



## HUNGER TASK FORCE

November 27, 2018

To: Chairman Donovan and members of the Public Safety Committee

From: Sherrie Tussler, Executive Director, Hunger Task Force

Thank you for calling this meeting. My name is Sherrie Tussler and I have been the director of Hunger Task Force for 21 years. Prior to this I was the founding director of Hope House for 10 years.

Milwaukee is different in that we separate the issues of hunger and homelessness where other communities do not. Hunger and homelessness are two symptoms of poverty. Most poor people experience hunger on a regular basis, but when poverty becomes complete people experience homelessness. I am here today to deepen your understanding of why there are so many people living in tent camps when heretofore there were not.

In 2015 The State of Wisconsin forfeited a waiver with the United States Department of Agriculture and voluntarily initiated time limits for able bodied adults on FoodShare. Although Milwaukee County was a Labor Surplus area, and exempt from the time limits around work requirements, Governor Walker moved forward. The State invested \$60M in funding and contracted with a for-profit company to oversee work requirements in Milwaukee County. Since 2015 when able bodied adults receiving FoodShare have their cases reviewed they are informed of the need to work, and prove that they worked, the minimum 20 hours per week in order to maintain FoodShare eligibility. For those unable to work or prove that they worked a time clock of 90 days was set. When the 90-day limit of FoodShare eligibility is reached the for-profit company informs the State and the FoodShare case is closed for three years or until such time that the person finds a job and reapplies for FoodShare. The program is called FoodShare Employment and Training, or FSET. Through FSET Governor Walker promised jobs and for those with addiction he promised treatment. People could be exempted from the work requirement if they were disabled or a caregiver, but proof would be required.

My experience as a homeless shelter director is that homeless shelters are filled with the underemployed and jobless, people with mental health and addiction disorders, people waiting for the social security administration to review their disability application and people waiting for state and local government to review their assistance applications. These people have family and friends who stepped in many times to provide housing or financial assistance for housing. But in the end, their family and friends could no longer carry the burden of failed community assistance programs.

Low income people live in groups—multi generational or friend groups that share living expenses to keep a roof over their head. Single adults have the hardest time of all affording housing so they often attach to a group and end up sleeping on the couch or in a basement or attic

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under the agreement that they contribute. This is couch surfing by necessity. FoodShare is food buying power and when you have it, you are a contributor to your group. When you don't have it you are a greater burden and at greater risk of being asked to leave the group.

Public policies established by the State of Wisconsin on FoodShare have resulted in the hungry becoming the homeless. In Milwaukee County 43,906 people have lost FoodShare since the beginning of work requirements. Statewide, 95,928 people have lost their food buying power. For every job found three people were left jobless and penniless.

Into the future additional harsh reforms are planned including drug testing the poor and requiring parents of school aged children to meet work requirements and prove that they did. Soon there will be families with children suffering homelessness in larger numbers.

We hope that the Public Safety Committee demanding accountability results in the homeless getting housed. Thank you.



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### FoodShare and the FSET Program: Summary

#### What is SNAP/ FoodShare?

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest nutrition assistance program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). SNAP was formerly known as Food Stamps, and the State of Wisconsin calls the program FoodShare.

FoodShare benefits are 100% federal money. FoodShare helps the most vulnerable people in our state purchase groceries. Over 11% of Wisconsinites receive FoodShare. Nearly half of FoodShare recipients are children. The fastest-growing population utilizing FoodShare are senior citizens. The average monthly FoodShare allotment in Wisconsin is \$105.97/month.

#### What is FSET?

To receive SNAP benefits, able-bodied adults without dependent children must work, volunteer, or report for work training at least 20 hours per week—a requirement instituted under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996.

There are three ways to meet the work requirement:

- Work at least 80 hours each month; or
- Take part in an allowable work or training program such as the FoodShare Employment and Training Program (FSET), Wisconsin Works (W-2) or certain programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) at least 80 hours each month; or
- Both work and take part in an allowable work program for a combined total of at least 80 hours each month.

