

— conversations on —  
**FOOD JUSTICE**

A series hosted by  
*Share Our Strength and Food & Society at the Aspen Institute*

## SUMMARY TO ACTION REPORT SESSION #2

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### SESSION DESCRIPTION

On December 15<sup>th</sup> Share Our Strength, in partnership with Food & Society at the Aspen Institute, aired the second session of **Conversations on Food Justice**, a series examining the intersection of hunger and racial justice. “Hunger is a Racial Equity Issue: Why That Matters, and What We Can Do About It” featured former Congresswoman Donna F. Edwards, and former Secretary of Education and President and CEO of The Education Trust John B. King Jr., and was moderated by Congresswoman Chellie Pingree (ME-01). The panel discussed social safety net programs like SNAP and WIC and examined the perceptions, policies, and practices that keep people hungry and poor. The conversation also explored how social sectors can join forces to reimagine an economy that nourishes all people, developing effective strategies for moving anti-hunger and anti-poverty work forward.

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### FEATURED PANELISTS



#### **Ms. Chellie Pingree**

Congresswoman- Maine’s 1<sup>st</sup> Congressional District

Chellie Pingree represents Maine’s 1<sup>st</sup> District and is a national leader in food policy. Pingree started her career as an organic farmer in the 1970s and has been engaged in food system reform ever since. In Congress, Pingree is an advocate for reforming federal policy to support the diverse range of American agriculture, including sustainable, organic, and locally focused farming. As a member of the House Agriculture Committee and the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, food policy reform continues as her top priority. Due to her leadership, the 2018 Farm Bill more than doubled funding for organic research, created the first federal produce prescription program, and established the first federal local food program with permanent funding.



#### **Ms. Donna F. Edwards**

Former Congresswoman- Maryland’s 4<sup>th</sup> Congressional District

Donna Edwards an American politician who served as the U.S. Representative for Maryland’s 4<sup>th</sup> congressional district from 2008-2017. Edwards began her public career with a series of nonprofit advocacy groups. In 1992, she joined Public Citizen and Congress Watch to advocate on consumer issues. Two years later, Edwards moved on to the Center for a New Democracy where she worked on campaign finance reform and rose to the position of executive director. In 1996 she helped found and lead the National Network to End Domestic Violence—an issue she confronted in her own marriage. In 2000 Edwards became the Executive Director of the Arca Foundation, a social equity and justice advocacy group.



#### **Dr. John B. King Jr.**

President and CEO of The Education Trust, Former US Secretary of Education

John B. King Jr. is the president and CEO of The Education Trust, a national nonprofit organization that seeks to identify and close opportunity and achievement gaps, from preschool through college. King served in President Barack Obama’s cabinet as the 10<sup>th</sup> U.S. Secretary of Education. King’s life story is an extraordinary testament to the transformative

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power of education. Both of King's parents were career New York City public school educators, whose example serves as an enduring inspiration.

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### SUMMARY AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

*“All of us need a safety net at a time in our lives. We should see that as a testament to our strength as a country that we are able to lift each other up.” —John B. King Jr.*

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long standing racial inequalities and further intensified troubling disparities in food access in the United States. Even during the Great Recession of 2007-2008, we did not see a hunger crisis like this. This year, Americans have been confronted with a pandemic and historic job losses, which further compounded hunger issues. As moderator Congresswoman Chellie Pingree opened with, “In the wealthiest country in the world we should never have to have conversations about hunger.” Unfortunately, one in four families with children could face hunger today.

According to a recent Census Household Pulse Survey data from June, Black and Latino households have had higher rates of food insecurity during the pandemic than whites, at 36% and 32% respectively, versus 18% for whites<sup>1</sup>. Households with children were even more disproportionately affected with 41% of Black households and 36% of Latino households having struggled with food insecurity<sup>1</sup>. Food insecurity is not a new concern for communities of color as this has been an ongoing issue for decades.

This session focused on the numerous barriers individuals face trying to access the nation's nutrition safety net programs. In response to the high levels of food insecurity during the pandemic, the US government provided the Secretary of Agriculture authority to allow state agencies to administer the Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT). This allows eligible school children to receive temporary emergency nutrition benefits, who would have otherwise received free or reduced school meals, if their schools were in operation. And yet, accessing and utilizing these benefits is not always easy. Depending on state regulations, applicants may need to fill out additional paperwork which presents further obstacles. Congresswoman Edwards shared the powerful role stigma and shame have in creating barriers to accessing charitable foods, saying, “I went through such hoops to avoid people from seeing me going to a food pantry. The system suggests there is something wrong with trying to feed yourself and your family. No kid in school should go hungry throughout the day.”

