“Creating legislation and system change requires a personal change as well. Asking anyone who benefits from the system to change it is going to be hard, because they don’t want to give up their place in power. The first step in this change is for the non-poor to realize that every single human deserves food, clothes, healthcare, and other resources. Not only the bare minimum, but GOOD food, clothes, and healthcare as well. See us as equals.”

~Participant of Impacted Community Review Process, June, 2021

Organized and Convened by
Resources for Organizing and Social Change
www.resourcesforsocialchange.org

Report as requested
By the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

Submitted, June 24, 2021

Impacted Community Recommendations & Review
On the Interim Report for
Ending Hunger in Maine By 2030

Report as requested
By the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry

Submitted, June 24, 2021

Community Participants:

This review was co-created by poor and working class people in Maine as organized by Resources for Organizing and Social Change.

Project Leads and Other Resources:

Sass Linneken, Project Organizer and Facilitator
Executive Director, Resources for Organizing and Social Change
www.resourcesforsocialchange.org

Dee Clarke, Project Organizer and Facilitator
Executive Director, Survivor Speak, USA
www.survivorspeakusa.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Table of Contents……3

Approach……..4

Method……..6

Community Demographics……7

Nature and Scale of Problem……8

Review of Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine By 2030……16

General, First Reactions……17

Feedback for Ending Hunger Priorities……19

Supported Priority Ideas……22

What is Missing from the Report……...22

Community Generated Solutions for Ending Hunger……...26

Note About Community Recommendations……..29

Supplemental Community Contributions……30

Approach

In late 2020, the Department of Agriculture, Conservation & Forestry (ACF Dept.) approached Resources for Organizing and Social Change (ROSC) to ask us if we might be willing to organize poor and working-class people we are in community with to take part in a series of strategizing sessions around the priorities laid out in the Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine By 2030[1]. ROSC declined this proposal, considering it to be a request to perpetuate tokenism[2] since poor and working class people were not initially invited as a specific group to help create the priorities in the report, though they will be impacted by them. We were not only unwilling to tokenize our community, we also did not feel it would be a worthwhile use of time as social change cannot occur in a meaningful, or productive way by strategizing priorities that are not created and informed by the people impacted by the issue attempting to be solved. This problem is further compounded by the reality that not including people most significantly impacted in setting the priorities means the only people at the deciding table were those who continue to play a role in keeping these inequities in place.

ROSC offered instead to organize people to review the Interim Report and offer feedback on its priorities, and to offer original ideas that may be missing because of its lacking perspective from communities of people who are currently experiencing poverty, hunger and food insecurity. Additionally, the ACF Dept. agreed this amended model could include the possibility of integrating some of the recommendations generated during the ROSC-led community review into the larger process of strategic planning, known as Phase II, which will follow ROSC's review process, and will be designed and then facilitated by Fio Partners throughout the summer months of 2021. Participants of the ROSC-led review would also be invited to take part in the larger Phase II process as the ACF Dept. initially requested. The ACF Dept. and ROSC met several times between November of 2020 through March of 2021 to come to a clear point of agreement on the details of this process, and ROSC was officially contracted to take on the project in April of 2021. We were tasked with producing the findings of our review by mid-June of 2021 to be sure a final draft from the entire process, including Phase II would be submitted in compatibility with the schedule of the state's congressional session.

Between May 17th and June 14th, five virtual meetings were held over Zoom where participants came together each week after reading the report, to discuss different aspects of it, with particular focus on the priorities as listed on pages 13-16 of the Interim Report. We also spent time discussing participants' past and present experiences with poverty, hunger, and navigating the safety net systems in Maine and outside of Maine. A member of the ACF Dept. sat in on four out of the five meetings to scribe for the group.

[1] https://www.maine.gov/dacf/about/endhunger/docs/ending-hunger-in-maine-ld1159-v3.pdf
[2] https://results4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Tokenization-Handout-and-Worksheet.pdf

Participants were reimbursed for expenses incurred engaging in the project through stipends funded from a grant made by the Elmina B. Sewell Foundation.[3] ROSC could not have carried the financial cost of paying out those stipends without that support, and without an ability to pay those stipends we would not have engaged with this process because the emotional lift impacted people need to make when educating power holders about their trauma is significant and does not come without a cost to them in more ways than just the material ones for which they were being reimbursed for.

[3] https://www.sewallfoundation.org/

Method

To preserve the most authentic voice of the impacted community's participant process, rather than paraphrasing thoughts and ideas that came out of these conversations, what you will find in this report are collections of supporting quotes from various participants, organized by the overarching themes that emerged regarding:

- lived experiences of poverty and hunger
- overall reactions to the Interim Report as a plan
- feedback on the specific priority pieces of the Interim Report
- feelings about what was missing from the Interim Report
- Ideas for how to address poverty at its root

We felt including specific, critical feedback on the components of the Interim Report was equally important to offering insights on the issue of ending hunger so differences in how power holders view the problem and solutions, versus the vantage point of people being impacted by the problem were highlighted. Those differences are what spell out the continued oppression of the people who are behind the numbers and data in the Interim Report.

You will also find here a robust list of recommendations we see as effective ways to get at the root of poverty and hunger. The recommendations in the list go deeper than addressing lack of access to food. They attempt to address needs for structural change that will eliminate the risks of poverty where they start. Hunger is a symptom, not a root cause. Poverty and a racist system that exploits and neglects its people are the root causes.

We chose this model of delivery, using direct quotes from our meeting notes, because people without power are so infrequently given a voice in spaces with those who do wield power. We wanted the time participants spent tapping into their experiences of poverty trauma for this work to be accomplished to not only count for the purposes of improving their circumstances and those of others, but also for the purpose of simply being heard in their own words.

Notes taken during our meetings were entered into a shared document each week that participants were able to access to offer edits as they felt were necessary for safety/privacy, and for purposes of accuracy and clarity. This report was also entered into a shared document and has been collaboratively built with various participants adding thoughts and suggesting edits throughout the life of the drafting process.

We are describing the method used to engage this process because *how* you do something is equally as important as getting it done. We want to underline how this process intentionally honored and invited the input of all participants throughout every single step because we know impacted people will bring as much useful thinking into the room as anyone else who is engaging here in a work role. We also did not want to filter participants' voices and thoughts through the perspectives of the Project Leads without a chance to see those interpretations and offer course correction wherever needed, though, to be clear, both Project Leads also came to this process with robust experiences of their own with both poverty and hunger.

