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## Trust Talks Episode #23: Understanding the Impact of Public Benefits

**Aimee Ramirez:** Hello, everyone. Welcome to the 23rd episode of *Trust Talks*. I'm Aimee Ramirez, director of policy change at The Chicago Community Trust, and I'm thrilled to host this conversation about food insecurity and the important role the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, also known as SNAP, plays in combating it.

SNAP has been getting quite a bit of attention lately. In early July, Congress passed legislation that would include significant changes to the SNAP program. In November, Congress ended what is now the longest government shutdown in history, which delayed disbursement of SNAP benefits to 42 million Americans, including 1.9 million here in Illinois.

In this conversation, we want to take a step back to talk about what food insecurity is, what it looks like in our communities, how our neighbors experience it, and how SNAP has become the United States' most effective tool in combating food insecurity. I'd like to give a moment for our panelists to introduce themselves. John?

**John Bouman:** Hi, good morning. Thanks for having me here today. My name is John Bouman. I'm the executive director of Legal Action Chicago and was previously the executive director of the Shriver Center on Poverty Law for 25 years.

**Danielle Perry:** Good morning. Thank you for having us. My name is Danielle Perry. I'm the vice president of policy, advocacy, and community engagement at the Greater Chicago Food Depository.

**Daniel Block:** Hello, my name is Daniel Block. I am a geography professor at Chicago State University studying food access. I am also the chair of the Department of Geography, Sociology, History, and Africana Studies at Chicago State, and I'm on the board of the Chicago Food Policy Action Council.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thank you all for being here today. So, to get us started, Danielle, I'd love to hear from you. Can you talk a little bit about what food insecurity is and what it looks like in Illinois and in Cook County?

**Danielle Perry:** Absolutely. So, when you think of food insecurity, simply put, it's whether or not people feel that they have enough food to survive and thrive. Do they have enough food to cook for their families three meals a day? People will self-attest whether or not they are in fact food insecure. Feeding America has said that one in eight families in the state of Illinois see themselves as food insecure. In our area here in Chicago, or the Cook County area, one in five families are food insecure, and with children, one in four. Some people will think those numbers are startling, but you have to even think about communities that have

been disinvested in for generations where you see poverty levels and food insecurity be even higher.

So, food insecurity is truly an issue in Illinois, and for the Greater Chicago Food Depository where we provide food to the local food pantries and shelters, and soup kitchens, we are seeing on average 175,000 families visiting our pantries a month. That number is almost the same as it was at the height of COVID. So, food insecurity right now, as we're walking up to the next crisis from the Big Beautiful Bill, we are already seeing such high levels of food insecurity here.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thank you, Danielle, and I appreciate you bringing up the overlap between food insecurity and living in underinvested communities, where access to food might be more challenging, in addition to the inability to afford to buy enough food to feed oneself and their family. So, I'd like to turn to Danny, if you can talk to us about the factors that contribute to a household's inability or challenges accessing quality food.

**Daniel Block:** Well, we found that number one truly is access to resources, income, or money. So, neighborhoods differ a lot in terms of the variety of different kinds of food stores that are in them, as well as the kinds of healthy or unhealthy food that are in these food stores.

Some neighborhoods may have a lot of food stores, but they're mainly corner stores. We found in our studies that a lot of times those corner stores may have a few fresh fruits and vegetables, but oftentimes they've been sitting out a while, the quality might not be as good, and the prices often could be higher. We have found that families are incredibly good at figuring out ways to feed the people within the families, even if the food stores in their communities are not particularly good. They may go elsewhere. They may go once a month to Costco, they may go once a week to an Aldi, let's say, and then perhaps use some of the corner stores on some kind of daily basis as well. So, part of that strategy certainly is SNAP for many or most low-income families.

**Aimee Ramirez:** So, there's quite a bit of balancing that families have to do to meet what they have in the bank and stretch it as far as they can. That can mean going to multiple stores, strategic planning, and the time it takes to have to do all this.

