

**Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the FY 2026-FY 2027 Executive Budget  
Topic: Human Services**

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Recommendations on the budgetary actions necessary to ensure equitable access of food to all New Yorkers and the continuation of a coordinated network of farm and food professionals to ensure a resilient local food system.

**Assembly Committee on Ways & Means, Assemblymember Gary Pretlow, Chair  
Senate Committee on Finance, Senator Liz Krueger, Chair**

**Assembly Committee of Social Services, Assemblymember Maritza Davila, Chair  
Senate Committee on Social Services, Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Children and Families, Assemblymember Andrew  
Hevesi, Chair  
Senate Committee on Children and Families, Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Aging, Assemblymember Rebecca A. Seawright, Chair  
Senate Committee on Aging, Senator Cordell Cleare, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Agriculture, Assemblymember Donna Lupardo, Chair  
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Senator Michelle Hinchey, Chair**

**February 5, 2026**

## Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of New Yorkers who are striving to put food on the table for their families, for the many workers who ensure that food is processed, aggregated, and transported from field to consumer, and the farmers and producers who work tirelessly, regardless of weather, to grow the very food we all need to survive and thrive. We appreciate the legislature's dedication to ensuring the enacted budget supports not only feeding New Yorkers, but ensuring that we are building a resilient local food chain, which ensures that New Yorkers have increased access to healthy food that is grown and produced in our own state.

Equity Advocates builds the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and structural systems change. Too often, race and socioeconomic background dictate who does and does not have access to healthy, local, and culturally relevant foods. Approximately 1 in 7 New Yorkers experience hunger, and Black and Hispanic New Yorkers are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity than their white neighbors.

In the past year, New York communities have not only been faced with rising costs of living, and especially increasing grocery prices, but some groups of New Yorkers have experienced major disruptions to the accessibility of their food after the passage of the Federal H.R.1 bill in July 2025, which delivered devastating cuts and changes to the Supplemental and Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for New Yorkers. With the passage of H.R. 1, SNAP eligibility restrictions for immigrants became even stricter. Refugees, asylees, and humanitarian parolees are now excluded from the program, leaving thousands of New Yorkers without access to SNAP benefits.

At the same time, food pantries and other emergency food providers are facing mounting pressure to feed increased demand from New Yorkers. According to Feeding America, for every 1 meal a food pantry provides, SNAP can provide 9. Yet with threats to both emergency food programs and the SNAP program, New Yorkers are running out of options. On top of this, the increasing presence of ICE across our state is causing fear and uncertainty about whether it is safe to even seek food at emergency food distribution centers, adding unnecessary barriers to accessing meals.

To ensure the FY2027 budget puts food back on the table for all New Yorkers, we recommend the legislature include the following in the FY27 enacted budget:

- **\$244 Million for a Food Benefit Program**, similar yet distinct from the federal SNAP program, which would restore food benefits for the 41,000 asylees, refugees, and survivors of domestic violence who lost their benefits post-H.R.1, and 65,000 immigrant families with children as identified by New York's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, and
- **\$2 Million for a First-in-the-Nation investment in a statewide network of community-rooted Local Food Councils** who are uniquely positioned to work at the

local and regional level to improve access to healthy food, strengthen local economies, and advance racial and economic justice in the food system.

### **Support New York's Immigrant Communities by Investing \$244 Million Into a State Food Benefit Program**

Equity Advocates urges state leaders to ensure that the FY 2026-2027 New York State Budget includes investments in strengthening access to food benefits for the most vulnerable communities by *restoring access to food benefits for 41,000 refugees, asylees, and Survivors of Domestic Violence* and supporting the New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council's (CPRAC) proposal to *create a state-funded food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP due solely to their citizenship status*. New York is facing an escalating food insecurity crisis, exacerbated by the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs of living, and systemic barriers that prevent many families from accessing federal nutrition assistance. Ensuring food security for all requires concrete investments that remove barriers to essential resources like food. Food is a basic human right, and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance.