Community Demographics

Project participants consisted of 17 people with long lived experiences of poverty and hunger, many coming from an intergenerational line of poverty that spans back a minimum of two to three generations. Participants ranged in age from late teens to early seventies. Of the 17 participants, three were white and the rest were Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC). Participants included transgender women and men, cisgender women and men, nonbinary people, two-spirit people, and other people from the LGBTQ+ community. Some people were employed, some were not, and many were living with varied disabilities. Participants also included single parents, people experiencing domestic violence, people who escaped sex trafficking, people who were formerly incarcerated, and people who have survived chronic homelessness. Because of the risk and fears of retaliation for people who are receiving public assistance, the identities of these participants will not be listed in this report.

The demographics of the participants are being noted because **the voices of impacted people matter and the people who gathered for this work hold varying intersections within their identities that force them to endure different forms of oppression as a result of a system rooted in and operating through a model of white supremacy.** This means the majority of the participants of this group while dealing with poverty and hunger are also grappling with varying forms of violent colonization, racism, classism, ableism, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, ageism, and a multitude of other forms of oppression. Systemic, institutionalized discrimination perpetuates at every level of government policy and place of power, from the municipal level all the way out to the state level, including through the people who work for safety nets like General Assistance, DHHS, Housing Agencies, throughout the nonprofit sector, and others. **These experiences of oppression, which are intersecting with the economic oppression already being sustained, not only compound the negative outcomes of poverty and hunger, they fuel them.**

Important demographic missing from this report: Because ROSC was not contracted for this project with enough lead time or resources for logistical needs around document translation for use of the Interim Report and other language supports necessary for making the project participation accessible to non-English speaking people, immigrants who recently came into the country and are holding asylum seeker or refugee status were not directly outreached to for participation in this part of the Ending Hunger in Maine By 2030 project. This is an enormous loss to this process. People with asylum seeker status are barred from working[4] upon arriving in the USA, and are disallowed from seeking financial help from most places outside of municipal level General Assistance, which are overtaxed and often difficult to access resources. Because of this lack of representation, the unique struggles faced by these communities are not reflected in this report, which we feel compelled to point out in hopes it will bring attention to this area of obvious need of focus.

[4] https://www.cvt.org/AsylumFact6

The Nature and Scale of the Problem

"In Maine you can get fat on food, but die poor."

~Participant of Impacted Community Review Process, June, 2021

The Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030, defined "Hunger, End of" with a disclaimer that entirely eliminating hunger is in their purview, impossible.[5] Their definition pointed out that Maine's Millenium Commission on Hunger and Food Security[6] suggested that risks of hunger will always exist because, "changes in household structure, health conditions, employment situation, and other related circumstances cause interruptions in income, mobility, and access to adequate amounts of nutritious food". While those examples can impact individual circumstances, a glaring reality of context is not present in this statement, which is that none of the causes of risk are pointed at the collective systems we operate with, and rather point to the individual circumstances of each person struggling. This implies poverty and hunger are individual failings as opposed to failings of our collective system.

For people who are impacted by poverty and hunger, the question is less about the household structure, and more about the lack of affordable housing. The question is less about the health condition itself, and more about a system that does not provide healthcare as a human right, and proper support for people who are grappling with debilitating conditions. The question is less about interruptions to wages and other sources of income, and more about why we are living in such a wealthy country without having a baseline standard of living that provides people with what they need to survive at a minimum, nevermind what they may need to thrive.

The question becomes what the point of a collective system is, if not to care for the collective.

Below are themes that emerged in our community conversations when people were asked what the *root causes* of hunger and poverty were, and what they felt needed to be further explored because it was either not mentioned in the Interim Report or not adequately addressed in it. We will explore more specific feedback on the Interim Report itself and its priorities further into this report but the following section offers some baseline of what people experiencing hunger and poverty know are the root causes to their struggles. This is being offered to not only inform but to bring some humanity to the numbers you see in the data. This list is not to be interpreted as exhaustive. Some of the statements here are general, and others are in direct response to something read or perceived about the Interim Report. The other reason this is being offered is because the Interim Report spent a lot of time talking about the numbers in the data but very little time on the actual reasons those numbers are what they are in a real world context. Trying to fix a problem without exploring why it exists makes it impossible to know where energy will be best spent to find productive solutions. The following offers the "why" by the people who are represented by the data.

---

[5] https://www.maine.gov/dacf/about/endhunger/docs/ending-hunger-in-maine-ld1159-v3.pdf
[6] https://digitalmaine.com/spo_docs/21/

1) Racism is a root cause of hunger/poverty

Supporting quote # 1: "Our whole system has been built on a very racist system and in the beginning all the people were caring about was keeping a particular group of white men in power, not caring about the women and definitely not Black people, that wasn't going to happen. And still today, all our institutions, our state systems, are built on this historical institution of racism."

Supporting quote #2: "...how can we talk about this without talking about racism? How do you solve a thing without naming it?! If they don't see how the white supremacy is at work… I'm tired of listening. It's in this middle ground where you're not too silenced, but how much do you speak up because that's going to hurt you as well. It's super depressing but I stay happy. I don't want to tell my doctors I'm depressed because it can be used against you as a Black person."

Supporting quote #3: "Racism speaks in this bullet point [access to education] as well. A lot of people have gotten their education and been qualified for higher paying jobs, but because of discrimination they don't get hired, or they get fired. They're just ignoring the actual systemic issues."

Supporting quote #4: "All the focus on people getting more education, but redlining put Black and Brown people into condensed areas and then dropped their property values, and our school funding is dependent on property taxes. Redlining is illegal but we never changed that funding model for education. So, if we don't want people to be hungry and we want to talk about education as a way to address root causes, why aren't we talking about how we fund education to start with? And how it's racist?"

Supporting quote #5: "I hear a lot about the root cause of forms of oppression and I always go back to white supremacy because that's what it is. I get told I'm attacking people. I just think it's a way of silencing Black women further. Most of what I have to say is going to be directed back to the root cause which I see as white supremacy."

Supporting quote #6: "I've been feeling really bogged down about racism and dealing with it daily and it's been getting to me. I'm just trying to look to my elders and see how they deal with that … that rage that we carry. How do we deal with that? ...every system is based off of racism and it sickens me because I have a little boy that's Black and I want to give him all the hopes and dreams. We were walking around and seeing all these houses filled with white people and a lot of Black people don't even get to dream of that. This country has just been built off of lies and it's getting to me a little bit."

