



**Written Testimony Presented by  
Island Harvest Food Bank**

**Before the:  
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS &  
SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEES**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing  
On Elementary and Secondary Education  
SFY 2023-2024**

**Wednesday, February 8, 2023**

Good afternoon, my name is Randi Shubin Dresner and I am the President and CEO of Island Harvest Food Bank. Chairperson Helene Weinstein, Ranking Member Ed Ra, Chairperson Liz Krueger, Ranking Member Thomas O'Mara, thank you for hosting this Joint Legislative Hearing on the Elementary & Secondary Education portions of Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

Island Harvest Food Bank has prepared this testimony in support of the Healthy School Meals for All coalition. Healthy School Meals for All would provide healthy school meals for all children throughout New York State, regardless of their family's income. Although this is a new program at the state level, this is not new to anyone with school-aged children during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The federal government provided free school meals for *all students*; however, that program expired in June 2022, resulting in a loss of access to healthy school meals for more than 726,000 students across 2,000 schools in New York State. Our coalition has determined that on Long Island, more than 240,000 students in approximately 500 schools were adversely impacted upon the end of the program.

Simply stated, Healthy School Meals for All allows us to improve the lives of more than 240,000 students on Long Island and more than 726,000 students statewide.

We know there's no "free lunch," which similarly applies to Healthy School Meals for All. The top-end estimate of the program cost is about \$200 million annually. With so many competing demands on the state budget, why should we spend this money to support all children, regardless of their family's income? Serving Long Island's most vulnerable populations for more than 30 years, we at Island Harvest have consistently heard a version of this argument; "how much food

126 Spagnoli Road, Melville, NY 11747

Melville | Uniondale | Calverton | Brentwood

631-873-4775 | 516-294-8528 | [www.islandharvest.org](http://www.islandharvest.org)



insecurity can there be in one of the wealthiest regions of one of the most prosperous states in the country?”

Hunger, which is how you feel without food to eat, and food insecurity, which you experience when you don't know where or when you'll eat your next meal, knows no income bracket, ZIP code, racial, or ethnic boundaries. But unfortunately, the reality is too many people are facing these adverse conditions, and many of us, or our neighbors, are one job loss, one medical emergency, or a few overdue bills away from needing the services of Island Harvest Food Bank and our network of community-based member agencies.

We heard remarks from Attorney General Letitia James at the Health & Welfare Council of Long Island's Winter Meeting. The Attorney General described her support for Healthy School Meals for All and related a story of two lines of students at the cafeteria. One line was for the children whose parents could afford lunch; the other was for students whose parents couldn't afford lunch. We all know how children can be, and the two lines create an opportunity to be unkind to one another.

We share the Attorney General's hope for a future with only one cafeteria line in New York State, meeting all students' health and nutritional demands.

We will leave you with this final thought: If you were building a \$227 billion budget from scratch and you could help ensure the health and well-being of every student in New York State by offering breakfast and lunch for \$200 million, wouldn't that be one of the first items you would include?

Thank you.

126 Spagnoli Road, Melville, NY 11747

Melville | Uniondale | Calverton | Brentwood

631-873-4775 | 516-294-8528 | [www.islandharvest.org](http://www.islandharvest.org)