

**Testimony Submitted by  
Chef Greg Silverman, CEO of West Side Campaign Against Hunger,  
Founding Director, The Roundtable  
On Behalf of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access  
For the Legislative Hearing on the FY23-24 NYS Budget: Human Services**

**February 13, 2023**

My name is Chef Greg Silverman, CEO of West Side Campaign Against Hunger, Founding Director, The Roundtable. Thank you to Assemblymember Maritza Davila and Senator Roxanne Persaud for holding today's budget hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access is a dedicated network of emergency food providers in New York City collaborating to bring more resources to communities, so none of our neighbors go hungry. We pursue opportunities for collective purchasing and collaborative advocacy work. The Roundtable was founded in 2018 by West Side Campaign Against Hunger with fellow providers New York Common Pantry (NYCP), Project Hospitality (PH), and St. John's Bread & Life (SJBL). One of the principal initiatives pursued was a purchasing pilot that tested new and expanded vendor relationships leading to 20% savings in food purchasing costs across the collective. Following the success of this pilot the group has focused on expanding opportunities for costs savings through collective purchasing and increasing membership, adding Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen (HASK), Met Council, Part of the Solution (POTS), and The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH). In 2021, Roundtable member organizations distributed 40 million meals, including 14.3 million pounds of fresh produce, from nearly 650 distribution sites across all five boroughs of NYC.

The Roundtable current activities fall into three categories:

1. **Strategic Purchasing:** From its inception, the Roundtable has had strategic purchasing as a cornerstone of its work, with the goal of procuring more high-quality, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food at better prices for its member organizations and the people they serve. This work includes ongoing price data gathering and aggregation from all the members to make informed purchasing decisions, save money and time, and improve data transparency. The Roundtable also engages in collective bulk purchasing - aggregating demand for select purchases. Initial bulk purchases have achieved successful savings ranging from 29% to 49% compared to standard distributor pricing.
2. **Mutual Support:** By creating a space for collaboration and communication among peer organizations, the Roundtable helps its members maximize their resources and find new ways of working together. The Roundtable is also exploring options for assistance for smaller pantries and food providers in NYC, sharing the collective insights and best

practices utilized by Roundtable members.

3. **Advocacy:** The Roundtable is a voice of advocacy for direct-service emergency food organizations in New York City. Because Roundtable organizations are embedded in the communities they serve, they keenly understand the resources and policies those communities need in order to ensure that none of our neighbors go hungry.

Together we envision a New York State where emergency food providers have greater capacity and autonomy to meet the demand of their communities and offer more nutritious, culturally relevant food. At the same time we want to see the State reimagine its investments in emergency feeding programs with reduced administrative burden, streamlined reporting and additional flexibility for providers. Finally, we urge the State to invest in and help seed innovative programs, collective action, delivery models, solutions and communication with customers within the emergency feeding system.

To help meet these goals, we respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following recommendations in the final FY24 New York State Executive Budget:

- **Increase the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program Funding to \$63 Million and include an annual increase in funding indexed to rising inflation.**

We are disappointed to see only \$34M included in the Governor's Executive Budget for this incredibly impactful program that addresses the ongoing hunger crises. Given rising levels of inflation and increased demand at emergency food providers across the state, we call on the Legislature to ensure the additional \$22.5M they included in the FY23 Budget is again included in the one-house bills and the final FY24 Budget. We are also calling for an increase in program funding for a total of \$63 million per year.

We also urge the State to include an annual increase in funding indexed to rising inflation, including food costs and COLA for Human Service Providers, and to tie funding to programming levels/goals annually. Further, we recommend that HPNAP is redesigned to allow EFPs greater autonomy over food choice, reduce administrative burden, streamline reporting, and allow grantees more flexibility and multiple pathways to access HPNAP funding. Providing more choice to sub-contracted EFPs on what food they can purchase through Food Bank and/or United Way using HPNAP credits would benefit sites.

- **Increase the NourishNY Funding to over \$50M and include an annual increase in funding indexed to rising inflation**

We are concerned about flat funding for the program at \$50M and encourage the State to increase funding for NourishNY as well as to include an annual increase in funding indexed to rising inflation, including food costs and COLA for Human Service Providers, and to tie funding to programming levels/goals annually. Additional funding will enable greater participation in the program and allow for rising food, staff and programming costs. And allow and create a model where subcontracting is available to community based Emergency Food Providers (EFPs) so that they can directly purchase food through NourishNY from the State.

We also urge NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) to conduct a program evaluation and release a public report evaluating the impacts and outcomes of NourishNY, how the program evolved, efficiency, transparency on how funding is determined & where it goes, how much of funding was used for food vs. other allowable expenses (15% allocation). Further we urge the State to require NYSDAM to seek stakeholder input on improving operations now that the program is permanent, particularly through participating in evaluation efforts.

Finally, we urge the State to maintain the program integrity of both NNY and Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), while streamlining contracting and reporting between the programs.

**For more information, contact Chef Greg Silverman, CEO of West Side Campaign Against Hunger, Founding Director, The Roundtable: [gsilverman@wscah.org](mailto:gsilverman@wscah.org)**