2) The benefits cliff (people losing benefits from one program because of access to another or small increases in income) keeps people struggling and hungry

Supporting quote #1: "When you're on food stamps and any kind of assistance, and you're trying to get a job and level up, if you get a job, you get all the assistance taken away. If you go and get a crappy little job, they take everything away from you and you are still stuck."

Supporting quote #2: "Why do we consider public assistance as income? I'd love to see a central application that went across all the state programs and whatever that makes you eligible for, you can get, and even if you qualify for two programs, they wouldn't impact each other. You'd pull people out of poverty so much quicker and we'd rely on the programs for much less time."

Supporting quote #3: "…you make a little progress in one area and then they start taking other things away. Now I'm at a point where they've taken away more than I've gained, so now I'm going backwards. How does that work? That math doesn't add up. That's frustrating."

Supporting quote #4: "It makes me think that the solutions that are offered by the powers that be…it's all about work and once you get there we are going to penalize you."

3) Making things means tested instead of universal keeps people from getting help who need it because the poverty line is too low

***Supporting quote #1*:** "This just reminds me of when my mother used to work at the hospital as a housecleaner, we couldn't even get food stamps, but all the money went to the rent and the lights. It was really rough for my mom."

***Supporting quote #2*:** "I worked and didn't qualify for SNAP; we moved all the time and I was going to get kicked out of my apartment. I remember one particular summer and one organization came to the neighborhood and all you had to do was show your food stamp card to get sneakers. And I didn't have one, and my sons were the only people in the neighborhood that didn't get sneakers and they were so mad at me, they didn't speak to me for a week. I should have just left the job to get welfare."

Supporting quote #3: "I was thinking about basic income, what a difference it would be to just know that something is coming in without ticking off all the boxes, what a game changer."

Supporting quote #4: When asked what was missing from the report: "Poverty line."

4) Generational poverty is a root cause of poverty/hunger

Supporting quote: "…you talked about generational poverty. My mother was poor, my grandmother was poor. I didn't do too much better, not because I didn't have high hopes and big dreams, but just because of what I was able to access. Hopefully my kids are going to be okay, but that generational poverty is something else."

5) Environmental degradation impacts access to traditional food supplies

Supporting quote: "I would also like to point out that there is also that 'culturally appropriate' term there. And what is culturally appropriate for Indigenous people is our food that we've been eating for generations which is now too polluted to eat. The state of Maine is instrumental in making sure we can't eat any of that food, it's too polluted."

6) Barriers due to lack of transportation impact ability to thrive and stay healthy

Supporting quote #1: "Is insurance the only barrier to access to a physician? What about physical accessibility? Can I actually even get there?"

Supporting quote #2: "My entire family only has one car at a time because they're constantly breaking down, and the bus around here barely exists. That combined with all the physical disabilities in my family, it's really hard for us to get around."

Supporting quote #3: "When I didn't have a car, I could only get food at Walgreens because that's what was within walking distance. I couldn't get produce. I also had to take an ambulance to the hospital for a chest infection because I couldn't get there. So, that costs the state money."

Supporting quote #4: "They [the authors of the Interim Report] mention transportation being an issue but don't talk about how they are going to tackle that issue. Not having transportation makes it so I can't get to the ER but I have a chronic condition. Support systems aren't always available and I can't afford an ambulance."

Supporting quote #5: "You need transportation to even take the driver's test to get your license. It also costs money to take the test. Driver's Ed is also very expensive. Getting your license should be free."

7) Inefficiency and errors at the agency level cause repeated problems

Supporting quote #1*:* "I applied for rental assistance the week it came out in March. I've been calling them twice a week. I had to show them I was getting evicted. Otherwise, I haven't heard anything. Now I owe $4,000 to my landlord. No one calls me back once."

Supporting quote #2 (in response to #1): "You're talking about the poverty tax. All that time we have to spend. I had to call for hours over and over and over again to get furniture after I was out of the shelter. That's time when you're working that you're taking out of your lunch, and then you're getting bad reviews because you're tired while you're doing your job."

Supporting quote #3: "…they lose your paperwork and you have to redo it. That can feel like a whole huge mountain. I've lost services for that before."

8) Being poor means possibly losing your children along with your assistance, and it also impacts the foster children's economic potential

Supporting quote #1: "When they take away your kids, they take away your assistance too. You lose your housing voucher for enough bedrooms, you lose your food stamps. And then they tell you it's up to you to find an apartment with enough bedrooms for the kids if you want to get them back. It makes it impossible to get them back, and it keeps you poor."

Supporting quote #2: "They wanted to take my children because I couldn't find a place to stay."

Supporting quote #3: "They give money and stuff to the foster family instead of the family who is having problems. Instead of just taking the kids they could give that money and support to the family first and see if it keeps them from needing to take the kids."

Supporting quote #4: "Often kids age out of foster care and end up in youth homeless shelters, until they age out of there and end up in adult shelters. They are separated from their family, on top of dealing with foster care, and lots of traumatic things; these youth end up missing meeting some developmental milestones. They live in a chaotic state and a lot of the skills that are needed to move on and try and build a life are missing, so they're surviving in chronic poverty and homelessness. It's really difficult."

Supporting quote #5: "A lot of youth that were in foster care age out of DHHS custody, so they lose that support, nevermind what the youth center/Longcreek did to them."

Supporting quote #6: "I have a lot of friends like 'CPS came and took my kids'. I don't understand the state of ME sometimes."

Supporting quote #7: "They only pick some kids and some families. It's unreal. If your family has a reputation of whatever… that doesn't define who the next family member is. How does that define you?!"

9) Applying for help is needlessly difficult and intimidating

Supporting quote #1: "I feel that applying for SNAP and Mainecare is really difficult. I've been waiting many times, waiting, putting in my application and they never renew my stuff. And I have a son so it's difficult. In Boston when you went to an ER you got your health insurance …it was connected to SNAP. It's very difficult, that one office in Portland anyways ...the barriers. The bus only runs every other hour, so people that don't have access to transportation…"

Supporting quote #2: "Applying for rental assistance is intimidating: lack of experience navigating public assistance. I've also been told all my life that relying on government assistance is dangerous, it may become unreliable."

***Supporting quote #3*:** "One thing that I want to say is that the thing that frustrates me the most is that the systems are specifically designed so that almost no one can access them. I used to kind of say that jokingly, no this is entirely intentional. Some people may not think about it as intentional, but it is a kind of eugenics. It makes me incredibly angry and I just want that recorded in the notes. This is definitely on purpose. I don't know how to fix it, but I want to just yell it."

