



Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank Legislative Briefing

**PRESENTED BY CASEY CASTILLO, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, TO THE
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
"Ending Veteran Hunger: Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Insecurity."**

ABOUT THE JACOBS & CUSHMAN SAN DIEGO FOOD BANK:

The San Diego Food Bank distributes food directly to people in need at 200 distribution sites throughout San Diego County every month. In addition, the Food Bank provides food to more than 500 nonprofits that operate feeding programs in communities throughout the county. These nonprofit partners collect food from our warehouses in Miramar and Vista and then distribute the food to those in need. This network is comprised of food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, low-income daycare centers, senior centers, churches, schools, and care centers for the elderly and disabled.

THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE FOOD BANK

The Jacobs & Cushman San Diego Food Bank and our North County Food Bank chapter have been feeding record numbers of individuals and families since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020. The Food Bank pivoted to meet the increased demand for food assistance by establishing outdoor, drive-thru food distributions and large-scale, high-volume Super Pantries located in communities across county and open throughout the week.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic impacted our community, the Food Bank provided food assistance to 350,000 people per month – about 11% of the county's population. At the height of the pandemic, this number skyrocketed to 600,000 people per month. Currently, the Food Bank is now feeding an estimated 500,000 people per month due to the lasting financial impacts of the pandemic and record-breaking inflation at 40-year high.

SERVING LOW-INCOME VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES:

Tens of thousands of low-income, active-duty military service members and veterans reside in San Diego County and rely on the San Diego Food Bank and our North County Food Bank chapter for food assistance.

Last year, the Food Bank served more than 39,000 low-income veterans, active-duty, low-income military personnel, and their dependents every month. For many low-income military families, San Diego County's high cost of living makes it difficult to put nutritious food on the table. These families struggle with our region's high rent, gas, utilities, and food prices. In addition, active-duty military spouses have an unemployment rate of nearly 30% which is due in part to frequent relocation. Prior to the pandemic, nationally, 25% of the nation's total active-duty and reserve personnel received food assistance from food pantries and charitable programs across the country. In San Diego County, the Food Bank distributed hundreds of thousands of pounds of food to low-income military and veteran families last year.

The Food Bank distributes food to nonprofits that solely serve military personnel including the Armed Services YMCA, Brother Benno, Military Outreach Ministry, and the USO. These military nonprofits pick up food from the Food Bank's warehouse to stock their food pantries, and they hand out the groceries to military families when they need emergency assistance.

In recent years, the Food Bank has provided food to the following military nonprofits serving active-duty and veteran military families:

- Assistance for Veterans
- Brother Benno
- Family Assistance Ministries
- Jewish Family Service
- Ladle Fellowship
- Military Outreach Ministry
- Murphy Canyon Bread Ministry
- Armed Services YMCA
- Spirit of Sharing
- US 4 Warriors Foundation
- USO Council of San Diego (Airport Center)
- Veterans Village of San Diego
- San Diego Military Outreach Ministries

The Food Bank also provides food assistance to low-income military and veteran families through the USDA's TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) which serves every zip code in San Diego County – at more than 90 distribution sites every month. Several of these distribution sites serve low-income military families in need of monthly food assistance which also serve the Food Bank's general client population.

The Food Bank is expanding our services to military families with our Mobile Food Pantry Program. Our Mobile Food Pantry is providing much needed additional assistance to our partners because many of our military nonprofit distribution partners are unable to store fresh produce and other food items because they lack proper refrigeration and storage space.

While we are helping our military nonprofit partners build their capacity in this area, our Mobile Food Pantry is distributing food at several strategically chosen sites throughout San Diego County that serve military families. The Food Bank distributes at least 7,500 pounds of fresh, nutritious food at each distribution site. In addition to food, these distributions will also include diapers for families who struggle to afford this essential item.

Food insecurity among low-income, active-duty and veteran families is a serious yet hidden problem which has been exacerbated by the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the current inflationary environment. The Food Bank advocates for measures that will improve the circumstances of veteran personnel and their dependents to ensure they have the resources needed to achieve financial and food security.

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