



Northern Illinois Food Bank Holds Press Conference with Elected Officials to Address the Crisis of Military Hunger

One in four active-duty military service members experience food insecurity

GENEVA, IL (October 17, 2024)—Today, Northern Illinois Food Bank hosted a press conference at the Midwest Veterans Closet in North Chicago, featuring elected officials and community leaders, to highlight the alarming issue of food insecurity affecting active-duty military families. The event aimed to address barriers that prevent service members from qualifying for vital assistance programs like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) and to propose legislative changes to alleviate this crisis.

Joining the Food Bank were Congressman Brad Schneider, State Senator Julie Morrison, State Representative Bob Morgan, State Representative Rita Mayfield, Representative from Senator Johnson’s office, and County Board Chair Sandy Hart, who collectively underscored the urgency for action and support.

“No one who has served and sacrificed for our country should ever have to worry about nourishing themselves or their loved ones. Yet, one in four active-duty service members experiences food insecurity, a rate 2.5 times higher than their civilian counterparts, (Source: [USDA](#))” stated Robert Desio, Manager of Public Policy and Benefits at Northern Illinois Food Bank. “Less than 0.5% of active-duty service members stationed in the U.S. received SNAP benefits in 2019, highlighting the urgent need for reform. (Source: [Department of Defense](#))”

For the past three years, Northern Illinois Food Bank has been granted support from Feeding America through RTX to enhance food distributions and advocacy efforts aimed at reducing food insecurity among active military personnel. In partnership with the Midwest Veterans Closet, the Food Bank directly serves and advocates for local military families facing hunger.

Julie Yurko, President and CEO of Northern Illinois Food Bank, emphasizes the organization's commitment in a statement, “These families have given so much for our country, and it is our responsibility to ensure they have access to nutritious food. We need stronger support—both through direct assistance and policy changes—to dismantle the

barriers that prevent military families from accessing essential resources. Together with our partners like Midwest Veterans Closet, our elected officials, and Feeding America, we are dedicated to advocating for change and ensuring that no military family goes hungry.”

Following the press conference, attendees participated in a monthly mobile market distribution where volunteers from Great Lakes Naval Base and New Trier High School helped distribute food. Each mobile market is funded by a grant from Feeding America and RTX, and serves over 150 military families.

“At RTX, we are committed to supporting our military service members,” said Randy Bumps, vice president of communications and corporate affairs, RTX. “Partnering with Feeding America in their military hunger advocacy initiative is just one way we strive to give back to those who have dedicated their lives to serving our country. We believe in ensuring that no military family faces food insecurity, and we’re honored to be part of this vital mission.”

Service members can also receive free groceries through Northern Illinois Food Bank’s My Pantry Express online food pantry with free pickups every Wednesday at a location less than 10 minutes from Great Lakes Naval Station.

Service members who live off base receive a Basic Allowance for Housing to help cover costs. This allowance counts as income in the calculation to determine SNAP eligibility, disqualifying many service members from accessing SNAP benefits.

Northern Illinois Food Bank, along with Feeding America and elected officials are urging Congress to support the bipartisan legislation from Sens. Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, that will help more service members access SNAP benefits by excluding the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) from the gross income calculation for SNAP eligibility.

“Every veteran, service member, and really every human being should have peace of mind that they can put food on the table for themselves and their kids each day. Unfortunately, that’s not the reality we live in and food insecurity for veterans and many others is not only real, but also prevalent,” said Congressman Brad Schneider (IL-10). “In the US Congress, I’m working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to break down the barriers that cause hunger and food insecurity among our current and former service members. But in the meantime, we need to make sure those who serve our country have the meals and resources they need. I’m so grateful for the incredible work that the Northern Illinois Food Bank and Midwest Veterans Closet do to feed and support the veterans and military families in our community.”

Elected officials also urged Congress to address food insecurity in the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act by including provisions to expand eligibility for the Basic Needs

Allowance (BNA) for military families. If Congress were to make these changes, the impact would be significant. More than 20,000 additional service members would be eligible for the BNA, providing them with much-needed support and hope for a better future.

To learn more about Northern Illinois Food Bank's advocacy program, please visit [Advocate - Northern Illinois Food Bank \(solvehungertoday.org\)](#).

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About Northern Illinois Food Bank

For over 40 years, Northern Illinois Food Bank has been dedicated to solving hunger and empowering neighbors. Our vision at [Northern Illinois Food Bank](#) is for everyone in Northern Illinois to have the food they need to thrive. A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and proud member of [Feeding America](#), we serve our neighbors in 13 counties with dignity, equity and convenience, providing 250,000 meals a day. We bring together manufacturers, local and corporate grocers, area farmers, corporations, foundations, and individuals who donate food and funding, and each week nearly 1,000 volunteers help us evaluate, repack, and distribute food. We also proudly partner with more than 900 food pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, and youth and senior feeding programs to provide nutritious food and resources. Our distribution centers are located in Geneva, Lake Forest, Rockford and Joliet.