



Military Hunger Prevention Act

Endorsed By: MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger; Greater Chicago Food Depository; National Military Families Association; Blue Star Families and Western Center on Law and Poverty

Background:

In a 2013 U.S. Census Bureau survey, approximately 23,000 active-duty servicemembers were forced to rely on the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in order to secure access to food for themselves and their families. Moreover, according to a 2016 GAO report entitled, *DOD Needs More Complete Data on Active Duty Servicemembers' Use of Food Assistance Programs*, "servicemembers on active-duty spent over \$21 million in SNAP benefits at commissaries from September 2014 through August 2015" suggesting that our servicemen and women are "having difficulty making ends meet."

Currently, there are a number of government programs that provide food assistance to low-income households that servicemembers may apply to and qualify for: SNAP; Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC); National School Lunch Program (NSLP); School Breakfast Program (SBP); Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP); and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). These programs help vulnerable military families in challenging economic circumstances by providing assistance for food purchases.

Problem:

While it is estimated that more than 20,000 military households receive SNAP benefits to help with food insecurity, there are other currently serving military families who are struggling, but do not qualify to receive needed assistance because of an unintended quirk in the eligibility rules. Servicemembers living in off-base or privatized military housing who receive the military's monthly Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) are often disqualified from receiving food assistance from federal food programs – like SNAP – because BAH is counted as income when determining program eligibility. In particular, the barrier to accessing SNAP benefits caused by counting BAH as income has led military families across the country to turn in desperation to food pantries and food banks – many operating on base or nearby military installations – for emergency food assistance.

Solution:

Currently, federal tax law exempts BAH from taxation by the Internal Revenue Service. Moreover, the IRS lists BAH as one of the tax-exempt military allowances not considered as earned income when determining eligibility for the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, Head Start, and other federal assistance programs.

Consequently, The Military Hunger Prevention Act would treat BAH in a similar manner and exempt the military's monthly Basic Allowance for Housing from consideration as income in determining the eligibility for federal nutrition assistance programs.

By enacting such reforms, we would enable those families struggling with food insecurity to relieve hunger in military households and ensure the mission readiness of our servicemembers.