

Testimony Submitted by  
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on behalf of  
**Food Bank For New York City**  
for the  
**New York State Joint Human Services Committee Budget Hearing**  
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Thank you to Chairs Persaud and Davila, and all the members of the Assembly and Senate Human Services 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. These critical “beyond food” services brought \$77M to New York City communities in 2023.

## The state of food assistance in New York State

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 community-based organizations who make up the food assistance network, rely on state food assistance programs 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 a 92% increase in visits compared to pre-pandemic levels while experiencing a 30% reduction in food supply** over the year before. Member organizations continue to report long lines, even in freezing cold temperatures, as New Yorkers in need struggle to keep food on the table.

At the height of the pandemic, with increased food supply from government assistance and private donations, Food Bank supported our network partners in serving over 120 million meals per year. Today, many of those pandemic food resources - both public and private - have ended, yet community need has remained high. One Food Bank mobile pantry partner in Queens, who started out in response to pandemic need continues to regularly serve over 1,000 families, providing them with the culturally relevant food items they need to thrive, reports many of the neighbors she sees are struggling to afford food because of inflation.

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. According to the [2023 NYC True Cost of Living Report](#), 50% of the city’s working age households do not have incomes sufficient to cover basic needs. As one of our community partners explained, “The pandemic may be going down, but now food prices are rising and jobs are hard to get. How are people supposed to afford food? If they can come out here and get a little bit of onion, a little bit of farro, a bottle of juice, it’s something they can hold onto. Every little bit counts.”

Since Spring 2022, New York City has experienced a large increase in asylum seeking migrants, with over 160,000 individuals settling in the city. According to the Mayor's office, as of January 2024 over 68,400 asylum seekers remain in City-sponsored care nightly, and that number continues to increase. Many asylum seekers face significant economic and health challenges and require community support to access necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, and hygiene items. One of our network partners in Manhattan, whose agency serves a community with an increased migrant population, saw visitors to their pantry nearly double in just one and a half months this past summer, stretching her already thin resources even thinner. In spite of the strain she, and countless food assistance providers around the city, remain determined to serve our city's newest neighbors.

Food Bank supports Governor Kathy Hochul's executive budget proposal's inclusion of \$2.4 billion to **New York City for providing services to migrants**. This funding will help organizations across the city meet this important need and serve as many neighbors as possible.

Food Bank's food assistance network will continue to serve all people in need living in the city, including our newest neighbors, using all resources available as necessary to meet the need in our communities. Food Bank has identified the following priorities for the FY25 New York State budget, as ways to help more New Yorker have access to nutritious food and the resources that will empower them to achieve food security for good. As you negotiate the final budget with the Governor, we ask for your support for these priorities.

## Department of Human Services Programs

In your oversight of SNAP administration, Human Services committee members know that SNAP is the most effective anti-hunger tool in the country. To meet the needs of New Yorkers, there's a focus on strengthening the SNAP program, making this federal benefit more impactful and bringing it to more eligible New Yorkers. The SNAP program offers nutrition assistance to New Yorkers in need and spurs an annual economic activity of over \$11.3 billion in our communities. You have the opportunity to strengthen this program for our neighbors and help the food assistance network by keeping more people off pantry lines.

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

**The current executive budget proposal of \$3.503M is a cut to NOEP funding. 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, bringing federal SNAP dollars to New Yorkers in need, and to local grocers and regional food system. FY24 allocation for NOEP was \$5.45M.

### **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. It will also encourage people who don't feel the administrative burden of the SNAP application is justified by \$23, who may now receive a more substantial grocery benefit.

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 meaningfully 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.** One of Food Bank's tax clients explained that she will spend her return on basic needs like food. When pandemic era enhanced SNAP Emergency Allotments expired last year, her SNAP benefits were drastically cut to just \$38 per month. Now she and many other SNAP recipients are struggling to afford the nutritious food they need.

#### **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.

This bill would 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. This task force is an important step toward expanding the benefit of nutrition assistance to those who need it most. Based on lessons learned from a similar policy that went into effect in California in 2022, we know that a rigorous analysis of the current landscape, including a cost estimate, is a crucial first step in building this program. This legislation would instruct the State to conduct such a study, so policy makers can understand the impact and scope of implementing a program of this type in New York. This policy is particularly timely given the influx of asylum seekers in New York, who are grappling with meeting basic needs.

## **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.

Across New York City, over 600 food pantries are supported by HPNAP. Every year, Food Bank receives more applicants for HPNAP funding than the previous year, and many agencies spend their HPNAP funds before the allocated time. 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.

#### **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 State Department of Agriculture and Markets, and now combined with the administration of HPNAP by the State Department of Health, helps food banks distribute New York-grown produce and other New York-produced agricultural products across our network.

## Additional Food Bank FY25 Budget Priorities

To assist in New Yorkers' meeting their household budget needs, Food Bank supports the establishment of a Working Families Tax Credit, which would reduce poverty levels, promote economic activity and improve food and housing security. To help all New York students have the nutritious food they need to be successful, we support Healthy School Meals for All NY Kids and the Hunger Free Campus Act.

### **Support New York State with the Working Families Tax Credit**

**The Working Families Tax Credit** would help lift New York children out of poverty and enrich communities, generate economic activity, and improve food security, housing stability and financial empowerment across the state. As one of the nation's largest free federal tax filers, Food Bank For New York City understands the impact of robust tax credits on households and communities.

The pandemic era expanded federal child tax credit, provided for in the American Rescue Plan Act, successfully **lifted 2.9 million children out of poverty**, driving the rate of child poverty to fall to a record low in 2021. Many of these gains were lost when the program was not renewed. The Working Families Tax credit would put resources back into household budgets and into communities, helping food assistance organization meet increasing need by helping more families avoid our lines. If passed, it will provide critical refunds to New York families to cover basic needs like food, shelter, medicines, and educational costs, and will be an economic driver for New York State by putting tax dollars back into our communities.

### **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. **The current executive budget proposal includes significant cuts to funding levels for key anti-hunger programs such as HPNAP and NOEP.** We ask that funding for those vital programs is restored. We look forward to working with the legislature to ensure all our budget priorities are fully funded in the final FY 25 state budget to help more New Yorkers achieve food security for good.

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