10) Help is offered at inaccessible times

Supporting quote #1: "Some of my neighbors work and they still can't provide enough for their families. And they go to the churches around here. I've been speaking to the mothers and they have to go to the food pantries, but they can't get in because of their work hours…10:30am-2:00pm and that's it for the pantry hours. Those are mothers work hours. There are three mothers in this property that I live at that are going through those problems. Can they close for an hour and open up after 5:00pm for an hour?"

Supporting quote #2: "Some of my neighbors by the time they get there it's all gone."

11) Healthy and nutritious food is unaffordable or there are barriers to growing it

Supporting quote #1: "I'm not eating healthy. I can't eat healthy if I can't afford healthy food."

Supporting quote #2: "To eat healthy it's an arm and a leg. You can't afford that when you're on food stamps."

Supporting quote #3: "Sometimes there are barriers to us growing our own food. I used to live in the projects in Bangor, I got in trouble for having a garden that was bigger than 4x8 feet. I wrote a letter and I didn't hear back for two years. Later I found out that they had doubled the garden size to 8x8. We were not allowed to grow food in our front yards, only ornamentals."

Supporting quote #4: "I got written up for having tomato and pepper plants in buckets on my porch a few years ago. The way they regulate poverty, stuff like that in the projects, they fine you for being in the wrong parking spot, not having the right trash bag. If you were late for your rent, you got a fine. Wow! It's because I can't afford it, now I owe more."

Supporting quote #5: "My thing is that I wish the government could make food in the grocery store more affordable. I like meat, but fuel prices, gas goes up, food goes up. It costs more to transport the groceries, the milk. Everything goes up. I think the government should figure out a way to put a cap on prices, milk, eggs, everything. Your food stamps won't last you."

Supporting quote #6: "Food stamps are better than nothing, but they don't do a whole hell of a lot if the food at the grocery store is still too damn expensive."

12) Food waste through subsidy or grocery waste is a problem

Supporting quote: "I remember my mom scraping off the food to get to the not-moldy part. My mom just didn't throw it away. It brings me back to the amount of food that I know is being wasted… It never ceases to boggle my mind when I first became aware of how much food is wasted that the government actually pays farmers and farms to not produce food."

13) Being dehumanized for being poor by institutions is a problem

Supporting quote #1: "I was also in foster care for 9 years and then when I had my first kid I had to go to General Assistance here in Portland, and they made the same kind of reference 'you're not working and you want us to pay your bills' and I'm like 'it's not your money.' If you argue with them to a point they won't even bother helping you. And I hope that it changes over time because there are people that are suffering."

Supporting quote #2: "When I was staying at the homeless shelter, it used to take more than an hour to get in every day because they searched us. We even had to take our shoes off and they would pat us down. Just because we were poor. And then they kicked us out again in the morning."

Supporting quote #3: "When I applied for Mainecare they asked me where I conceived my child! Conceived?! It just dehumanizes people. WTF man. How is that in any way relevant?"

Supporting quote #4: "...Like WIC, you have to go, weigh your kid, talk to the counselor about how you're fucking up as a parent."

14) Internalized shame/classism

Supporting quote #1: "If I had to receive food help at a food store, I would not want to do that in public due to internalized classism and feelings of shame. This would have the opposite effect of creating emotional/social wellbeing."

Supporting quote #2: "…those of us in poverty learn these things where people not only become ashamed of it, but bash other people in poverty. It's a shame, it's a terrible system."

Supporting quote #3: "When I was a kid, food stamps were still paper. My mom and her sister would send the kids to the grocery store, and my older cousin would pick out the food but send the younger kids to pay with the food stamps so she didn't need to be seen."

Supporting quote #4: "When we think about 'how did we end up with this internalized shaming?' So often the solutions we talk about are more education and more job training and how the person should be working harder and different like they are the problem. That puts the onus on us, instead of … what are the root causes? Is it that I'm not educated enough or is it that I'm living in a system where a CEO can make tons of money and I can make $7 an hour or that I should work even though I'm disabled."

Review of Interim Report on Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030

Listed below are four sections of feedback on the Interim Report. Supporting quotes in this section may show up more than once or may have shown up in prior sections of this report. This is not an unintentional redundancy, if a quote was supporting a theme, we used it.

This feedback was organized by:

- General feedback on the entire report
- Specific feedback on the Priorities found on Pages 13-16 of the report
- What is missing from the report
- What works well in the report

We offer this feedback in the hopes we can move closer to a more compassionate framework of economics that sees poor and low-income people as whole human beings deserving of dignity, including access to food, without a requirement of proving worth. Many of the priorities listed in the Interim Report were offered in a spirit of good intent, but almost none of them touched on ways to leverage the collective power in our collective system. If the only way we see solving the issue of hunger and poverty is to continue to try and work out ways to help people who are already struggling to work even harder, we will have failed in our ability to lift all at once and be better for doing so.

Though the feedback below may seem critical it is important to remember that if you are reading this as a person fulfilling a professional duty, what you are seeing is from a vantage point of lived experience. There is often a misconception that poor people are looking for something without wanting to earn it. We challenge that perception by asking: what is earned about being born into a family with more than another? What is earned about taking a salary and stock benefits that accumulate to $11.5 Million per day[7] while a minimum wage employee makes on average, $58 per day?[8]

The feedback for this report is intended to be received constructively with the understanding that we want the world to change because poverty and hunger hurt and ruin lives, and we can't fix this alone. We also can't fix it if we are not honest about what we need. We need systemic, structural changes. We need our collective system to act like it cares about the whole of the collective. People talk all the time about personal responsibility and lifting by the bootstraps. What you will find in the feedback below will most often point to where we could be taking collective responsibility to care for each other. While personal responsibility is certainly one component of a successful life, you can't pull yourself up by your bootstraps if you don't have any boots to begin with.

[7] https://www.sec.gov/Archives/edgar/data/1018724/000110465921050333/tm2035374-1_def14a.htm#tEXCO
[8] https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/wages/minimumwage

General, First Reaction Feedback on Interim Report

1) Priority I & II's solutions did not appear to address why the data is what it is or the root causes of hunger

Supporting quote #1: "There was a lot of data in the report but there wasn't a lot in there about why the problem exists."

Supporting quote #2: "This report addresses symptoms but not reasons and root causes of poverty like low minimum wage or extremely low disability payments."