**Daniel Block:** Yes, absolutely.

**Aimee Ramirez:** We also know that people who experience food insecurity don't experience it in isolation. People experiencing food insecurity cannot generally say that everything else in their life is stable, except that they just happen to not have enough food. So, John, I'd love it if you could talk to us a little bit about, for a household experiencing food insecurity, what, in addition to having to figure out how to feed everybody in the home on the household budget, what other challenges are they also experiencing and working through?

**John Bouman:** Sure. Well, it comes at people from all different directions, and most of the time, it's things they can't control. Utility costs are skyrocketing, and rent is skyrocketing. Transportation, medical costs, every so often, people in the family need shoes and winter coats, and things like that. You have to constantly make these decisions and trade-offs.

Employment can be on again and off again in the workforce environment that we have. So, there's a tremendous amount of pressure on families to balance things, to decide what to pay and not to pay, and how to keep food on the table. Keeping food on the table is just a part of that daily stress of being a lower-income family, and that stress adds its own costs to this whole equation.

There are sometimes increases in outbursts of family violence because of these kinds of pressures that people are under. So, in that context, the struggle to keep food on the table is crucial, right? It's a compelling basic need, and to take away the source of being able to pay for a sizable portion of that with SNAP benefits, which used to be called food stamps, it's an incredible burden and essentially will mean that the family may not only go without food, but may be faced with all these other trade-offs. They may start to face eviction and homelessness, and those kinds of spirals that people get into when these things get out of whack.

**Aimee Ramirez:** I appreciate, John, you elevating the impact that SNAP has not just on the transactional act of taking your link card to a grocery store and paying for groceries and taking them home, but the calculus that that has on the overall household budget. If this is money that I spend on food, then I can use other earned income to pay my rent, to pay for medication. We just had this first snowfall in November, and making sure that your kids have appropriate boots, those costs are things that take away from other household necessities as well. I'd love to come back to you, Danielle, starting this conversation of SNAP, but recognizing that resources to meet food demands are layered, and the "S" is supplemental, SNAP does not cover a household's entire food budget, and it's not meant to.

So, can you talk a little bit about some of the other programs and services that households lean on to fill all of the pieces of the pie to meet the household food needs?

**Danielle Perry:** Yeah, I think I agree that SNAP is truly a supplement. Most people think that people on SNAP are not working, but the truth is, many of them are, and they are maybe not making enough. So, they need this as a supplement, but they also could use some other benefits of the safety net, like WIC, which helps people who are having babies or have kids under five. School meals, a lot of children eat breakfast and lunch at school, and need those two meals, which is helpful for their parents.

A lot of families include seniors. We don't all have the two parents and two kids at home. Some people have grandparents at home as well, and those grandparents receive hot meals from Meals on Wheels or other programs like that, older adult programs that provide them meals. So, there are a lot of different ways that people can get food, including the

pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters who do provide food as well. Those mixed together can provide food for all the different people in the family.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thanks, Danielle. And of course, with SNAP being the biggest program, and I think that's part of what we saw with the government shutdown, is this scramble on November 1<sup>st</sup>, when nobody gets their SNAP benefits, is how do we replace these benefits? I think one of the sad things that we didn't really want to say out loud, but knew in the back of our minds, is we can't replace them. It's more than \$400 million that comes to the state of Illinois alone. There's no level of additional state funding, additional city funding, philanthropic support, or charitable giving that is going to fill \$400 million. So, Danielle, can you talk to us a little bit about why does the Food Depository advocates so strongly for SNAP and what do you see this program, in addition to the emergency food supports that the Food Depository is providing, give households experiencing food insecurity?

