



## Coalition and Valued Associates Advocacy and Actions...

NBC Nightly News ran a story on Sunday night about [military families being forced to subsidize their income with trips to the food banks](#) based on the [Hunger in America 2014](#) report. The report was released by Feeding America, a non profit organization with a “nationwide network of 200 food banks spread across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.” The Feeding America network works with 58,000 food programs and serves 46.5 million people across America – that is “1 in 7 people” each year who access food pantries to make ends meet.

Although this is the sixth report released by the organization it is the first time respondents were asked about U.S. military service among members of their household. Through interviews with more than 60,000 clients and 32,000 partner agencies, the report concluded that:

“Twenty percent of households have at least one member that has ever served in the U.S. military. Approximately 620,000, or four percent of Feeding America client households contain a member who is currently serving full or part-time in the military, either in the Armed Forces, Reserves or National Guard.”

“Nationally, there are approximately 2.5 million military personnel, including members who currently serve on Active Duty in the U.S. Armed Forces or Coast Guard, as well as members who serve in the Reserves or National Guard. When comparing the number of Feeding America households who report at least one person currently serving in the military with an approximate estimate of the number of current military personnel, the data suggest that an estimated 25 percent of households with a member currently serving in the U.S. military receive food assistance from the Feeding America network.”

The National Military Family Association issued a [press release](#) this week in response to the report. Joyce Raezer, NMFA Executive Director stated that, “The number of military families living on the financial edge is higher than it should be.” She also said:

“While these numbers may come as a surprise, NMFA’s stance is that no military families should have to struggle to make ends meet. Now is not the time to limit pay raises and housing allowances, raise commissary prices, increase out of pocket health care costs, or cut critical family and service member programs like financial education and spouse employment support.”

According to the Military Times article, [DoD questions military data in food bank study](#) (8/19), “The Pentagon’s personnel chief is taking exception to statistics from (the) recent study that concluded 25 percent of military households use food banks.” During the DoD Military Family Readiness Council meeting on 18 August, Jessica Wright, Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness disputed that number but said she would direct her senior enlisted adviser to put together a “how-to” fact sheet for service members to apply for the Family Subsistence Supplemental Allowance.

ALA and the Coalition believe the answer is not to have more service members apply for supplemental allowances but to promote and protect benefits that preclude military hardship. This is precisely why the commissary benefit should be protected by DoD, not dismantled. It saves military families thousands of dollars off their grocery bills each year. And with the USDA expecting food inflation rates to nearly double during 2014, commissaries – more than ever – safeguard our military families’ financial wellbeing. If commissaries are cut, more military families will have to apply for subsistence allowances or access food banks to help feed their families.