

Voice

News

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Photo courtesy of La Casa de la Raza

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White House Denial of Food Funds Elicits Local Solidarity

By Isaac Hernández de Lipa / VOICE

A WHITE HOUSE DECISION TO DELAY FUNDING FOR FOOD for those in need during the government shutdown has created community solidarity and a wave of efforts to feed people.

In a *New York Times* report today, November 5th, “Millions of low-income Americans will see staggering cuts and delays to their food stamps this month — with some receiving potentially nothing at all — because of the way that the White House has chosen to pay partial benefits during the government shutdown. For many people enrolled in the program, the losses may soon prove to be far greater and more severe than the Trump administration has publicly acknowledged, underscoring the magnitude of its refusal to fully finance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, the largest federal anti-hunger initiative.”

The local effect of the White House decision will be catastrophic to the over 55,000 people in Santa Barbara County relying on SNAP benefits for food, known in California as CalFresh.

With this information, VOICE decided to listen, and to spoke to local organizations fighting to feed the broader community in the face of this crisis.

“In the Spring, we noticed a distinct drop in the number of people coming to our public Healthy Food Fairs, so we surveyed our clients to learn that 60 percent of our clients say that fear of immigration enforcement prevents them or their family from accessing services. So we decided to change our food distribution format,” commented Lori Lander Goodman, CEO of LEAP.

The FoodBank of Santa Barbara County (foodbanksbc.org) was already dealing with losing 25 percent of its USDA funding due to federal cuts. With the help of donors, they’d reduced that gap to 14 percent of the eleven million pounds of food they deliver each year through a network of 200 nonprofit partners.

“Current indications from the government are that the government is not committed to even partially funding the program



Photos courtesy of La Casa de la Raza

past the end of this month,” said Erik Talkin, CEO of FoodBank of SBC. “Three quarters of the people receiving benefits are children, seniors, or adults with disabilities. These are the people whose health is being sidelined, the people who the FoodBank has to urgently find enough food for.”

“We’ve seen more families and individuals with food insecurity over the past two months than we have seen in years past,” said Sylvia Barnard, Chief Executive Officer of **Good Samaritan Shelter** (goodsamaritanshelter.org). “You can sponsor the delivery of a Harvest Box for a family in need. They’re filled with fresh produce grown in their Bridgehouse Farm, by their farm trainees in Good Samaritan’s job training programs. Good Sam is also partnering with KCOY for the Annual Turkey Drive on November 20th.”

Both LEAP (leapcentralcoast.org) and **Carpinteria Children’s Project** (carpchildren.org) provide food, diapers, and other community services. “In moments like these, when families are stretched

thin, community is what sustains us,” said Teresa Alvarez, Executive Director of Carpinteria Children’s Project. “Our mission has always been to make sure every child in Carpinteria has the foundation to thrive, no matter what challenges their families are facing.”

Lander Goodman added that LEAP, which distributed 90,703 pounds of food and 61,798 diapers last year, “We now have an emergency food pantry. We’re seeking donations to fill the pantry. Clients in need can come pick up food. We have increased our diaper distribution. And we’ve experienced a 158% increase in demand for immigration related services,

compared to last year.”

“Although SNAP is losing funding, the **Library’s Community Resource Specialist** can help connect patrons with other local services such as the FoodBank and Unity Shoppe,” said Brandon Beaudette, Santa Barbara Public Library Director. “Appointments for one-on-one assistance are available at both the Central and Eastside Libraries.” The Library also hosts two People’s Pantries, where community members can take what they need and leave what they can.

Unity Shoppe (unityshoppe.org) is conducting their Season of Hope food drive, collecting non-perishable food items at fire stations through December 12, the day of their 39th Annual Telethon, live on KEYT Channel 3, 5 to 8pm.

At the **Organic Soup Kitchen** (organicsoupkitchen.org) which provides organic meals for people with medical diagnoses, and to low-income residents, Founder Anthony Carroccio shared, “For many of the people we serve, SNAP was their last line of defense against hunger. These are our neighbors, seniors, and people with chronic illness, who already live on the edge. With these benefit cuts, many will simply go without food unless we step up as a community.”

In response to a significant uptick in funding requests from organizations that provide essential services, **The Santa Barbara Foundation** (SBFoundation.org)

launched a Critical Needs Response Fund, providing grants of up to \$50,000 to nonprofits responding to crises in Santa Barbara County. “By providing timely and targeted support, we can help alleviate the pressures faced by our local nonprofits and residents during times of crisis,” said Jackie Carrera, SBF president and CEO.

At the **Girls Inc. of Greater Santa Barbara** (girlsincsb.org) Goleta location, the girls help tend and harvest fresh produce onsite. “These elements are part of our focus on nutrition education, gardening, and connecting girls to where their food comes from,” said their CEO Cydney Justman. “By keeping our programs deeply subsidized and free for many families, we allow parents to direct their limited resources toward

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- Lori Lander Goodman, CEO, LEAP

breathing room in their monthly budget when SNAP benefits and other safety net supports are shifting.”

Taylor Swan, Chief Development Officer of the **United Boys & Girls Clubs of Santa Barbara County** (unitedbg.org), noted, “72 percent of our members are living on or below the poverty line. Through our Zero Hunger Food Program, we provide nutritious meals and snacks every day to hundreds of local youth who rely on our Clubs for nourishment, stability, and care.”

La Casa de la Raza (lacasafounders.org) has recently added a mobile pantry; they also run a community pantry as well as other services through The Restorative Justice

Education Center.

Parks and Recreation (sbparksandrec.santabarbaraca.gov) hosts weekly food distributions with no pre-registration required; first come, first served in a bring-your-own-bags format.

United Way of Santa Barbara County (unitedwaysb.org) offers several community programs “focused on a comprehensive and long-term approach to household security – ensuring families have the tools they need to be resilient at home, at school, and in times of crisis, for people in need referred by their case manager.”

“CalFresh benefits are 100% federally funded and there is no mechanism for the State or the County to provide interim funding for the benefits,” said **Santa Barbara County Social Services**. “The County will continue to receive and process applications and renewals so that when the federal shutdown ends those delayed benefits can be issued at that time.”

Lander Goodman concluded with, “At this moment, our organization and clients are facing tremendous fear and uncertainty. Our clients are worried about ICE, about the safety of members of their families, and about retaining the benefits they rely upon. During the COVID crisis, we also faced tremendous fear and uncertainty, especially in the beginning. In times of fear and uncertainty, we know that LEAP needs to be a steady presence. We did not and will not retreat from our commitment to serve our community. One big difference is that during the COVID crisis, the government stepped up to support businesses, nonprofits, and families. At this moment, the federal government is removing support.”



Lori Lander Goodman

Photo by Isaac Hernández de Lipa

