

TESTIMONY

H.B. 2

Good Morning Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee. My name is Peggy Grimes (Spell Name). I'm the Executive Director of the Montana Food Bank Network. The Montana Food Bank Network is the only statewide food bank in Montana. Our JOB is to assure that all of our 196 partnering local emergency food providers statewide have the food they need to meet the growing demand caused by the loss of jobs, and the increasing costs of food, fuel and housing our neighbors are experiencing throughout Montana.

The Montana Food Bank Network is a private sector operation. Our efficiencies are proven in our ability to move millions of pounds of food across the 4th largest State in the country with an administrative overhead rate of just 6%. This means that 94 cents on every dollar received goes to getting food to where it is most needed. To my knowledge, no state government agency can operate as efficiently as we do.

Two years ago, and for the first time, I stood before this Committee with a request for one-time only funding to purchase food for the emergency food system. At that time, the number of individuals accessing emergency food jumped by 20% in just one year. Unfortunately, due to the recession, food donations were decreasing at the same time the need was escalating. The Legislature provided \$2 million in one-time only funds to purchase food. Those dollars provided an additional 3.3 million pounds of food in the first 18 months of the biennium. With these funds Montana Food Bank Network was able to distribute 7.4 million pounds of food in 2009 and 8.5 million pounds in 2010. This food went to local food pantries, soup kitchens, faith-based organizations, rescue missions, youth homes, boys and girls clubs, teen recovery centers, group homes and senior centers all across our State. Because of the Montana Food Bank Network's leveraging power through buying in truckload quantity, and our ability to access national food donations through our partnership with Feeding America--the national food bank network--we are able to make these dollars go much farther than a small local pantry.

Unfortunately, the economy has not improved and instead of seeing people go back to work or families more able to provide for their own food needs, we've seen further increases in the need for emergency food. In 2010, 175,000 Montanans received food from an emergency feeding program. The total number of visits for the year was 911,000. When you compare the number of individuals receiving emergency food in 2010 with the nearly 89,000 people needing food in 2008, prior to receiving the current funding, that's a 98% increase in participation over two years. Without the funds provided by the 2009 Legislature, people who lost their job in 2009 or 2010 would not have been able to rely on their local food pantry for food. So let me congratulate this body for its foresight in providing the necessary funds to assure that the emergency food system was strong enough to meet that demand.

I'm not a lobbyist and I don't know the best vehicle for getting this done, but I do know that the Montana Food Bank Network is the most efficient way to get emergency food to where it's needed in our State. I know this Committee will be faced with some very difficult decisions in where money should be spent, but I implore you to please consider the fact that the most basic of needs – food, must be a consideration. So whether Rep. Barrett's bill, H.B. 221, or an amendment to the Governor's budget is the right vehicle, I leave to your competent consideration. However, I ask you to please not leave this session without assuring that every Montanan (your constituents) have food on their table as you endeavor to help create the jobs that will put them back to work so they can provide for themselves.

The current demand is bigger than can be met by the private sector alone. It is my fervent hope that we will not be back again next Session. However, right now we must work together as a private/public partnership to get the job done.

The Montana Food Bank Network and its Partners are doing everything we can to meet the current need. We are encouraging our donors to step up and we're cutting expenses wherever we can. So I ask you today to put your "pennies" together with our "pennies" and let's make sure no one in Montana has to skip meals in order for their children to eat, or that children have to go to school hungry, anxiously awaiting school lunch to get something in their stomach so they can think and learn and become the citizens of tomorrow, some of whom may one day be sitting in your chairs making the decisions for our State.

Thank You.