***Supporting quote #3*: "…**this is the plan to take care of food, regardless of the plight, we're in poverty. Let's make sure you have all the food you need while you're suffering."

Supporting quote #4: "In Maine you can get fat on food, but die poor."

Supporting quote #6: "I didn't see anything in their priorities that meaningfully addressed the needs of elders."

2) Solutions need to focus more on structural, systems change

Supporting quote #1: "The priorities in the report all feel very individualistic still, to me anyway. Every poor person still needs to fend for themselves, apply to things for themselves, educate themselves, there's no pulling everyone up all at once."

Supporting quote #2: "This is saying I need an able body and a job…I do not have these."

Supporting quote #3: "Fortunate and unfortunate, I've gone to a lot of trade training but it never changed my income because it wasn't a lack of training, it was other issues."

Supporting quote #4: "When it [the report] leads into 'here are the actions we're going to take:' it says the strategies could create greater self-reliance, independence, and reduce the need for safety net programs over time. It feels like shit that this whole report is about getting me off the dole, and not about me getting my needs met because I'm worth something."

Supporting quote #5: "Yeah, if this is systems change, whose systems are we talking about changing?"

Supporting quote #6: "The systems would do well to focus on ensuring Maine meets the needs of all people. People experiencing poverty and people in the upper middle class may have similar needs, one able to meet those needs even if they struggle, the

other not able to. Maine would fare way better if all basic needs were met at a standard rate of dignity and wellbeing."

Supporting quote #7: "What I'm hearing you talk about, it just seems like it's a really exclusive idea. If you're plugged into a system you may be able to access more. But if you're not, then you're out of luck."

3) The term 'culturally appropriate' in Priority 1 wasn't actually addressed in the their solutions

Supporting quote #1: "I would also like to point out that there is also that 'culturally-appropriate' term there. And what is culturally appropriate for Indigenous people is our food that we've been eating for generations which is now too polluted to eat. The state of Maine is instrumental in making sure we can't eat any of that food, it's too polluted."

Supporting quote #2: "I was confused about 'culturally-appropriate' food. If you're on SNAP or WIC you might be able to pick what you get, but aside from that option I don't think that's an option. The bullet points don't seem like they would help with that."

Supporting quote #3: "It's not just skimmed over, it's completely left out."

4) People with disabilities and/or their caregivers need to be more thoroughly considered in solutions

Supporting quote #1: "What about those of us that are disabled? It doesn't include us."

***Supporting quote #2*:** "…no amount of training or education is going to change the fact that I have to take care of my kid who has disabilities."

Supporting quote #3: "Disability is not mentioned here. One of the things that is so frustrating, I got on it in 1999 or 2000, it took a really long time to get on it. I was lucky to have a place to sleep at the time and get TANF because I have a child. It can take two or more years and then if you work in that time at all they say, 'hey look you can work, you're not disabled.'"

Supporting quote #4: "Why are we not talking about raising disability to minimum wage when it's not even that?[9] We're talking about food insecurity and we're not talking about that."

Supporting quote #5: "Pay parents and caregivers. My daughter has a chronic illness and I can't send her to a daycare. I'm working 20 hours a day and I'm not paid for my labor, and I have other kids. I'm a 20 hour a day nurse, and I'm a mom, and an

[9] https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10003.pdf

advocate. My phone is always dead because I'm on the phone constantly with the doctor and the pharmacy. Anybody who has to take care of other people should be paid to do it."

5) Focus on education needs to more thoroughly consider special needs and systemic oppression

Supporting quote #1: "Racism speaks in this bullet point as well. A lot of people have gotten their education and been qualified for higher paying jobs, but because of discrimination they don't get hired, or they get fired."

Supporting quote #2: "In the state of Maine labor statistics it shows the average income of a college educated Black person vs. a white person with a high school diploma[10]. You will cringe. You won't be surprised, just shocked that they have the info. What's changing about that? What's the strategic plan to change that?"

Supporting quote #3: "Higher education is not something that is possible right now, I have disabilities preventing me."

Supporting quote #4: "They talk about people gaining access to education but they are not talking about what to do about people who are educated but still living in poverty or are low-income."

Feedback for Priorities as Listed in Pages 13-16 of Interim Report

PRIORITY 1 Feedback:

- "How does the first priority create access to culturally appropriate food?"
- "What really strikes me about this priority [Priority 1] is the subtle way in which the language indicates that more agency is needed on the part of people seeking assistance as opposed to just reducing barriers to services. For instance, job training, that might not be the issue."
- "I was confused about 'culturally-appropriate food.' If you're on SNAP or WIC you might be able to pick what you get, but aside from that option I don't think that's an option. The bullet points don't seem like they would help with that…It's not just skimmed over; it's completely left out, the culturally appropriate part...If the report is going to use that term they should use it appropriately and know what it means."

[10] https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MECEP-racial-inequality-fact-sheet-FINAL.pdf

PRIORITY 2 Feedback:

Note: The feedback for this priority is segmented to reflect the multiple sub-priorities listed under this section on pages 14-16 of the Interim Report.

[General Feedback]

- "Having this one (Priority 2) without having any commentary about colonialism and racism is a joke. So many of our health disparities are tied to colonialism and racism …so, not even mentioning it?!"

- "I was so annoyed!! And access to education. If we're thinking about education… I'm thinking about redlining. It's against the law to redline. But we're still funding schools based on property values/taxes. So it's still racist. So, if we're talking about big systemic change, we should talk about changing how we fund schools, not telling me I need to go out and get more training."

- "These priorities are missing out on looking at the big picture. No training or class is gonna do it."

[Foster Economic Stability]

- "This assumes I can get to a training center."

- "Higher education is not something that is possible right now, I have disabilities preventing me."

- "Racism speaks in this bullet point. A lot of people have gotten their education and been qualified for higher paying jobs, but because of discrimination they don't get hired, or they get fired. They're just ignoring the actual systemic issues."

[Incentive Savings Accounts: listed under Foster Economic Stability]

  - "Incentive savings account won't work because I don't have money to save right now."

  - "If you'd give it to us if saved, why not just give it anyway?"

  - "People on SSI are not able to access this savings program. You have to have a job."

[Provide a Safe and Healthy Place to Live]

- "The housing bonds are extremely helpful. They create apartments that have some kind of tax credit so that the units can be less than market rate but some people still can't

afford it without a Section 8 voucher."

