

## Remarks from Executive Director, Melissa Zimmerman

I want to begin by thanking you for being here tonight and for the unwavering support you've shown to Jewish Family Service. On behalf of our Board, staff, and volunteers, we are deeply grateful for this remarkable community. Your partnership makes it possible for JFS to meet the growing needs around us — and those needs are increasing every day.

As I reflect on my first year and a half as Executive Director, one of the biggest lessons I've learned is that real impact doesn't come from one big moment. It's built through hundreds of small, powerful acts of kindness. A bag of groceries handed to a mother who's skipping meals so her kids can eat. A counseling session that gives someone hope on their darkest day. A check-in from a friendly visitor that reminds an older adult they're not forgotten. Together, these moments are profound.

One of the factors that attracted me to JFS is my strong connection to the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, the call to "repair the world." At JFS, we live this value every day. We show up for individuals and families of all backgrounds—through affordable mental health care, emergency financial assistance, services for older adults and caregivers, and our beloved Alex & Sally Lebwohl Food Pantry.

But right now, across the country and right here in Utah, safety nets are breaking. Programs that were built to prevent hunger and homelessness are disappearing.

The state of Utah is facing an alarming increase in food insecurity and economic strain. Nearly 11% of Utah households are food insecure, impacting hundreds of thousands of families. A staggering 38% of homes are categorized as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed — meaning they earn too much to qualify for assistance, yet too little to thrive. These are the families we see every day in our food pantry line. These are the voices behind the 150 to 200 requests for emergency financial assistance we receive every month.

At JFS, our work is more essential than ever. Our Food Pantry is not just a service — it's a lifeline. And I'll be honest, this year has tested us. We've hired extra staff and relied on incredible volunteers — but we are still stretched thin. And just as demand rose, we received a cut in federal funding for this vital work.

Our Emergency Financial Assistance program remains a critical resource for hardworking families facing eviction, utility shut-offs, or medical crises. Yet, funding is extremely limited — we simply can't meet the growing needs with the resources we have.

We took a big step forward this year by securing our first Medicaid contract—an exciting move that helps sustain our counseling program and expand care to those who need it most. But even as we celebrate that milestone, we're facing devastating funding cuts to our psychiatric care program. This is a service where clients can see a highly skilled nurse practitioner for just \$15 a visit — a life-saving treatment that for so many would otherwise be inaccessible due to cost.

And then there are our older adult programs — Respite Care, the gleeful choir, lunch bunches, exploring creativity class, caregiver support groups and so much more. These programs have seen the largest funding cuts of all. At a time when our aging population needs us more than ever, we are not able to expand and grow in order to meet the rising needs.

This is the reality we are facing: more need, fewer resources.

JFS is unique in that every person here tonight can connect in some way to our mission. Maybe you've struggled yourself. Maybe someone you love has faced mental health challenges, or food insecurity, or the exhaustion of caregiving.

We know that so many of you have already given generously, and we are truly grateful — but the need in our community is greater than ever, which is why we are asking you to consider doing even more.

By donating, you are helping to feed families, to provide rent assistance to someone facing eviction, to offer mental health counseling to someone who is struggling, and to assist older adults and caregivers navigating the challenges of dementia.

Your generosity is truly what makes everything we do possible. Every dollar you give is a lifeline. Together, we are not just serving the community—we *are* the community. While the challenges are great, we have the opportunity to rise together and meet them head-on.