

## *From the desk of Vice Mayor Weinroth*

Food insecurity is part of the daily life for twenty percent of Palm Beach County residents. Helping these individuals and families is a daunting task necessitating a long-term comprehensive plan. This is an issue we cannot afford to ignore and a war we cannot lose.

Back in 2015, Palm Beach County, in partnership with the United Way of Palm Beach County, launched a comprehensive Hunger Relief Plan. It established a strategy for a comprehensive campaign to raise awareness of the extent of hunger in our community.

Coordination and collaboration are keys for the success of the Hunger Relief Plan. Prior to the pandemic, progress was being made. The number of food insecure individuals in the county had fallen from 200,000 residents (including 64,000 children) in 2015 to 184,000 residents (53,000 children) in 2019.

Nobody was taking a victory lap over these numbers, but it was clear, the initiatives were fruitful.

One of the goals of the Hunger Relief Plan has been to provide *ALL CHILDREN* in Palm Beach County with access to the nutritious food they need to build healthy bodies and strong minds. The childhood hunger working group focused on three areas:

- after-school meals
- summer break spots
- weekend backpacks

Another goal of the Hunger Relief Plan has been to ensure low-income older county residents have balanced nutritional diets. A five-year plan to end senior hunger, "Senior Hunger Solutions," was developed. Its key elements included SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program) and the expansion of congregate and home-delivered meals.

The pandemic has resulted in the most vulnerable in our community, living close to the edge, with savings depleted, bills accumulating, and no means to afford the cost of housing and nutrition. Many of these at-risk individuals are working poor, who are struggling to stay above water but now find themselves pushed into a financial abyss.

The county and its many nonprofit partners have redoubled their effort to mitigate the misery endured by over 300,000 of our residents. Along with the

Palm Beach County Food Bank, Farmshare and Feeding South Florida, the county continues to deploy resources.

The county received \$263 million in CARES Act Recovery funds from the federal government. Of that, over \$32 million has been budgeted for emergency food distribution (food distribution exceeding normal base expenses and community food programs identified in the county's emergency feeding program).

Just a reminder that the county's mask mandate remains in place, and everyone is encouraged to remain vigilant with social distancing, avoid large crowds and use proper sanitization measures such as handwashing.

Please contact my office if you need assistance at 561-276-1220 or email me at [rweinroth@pbcgov.org](mailto:rweinroth@pbcgov.org).