- "We need caps on rent, to deal with the Air B&B thing, to limit huge development of condos. A lot of low-income housing in Portland is being renovated and in both complexes I know of nearby, those people had to relocate during the pandemic and were told they could come back, but there is no guarantee. This priority isn't even scratching the surface. Glad they named this as something related to food, but it is so bare bones. You're hard pressed to find a place in Portland that will take rental vouchers."

[Eliminate Health Disparities]

- "Having this one without having any commentary about colonialism and racism is a joke. So many of our health disparities are tied to colonialism and racism … so, not even mentioning it?!"

- "This talks about preventative measures [for medical care] but does not speak to conditions that cannot be prevented."

- "It is a luxury to live in a choice mode of "preventative." How grand to have access daily to so many fruits and vegetables, I, we all, need. And healthy proteins and fats, seeds, and nuts. All for health and so preventative...My dream!"

- "Is insurance the only barrier to access to a physician? What about physical accessibility? Can I actually even get there?"

[Prepare for Academic and Employment Success]

- "One of the sub-points is addressing childcare deserts and affordability. I read an article just yesterday about all the childcare deficits, 61 closed because of the pandemic. There was never affordable childcare. We're not paying early childhood educators. They have to have a master's degree and they get paid $13 an hour. It's a real soul sucking job to be with a toddler all day and then get paid $13 an hour and get no healthcare. It all cycles back to not providing people with an income that reflects the value of their work. How about just paying everybody so that we can all live?!"

- "To get people educated so that they can be 'better prepared' for higher wage jobs? How about all of our jobs pay us enough so that we can eat! I'm not against education, but why is everything in this context? This is not addressing the root cause of the problem of wages being too low to begin with."

- “The academic and employment success is again just missing what the real barriers are. If you look at it from the outside, why don’t people get higher wage jobs or go to school? This isn’t asking that question.”

- “If I were a middle class kid I would have gone to college and graduated on time. I couldn’t go, and now because I’m a mom, I need to do that [be a mom].”

[Address Emotional & Social Wellbeing]

- “Food resource centers: I think what they’re trying to do is make people feel empowered but when I see this, it feels like a hellish thing. You have to smile and nod and deal with teaching resources. It feels like a hoop to jump through. I think they are trying to make it empowered but it seems like that could be a disaster. Like WIC, you have to go, weigh your kid, talk to the counselor about how you’re fucking up as a parent.”

- “No matter what, we are still made to be dependent. Food pantries, food boxes are all dependencies and don’t make us independent or feel emotionally well. Having our own cash or EBT gives us independence and choice. They should be focusing on how to make it so food pantries can shut down, not improving their system of how they have us stand in line, or how they offer fresher food. It should be how to assist the community to access food on their own time at a store with their own money or EBT.”

Supported Priority Ideas from Pages 13-16 of the Interim Report

We are simply listing the priorities here that were verbally supported during this process, without taking up space in this report to offer an explanation as the rationale for these ideas are already laid out in the Interim Report.

- Automatic enrollment into assistance programs like WIC
- Affordable housing bonds (to decrease discrimination)
- Tenant-based housing vouchers
- Increasing farm participation in the Senior Housing Program
- After school and summer meal programs
- Universal Free School Meals

What was missing from Priorities in the report or in need of critical feedback?

1) There are barriers to accessing help not discussed in the report

A) Help is often only offered during inaccessible hours

Supporting quote #1: “Some of my neighbors work and they still can’t provide enough for their families. And they go to the churches around here. I’ve been speaking to the mothers and they have to go to the food pantries, but they can’t

get in because of their work hours…10:30am-2:00pm and that's it for the pantry hours. Those are mothers work hours. There are three mothers in this property that I live at that are going through those problems. Can they close for an hour and open up after 5:00pm for an hour?"

B) Waitlists for rental vouchers are too long and/or landlords discriminate

Supporting quote #1: "…the waitlist is ridiculous. An apartment is $1,800 a month. How am I going to pay the rest of the bills, feed my kid? I get so mad about the whole Section 8 thing. I get really mad."

Supporting quote #2: "Got on all the housing lists and they said go to a homeless shelter to make it faster. There are 6 year waits."

Supporting quote #3: "You're hard pressed to find a place in Portland that will take rental vouchers."

Supporting quote #4: "When I was homeless when I was younger I was told it was a 10 year waitlist for a Section 8 unless I went into a shelter. I had places I could sleep but I went into the shelter instead and got my certificate in 15 months."

2) There were no universal programs suggested in the report aside from Universal School Lunch

Note: Suggestions for universal programs to implement found on Page 25 of this report, under the Community Recommendations section. Lifting collectively is crucial.

3) The Interim Report focused more on individuals than on failed systems

Supporting quote #1: "What's clear and yet unspoken in the report is that people who are resource-deprived must be unworthy in some way. The report makes the resource-deprived seem inherently less valuable as humans."

Supporting quote #2: "All of this focus on how we can get people working more, that's not going to solve the problem. Us being resource deprived is not our problem, our failing, it is a failing of our collective system …our racist system, which is not even mentioned in this report."

Supporting quote #3: "This all feels very individualistic still, to me anyway. Every poor person still needs to fend for themselves, apply to things for themselves, educate themselves, there's no pulling everyone up all at once."

Supporting quote #4: "All the focus on people getting more education, but redlining put Black and Brown people into condensed areas and then dropped their property values, and our school funding is dependent on property taxes. Redlining is illegal but we never changed that funding model for education. So, if we don't want people to be hungry and we want to talk about education as a way to address root causes, why aren't we talking about how we fund education to start with? And how it's racist?"

4) The report didn't address military spending or how to better support veterans

Supporting quote #1: When asked what was missing from the report: "Military spending."

Supporting quote #2: "The report didn't talk about how to help veterans or their families."

5) Caregivers were not mentioned in the report

Supporting quote: "Pay parents and caregivers. My daughter has a chronic illness and I can't send her to a daycare. I'm working 20 hours a day and I'm not paid for my labor, and I have other kids. I'm a 20 hour a day nurse, and I'm a mom, and an advocate. My phone is always dead because I'm on the phone constantly with the doctor and the pharmacy. Anybody who has to take care of other people should be paid to do it."

6) Sharing Economy

Supporting quote #1: "When I was a little girl, I didn't understand why we had to pay for food and stuff. I always wanted the world to be like a village where we shared."

Direct response to quote #1**:** "My child just said, 'same."