**Danielle Perry:** Well, you pointed out correctly, for every meal that we can provide in the emergency food system, SNAP provides nine. SNAP is a powerful tool. There is no way charity can make up for what SNAP can do. Many people think of SNAP when they hear us talk about it on the news or in a podcast like this, they'll say, "Oh, this doesn't impact me because I don't receive it." But they have no idea how much of an economic multiplier SNAP truly is, for every dollar people spend in the store with SNAP it multiplies by a dollar fifty, sometimes up to a dollar eighty, and those tax dollars go into all of our communities. Not only that, not just the fact that it brings in \$4.7 billion a year into this state, but also imagine if it were to come out, what would happen to that store? What happens to that grocery store, that local market, or that corner store that depends on the dollars that come from SNAP? What will they have to do from a revenue perspective? Will they have to let people go and basically eliminate those jobs? Will they have to increase prices in the grocery store?? We are already begging for stores to come into our communities from a food access perspective. With that amount of revenue loss, they may close. In the same neighborhoods where we've been begging for food access, we'll then have to lose the few stores they do have.

So, this is not just about the people receiving the benefit. This is about our communities and the access to food, and whether or not we'll also receive those tax dollars that then go into our communities as well.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thanks, Danielle. I really appreciate you elevating how we all benefit from SNAP. Even if you don't get a link card, we all reap the benefits of this program that is investing in our communities, it's investing in the health of our uninsured or underinsured residents and neighbors. It invests in the retail that we want to see in our vibrant communities. So, I want to go back to you, Danny, you touched on how communities where access to a lot of healthy, nutritious food can be lacking because the quality of the food is not always fantastic. The fruits and vegetables that might be there might not be fresh fruits and vegetables; they might be canned or frozen fruits and vegetables.

So one aspect is whether or not people have enough money in their pocket to buy food, and the other is, is there is a place that they can go to in their community to spend those dollars on food that is quality, nutritious, fresh, and that there's dignity in the experience of putting food on the table. So, I'd love to hear about what you've seen in terms of community-level interventions and community leaders and organizations and groups coming together to say, well, if the big retailer doesn't come to our community, we're going to take this matter into our own hands, and we're going to bring fresh produce to our neighbors.

**Daniel Block:** I'd love to talk about that. Truly, over my twenty-five years of working on this in Chicago, the number of inspiring programs has just mushroomed. We're really looking at an amazing number of programs that are working in Chicago. Some of them though, are reliant on SNAP and especially the new stores that have opened. But let me just list off a few. First of all, at the most grassroots level, there are community gardens all over the city, and the city has promoted that through access to vacant city land, through a program where you can work with your alderman to get a sort of long-term lease to the city land for a dollar to put an urban garden on there. Those community gardens and urban agriculture programs that are on those pieces of land both promote community, what we call third spaces, or gathering places where people have come together to plant and harvest.

Unfortunately, we're going into the winter, there's not as much coming out of those gardens in the winter, although many people have learned to can, and know already. That I think is just the proliferation of community gardens and the fact that, actually, the city has worked to create an urban agriculture zoning program that allows those to be legal and promotes them has been a really important addition in the last twenty-five years.

But there's also larger programs like in Englewood, the Go Green Community Market, which is attached to IMAN and their health center there. So, that is a market that has been set up by IMAN, the Inner City Muslim Action Network. I have not talked to them, but I am sure, since it's a retail market, that they're being affected by the loss of SNAP. There's also urban gardening and urban agriculture training programs, like the Urban Growers Collective runs in South Chicago and Elko Gardens, and elsewhere, that are really both growing and training, the Windy City Harvest program out of the Chicago Botanic Garden. There are many, many programs that are doing this kind of stuff.

Overall, I'd say that these focus on taking some control of land within communities to help the families within those communities feed themselves, rather than relying on sort of outside forces often to come in and decide to build a grocery store in their community. Food sovereignty is kind of the term that people often use.

**Aimee Ramirez:** And don't we all want to be there for our neighbors?

**Daniel Block:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Aimee Ramirez:** John, I'd like to come back to you, just thinking about the history of some of these programs and interventions to help people put food on the table, the SNAP

program has not always looked the way that it does. So, can you talk to us a little bit about how the government has been intervening on behalf of households in need of food assistance and what that's looked like over the years?

**John Bouman:** Well, it started in the Lyndon Johnson years as part of the Great Society and the War on Poverty, and the program was actually put together in a compromise between George McGovern of South Dakota and Bob Dole of Kansas. Two people on the extremes of their party back in the day who were as far apart as they could get in the Senate in their politics.

