

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing— Human Services

Testimony of Feeding New York State

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February 7, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of Feeding New York State, the state association of New York's 10 Feeding America-affiliated food banks. Our food banks work in partnership with over 3,000 community-based organizations including food pantries, emergency shelters, community kitchens, and programs that support all New Yorkers in need of food. Together, we are guided by the view that healthy food is a basic human right that must be guaranteed to all New Yorkers.

New York State has made significant progress on the issues of hunger and food insecurity in recent years. Two years ago, in response to the expiration of child nutrition waivers, the enacted budget expanded free school meals for over 350,000 children. Last year, our state opted into the newly created [Summer EBT](#) program, which has provided over \$200 million in food assistance benefits for more than 1.5 million children. We are also encouraged by Governor Hochul's recent proposals to [strengthen our state's Child Tax Credit](#) and provide [Healthy School Meals for All New York Kids](#)—both of which would have a significant impact for New York families, helping build a healthier and more affordable state.

However, despite this progress, we have more work to do. Our food banks and community partners report serving around 70% more households and individuals compared with 2019. Food prices have jumped by [more than 25%](#) since before the pandemic, and today, 1 in 5 New York households are “severely rent-burdened” according to a recent [report](#) from the New York State Comptroller's office. In alignment with Governor Hochul's focus on affordability, we propose several initiatives to help reduce the cost of food for New York families.

Guarantee a \$100 SNAP Minimum Benefit for All Participating New Yorkers

Today, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nearly 3 million New Yorkers with monthly food assistance benefits. The program is widely understood as the nation's largest and most impactful anti-hunger program. Despite the program's success in helping New York households afford a more nutritious and well-rounded diet, far too many New Yorkers receive inadequate benefits. While SNAP benefit levels are determined by Congress and the

federal government, states including New Jersey and New Mexico have used state funding to raise SNAP benefits for participating households. New York should take the lead as well.

Data from New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) shows that over 107,000 New Yorkers currently receive monthly SNAP benefits that amount to less than \$100, while some receive just \$23 per month. These individuals are typically older adults with an annual income of around \$16,000 per year, over a quarter of whom are actively receiving [SSI](#) benefits. It is simply impossible to afford a month of groceries, let alone a day or two of food, with just \$23. Additionally, low benefit amounts are often cited as a barrier for SNAP participation—suggesting that a more adequate minimum benefit could draw down more federal dollars into New York State. That is why raising the SNAP minimum benefit has bipartisan cosponsorship in both the Assembly and Senate ([A.1318](#) / [S.665](#)), endorsements from over [250 New York-based organizations](#), and broad-based support from [66% of New York voters](#).

For all of these reasons, we respectfully request that the FY2026 Enacted Budget appropriate \$70 million to ensure that all New Yorkers participating in SNAP receive a more adequate minimum benefit of at least \$100 per month. This initiative would directly help New Yorkers better afford food, while also supporting grocers, retailers, and farmers’ markets across the state.

Restore Full Funding for SNAP Outreach and Application Assistance

The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) helps eligible low-income New Yorkers connect to SNAP, our nation’s largest anti-hunger program. Statewide, 84 local SNAP navigators conduct outreach, provide free and confidential pre-screenings, and help potentially eligible families apply. By increasing SNAP participation, NOEP also helps more low-income New Yorkers automatically qualify for other interconnected programs, including Summer EBT, WIC, and free school meals, ensuring New York is fully leveraging federal resources to alleviate hunger.

The FY2024 and FY2025 Enacted Budgets each included a \$2 million legislative add-on to support expanded NOEP services. This additional investment has enabled NOEP to add 24 new SNAP navigators in high-need and rural areas and expand remote services statewide. Last year alone, the program reached more than 163,000 potentially eligible New Yorkers with information about SNAP, and more than 34,000 households received SNAP benefits as a direct result of NOEP services. However, in the absence of sustained funding, NOEP will be forced to scale back those impactful expansions at a time when hunger is on the rise.

That is why we urge the New York State Legislature to sustain a \$2 million legislative add-on for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York’s statewide network of SNAP navigators. This investment, when added to the \$3.624 million proposed in the FY2026

Executive Budget, will provide a total of \$5.624 million to ensure continued access to SNAP navigators in communities across the state.

Expand Food Assistance for Non-citizen Households with Children

In addition to raising the SNAP minimum benefit and investing in SNAP application assistance, we must also ensure that vital nutrition benefits are available for New Yorkers excluded on the basis of their immigration status. Arbitrary barriers to SNAP access – which include both harmful waiting periods and outright exclusions – exacerbate food hardship for immigrant New Yorkers, who contribute over \$27 billion annually in state and local taxes. We must ensure that all of our families can afford healthy food in their communities.

Last year, the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) proposed a package of policy interventions to Governor Hochul that would help meet New York’s goal of cutting child poverty rates in half by 2031. Included in the set of proposals is a state-funded food assistance program for non-citizen households with children. Research commissioned by the council suggests that this initiative would positively impact over 64,000 households, providing an average benefit of over \$2,000 per year.

While we believe that this state-funded program should benefit all excluded New Yorkers, including households without children, we respectfully request that the FY2026 Enacted Budget include \$140.8 million to provide vital food assistance for non-citizen households with children.

Further, it is our view that this program must guarantee that all non-citizen New Yorkers are protected in light of threats from the current administration. In this climate, New York State has a moral responsibility to both support and protect all of its residents. That is why our state must also prioritize the safety of those who participate. Legislation in the Assembly and Senate, ([A.3506](#) / [S.2235](#)) would establish statewide protections for immigrant New Yorkers by prohibiting state and local collusion with federal immigration officials. We urge the legislature to pass such protections to help protect families and ensure that this benefit is a safe, accessible program for all New Yorkers.

Conclusion

Our association recognizes that more is needed to fully address the worsening crises of hunger, poverty, and food hardship. To strengthen food security, we must also urgently address issue areas including but not limited to living wages, housing, healthcare, transportation, mass incarceration, immigration, and corporate consolidation. However, we have a real opportunity in this budget cycle to raise SNAP benefits for older adults, invest in SNAP outreach and application assistance, and expand SNAP access for excluded New Yorkers. Each of these initiatives would directly benefit struggling New Yorkers, as well as our state’s economy and food system.

We thank New York State for the decades of partnership in the fight against hunger, as well as this committee for the opportunity to share our perspective on how the FY2026 budget can meaningfully address food hardship. Our work continues until every New Yorker has the guarantee of healthy food in their community.