Research published in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine reveals a stark disparity: noncitizens are nearly twice as likely to be food-insecure as U.S.-born and naturalized citizens.<sup>1</sup> Food is a basic human right, and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance, regardless of their immigration status.

SNAP is the largest and most impactful anti-hunger program in the United States, providing nearly 3 million New Yorkers with an average benefit of \$6.89 per day in 2024.<sup>2</sup> SNAP has been proven to not only enhance food security but also improve health outcomes, stimulate local economies, and reduce poverty.

Yet despite contributing over \$27 billion per year in state and local taxes, many immigrant New Yorkers have been unjustly excluded from SNAP benefits. Lawful permanent residents, including Green Card holders, face an arbitrary five-year waiting period before accessing SNAP benefits. Other groups are excluded entirely, including those with Temporary Protected Status, DACA, and undocumented status, which together comprise as many as 673,000 New Yorkers<sup>3</sup>.

#### ***Refugees, Asylees, and Humanitarian Parolees***

With the passage of H.R. 1, signed into law in July 2025, SNAP eligibility restrictions for immigrants became even stricter. Refugees, asylees, and humanitarian parolees are newly excluded from the program, leaving thousands of New Yorkers without access to SNAP benefits. Implementation guidance issued in October 2025 directed states to immediately deny

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<sup>1</sup> [American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Food Insecurity Disparities Among Immigrants in the U.S.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP](#)

<sup>3</sup> [American Immigration Council, Immigrants in New York](#)

new applications from New Yorkers in these groups and remove current recipients at recertification. We encourage the legislature to restore access to vital nutrition benefits for New Yorkers excluded on the basis of their immigration status in this year's enacted budget. We must ensure that all of our families can afford healthy food in their communities.

The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)'s most recent estimate is that 41,000 New Yorkers will be affected by this change, though this number could change as the full impact becomes clearer. This part of the proposal will cost approximately \$103 million per year in benefits to recipients based on average SNAP benefit costs.

### ***Households with Children***

The New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) in December 2024 recommended<sup>4</sup> that New York State create a State food benefit for households with children who are ineligible for SNAP due to immigration status, as part of a pathway towards cutting child poverty by half by 2031. This crucial investment will ensure that New York families can put food on the table and that no child is left to face hunger.

According to the Urban Institute's modeling for CPRAC, establishing a State-funded food benefit for excluded families with children would reach nearly 65,000 New York households, providing each family with an average of \$2,169 in food assistance annually. CPRAC estimates that implementing this policy would cost up to \$141 million per year.

### ***Momentum***

There is growing momentum around the country for more equitable SNAP access. For example, in 2022, California expanded its state food assistance program to provide benefits for excluded Californians aged 55 and older. Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington have each implemented similar state-funded programs to provide food assistance for excluded immigrant households. Further, [110+ organizations](#) — including groups focused on health, food security, immigrant rights, and agriculture — have joined the SNAP4All New York Coalition, calling for a state-funded food benefit for all income-eligible households currently ineligible for SNAP due to citizenship status.

### ***Cost and Impact***

Investing \$244 million in a food benefit for excluded New Yorkers isn't just a policy choice—it's an economic stimulus. This \$244 million investment would generate 3,323 direct jobs in the food and beverage retail sector and an additional 2,367 jobs through indirect effects, bringing the total of additional jobs created to 5,690, strengthening both local economies and the families they serve<sup>5</sup>. According to OTDA, SNAP use in New York supports the 18,000 retailers across the state who accept SNAP, including grocery stores, local shops, and the more than 400

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<sup>4</sup> [Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, 2024 Recommendations and Progress Report](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Updated Employment Multipliers for the U.S. Economy, Economic Policy Institute, 2019.](#)

SNAP-authorized farmers markets and farm stands, which can be found in every county. Impact evaluations have shown that New York City's Health Bucks program alone has led to more than 70% of farmers and vendors at NYC's greenmarkets reporting increased sales.<sup>6</sup> According to Governor Kathy Hochul, the cuts to SNAP in H.R.1 will have double the impact to New York's farmers due to the state's farmers markets dollar matching program.<sup>7</sup> The legislature has an opportunity to ensure these effects are not felt by our local businesses and farmers through expanding the federal SNAP program with state-funded assistance.

