

### Food Insecurity Rates

4-14%

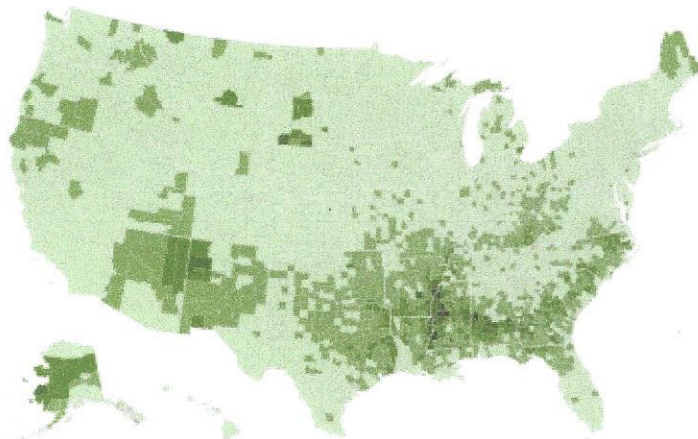
15-19%

20-24%

**25-29%**

30% +

MAINE



Sara Bloom  
Biddeford

I am happy to shorten this statement if invited to testify live.

Hello, My name is Sara Lambert Bloom and I live in the Mill in Saco Falls in Biddeford. I first came to Maine when I was a graduate student at the Yale School of Music to perform in the Pierre Monteux Summer Music Festival in Hancock in 1968. Two years later I married my Yale oboe professor, Robert Bloom and we began summering with our extended family on Great Cranberry Island in 1970. After Robert passed away, I took early retirement from my career as a professional oboist and became a permanent resident of Maine, living 5 years in Rockport, another 5 years in South Portland, and now in Biddeford for the past 10 years. So I guess I'm still from away, but I have been blessed by what is now a 52-year relationship with Maine, a place dear to us that sustained my family for decades as we pursued our busy careers across the country and abroad and is now my forever home.

During the past 20 years living here in Maine, I worked on my mission to publish Robert's legacy, including his oboe pedagogy and 42 volumes of his 18th-century editions of masterworks for oboe. I supported myself while working on legacy projects by working first as a Senior Credit Analysis for MBNA in Rockland and Belfast and then as a Senior Mortgage Loan Officer in South Portland. This intimate look at people's finances gave me the benefit of knowing first hand of the financial challenges Mainers face, in locations from DownEast to the MidCoast to Southern Maine and inland. And all the while I was struck by the amount of chronic hunger that I was witnessing, even as--pre-Covid--unemployment was very low. I came to learn that I had to take into consideration other factors such as low wages, the high cost of housing whether renting or owning, and the high cost of heating mostly old, poorly-insulated housing stock, the high cost of health insurance and medications, the high cost caring for elderly relatives, the high cost of transportation to job sites, the high cost of higher education, and more. So a return to fuller employment, as welcome as that is to everyone in every job sector, isn't the complete answer to chronic hunger in Maine.

My career as a professional oboist and my marriage to Robert, who enjoyed a long career as an internationally renowned oboist and master teacher, took me to many places but I always remained grounded in my upbringing in a tiny coaltown in Appalachia. By most standards, we had very little, but because we always had food, thanks to my parents' hard work and their "Victory Garden" and chicken coop, we were able to study and reach our goals, which was for me to attend the Oberlin Conservatory in 1962 and then on to Yale, and the rest was history. As Rep Terry states, it all starts with adequate nutrition.

So lessons learned around the dinner table during my childhood are what brought me here today.

My mother's cousin, Betty Hayes who was born in 1908, was one of the first woman MDs in Pennsylvania. She promised her father on his deathbed that she would take over his practice which involved caring for 4000 coalminers and their families who faced horrendous living conditions in the 21 coal towns she served. She took a bankrupt coal company to the supreme court to rid the drinking water of several of our neighboring coal towns of typhoid about the time I was born. Woody Guthrie wrote a song (but unfortunately never recorded it) titled The Dying Doctor about her promise to her father. My father died in 1981, just shortly before the new water tower in our town was dedicated to him. He brought running water to our town from a source that did not dry up for most of the summer as had been happening during the previous decades, and he brought indoor bathrooms to our neighbors to replace their outhouses, and with a federal grant he rid us all of the toxic fumes hovering over us from the constantly burning boney dumps that surrounded our town. Sounds horrible, doesn't it, but it was nurturing because we had food. And music and sports and learning and fun and laughter! And always, a sense of responsibility to our

community of people we loved.

I began my serious inquiry into Maine's widespread and chronic hunger in 2006 by volunteering at the Preble Street Soup Kitchen in Portland. "Who are these people and why are they chronically hungry?" I volunteered at the Good Shepherd Food Bank in Auburn. "Where is this food coming from and where is it going and is there enough to reach every corner of Maine and if not, what else is needed?"

In 2011 when I moved to Biddeford, having completed the Bloom legacy work, I began learning more about all the wonderful ongoing efforts to combat hunger and continued asking what the gap was, how much more money was needed to be raised to End Hunger in Maine. No one I asked really knew the answer or even an estimate so I began working with the professionals and came up with a figure. With that information in hand I wrote a Letter to the Editor in May 2018, ending with, "While I'm not stepping up to the task of crowdsourcing, I would like to plant an idea... Over 700,000 Mainers filed taxes last year (some jointly). If each donates just \$6, Maine would become first in the nation to close the gap and end hunger by thus engaging our citizenry, but only if we continue to support and expand current heartwarming and creative efforts being carried out by the many who lead the way." It was published in the Portland Press Herald and media around the state and was well-received but there was no actionable outcome.

Then we held a Panel Discussion in June 2018 at Union Church in Biddeford Pool and listened to the brilliant presentations given by Holly Culloton, Biddeford's Master Gardener/Volunteer, Frank Wertheimer, Associate Professor of Agriculture at the University of Maine's Cooperative Extension who is state coordinator for the Maine Harvest for Hunger program and committee chair of the Maine Hunger Dialogue, and Justin Alford, co-founder of Full Plates Full Potential with the late John Woods, may he rest in peace. It was a lively discussion chaired by Rev Jane Field, Director of the Maine Council of Churches and while it also was well-received, nothing seemed to propel us to the Ending Hunger goal line.

So in September 2018 I teamed up with my friend and colleague, Sandra Ragan, and we met with Rep Maureen Terry to strategize this Bill. And here we are today with the real possibility of ending hunger in Maine within a year or two if the bill is passed, which I urge you to do, and signed into law this year.

With my decades of experience reaching out to maximize audiences for our musical performances, I am well aware that the work doesn't end with a checkoff box being added to the income tax form, so please know that, bringing our friend and colleague Maureen White on board, we are already brainstorming a "marketing" strategy to get folks to give serious consideration to checking that box! Our strategy will also reach folks who do not pay Maine income tax--our summer residents, visitors, and friends of Maine--with an exciting way for them to contribute their dollars to the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry and perhaps contribute their singing voices (virtually) to a promotion that will allow us to come together to take care of each other. It involves anyone and everyone of all ages from around the state including the islands to join in the production of a 4.5-minute recording, singing backup (virtually) to a celebrity performance of the Hunger Anthem--and no, it was not written by Woodie Guthrie but I think you'll love it!