Direct response to quote #1: "This is what the beloved community looks like. What do we need to get there? That's exactly what it is, everyone's needs are met. That is just so healthy. It's hard because we figure it's never going to happen. Yeah, we need money to do it, but it's possible."

Direct response to quote #1: "I really appreciate what xxx just said about beloved community. Our purpose in this world is really to walk each other home, to support each other. And that's not how our society works. I'm always telling people in power to look to Indigenous people for models of what they're doing. During the pandemic, the Penobscot Nation started a food delivery program, no questions asked, our traditional foods. It was just nice to see that our traditional foods that our DNA responds to so well were in there. It's just a beautiful example of what communities can do."

Supporting quote #2: “In order to change the quandary we’re in we have to change our systemic issues. We need federal government programs to act more like Presente Maine. We need to transform the relationship that government agencies have with us …it’s paternalistic, not solidarity. It’s top-down charity.”

Community Generated Solutions

"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

~Alexander Den Heijer

When hunger is looked at, and treated, as a symptom rather than a root cause problem, it becomes clear finding solutions to end it can't occur without first examining the conditions that create it. While hunger may occur for any plethora of the individual-centric reasons that keep a person from earning a living wage within a system that doesn't value the lives of those with little power, money or ability, if we only point our focus there we'll miss an opportunity to create a thriving, well balanced environment where we can grow new possibilities from what was thought to be inevitably unattainable. 96% is not enough. This will not end hunger, it will starve 4% of our population.

We reject the idea that it's impossible to fully eliminate hunger because poverty is a construct of human design. Nothing will change if we don't change it. The list below is wide-ranging and offers both big ideas and very pointed ones, all of which will address conditions that create poverty, which is the actual problem. Hunger is but a symptom. We created this list as much for the nonprofit worker as we did the policy wonk. There are solutions here that can be implemented at every level, from the classroom, to the office of economic policy, to the department of corrections, to the DHHS office, to the Dr's office. Our hope is that you will both consider these recommendations in strategic plans to end hunger by 2030, and in future work you do with the public, at every level where people in poverty may be impacted.

Taken individually, these solutions may not fully address hunger at its root, but taken together, they offer a concrete road map to transformative change that could have wide-reaching, generational impacts that alleviate human suffering and decrease poverty. This list is in no way exhaustive in regard to what types of actions can be taken to address the root causes of hunger, but it is robust and a solid start for work we hope continues long after this process ends.

Universal Program Recommendations:

Universal Basic Income (enough for needs like rent, food, healthcare, utilities)

Universal Healthcare (including vision, dental, mental health, and alternative, holistic/natural medicines and methods)

Universal Childcare (that is culturally competent and doesn't force assimilation)

Universal Higher Education

Universal School Breakfast and Lunch

Income and Equity Recommendations:

Raise the minimum wage to a “thriving” wage

Raise the poverty line

Pay reparations to descendents of enslaved and colonized people

Supplement disability payments through state funding until they equal at least State standard minimum wage

Regulate executive earnings by instituting a wage cap (maximum wage) for high level administrators

Housing Recommendations:

Institute Rent Caps

Do a study on why housing voucher waitlists are so long and fix the problem

Increase the number of rental vouchers the state will fund

Pass a law making it illegal for landlords to discriminate by refusing to rent to people with rental vouchers

Healthcare Recommendations:

Direct DHHS to decrease Mainecare reporting requirements for healthcare providers so they will stop refusing to accept Mainecare recipients as patients

Increase the number of detox and long term beds for people with substance use disorder

Fully fund all forms of reproductive healthcare, including abortion services that include optional mental health supports before and after procedure

Education Reform Recommendations:

Introduce critical race theory into k-12 curriculum, so we can grow a generation better prepared to dismantle the systemic issues of racism that keep disparities in place for all non-white residents.

Restructure public education funding so it is not dependent on property taxes. Past policies of redlining make this practice racist.

Environmental Recommendations:

Pass stronger environmental regulations to protect and restore Indigenous food supply and sustenance rights

Public Assistance Reform Recommendations:

Create a single, central application that cross checks for eligibility for all public assistance programs run by the state, and/or create an automatic enrollment process for *all* major programs once someone is approved for MaineCare (until we approve universal healthcare!).

Avoid benefit cliffs and negative interactions among programs by using applicant's base income (excluding all benefits from public assistance) as the eligibility qualifier for all state-funded assistance programs. This can be achieved by passing legislation that deems public assistance as "exempt income" for application purposes.

Provide assistance without making people prove they are drug-free

Do not cut off assistance and services to families when their children are put into foster care

Lift arbitrary limits on the amount of time a person can receive assistance. If they need it, they need it.

Research and transform as many programs as possible into solidarity models as opposed to top-down charity models🙌🏾🧘🏾‍♀️

Transportation Recommendations:

Remove barriers to obtaining driver's licenses, including lowering or eliminating prohibitive costs

Increase funding to create more public transportation

Create a voucher program to help low-income people purchase vehicles

Child Protective Practices Reform Recommendations:

Pass a policy that requires all supports and money that would go to a foster family to first go to a family where risk of removing the child from the home is present

Institute a lengthy grace period before taking away any public assistance from a home where a child was removed, or consider not taking assistance away at all, to help maintain stability that favors reunification

Provide automatic rental vouchers to youth who age out of the foster care system

Prisoner Reform Recommendations:

Create more support programs for people reentering society after release from prison

Ban the box on job applications that require people to disclose past convictions

Pass a law outlawing housing agencies from denying rental vouchers based on criminal records.

Access to Food Recommendations:
Regulate food prices in favor of the consumer

Provide food, no questions asked

Note about Community Recommendations

There are significant and compelling reasons for why we believe each recommendation listed above would help to end hunger, and more importantly, eliminate its root cause of poverty. Because of the quick turnaround needed for submission of this report we were not able to offer our rationale behind the items on this list. In short, each of these not only addresses structural ways poor people are kept poor, many of them also address ways our system operates to keep racial disparities in place. For instance, when we say you should ban the box on applications that requires disclosure of criminal records, we are not only suggesting that formerly incarcerated people need to be able to financially sustain themselves, we are also suggesting that our legal system disproportionately penalizes non-white people[11] and this type of policy would be a step in the direction of acknowledging that and working to keep further damage from occurring as a result of that fact.

