



Opinion

Frank: Tell Congress to fund SNAP

By Sandra Frank, Guest Columnist

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As the longest shutdown in U.S. history drags on, we are all deeply concerned about its impact on the lives of furloughed federal employees, contractors and vendors. All Faiths Food Bank continues to provide food and, for now, has sufficient supplies to meet their needs. We want to reassure those currently affected by the partial government shutdown that they are not alone, and they can rely on us for help.

However, we are facing yet another crisis in the next few weeks. If the shutdown continues, federal funding for essential food safety-net programs will be ending. Our most immediate concern is that funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) runs out at the end of February.

In Sarasota County there are 32,000 families, and in DeSoto County another 6,300 families, who depend on SNAP to put food on the table. Children will be hardest hit. Almost 70 percent of the 38,300 families enrolled in SNAP have kids.

Within a few weeks, tens of thousands of our neighbors who depend on federal food assistance will likely turn to the local food bank and agencies for more help.

All Faiths Food Bank is the largest anti-hunger relief organization in our area and, last year, we partnered with 203 agencies and programs to provide over 8.75 million meals.

However, according to Feeding America, for every meal provided by food banks, SNAP provides 12. Simple math gives us an idea of how many meals All Faiths and its hunger-relief network would need to provide in order to replace this critical federal food assistance program.

We are preparing for the worst-case scenario and the possibility that there will be no funding for SNAP after February. We fully expect an overwhelming demand on our food bank and agency partners in February and perhaps beyond.

All Faiths Food Bank will do everything we can to feed people, especially children. But we know we cannot fill the gap created by the loss of SNAP for the 38,300 families in our service area who need this fundamental federal food program.

Our goal today is to make sure the community is aware of what could happen if the shutdown continues. If federal funding is not restored, the crisis will begin to hit in late February and millions of meals would likely be lost from the plates of children, veterans and seniors.

We are staying closely attuned to the status of SNAP and other core federal food programs such as WIC which will also expire at the end of February if funding is not continued. WIC, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, provides food for low-income pregnant women, infants and children up to age 5. Babies, toddlers and mothers will suffer the most if federal funding is not renewed.

What can you do to help? Email, call or write your elected officials in Washington. With compassion and clarity, share your concern that children, seniors and veterans will be harmed if funding for federal nutrition programs is not continued. Let them know that people need and deserve to have food.

For information about the shutdown and how you can help, please go to our website allfaithsfoodbank.org.

Sandra Frank is CEO of All Faiths Food Bank.