

Democratic Women of McDonough County

P.O. Box 56
Good Hope, IL 61438

info@democratic-women.org

December 26, 2019

An Open Letter to Our McDonough County Community,

The needs of the vulnerable in our community members are too great to leave to charity and chance. For the first time in several decades, this year no charities advertised holiday meal food sacks. Our County Board and city leaders must make addressing food scarcity and nutrition a much higher priority.

Although the City of Macomb created a Community Resource Coordinator to help connect families to agencies and resources, that position now sits empty, with no initiatives to address food insecurity and malnutrition. This position must be filled, so that this never happens again at the holidays. It is the proper function of local government to provide the communication, coordination, outreach, education, transportation, and resource allocation to combat the increasing food insecurity in Macomb and greater McDonough County.

The need to address food insecurity in our rural area is clear. Individuals in McDonough County experience a higher rate of poverty than Illinois as a whole ([22.3%](#) compared to [13.5%](#)). Among our elementary students, 57% of students at Macomb's Lincoln School, 68% at B-PC, 61% at West Prairie-South Elementary are eligible for free and reduced lunches, meaning they may face food insecurity during winter break. With recent drastic cuts to federal SNAP benefits by the Trump Administration, many more community members will find themselves in an increasingly desperate situation. When food insecurity rises, a rise in homelessness often follows. We must work to prevent that from becoming our local reality.

Requesting our county and city governments coordination and maximize emergency food assistance for families in need is not an unreasonable expectation, even for a small town like ours. While we have numerous pantries, there's little evening or weekend availability. Access to food resources outside traditional work hours is crucial.

Why not rely on charity? As we have seen this year with no holiday food bags (in contrast with three different efforts last year), we cannot leave people's ability to feed their families up to the goodwill of well-meaning neighbors. Furthermore, the religious nature of many private nonprofit food pantries can discourage certain groups of people from seeking help, whether they follow a different religion, no religion, or are LGBTQ or part of another group that some churches discriminate against.

The need exists, the precedent exists, and existing remedies do not fully address the problem. Therefore, we call for the city and county board to address food insecurity now by filling the vacant Community Resource Coordinator position and establishing a Food & Nutrition Taskforce.

Sincerely,

Heather McMeekan, President
Democratic Women of McDonough County

Verna Parkins, Vice President
Democratic Women of McDonough County