to see that this conference would incorporate the topics of nutrition and health; two areas that are largely related to food insecurity and are frequently left out of the conversation. As USDA Secretary Vilsack has publicly commented this year, **addressing food insecurity in America also means addressing nutrition security**.

Food insecurity in our Bay Area and Northern California region is present and on the rise. On top of this, inflation on food is outpacing that of the average inflation rates - many of the items we purchase and distribute, such as meat and dairy, are costing us 10-20% more than it typically does. Organizations such as the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano and other hunger-relief groups are working to support those experiencing food insecurity, yet effective policy, communication, collaboration, and engagement from partners across the nation, sectors, and backgrounds is what will lead to true hunger solutions in America. The White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health is well-poised to facilitate this work.

Thank you, Chairman McGovern, Ranking Member Cole, and Congressman Garamendi, for your leadership on this important cause and we at **the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano** are committed to supporting the **White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Health** as it moves through the next steps to becoming a reality. If you'd like to talk further, our President and CEO, Joel Sjostrom, can be reached at [jsjostrom@foodbankccs.org](mailto:jsjostrom@foodbankccs.org) and I can be reached at [cbates@foodbankccs.org](mailto:cbates@foodbankccs.org). You can also visit our website [foodbankccs.org](http://foodbankccs.org).

Thank you,



Cassidie Carmen Bates  
Government & Public Affairs Manager

#### **Supporting Documents:**

- ◆ The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's [2021 Impact Report](#) is a brief visual description of what's discussed in this letter.
- ◆ The New York Times wrote about the Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's wildfire response and captures one of our client's experiences as a wildfire victim who lost their home - [you can read that NYT article here](#).
- ◆ The Food Bank of Contra Costa and Solano's Advocacy Team facilitates three community-based programs that empower community members with lived experience with hunger to advocate for food security legislation. We host a Speaker Series annually and you can [hear the 2-minute Hunger Stories of the 2021 cohort here](#).

