

Chairman James P. McGovern (MA-2)
House Committee on Rules
Testimony before the Committee on Appropriations
Member Day Hearing
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Chair DeLauro, Ranking Member Granger, and members of the committee, thank you for having me.

Before I begin, I want to thank this committee, and especially Chair DeLauro, for combatting hunger before the pandemic and during this past year.

As you know, our government's response to hunger is about managing it, not ending it. The pandemic brought the realities of the hunger crisis to kitchen tables and living rooms across the country.

Even before COVID, 35 million Americans faced food insecurity in 2019.

Hunger makes it harder for children to grow, harder for students to learn, harder for parents to work and take care of their kids.

This isn't an urban or rural problem. It is pervasive and can be found in every Congressional district.

It's also a crisis we must not accept.

Congress has come together before and made great strides on hunger.

Following the first-ever hunger conference in 1969, my old boss, Senator George McGovern, worked with Senator Bob Dole and others to create what we now know as the SNAP, WIC, and the School Breakfast and Lunch programs.

And in the face of a global pandemic, this Congress, led by this committee, showed that we can dramatically reduce child poverty and food insecurity.

Yet, even with the important work we did, hunger persists.

We need permanent solutions so every person in America can feel financially secure, which includes not worrying how to feed your family.

To do this, I will be introducing a bill with Senator Cory Booker to create a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger and Health to develop a roadmap to end hunger in America by the United Nation's global goal of 2030.

At Rules, we're holding hearings and roundtables, and travelling to see local innovations at work to bring good ideas back for us to consider – both here in Congress and through the conference.

We know hunger is not an issue that breaks down neatly into one department or committee.

Rules met recently to discuss hunger among military families and veterans. We learned how high unemployment for military spouses and high child care costs can strain family budgets, and that limited data make understanding the problem harder. We learned how military members are treated differently in SNAP if they live on-base or off, and that the transition from active duty to civilian life creates a host of destabilizing challenges.

For veterans, we learned that homelessness impacts all other issues, including hunger. And we heard how food banks – one in West Virginia, specifically – have been working with the local VA hospitals to bring food to vets in need.

As VA hospitals grapple with how to add on-site food pantries, civilian hospitals – like Boston Medical Center, who testified before Rules in April – have been doing this for years, both to better serve the community and to stem rising costs.

We also learned that limited access to reliable broadband in rural communities makes everything – from talking with vets in need, to collecting and analyzing data, to collecting and rerouting food – harder.

Many of these issues lie between committee and departmental jurisdictions, making it harder to address problems that are 1) solvable, and 2) deserve a solution.

Rules will work to build the momentum, but only the Appropriations Committee can provide the resources.

First, I ask you to set aside \$2.5 million to fund the second White House conference in 50 years to focus on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health.

Second, help us better connect the dots and break down silos.

To ensure this conference is a substantive, policy-oriented effort, we need information from federal departments and agencies immediately.

Because the Members of this committee can see across the whole field, require the departments and agencies you oversee to think critically about the role they can play in ending hunger. Ask them to identify the challenges and opportunities that exist, examine authority limitations they face, and identify opportunities for better collaboration across government silos.

If that sounds like a good, common-sense idea, it's because it came from a member of *this committee*...Congressman Cole, who is also our ranking member at Rules.

Finally, across the FY 2022 appropriations, look for ways each subcommittee can reduce food insecurity so we can start to make things better immediately.

Senator Dole wrote Congressman Cole and me recently saying:

“I remain proud of the work Senator McGovern and I did then, and I endorse your effort to secure a second White House Conference to identify the next frontier of programs to finally end hunger in America.”

Like Senator Dole, I believe we can still do big things together. Help us in this next – and hopefully final – frontier to end hunger once and for all.

Thank you.