

Testimony Submitted by
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on behalf of
Food Bank For New York City
for the
New York State Joint Health Committee Budget Hearing
January 23, 2024

Thank you to Chairs Rivera and Gottfried, and all the members of the Assembly and Senate Health Committees for the opportunity to submit testimony on the proposed FY2025 Executive Budget for New York State. Food Bank For New York City (Food Bank) has provided free, nutritious, and culturally appropriate meals to New Yorkers for over 40 years. We partner with over 1000 organizations across the five boroughs including food pantries and soup kitchens, senior centers, shelters, schools and other community and faith-based organizations to provide food assistance, income support services, and nutrition education to New Yorkers of all ages. We also oversee the New York City SNAP Task Force and are one of the largest providers of free tax prep in the nation.

Food assistance organizations across the city and state are serving an increased demand with dwindling resources, at the same time that they have become vital for non-citizen residents who cannot utilize federal nutrition programs like SNAP. Food Banks like ours and the food pantries, soup kitchens, and other organizations who make up the food assistance network, rely on state programs such as the ***Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program*** (HPNAP) and ***Nourish New York*** to bring nutritious, culturally appropriate, and regionally sourced food to New Yorkers in need. **In our most recent member survey, Food Bank's network of community-based organizations reported that visits to food assistance programs remain 80% above pre-pandemic levels.**

At the height of the pandemic, with increased food supply from government assistance and private donations, Food Bank supported our more than network partners in serving over 120 million meals per year. Today, many of those pandemic food resources - both public and private support - have ended. The nationwide rise in the cost of living, particularly increased costs for food and other necessities like housing, have put lower income families at greater risk, forcing hard choices in the face of limited resources.

Community Food Assistance Program Funding

Food Bank urges increased support for the food assistance network in the next New York State Budget.

Fund the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) at \$64 Million

We ask that cuts proposed in the 2024-2025 Executive Budget to HPNAP be reversed, and that the program is fully funded at \$64M to accurately reflect community need. HPNAP, which is administered by the Department of Health, is one of the most successful anti-poverty and nutrition programs in New York. Through lines of credit at Food Bank and the United Way of New York City, HPNAP enables local food assistance providers to distribute millions of pounds of nutritionally balanced food to New Yorkers experiencing hunger and food insecurity – many of whom are excluded from federal nutrition programs. For over 30 years, HPNAP has supported food security for New Yorkers through healthy food procurement, storage and distribution, and operational expenses. HPNAP is a lifeline for the nearly 3 million New Yorkers, including 1.2 million New York City residents, who rely on emergency food programs to keep food on the table.

Every year, Food Bank receives more applicants for HPNAP funding than the previous year, and many agencies exhaust their HPNAP funds before the end of the funding period. Our budget ask includes increased funding for HPNAP to allow the food assistance network to expand its reach and better serve more New Yorkers in need. The current **executive budget proposal, released by Governor Hochul earlier this month, rolls back funding of HPNAP to \$34.5M, a pre-pandemic amount that will not meet the need of food assistance providers thorough out the state.**

Fund Nourish New York at \$75 Million

We ask that funding for Nourish New York is increased to \$75M, to provide New Yorkers in need nutritious, locally produced food; and to support our local farmers and strengthen the food system for all of us. Nourish New York, previously administered by the Department of Agriculture and Markets, and now combined with the administration of HPNAP by the Department of Health, helps food banks distribute New York-grown produce and other New York-produced agricultural products across our network. The program helps improve the selection of food at distributions – providing more choice to hungry New Yorkers who often don’t have the freedom to choose.

Since 2020, Nourish New York has provided over 70 million pounds of healthy, nutritious food to hungry New Yorkers while generating \$150M in direct benefits for over 4,000 producers across the state. Not only does Nourish New York support hungry New Yorkers with nutritious produce, the program also directly supports producers – from the fishing industry on Long Island to fruit and vegetable growers up north and out west to dairy farmers across the state.

Additional Food Bank FY25 Budget Priorities

Fund The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) at \$5.45M

We ask that NOEP is fully funded at \$5.45M. NOEP is New York’s largest SNAP outreach, education and application assistance program and increases SNAP participation among eligible residents and helps to maximize federal matching funds coming into the state, helping households, communities, and the regional food system. Funded since 1987, NOEP is a unique model that combines statewide activities with community-based services. At the community level, NOEP manages a network of community-based organizations, including working with Food Bank’s SNAP team, skilled at conducting SNAP outreach and enrollment assistance. In 2022, NOEP helped more than 26,000 households receive more than \$114 million in annual SNAP benefits, and generate more than \$175 million in economic activity in NY state. Investment in this critical service brings a significant return on investment, bringing federal SNAP dollars to New Yorkers in need, and to local grocers and regional food system. **The current executive budget proposal of \$3.503M is a cut to NOEP funding.**

Raise the SNAP Minimum in NYS (A.6214/S.7663)

We ask that NY create and fund a state SNAP minimum benefit program, so that eligible households receive a monthly state SNAP benefit equal to the difference between the household's federal SNAP monthly allotment and one hundred dollars (\$100). This increase will make SNAP a stronger resource for the tens of thousands of New Yorkers who are eligible for SNAP but at a benefit amount that is less than \$100 per month, including people on a fixed income such as older adults. New York has the opportunity to follow our neighbors in New Jersey, acknowledging that the federal minimum of \$23 per month is not enough to supplement a grocery budget in our state. This will improve nutrition for seniors and households on the cusp of poverty and improve health outcomes and financial security for older adults.

Create and fund the New York State Working Families Tax Credit (A.4022a/S.277a)

We ask that New York State pass and fund the Working Families Tax Credit, which would provide a fully refundable tax credit of up to \$1,500 per child and streamline the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Empire State Child Tax Credit (CTC) to provide increased support while lessening the additional cost to the state. This will provide much needed budget relief to New York families. This new tax credit is estimated to result in a 13.4% reduction in children under the age of 18 living in poverty, with a 19.6% reduction for those under 18 living in deep poverty.

SNAP for All Task Force (A.5933/S.7692)

We ask that New York State establish a task force to examine, evaluate and determine the feasibility of establishing a state-funded version of SNAP, “SNAP for All,” which would provide nutrition benefits for all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status.

Healthy School Meals For All NY Kids (A.1941/S.1678)

We ask that all students in NYS have access to cost free meals at school and all the benefits that provides to families and to communities. Providing free meals for all students — regardless of income — is a proven strategy to reduce food insecurity, improve mental and physical health, support students’ ability to thrive academically, and bolster educational, health, and economic equity. The FY24 NYS budget included \$134.6M for school meals. This along with an expansion of federal community eligibility (CEP), covers almost 90% of NYS students. However, an estimated 700 schools serving 325,000 students remain without access to cost free school meals.

Hunger Free Campus Act (A.2645/S.2913a)

We ask that the Hunger Free Campus Act is passed and funded so that New Yorkers trying to better their economic outlook through higher education have access to the support they need. The Hunger Free Campus act would establish grant funding for public colleges who to address student hunger, leverage sustainable solutions to address basic food needs on campus, raise awareness of services currently offered to address basic food needs, and build partnerships at the local, state and national level to address food insecurity among students.

Conclusion

New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity are losing support and resources while their need remains high. Food Bank For New York City supports the state’s continued investment in critical food assistance and nutrition programs. However, **the current executive budget proposal includes significant cuts to funding levels for key anti-hunger programs** such as HPNAP and NOEP. We look forward to working with the legislature to ensure these and our other budget priorities to help New Yorks achieve food security for good are fully funded in the final FY 25 state budget.

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