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Greater Chicago Food Depository to distribute food to hundreds of workers affected by the federal government shutdown

CHICAGO – The Greater Chicago Food Depository is planning to distribute food next week to more than 500 federal employees affected by the ongoing government shutdown, including Transportation Security Administration workers at Chicago Midway International Airport and workers with the Federal Bureau of Prisons.

The Food Depository is Chicago's food bank, regularly distributing food to more than 700 partner agencies and programs throughout Cook County. Any person facing food insecurity, including federal workers who are furloughed or working without pay, can seek and receive food at any food pantry or mobile distribution in our vast network. Anyone in need will be welcomed.

Next week, the Food Depository is taking the additional step of distributing boxes of food directly to some federal workers in light of the federal government shutdown, which is already increasing hunger in our communities and causing hardship for thousands of families in the Chicago area. As part of the distribution, Jewel-Osco is providing 500 \$25 gift cards to help Midway TSA families in need.

"Our hearts go out to these federal workers, many of whom are facing food insecurity for the first time. It's unacceptable that this shutdown continues," said Kate Maehr, executive director and CEO of the Greater Chicago Food Depository. "We call on the White House and Senate leaders to end the shutdown immediately."

The Food Depository will deliver 25-pound boxes of nonperishable food to a TSA training site near Midway airport on Tuesday and Thursday morning for a total of 420 workers, who will be able to pick up the food in between shifts. Fresh produce will also be distributed as available.

The Food Depository also plans to distribute boxes of food to about 100 workers with the federal prison in Chicago next week. Conversations are ongoing with other groups of federal workers, such as the Coast Guard and the TSA workers at O'Hare International Airport, on how to best meet their needs.

The situation is fluid. If the shutdown ends before the confirmed distributions next week, it will be up to the discretion of those groups on whether to proceed. The Food Depository stands ready to help.

"We're grateful to our donors and community partners, particularly Jewel-Osco in this instance, for making this outreach possible," Maehr said.

In addition to the plight of the federal workers, the Food Depository is concerned about the 1.8 million people in Illinois receiving benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). The benefits for February will be issued earlier than usual, on or before Jan. 20, but must last all of February.

It's unclear how SNAP would be funded in March, if the shutdown continues that long. Any disruption to SNAP benefits would be unprecedented and devastating for almost 40 million Americans, and jarring to the overall economy, Maehr said. Such a large-scale disruption in SNAP benefits would also increase demand at local food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the U.S.

For every one meal provided by the Food Depository in Cook County, SNAP benefits provide the equivalent of eight meals, according to 2018 data.

Protecting federal food assistance is compassionate, prudent and necessary. The Food Depository encourages anyone concerned by this crisis to contact the White House and their Senators and urge a swift resolution to the shutdown. To receive ongoing updates, visit chicagosfoodbank.org/advocacy

To find the food pantry nearest you, visit chicagosfoodbank.org/find-food

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About the Greater Chicago Food Depository

The Greater Chicago Food Depository, Chicago's food bank, is a nonprofit food distribution and training center providing food for hungry people while striving to end hunger in our community. The Food Depository, founded in 1979, makes a daily impact across Cook County with a network of 700 pantries, soup kitchens, shelters, mobile programs, children's programs, older adult programs and innovative responses that address the root causes of hunger. Last year, the Food Depository distributed more than 69 million pounds of shelf-stable food, fresh produce, dairy products and meat, the equivalent of 159,000 meals every day. For more information, visit chicagosfoodbank.org or call 773-247-FOOD.