

Congressman Jim McGovern – Visit to Capital Area Food Bank – June 23, 2021
Client Leadership Council Convening: The Power of Voice
Client Leadership Council Member Testimonies

Kimberly Harris:

Fellow Council Members, it is an honor to be with you today. My name is Kimberly Harris. CEO & Co-Founder, Women's HQ. I am a daughter, a mother, a Domestic Violence Survivor, and a proud member of the Capital Area Food Bank Client Leadership Council. My humble beginnings are rooted in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania where my life began with two remarkable parents who were both professionals. My mother worked in the Health Field and my Father in Law Enforcement. This dynamic duo taught all of their children how to manage life under the most challenging circumstances to achieve the success we wanted for ourselves.

I was three years old when my father passed away. In an instant, my mother became a single parent of six (6). The life we knew changed completely. My mother was suddenly maneuvering one income, raising us in project housing, and on food stamps. My siblings and I never identified or understood food stamps were helping us battle food insecurity - and - we certainly didn't believe we were low income. Food Stamps made it possible for my mother to get fresh dairy delivered twice a week to



our front door from Menzies Dairy Company. We also received fresh meat deliveries from Steel Meat Company and mom shopped bi-weekly early Saturday mornings at the Farmers Market less than a mile away from our home for fresh fruit and vegetables.

We never felt like we lived in a food desert. We had access to high-quality and fresh nutrition. The federal food system helped provide support for my mother who was navigating both the trauma of losing her husband and the father of her children.

As an adult, my battles with food insecurity developed when I was in a relationship that turned violent. As a woman and a mother, I recognized that safety and security were my immediate needs. The experience forced me to seek shelter due to the ongoing domestic violence. My education and career path were interrupted - creating a situation that felt beyond my control. The support and benefits I received not only granted me shelter from unexpected homelessness and food insecurity - but - they helped me lift myself out of poverty. These

experiences helped to make me much stronger, wiser, and appreciative of all the resources and opportunities provided by the District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH DC), and the Feeding America/Capital Area Food Bank.

Federal emergency assistance ensured that I could focus on my studies and achievements. I earned my bachelor's degree at The Catholic University of America in Business Management and my MBA, with a focus on leadership from Georgetown University.

From witnessing my mother's experience as a child to my own experiences with food insecurity, I have learned the importance of caring for our neighbors, brothers, and sisters. Through a whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach, I believe we can ensure families experiencing food insecurity and/or homelessness - especially in situations where they are in a forced displacement whether due to interpersonal violence, or the loss of their jobs because of the COVID pandemic, SNAP benefits, and Food Banks are urgently necessary to preserve families. Those benefits help to ensure families like mine have access to healthy and nutritious food, and safe housing. Interrupting and ending cycles of poverty begins with understanding the common good for all including these services.

Throughout the COVID pandemic, my focus as a Domestic Violence Survivor & advocate is to develop innovations for women of color who are navigating out of poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, and food insecurity into reclaiming their lives. Through the work of organizations like Feeding America, and others like DASH, I want to encourage the House Hunger Caucus and the Congressional Hunger Center to please support programs, public/private partnerships, and legislation that made my story possible. The federal benefits for families like mine make a difference. Access to transitional and permanent housing and SNAP programming for needy individuals and families make a difference.

Your leadership in support of community development efforts will ensure farmer markets like the one my mother shopped continue to transform moments of despair into a healthy foundation. Making sure farmers can deliver to local supermarkets, grocery stores can help create change in communities facing food insecurity. Further, the continued focus on these benefits can support reliable access to high-quality and fresh foods for small and large business operations providing food delivery - as the programs did for my mother when she was raising me and my siblings. The deliveries from Menzies and Steel Meat meant my siblings and I felt connected to our community, and more importantly - it connected our community to us. For my sister Survivors, I also know how important access to upgraded kitchen facilities in shelters, or temporary housing, can help them provide their families with three (3) healthy meals per day. While every family is unique, access to federal discount coupons with community supermarkets providing additional savings for persons residing in shelters with kitchens to prepare their meals on-site would be innovative.

Meeting women and children where they are, without judgment of the circumstances surrounding their urgent need is critical. Each one of us is worthy of dignity and our access to healthy foods, housing, safety, and education can and will transform our nation. My experiences are both unique and similar to so many others. I encourage our federal representatives to fully fund SNAP and other mechanisms to support our sisters and brothers. This will ensure we all have access to all our nation has promised. Thank you!