But they realized together that McGovern was concerned about people having food security. Both of them were concerned about supporting the farmers. This creates a market for food. So, that's why the program is in the Department of Agriculture and not in the Department of Human Services, because it's a part of the whole big compromise around subsidies for farmers and food production in the United States.

I remember when I first started a long time ago, you literally got food stamps, like wartime coupons for food, and that gradually morphed into a subsidy, separate from cash assistance for food, but it gradually covered more and more of the working poor and then became maybe twenty years ago electronic, like a debit card, in Illinois called the link card.

But what you've got is, they put it out there as something you can only spend on food. So that secured the support for the farmers, and that helped the overall financial capacity of the family. But it is not something you can just spend fungibly on whatever. It's always been a separate support for food and nutrition for families. It's never even been meant to cover and never does cover all the food needs of a family in a given month.

So, if the family has to depend only on SNAP, the food runs out in the third or fourth week of the month. And that's true for the households where it's just an older person who maybe even can't get out of the house, and they eat rice for the last week of the month or something like that. So, it's very close to the bone, and as I said earlier, this disruption really is an immediate impact on families, not just for their food, but for everything they need. So that's kind of a brief track of the history of the program.

**Daniel Block:** I just want to add a story. We did some focus groups with the store owners in the Austin neighborhood and asked them about when and how much produce they sell, and these were mainly corner store owners or small grocery stores. A number of them only sold produce around the first of the month when the SNAP money came in. I think that story brings together both the availability of that food as well as the importance of SNAP to people's diets.

**Aimee Ramirez:** I think it gives an anecdote to what research has also shown, that when people have more money to buy food, they make healthier choices because one bag of potato chips is a lot less expensive than a pound of apples, and when you have limited resources, that's part of what defines food insecurity is the ability to acquire nutritionally dense foods to support a family. I appreciate this kind of line in the conversation related to some of the misconceptions sometimes associated with the SNAP program. So, Danielle, I

wonder if you can tell us a little bit about who is eligible for SNAP, who receives it and what they use the money for, and what they can't use the money for?

**Danielle Perry:** Absolutely. It's so important to burst these myths, to stop people from spreading so many untruths about SNAP. One of the first things I tell people when I talk about SNAP is that seventy-five percent of the people on SNAP are children, seniors, and people with disabilities. That is so important to hear because what people will tell you is that it's just people sitting on the couch, not working, but it's completely untrue. The majority of these people are not even eligible to work, and then the ones that do are working folks; the majority of them are people who work every single day. What they're able to use it for is another thing people completely make up or send out falsehoods about. They can use it for food. John literally just said that they can use it for food, and not even every type of food; they can't go to the store and buy the rotisserie chicken or the ready-made meal. They have to buy food that they would have to then prepare. So that's important to note as well. I think it's so important for us to make sure people know who's receiving this and what they're able to even do with it.

**Aimee Ramirez:** There are so many things that you buy at the grocery store that aren't food but are still necessities. If you have a small child, they still need diapers, for a household, you need cleaning supplies. There are certain things like necessities that the SNAP program is not going to cover, and the card's just not going to work when you go to the grocery store. This is what's link-eligible, and you're on the hook for the rest.

**Danielle Perry:** Right.

**Aimee Ramirez:** John, part of the debate that's been taking place recently and is not new, related to SNAP and SNAP eligibility has been along the lines of work requirements and how much somebody needs to work and prove that they're working in order to maintain eligibility for the SNAP program. Part of the reforms that we'll also be seeing with the SNAP program will also shift how much the federal government contributes to the program and how much states have to contribute to the program. A lot of this is based on concerns for waste, fraud, and abuse in the SNAP program, and we have to make sure that the people who need the program are the people who actually get the benefits. So, can you talk to us a little bit about what SNAP fraud is and how often it actually happens?

**John Bouman:** SNAP is one of the most efficient programs in the country. Always been a very serious focus at the state level and at the federal level on accurate payments and eliminating fraud. The rate of incorrect payments is maybe three percent or less. It's not significant. Most of those are good-faith mathematical errors by either the people administering the program or the family. If your income fluctuates and you have to report all those fluctuations, those calculations get complicated and mistakes are made.

