



# Illinois Hunger Coalition

Working to End Hunger in Illinois since 1988

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Transcript of Diane Doherty's remarks, March 19, 2009,  
at press conference for the Campaign for Illinois' Future, Springfield, IL

“One night recently as I was leaving my office, our Hunger Hotline rang and I picked up the phone and there was silence on the other end and I said, I’m here, take your time, I can listen. And a few minutes later a man choked out his story and his name was Bill, 53 years old, he’d been working since he was 12 years old, and in June of last year the company he worked for in Lombard, Illinois, told him that they were having financial trouble and asked him if he could work for free. He went back and talked to his wife. She said, ‘We have a 13 year old daughter, we have savings, in this economy it’s best if you just keep working.’

“Well, to make a long story short, the company went chapter 11 and the company that took over, that bought them out, didn’t assume their debt and so he went to the unemployment office to apply for unemployment insurance and he was told he wasn’t eligible because the company had not been paying into unemployment and they had not been paying their federal and state taxes.

“He’s just one of the thousands of calls that we’re receiving through our 1-800 Hunger Hotline [1-800-359-2163]. We’ve had a 60% increase in the number of callers to the hotline and our pantries—we have over 600 member pantries throughout the state. Some [of our pantries] are seeing increases up to 70%, sometimes higher.

“And I thought a lot when I heard about an executive who got a \$1.4 million bonus and we all know about those guys. It was interesting to me it was 1.4 because right now in the state of IL there’s 1.4 million people that are on food stamps. One in ten people in the state of IL are on food stamps right now. And if it weren’t for the caseworkers in the DHS offices, we wouldn’t even have the over 70% of the people who are eligible on food stamps who are on [them].

“But that’s only part of the story. The other part of the story is that some of our local DHS offices have caseload sizes up to 2,000. In most states it’s less than 300. Even the [IDHS] department says that the caseload sizes should not be more than 600 households, and the average is well over 800 in the state, but . . . we have some that are up over 2,000.

“We need a tax increase to help support our state employees. We have one of the lowest—in fact we are the lowest—for the number of state employees per capita, and yet . . . three years ago before the problem got even worse, [we had] close to half



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a million people who suffer from food insecurity, which means they don't have regular access to food. Many of those are children, at least more than half of those are children.

“We always say the food stamp program is the first line of defense against hunger [and we don't] have enough caseworkers . . . The “Bills” of the world, when they go to a DHS office, they have to come back day after day after day. He had to swallow his pride and go back. We're not going to be able to meet the demand unless we have more workers in those local offices. They're finding that this new group of people who are unemployed, the “Bills” of the world who have never ever gone without working, have never asked for assistance, when they come into an office, it takes twice as long to do an interview with them and try to help them get the services that they need.

“And this impacts our caseworkers that work with families where there is child abuse and we know, we have decades and decades of research that shows when the economy worsens, when workers lose their jobs, when people are suffering economically, we see greater number of cases of domestic violence, we see an increase in child abuse and neglect. So I don't know how we can walk away from those folks.

“The pain is palpable.

“We have an office in Marion, Illinois and [one] up in Chicago, and part of our staff is here with me today. And I look at the staff at the end of the day and I see the pain and suffering in their eyes from the pain and the suffering in the community.

“And again, we know that these programs work. The other thing is that we need economic stimulus in our low-income communities and food stamps are 100% federally funded. So for every \$1 in food stamps, that turns into about \$2 in the local economy. So for just one month recently, we brought in \$348 million into local communities through the food stamp program but we will not be able to meet the increased demand or even meet the people that were eligible prior to that unless we are able to increase the number of staff at DHS offices.

“We have less people working in DHS offices than we did in 2001 and we can't deal with that any longer. So we applaud the governor for looking to increase taxes. We believe that we need to all pay our fair share because we are not the people of AIG who can go to golf outings and get bonuses. We are the working people of the state of IL who need this support. Thank you.”

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