The list above is in no way exhaustive, it is just what came out of the conversations we were able to hold within the five meetings, and then through the short amount of time we were given to report out on those conversations. The overarching point is that you can't solve hunger without addressing poverty, and you can't address poverty without acknowledging and addressing structural racism in both the design and execution of our policies. Our aim with this list was to address the problem through that lens. It was also to address the issue as a systemic problem, not one that will be solved without a collective, systemic lift.

[11] https://www.vera.org/downloads/pdfdownloads/state-incarceration-trends-maine.pdf

Supplemental Community Contributions

1) “It has to cost society more to do everything in this way instead of making sure everyone just has what they need. These are all round about ways. If you just made sure everyone had housing, food, healthcare... We talk about it like it’s a big complicated thing. It is if we’re not going to just give people what they need, it becomes complicated.”

2) “When they are talking about emotional and social support (in the report) that you need support when you don’t have food and shelter. Why don’t we give people that food and shelter instead of counseling to cope with not having that stuff?”

3) “I think people should be able to access help. But housing, food, money, and healthcare, that’s just …those little things are the walls to keep one whole!”

4) “The way things are set up, our worthiness for food is based on our worthiness to the corporatocracy.”

5) “I only just got food stamps. In January I lost my job … COVID. I remember walking around the grocery store. No money but I’m hungry. I’m trying not to cry. I’m too old to steal the food, and I’m too proud to go home and ask my sons for help. At this age of my life I’m supposed to be okay, enjoying my golden years, not worrying about what I’m going to eat. I’m back where I started fifty years ago, hungry, homeless, nothing. It took me having a heart attack, being hospitalized, to take someone to intervene and come in and get me signed up for food stamps. My son came in and said ‘ma you’re going to stay with me’. But without someone having the compassion in their heart for this lady who worked her whole life but has nothing … I still have not been approved for disability, for SSI. I have another three months, four months to go without any other kind of income, but my $200 food stamp allotment, which still doesn’t cover it.”

6) “I prefer to have choices, to go to the grocery store, not the food pantry. There is something about being able to go to the grocery store and to buy the food that you want and to afford it.”

7) “From being in these meetings, someone like myself, it can be more harmful to talk about this poverty stuff than it is helpful. It’s not something I’m trying to hide, but it’s something I’m confronted with daily. I’m here to serve in whatever capacity I can, while also protecting my mental health.”

8) “One other thing I wanted to highlight from the report is a program where they pay prisoners to grow food for the food bank, and I just want to say out loud: first of all, celebrating **enslaved labor** feels very fucked up to me and also when they talk about it as a transferable skill, maybe if that person ends up with a yard. If we’re going to talk about systems, why don’t we talk about what people released from prison are allowed to do. I don’t think that should be a way that we can further end poverty.”

9) “We could create a tool for poverty prevention that is a card like a debit card that is issued to all adults and can be automatically activated for EBT right at the cash register. Everyone would get one, like a Social Security card, but for a safety net.”

10) “I would like GoFundMe not to have to exist.”

11) “None of the priorities under Economic Stability would have helped me before or now.”

12) “They talked about culturally sensitive food and that’s good but what about disability specific food? Ensure is so expensive.”

13) “Why do people feel ashamed? When we don’t talk about why we live this way it is assumed it is just our fault. The “why” of this data isn’t us. We are not the cause, we are the ones who suffer.”

14) “Reallocate resources. If you get up close to rich people’s lives. People just give them resources. It sounds crazy when you say it. Give poor people resources. They don’t trust us to use them in the way they want us to.”

15) “Root causes of poverty/food insecurity?

-Lack of intergenerational wealth
-Renting does not offer equity building
-Racial disparities and stolen wealth
-Lack of privilege in the start of life
-Internalized poverty trauma and instability
-Worry about instability being passed
-Uneven distribution of resources
-Needing to beg for what’s needed
-Spiritual poverty
-Billionaires existing
-Unearned wealth for people”

16) The report mentioned nothing of climate change or environmental justice.

17) “They didn’t mention anything in their report about supporting immigrants. As a matter of fact, the word “immigrant” only showed up once in the entire thing. I don’t know what percentage of our population is immigrants, if it’s around 4% maybe they are the people they are willing to let starve since the definition for ending hunger was that 96% of households have enough food.”
.

18) We’re closing in on a 15 month pandemic, and the only thing power holders focused on were getting people back to work, keeping people off unemployment. We could’ve and should’ve spent that time making sure people were fed well, stayed safe at home, and were paid to stay at home. Other countries did it, and did it easily. We also have been brainwashed to

have so little care for others that half of the U.S thought it was against their rights to wear a mask in public places (Side note, funny how the bodily autonomy only matters when it comes to deadly pandemic harm reduction and not life saving and money saving abortions). “Essential” workers were called heroes just because they didn’t want to quit and starve. If our government is so incapable of keeping us alive, educated, and fed during a **global pandemic**, why do we have one at all?

19) “We shouldn’t have to beg and prove we need a good quality of life.”

20) Note about connections to domestic violence*:* “Housing and food insecurity is why people stay in domestic violence. I want to be honest that my situation is complex, my only ability to have any security is coming from my partner. My child has a life-threatening, chronic condition. I can’t work because I need to take care of him. It is impossible to leave. Every time I try to leave. My partner and I can’t afford to live apart. I met him when I was very young. Honestly, it feels so hard to keep my child safe with his health. In my twenties I was running out of this relationship, but since in my 30’s I’m just trying to make it feel as safe as it can. The weight of this--if I were middle class, I would have left this relationship years ago. If I were middle class, I’d have had a fuller life, I wouldn’t worry about how to feed my child. I was asked if I am afraid to be poor and I’m not, but my kid has a chronic health condition and keeping him safe without housing and food stability is impossible. None of the priorities [in the report] would help me gain safety so I can leave. I’ve lost all my closest friends because it’s too much. The fact that I have this big secret. I did everything you can think of to get out in my 20’s and nothing in the system was supportive. I’ve been through the system trying to leave. I do not have the strength. I’m just trying to make the most of the situation. I’m just gonna get through as safely as I can. I was in my early twenties when I first realized I needed to get out of the relationship. I am in my mid-thirties now.”

21) “When I was homeless when I was younger I was told it was a 10 year waitlist for a Section 8 unless I went into a shelter. I had places I could sleep but I went into the shelter instead and got my certificate in 15 months.”

22) “I’ve been enjoying these meetings, I just love whenever I can turn my pain and the shit I’ve been through into the positive. It’s really good to bring all that was really negative in my life and turn it into a positive.”