In addition to highlighting barriers to accessing food resources, the conversation also illuminated the challenges of accessing healthy and fresh food for many struggling with hunger. Congresswoman Edwards said, “If you go back 400 years and look at black enslavement, the entire process for people figuring out how to feed themselves and their families, was unhealthy from the beginning. It was the worst of the food supply...and many of those same ways of preparing meals and what goes into food preparation has gone down through generations.” Black and Hispanic communities are often limited in food selection owing to the prevalence of more unhealthy food retailers due to zoning policies and legacies of redlining. Secretary King suggested that in an effort to curb these historical inequities, we could try to have kitchens in schools, community gardens, or a curriculum based on nutrition and healthy eating; but in many cases we have made a deliberate choice not to invest in these programs. Secretary King explains, “We chose to focus on the minimum threshold of calorie provision. We pay the price. We actually think we are saving money but when you look at the health consequences, it is costing us money.” The average monthly Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefit per person is around \$129, and this does not lend

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<sup>1</sup> Schanzenbach, D. W., & A. Pitts. (2020). How much has food insecurity risen? Evidence from the Census Household Pulse Survey. Institute for Policy Research Rapid Research Report.  
<https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/documents/reports/ipr-rapid-researchreports-pulse-hh-data-10-june-2020.pdf>

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itself to purchasing foods that are of nutritious value. Instead processed food is more commonly purchased, which can lead to poor nutrition and health outcomes.

The panel surfaced the significant impact hunger has on rural populations, and also observed that we often think this is someone else's problem. We need to do a better job of educating ourselves on the connection between race and hunger; and the link of history and Jim Crow to the racial income wealth gap. There is a growing awareness of the challenges systemic racism presents in our society, and we need to hold ourselves and lawmakers accountable to continuing education on that history, as well as to center our public policy on the needs of families. Advocacy should extend beyond a public display of support or acknowledgement, and we need to vote for policies that make it easier to access food, affordable housing, and equitable educational opportunities. The panel affirmed that society must transition from rhetoric to substantive policies that make our communities more equitable.

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### RESOURCES

Article: [People of Color are at Greater Risk of COVID-19. Systemic Racism in the Food System Plays a Role](#)



*Food apartheid and economic inequality are among the factors leading to high rates of infections and deaths of Black and brown Americans.*

Report: [How Much Has Food Insecurity Risen? Evidence from the Census Household Survey](#)



*The COVID-19 health emergency has led to a sharp economic slowdown, with soaring unemployment and spikes in need as illustrated by news reports of miles-long lines at food pantries. In this report, we estimate current rates of food insecurity and the extent to which food insecurity rates have increased in national data and by the state using the Census's Household Pulse Survey.*

Article: [Stark Racial Disparities Emerge as Families Struggle to get Enough Food](#)



*The pandemic has left Black and Hispanic households much worse off than white families. Nearly four in 10 Black and Hispanic households with children are struggling to feed their families during the coronavirus pandemic — a dramatic spike that is exacerbating racial inequities and potentially threatening the health of millions of young Americans.*

Report: [Applying a Racial Equity Lens to End Hunger](#)



*Applying Racial Equity to U.S. Federal Nutrition Assistance Programs provides first-ever analysis to identify ways key nutrition programs can apply racial equity principles so that people of color are no longer disproportionately at risk of food security.*

Report: [The Role of the Federal Child Nutrition Programs in Improving Health and Well-Being](#)



*Poverty, food insecurity, and poor nutrition have detrimental impacts on the health and well-being of children in the short and long terms. One critical strategy to address these issues is connecting vulnerable children and their families to Child Nutrition Programs*

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### POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS

[The Hope Center](#)



*The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. We believe that students are humans first. Their basic needs for food, affordable housing, transportation, and childcare, and their mental health are central conditions for learning.*

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### CALL TO ACTION LIST

*"We have to move from a performative wokeness to policy wokeness"- John B. King Jr.*

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People often ask, what is the next step? If there is a right way to take the step, or if there is a formula. There is not, but we can all do something. Individual actions suggested by the panelists include the following:

- Reframe the conversation: Ask, “What do families need in order to sustain and thrive?” When we ask this question, it becomes a maximum, not a minimum. Policies, then, can be developed from the perspective of families and not State or congressional requirements.
- Vote! Use your voice to influence substantive policy.
- Hold elected officials at every level accountable for supporting equal food access. To learn more about bills needing your support, and to take action with No Kid Hungry, visit <https://www.nokidhungry.org/what-we-do/advocacy>

We hope you will continue the conversation in your organizations and in your community. Please engage with us, and let us know how you are keeping the conversation going. Thoughts on future topics for this series are also welcome. Reach out to us at [foodjustice@strength.org](mailto:foodjustice@strength.org) and learn more about the initiative and upcoming sessions at <https://www.shareourstrength.org/program/food-justice-series>

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**Share Our Strength** is ending hunger and poverty – in the United States and abroad. Through proven, effective campaigns like No Kid Hungry and Cooking Matters, we connect people who care to ideas that work.

<https://www.shareourstrength.org>



**Food & Society** at the Aspen Institute brings together public health leaders, policymakers, researchers, farmers, chefs, food makers, and entrepreneurs to find practical solutions to food system challenges and inequities. The common goal is to help people of all income levels eat better and more healthful diets—and to enjoy them bite by bite.

<https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/food-and-society-program/>