

**Testimony for “Hunger Among Veterans and Servicemembers: Understanding the Problem and Evaluating Solutions”**  
**House Committee on Agriculture, Subcommittee on Nutrition, Oversight, and Department Operations**

November 10, 2021

Chairwoman Hayes, Ranking Member Bacon, and Members of the Subcommittee,

My name is Tim Keefe, and I'd like to start by saying that I have worked since I was 11 years old. I never had to worry about being hungry because I could work and eat. It wasn't until I couldn't work that I experienced true hunger.

I suffered an injury at work and for the next 2 years I went through 2 surgeries, physical and occupational therapy. But it would be another 2 years before I was medically able to return to work, as far as the Maine Department of labor was concerned. Eventually what money I had ran out and I found myself homeless and living in a tent in the woods in the winter in Maine.

With no income or address, I applied for SNAP benefits and received \$194 worth of food per month. Which was crucial. However, because of work restrictions on SNAP benefits I was cut off after three months. I brought all my paperwork to the SNAP office including the declaration by the Department of Labor that I was medically unable to work. I was told that this did not qualify me for disabled status in which the work restrictions would be waived, I showed my doctor's paperwork which cleared me for work but the DOL wasn't reading it like that. It was to no avail. I then asked for the paperwork that I needed to volunteer and satisfy the work restrictions that way... the screener told me that he didn't feel comfortable putting me into a volunteer situation with my injury. I asked, “what do I eat?” He told me that there was an appeal process and I asked, “what do I eat until then?” I waited in silence for a full minute for an answer, but the screener must have thought it was rhetorical because he just stared blankly back at me until finally stating that there was nothing he could do.

In the year to follow, I filed appeals both to SNAP and the Dept. of Labor for a change in status, but I lost all of them, while in the meantime I had to add seven holes to my belt just to keep my pants up. My conditions devolved to that of a caveman, foraging for food took up a lot of my time. Once a month I could hitchhike 25 miles and visit the food pantry. This was lifesaving, I was able to fill a backpack with enough food to give me a meal a day for two weeks if I stretched it. Still, there were more days than I care to remember where there was nothing to eat.

Unfortunately, I can tell you first hand that, when you have gone a couple of days without food your whole being cries out for it. You can't sleep, as tired as you are, you can't do anything else but try and get food. I contemplated stealing food many times with the justification being that if I got away with it, I would eat, if I got caught, I would go to jail for at least some amount of time, and I would eat. It's a level of desperation that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy.

A little more than a year later I turned 50 years old and aged out of the work restrictions, I immediately reapplied and received that \$194 benefit. It amounts to about \$6.45 per day but I'd didn't take long for my health and energy to increase and I started gaining the weight back.

The return of the snap benefits meant that I could concentrate on Improving other areas of my life and another year later I was working again.

When I swore into the navy at the Military Entrance Processing Station in Boston, I was ready and willing to give my life for my country. During this time in my life, I felt like my country wouldn't even give me a sandwich in return.

Mr. Tim Keefe  
Navy Veteran