



## Prepared Testimony: Casey Castillo, Interim CEO and VP of Finance & Administration

### Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank

Good morning distinguished committee members, thank you for your invitation to testify today.

The San Diego Food Bank and our North County Food Bank chapter currently partner directly with 17 nonprofit organizations with food distribution programs that primarily serve low-income military personnel and their dependents. In addition to these military-focused nonprofits, we know that many low-income military and veteran families are accessing food through a number of our more than 500 nonprofit partners throughout the region. Through our targeted Military Initiative, the Food Bank is serving more than 40,000 low-income, active-duty military personnel, veterans and their families each month. This service has been at the core of our mission for more than a decade and is as critical as ever because of the inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Throughout the pandemic, the Food Bank has responded to an increase in community-wide need: our service population nearly doubled and we began distributing millions of pounds of food on top of our typical distributions—we went from serving 350,000 individuals each month to now serving 550,000 individuals every month and have now distributed more than 85 million pounds of food since March 2020. In the initial phase of our response, we prioritized large-scale distributions that drew a great deal of attention, helping to ensure that our community knew we were ready to serve, that we had plenty of food and that we could help. Then we activated and enhanced our existing nonprofit partnerships. Throughout the region, we established Super Pantries: high-capacity, high-volume distribution hubs that could serve more people, more often, in a dignified and efficient manner. Over the course of the pandemic, these 35 pantries have collectively distributed more than 14 million pounds of food since July 2020.

We know that over the last 20 months, many people accessed the Food Bank's services for the very first time—our early efforts to strengthen partnerships meant that we were able to distribute more than 3 million pounds of food to low-income military and veteran families throughout the pandemic, the equivalent of about 2.5 million meals. Our nonprofit partners include Assistance for Veterans, Brother Benno, San Diego Armed Services YMCA, USO San Diego, Veterans Village of San Diego, Support the Enlisted Project, and many others. The on the ground work these partners do ensures that food is getting to those who need it via trusted partners who understand the unique circumstances our junior-ranking, low-income military and veteran families face.

Often, individuals rely on the Food Bank for somewhere between 3 and 6 months, our services are the hand-up families need to make sure rent can be paid, school supplies can be purchased, car repairs can be managed, and other unexpected life events can be addressed. Reducing food insecurity among the military and veteran population in our community is critical.



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