So, a small percentage of the small percentage is outright fraud, and that's mostly by hackers who are able to skim benefits by hacking into the system. Once in a while, you'll find a store that engages in some sort of scheme. If food stamps are three percent

incorrect, the IRS is fifteen percent. That doesn't mean we shouldn't have a tax system, right? The waste, fraud, and abuse is not based and never has been based on facts.

It's been based on anecdotes, and it's basically the cover story for the people who think that millions of children and seniors shouldn't have access to food, that it's just not appropriate for the government to be doing that. But that's not a persuasive narrative. So, it's waste, fraud, and abuse. It's like waving a red cape at a bull. It just covers what's essentially just taking food away from people. Then you have to find a way to do it, which is the two schemes you mentioned. One is work requirements because that takes advantage of the stereotype about people on the couch, which is not factual either. What it does is it catches people up in bureaucratic churn, right? The paperwork increases, the things you have to prove, and the pieces of paper you have to produce to prove it increase. Meetings are called, you might miss a meeting, the caseworker fumbles the documents, and they fall behind the radiator. Things happen where fifteen percent or so of the people who are eligible get cut off because of bureaucratic red tape.

That's what that is. It's a red tape way to reduce the payment of benefits to eligible people.

**Aimee Ramirez:** I appreciate you mentioning this additional work that people who receive SNAP have to put in, the additional paperwork, but then on the other end, somebody has to receive that paperwork and review it, and we're talking about 1.9 million people in Illinois. Granted, not all of those are going to have to adhere to this work requirement, but that is more work that our friends and partners at the Department of Human Services are going to have to do to keep up with.

**John Bouman:** That's right. That brings me to the other thing you mentioned, which is basing the amount of federal support for SNAP benefits on the state payment error rate, which is a deep existential threat to the program in Illinois that's looming on the horizon right now. So, historically, the federal government has paid for a hundred percent of the benefit costs and splits the administrative costs with the state, and the state administers the program. They've always been subject to audits. They've always been subject to their own efforts and federal efforts to ensure the accuracy of the payments. What's changed, a recent law that passed in Congress, is if the state's payment error rate is above a certain threshold, the state will have to start assuming responsibility for a percentage of the benefit cost for the first time ever. So, this has never been in the state budget. They estimate that Illinois, if its payment error rate stays the same, Illinois will be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars that are not currently in the state budget. If the state doesn't pay its share, it also won't get the federal share. That could just be the end of the entire program for the 1.9 million folks who need it in our state. That's looming out there to go into effect about a year from now unless Congress changes it, and people should be aware of this by leaning on their elected officials to help make sure that that does not happen.

**Aimee Ramirez:** It is very frightening to think about the future of this program. I think part of what we've elevated in this conversation is that it doesn't just help the people who receive the benefits directly; it helps all of us. It is an important factor and contributor to our

communities. Before we move on, Danielle, I did want to come back to you for one moment because I feel like this issue related to work requirements is very important. I think it's important for our audience to know what exactly these work requirements are, what they mean for people who fall under this category as able-bodied adults without dependents, and what penalties they will face if they can't meet the work requirement.

**Danielle Perry:** I agree with you. This is the number one thing we should all be talking about right now, because if people don't know the rules and how to meet these requirements, they are at risk of losing their benefits in the long term. So, like you said, what does it even mean? What does it mean to now be required to prove that you're working?

By definition, you have to be working eighty hours a month. If you are not working those eighty hours, you can volunteer eighty hours, participate in a SNAP employment and training program, or be on unemployment. Those are basically the four things you have to consider, and people always ask if it can be a mix of those things, and yes, it can be. Let's say you're working a part-time job and this month you only got seventy hours, and you work those seventy hours, you could volunteer the other ten. That is true.