If non-exempt able-bodied adults without dependents do not meet the work requirement, they will only receive 3 months of FoodShare benefits in a 36-month (3 year) period until they meet the work requirement, meet an exemption, or the 36-month period has passed.

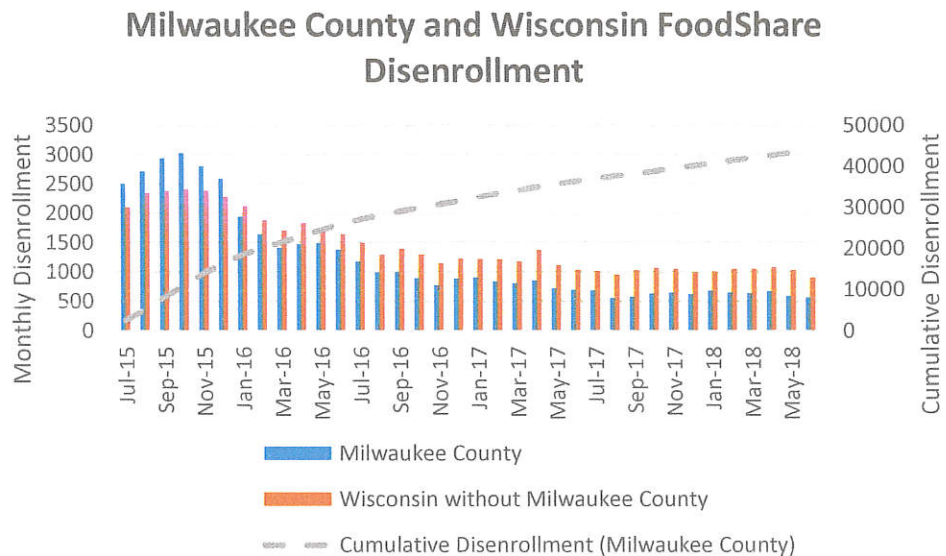
#### History of FSET in Wisconsin

During the recent recession, elevated unemployment rates made many areas across the country eligible for waivers from this requirement. As the economy has improved, an increasing number of places are no longer eligible for these waivers.

In Wisconsin, time limits for FoodShare, the state's SNAP program, became effective statewide as of April 1, 2015. Because this state had chosen not to request an available federal waiver for eligible areas with high unemployment (currently 33 out of 50 states have requested and been granted such a waiver), time limits are in effect throughout the entire state. Those recipients who cannot find work on their own can maintain their benefits by participating in Wisconsin's FoodShare Employment and Training Program (FSET), which is outsourced to private agencies contracted regionally throughout the state. Failure to meet program mandates means individuals are eligible for only 3 months of Time Limited Benefits (TLBs) out of every 36-month period.

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The graph below shows the number of FoodShare recipients who disenrolled due to TLBs for both Wisconsin (without Milwaukee County) and Milwaukee County since the onset of the FSET program. The graph also depicts the cumulative disenrollment for Milwaukee County over this time. The state does not report out cumulative statewide disenrollment numbers, so the true effect needs to be added up every month. One can see that Milwaukee County's disenrollment is higher or as high as the rest of the state.



Who is affected?

Time limited benefits apply to adults aged 18-49 with no children in the household who do not have a documented disability. Individuals may be exempt from time limits for reasons including illness, school enrollment, pregnancy, homelessness, participation in drug or alcohol treatment, or providing care for another person.

Results of FSET to date (June 2018)

- 95,928 FoodShare recipients have lost their benefits statewide due to time-limited benefits (TLBs)
- 43,906 individuals have lost their FoodShare benefits due to TLBs in Milwaukee County
- 44,047 reported new employments have been recorded
  - More than one employment per person can be counted
- 28,996 individuals have reported to have gained employment
  - By region data is only available starting in Year 2
  - Year 1 gained employment statewide: 9,071
- Average of 41% of FSET enrollee program activity is categorized as “Job Search”
  - No clear definition of activity categories