



Testimony before Philadelphia City Council

**Kate Scully, JD
Policy Director, Center for Hunger-Free Communities
Drexel University Dornsife School of Public Health**

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Good morning, and thank you the opportunity to testify on the need for emergency school meals.

My name is Kate Scully and I am the Policy Director at the Center for Hunger-Free Communities, a research center that focuses on addressing hunger and poverty through numerous program and research studies.

As the latest snowstorm hit the east coast, many families went to the grocery stores to stock up on milk, bread, and eggs. The local news stations set up in grocery store parking lots to show shelves empty of those staple items as people prepared to ride out the storm.

For too many, like Kim Williams, a member of Witnesses to Hunger from Washington, DC, a snowstorm meant missed work and the need to provide more meals for her kids because school was closed – something she did not have in the budget.

Thankfully for many parents in DC, there was an option for their families. Ten schools throughout the city opened up to provide meals to kids who would usually get breakfast and lunch there every day.

Kim was able to stretch the food she had to get through this storm, but she knows many families who were happy to have the option of school meals even if it meant walking through the snow. Kim said that, “One more day and I would have been out there with my kids looking for a hot meal.”

That is just how serious hunger is for so many families in DC and so many here in Philadelphia. Just a few days of additional meals, an unbudgeted and unexpected expense, can force an entire family out in search of a hot meal.

When I asked Kim what she thought about DC schools opening to provide meals she said, “I think it is a great idea to open schools to make sure families are able to fill their bellies. I think it was one of the best decisions ever made!”

Philadelphia faces deep poverty and families here often struggle to make ends meet. Here 142,631 households rely on SNAP in order to put food on their table and 45% of those households include children. Despite the incredible help SNAP provides, 21.2% of people in Philadelphia are food insecure including over 80,000 children.

Food insecurity is defined as not having enough food for an active and healthy life. We know from our research with Children’s HealthWatch that young children in food insecure households are more likely to be in fair or poor health, to be hospitalized, and at risk of developmental delays.

From our research we also know that families who are food insecure are often also housing and energy insecure. A few missed meals might not seem like a lot, but when that family has to pull money from their rent or utility bills to pay for breakfast and lunch, it can start a dangerous cycle of moving resources around but never fully covering expenses, leading to utility shutoffs or even evictions.

Now there may be questions about how providing meals in schools during snow emergencies will work, such as how it would be safe for people to get to the schools.

Kim had a response for that as well: “Those that felt that it was unsafe stayed indoors. Those that were hungry were relieved and thankful because they were hungry. There will always be pros and cons to any and all situations but the fact that families actually had an option for hot meals is the true blessing. The option is the blessing.”

We hope that City Council will provide the people of Philadelphia with the same option and the same blessing.