



Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice  
*UU advocacy in the nation's capital*



## Write Here! Write Now!

**Advocacy Corps will hand-deliver letters on February 11, 2020**

**Contact:** [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org) or 703-786-5206

*as of 2/6/2020*

**Send Letters - Organizers:** Emailed by Mon., Feb. 10 by 12 pmET to [advocacy@uusj.org](mailto:advocacy@uusj.org)

## Tell your U.S. Representative to Address Food Insecurity for our Military Families

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**Why are we writing - now?** Our Unitarian Universalist Principles compel us to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of individuals. Our 2011 Statement of Conscience compels us to support the basic human requirements of food and nutrition for all. Many families of servicemembers, who serve to protect and defend our nation, are struggling to put food on the table. **We believe that no one should face food insecurity in our wealthy nation.**

**Why now?** A UUSJ partner, MAZON -- a Jewish response to hunger -- alerted us to this long-standing issue of food insecurity among active military and veterans. The administration and the Department of Defense (DOD) rejected a proposed provision within the recently-passed 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that would have addressed this problem. So now **we must push for a new solution.** MAZON works with the National Military Family Association which knows the problem firsthand. UUSJ agreed to partner on this issue that debilitates military families and contributes to reduced national readiness.

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**Background:** Thousands of military families in this country experience food insecurity. This is an underreported reality. A 2016 Government Accountability Office Report revealed that the DOD does not even know the extent of servicemembers' use of food assistance programs. A DOD survey provides some information on servicemembers' use of food assistance programs such as SNAP, but is of limited value because it does not inquire about the use of other food assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program. No DOD office monitors food assistance needs. Without more complete data, DOD will not be able to measure fully the prevalence of food insecurity among servicemembers. While difficult to quantify, it is clear that **food insecurity is a significant problem for many military families; indeed, there are food pantries on or near almost every military base in the country.** See this July 19, 2019 NBC News story, which includes a video: [Why are many of America's military families going hungry?](#)

On July 16, 2019, in support of the **Military Hunger Prevention Act (H.R.3801)** co-sponsor Rep. Don Young (R-AK-At Large) said, "DOD's response to this problem has been, to put it politely, lacking. Their description of this problem as minimal and their suggestion that these members take financial literacy training is not only insulting and condescending, it also does nothing to help the problem. If anything, it helps to exacerbate the problem by keeping the barriers of shame and stigma to assistance intact."

The Military Hunger Prevention Act of 2019 (H.R.3801) was introduced on July 17, 2019, by Reps. Susan Davis (D-CA-53) and Don Young (R-AK-At Large). **This bill is a common sense solution to address this long-standing issue in military compensation policy that has left thousands of military families—often lower ranking enlisted service members with multiple dependents—struggling with food insecurity.** This unacceptable situation is the result of a technical error that has prevented struggling military families from qualifying for needed federal nutrition assistance benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Many military families find themselves ineligible for SNAP benefits because their Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) is counted as income when determining program eligibility.

The bill establishes a new basic "Military Family Basic Needs Allowance" for certain eligible regular members of the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force, with basic pay set at or below 130% of the Federal Poverty Level. This will better serve the many military families that experience food insecurity and struggle to cover their basic needs. It would also address the unique challenges and expenses associated with military service, such as moving frequently. The program will be structured to eliminate common barriers to assistance, including shame, stigma, and fear of retribution.

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**UU Grounding:** UUs have passed two Statements of Conscience, Ethical Eating: Food & Environmental Justice (2011) and Escalating Economic Inequity (2017) that are directly relevant to this issue. Both Statements call UUs to address the problem of hunger in this country.

**(see other side for Key Message and ASK, Suggested Talking Points and Sample Letter)**

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**Key Message and ASK: The US House should act to the address food insecurity of active military members and consider supporting the Military Hunger Prevention Act (H.R.3801).** If your Representative is already a co-sponsor of the bill, provide thanks. You'll find a list of co-sponsors at ([www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov)). (The only Republican is Rep. Don Young.) Urge your Representative to remedy this shameful problem that hurts military families and contributes to reduced readiness.

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## Suggested Talking Points & Facts

*[Use your own examples, tell your story or draw on these points]*

- **This is an affordable problem to fix -- the estimate is that this would cost less than \$45 million annually, which is staggering in comparison to the DOD's budget of \$750 billion.** *"Our service members and their families shouldn't be forced to rely on these programs in the first place – but at the very least, we should ensure that those who are struggling have access to this safety net."* Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)
- **Military families say financial issues are one of their top stressors.** This is higher than civilian families (13% vs. 7%), according to recent research by Blue Star Families. Nearly 9 in 10 active service members and 84% of spouses or partners have worries about personal finances, according to a report by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling,
- **Unique challenges and costs associated with military service make it more difficult to take care of a family** -- including frequent moves, high rates of spousal unemployment, lack of nearby family support, and limited access to affordable child care.
- **One-third of military children at DOD-run schools in the U.S. in 2018-19 were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch,** according to a Pentagon report.
- **Food pantries operate on or near every military installation in the U.S.** Military families have been forced to turn in desperation to food pantries, especially in expensive cities like San Diego.

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## Sample Letter to Your Representative

*[Use your own words. Speak from your heart -- this is only a sample letter.]*

*[Today's date]*

Dear Representative \_\_\_\_\_,

Why are so many military families going hungry? I am a Unitarian Universalist from *[optional: name of congregation and location]*. Guided by my faith, I believe that we must address the shameful problem facing mostly our younger, lower-ranking enlisted military members and their families who are experiencing food insecurity. I'm writing to express support for the Military Hunger Prevention Act (H.R.3801). This bill would provide a solution to a technical problem that has been ignored for too long. It would allow military families experiencing food insecurity to qualify for needed federal nutrition assistance benefits like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

*[Insert personal experience, situation you are aware of, what makes you concerned about this issue or pick one talking point in your own words, to support the main message.]*

I urge you to address food insecurity for military families and consider support of H.R.3801. No one—especially those who make significant sacrifices for our country—deserves to go hungry. I urge you to support this common sense solution to a long-overlooked problem.

*[Adapt a closing such as...]* Thank you for your consideration of my [concerns/story]. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely, *[YOUR NAME and COMPLETE ADDRESS must be included to be counted - proves that you are a constituent. And include your EMAIL optional-some offices like to respond by email.]*

(See other side for Why We Are Writing - Now?, Background, and UU Grounding)