

# EAST BAY TIMES

## Congressman hears hunger issues at Richmond food pantry visit



Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-Concord) talks to Sandra, a constituent, at the Richmond Emergency Food Pantry on Aug. 8, 2017 (Tom Lochner)

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RICHMOND — As U.S. Rep. Mark deSaulnier (D-Concord) paid a visit to the [Richmond Emergency Food Pantry](#) on Tuesday, he and a group of local volunteers were thinking beyond how struggling people would put food on the table for the next few days.

“For me to come out here helps me to advocate with my Republican colleagues not to cut the funding for programs like this,” DeSaulnier said shortly before noon on the campus of Grace Lutheran Church, where the all-volunteer pantry distributes food to low-income households from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Tuesday and Friday.

Approved households can pick up food once a month; information on how to apply is available [here](#). Information on how to volunteer is available [here](#).

One of the recipients on Tuesday was Sandra, a woman in her early 60s who is currently homeless and spending nights in her car after losing her Section 8 rental support.

“This is the best organized food giveaway,” Sandra said, as she carried away a package of standard food bag items — corn flakes, milk, peanut butter, carrots, green beans, spaghetti sauce, beef stew, dried cranberries, rotini and rice — enhanced with fresh produce.

On Tuesday the produce offering included potatoes, onions, plums, apples and melons. There were some food containers from restaurants and delis. Additionally, there is about 200 to 500 pounds per week of meat, mostly on Fridays, donated by FoodMaxx in San Pablo, frozen on the “sell by” date, said REFP volunteer and board member Janet Bruce.

There is little waste in U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded food programs by comparison, say, to the money wasted by the Defense Department, DeSaulnier said.

During a brainstorming session with residents, local and regional food distribution officials, and local volunteers in a church meeting room, DeSaulnier listened as Lisa Arnold recounted how she struggled to find not only food but medicine and other services when she was released from jail in January after serving time for witness intimidation. She explained that she had been accused of telling a girl not to talk to police; went through a trial that ended in a hung jury; and ended up pleading guilty to avoid a second trial, even though she maintains she was innocent.

Today Arnold is guardian of her granddaughter and also cares for other family members, she said.

When she came out of jail, Arnold could not immediately get MediCal. She is diabetic, and so she went to Kaiser Permanente to get insulin, and now is struggling with the bills. When she was in jail, she was startled by the level of recidivism, much of which she attributes to people not knowing how to get services when they get out of jail. “They kept coming back,” she said. “They had to feed their family; they needed money.”

During Monday’s brainstorming, Arnold advocated “some coordinated way to connect people to resources” — she cited referrals to housing and employment opportunities as well as medical care and food — with the help of something akin to an exit interview just before when people come out of jail.

Her plea resonated with Carly Finkle, advocacy manager for the Food Bank of Contra Costa & Solano, which supplies the Richmond pantry.

“Poverty is a many-headed beast. An empty stomach is part of it, but it doesn’t exist in isolation,” Finkle said after the brainstorming session. “Just giving someone food stamps ... won’t solve the issue of hunger.”

DeSaulnier said he was interested in Lisa’s idea and would look into it further.