So, by definition you have to be working eighty hours. If you are not, you can only be unemployed or not meet those requirements for three months in a three-year period. So, let's say I lose this job at the Food Depository today, and I'm not working in December, January, and February. That would be the three months for me, and then I would not be able to receive SNAP because I wasn't a working person but was eligible to work.

**Aimee Ramirez:** So, you would be excluded from the program until December of 2028, correct?

**Danielle Perry:** It's a fixed three-year period, and I believe our fixed three-year period ends in 2026. So, you would be unable to use it for the rest of the fixed three years, and then it restarts again. Let's imagine on the first of those next three years, if you don't work for those three months, the rest of that three-year period, you are not able to use it unless you can show that you're working again.

So, the fixed three-year period can get a little confusing, but if it's the beginning of that fixed year, that's a long time for somebody to not be able to use this benefit, and imagine, life happens. So I lose my job today, and I don't have the three months, and now the period's pretty long. Imagine if I do find another job, but a year from now I get hurt, and I just need it for a month, I would not be able to use it because I've depleted those three months.

That's how important that three months every three years is to explain to folks. So, what we tell people is, first, you need to see if you even are eligible to work by definition. If you could qualify for an exemption, if you are in fact disabled, or there are a number of exemptions that exist, you should reach out to the Illinois Department of Human Services. You should either call their hotline or go in person and see if you qualify for an exemption.

If you do, you should apply for it, and if not, you need to talk to them about what your options are to meet the eighty hours, what volunteerism looks like, and whether you can enroll in one of the SNAP employment and training programs.

That is the message we need to get out to folks because December 1st is the date by which the state is supposed to begin evaluating whether or not people are working. This is coming fairly quickly, and even if they were to get maybe a month or two extension, they likely will begin evaluating this if not December 1st, February 1st. So, we will see up to about 450,000 people who, we believe, will be eligible for work, possibly lose their benefits in a matter of months, and this would impact them for a while.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thank you for that. It is sobering to think about, but I think such an important point that we all have to be aware of, that the implications are very real, and it's a severe penalty if you're not able to fully work in those three months. The other thing that I think it's important for us to keep in mind is that these reforms that took place increased the age range by which people have to adhere.

So, an able-bodied adult without dependents was considered somebody between eighteen and fifty-four years old, and now it's somebody between eighteen and sixty-four years old. So, people who have not had to worry about being thought of as an able-bodied adult without dependents who are in their mid-fifties, now have to think about, am I going to be able to meet this requirement in order to keep my SNAP benefits?

We've been touching on this a little bit, but as we come to the end of our conversation, I want to ask each of you if you can share, what do you feel right now is at greatest stake in terms of food insecurity and people's access to meet their food needs?

**Danielle Perry:** I can start. I think SNAP is more important than people realize. Last month was a dress rehearsal for what we're about to see. I think what's so important right now is that we all become advocates for SNAP. We've talked about it today, but SNAP is so powerful. It could do so much for families and for those of us who feel like it doesn't help us, you've made this point, Amy, more than once. It impacts all of us.

So, what I'd love to see us do in this moment to fight for food security and to end hunger is to stand up for SNAP in this moment. To not think that just because the government isn't shut down anymore, that SNAP goes back into the background. But we need to keep the drum beat. We need to make sure people know about the changes that are happening, not just from work requirements, but all the changes the state is going to make to try to lower their error rate, whether that's coming in person now or having to show a lot more documentation to keep SNAP.

We need to keep everybody who's eligible on the program. We need to close the gap of people who are eligible but never signed up. We need to have everyday folks, whether they receive this benefit or not, talking about this, lifting it up, and advocating that our state, as great as our state is, actually pays the bill so that we can keep SNAP in this state for the long term.

**Daniel Block:** I'd like to highlight something that Danielle said a little earlier, and you've also touched on, that SNAP is a program that helps communities. I always think of food access issues as issues truly about investment in communities. Like if you have a low number of grocery stores in a community, it means that there isn't a lot of retail investment happening there. Well, SNAP allows families and people within communities that might not otherwise be getting a lot of investment to spend money within their communities at the stores that are there, and often at the stores if there aren't that many stores there, in the stores in surrounding communities. This is not only about individual families, although that's very, very important, it's about community investment. Finally, this is a big deal in Chicago. It's a big deal also in a lot of suburbs of Chicago that also have a lot of food access issues, as well as a lot of poverty. And it's a big deal out in rural areas. There are counties where there's hardly a store as well, like at all, and there's a lot of rural poverty. So, this truly is an issue that brings together communities from across the state and across the nation.

**Aimee Ramirez:** I think that's an important point. And I think something that Feeding America says all the time is, there is not a single zip code in the United States where there is not some level of food insecurity. It doesn't matter if it is the lowest income or the highest income; there is food insecurity in every single zip code in the United States.

**John Bouman:** And the poorest counties in Illinois are in the southern tip of the state, where high numbers of people who live there rely on this program. The farmers who are supported by the program, the retail merchants who have the convenience stores, the grocery stores, and the employees in those stores, it matters to all of them.

Just to echo what Danielle was saying, this affects everybody. It affects your kid or your niece or nephew who got out of school and doesn't get a job right away, to keep body and soul together. It affects those older people now living alone, who you may see at your church or wherever you gather. They depend on this. What we saw in the crisis around the November allotment and the delay in the payment is that this actually does not matter based on politics. The people I saw activated around this, whom I know from other parts of my life, vary widely in their politics, but they share a certain system of values about what's right and wrong and where we need to have a generous frame of mind. And this is one of those, right? SNAP is right smack on that pressure point of people's systems of values, and I think going into action around this is the right thing to do.

**Aimee Ramirez:** I want to thank you all profoundly for taking the time to be part of this conversation and helping our listeners understand the complexities of food insecurity and how critical SNAP is to alleviating hunger in our communities. As an advocate, it's hard for me to end a conversation without some kind of call to action for the audience. So, can each of you share what you think is one thing our listeners can take with them to support our food-insecure neighbors and protect access to resources that help people put food on the table for themselves and their families?

**John Bouman:** So, taking action to support SNAP and to resist and roll back these cuts to SNAP is something that is a path that is likely to succeed. If you get active around it, as we just saw with the shutdown, it ended the shutdown because people of all political stripes said, "No, this can't happen." And you know that if you take action on something, you're more likely to take it and you're more likely to stay with it if you see that the pathway to it being successful. We just saw that activists around this issue can be successful and can resonate with wherever you're coming from and why it's important to you. So, look for ways to join with others to be active on this.

**Daniel Block:** I would echo what John just said, but I'd say that there are a lot of organizations from all sorts of types that are working on this. Religious organizations, national organizations that are focused on hunger, and alternative food kinds of production groups that I was talking about before. Come out and get interested in what the Chicago Food Policy Action Council is doing. We have a good food purchasing policy that connects local farmers to institutions throughout the area. But number one, if we lose SNAP, this would truly be a horrible thing.

**Danielle Perry:** I agree with them both, and I'll say the Greater Chicago Food Depository is known for putting food in pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters across this county. But what some people don't know is that we have an advocacy center. You don't have to search for a place to go. You can come to the Food Depository. We would love for you to join us and become a SNAP advocate today. You can go to our website, [chicagosfoodbank.org](http://chicagosfoodbank.org), and join our team. We'd love to have you. We all have to lift our voices, and we have opportunities for you to do it, whether that's on social media or in person, or media, like podcasts, like what we're doing in this moment, whatever it is, whatever you decide, we have a place for you to join us. Most importantly, we'd love to see you join us in Springfield as we advocate to the General Assembly to pay the bill, pay for us to continue SNAP in this state. You can join us literally today.

**Aimee Ramirez:** Thank you all so much again for joining us today. As hard as the near future is, thinking about SNAP and food insecurity, it is inspiring to see the level of knowledge and work, and advocacy that you all bring to this issue. I hope our listeners will join the Food Depository and others in this fight to make sure that nobody in our community goes hungry. Thank you again for joining us and thank you for listening.

**Daniel Block:** Thank you.

**Danielle Perry:** Thanks.

**John Bouman:** Thank you.