A full SNAP4All policy would ultimately benefit more than just the families and individuals who have lost their food assistance benefits, and would keep our local economy strong. **This full program is laid out in S.9033 (Rivera) / A.6632 (González-Rojas).**

### **Allocate \$2 Million to Fund a Nation-Leading Network of Local Food Councils**

Providing funding for New Yorkers to access food is only a small part in increasing food security. We are at a critical juncture where New York's food system is both our greatest vulnerability and our most promising solution to climate, economic, and health challenges. According to the 2022 USDA census, more than 2 million acres of New York's farmland belong to aging farmers, 90% of whom do not have a plan for farmland transfer. New York's producers are also navigating unprecedented and unpredictable weather patterns and climate conditions, rising farmland prices, and most recently tariffs which are affecting many farm businesses and contributing to rising food costs. Infrastructure to support aggregation, transportation, food processing, and cold and dry storage to ensure the food that is grown can reach communities also remains a challenge. And as mentioned before, with increased ICE presence and uncertainty regarding the safety and wellbeing of immigrant and migrant workers along the food chain, food supply is also affected.

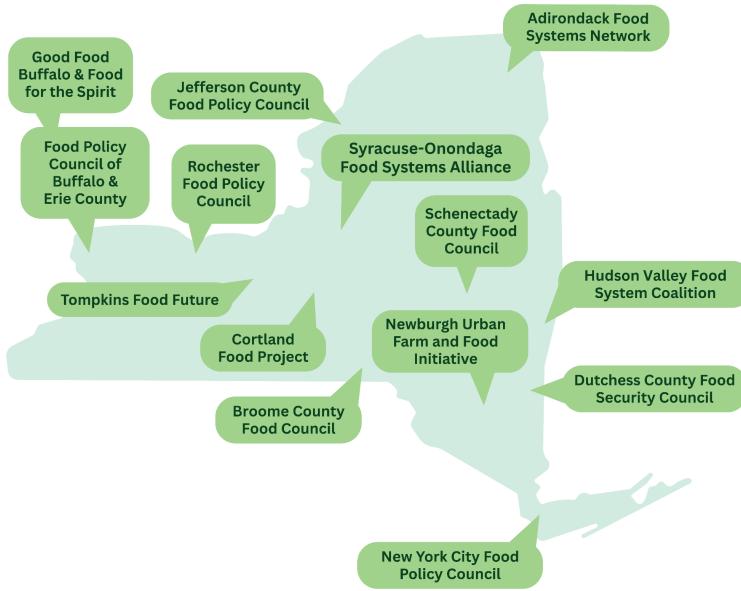
New York's food system touches every aspect of daily life, yet critical decisions about food access, agriculture, transportation, and public health are often made in isolation rather than coordination. When systems operate in silos, resources are wasted, communities lose efficiency, and the state remains less prepared to respond to both everyday needs and moments of crisis.

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<sup>6</sup> [Implementing a Farmers Market Incentive Program, 2013.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Governor Hochul Unveils Devastating Impacts of Republicans' 'Big Ugly Bill,' on New York State, 2025.](#)

## Existing Local Food Councils Across New York State



Local Food Councils (LFC) offer a proven, community-rooted solution. New York currently benefits from 13 active Local Food Councils serving diverse geographies—from the Adirondacks to New York City to the Southern Tier—which connect thousands of residents, farmers, and small businesses who live and work within their regions, counties, or municipalities to respond to food emergencies and work together to build resiliency in their hyperlocal food systems. Local Food Councils are cross-sector, community-led coalitions working at the local and regional level to strengthen food systems through collaboration, policy change, and place-based action. They are the "connective tissue" of the food system, building statewide food democracy through community-led

governance. These LFCs are poised to work together as a network to increase the sustainability and resiliency of New York's food system, which will over time lessen the demand on emergency food suppliers, but are lacking the necessary and sustained funding to carry out their work.

*We urge the state to invest \$2 million to create a new program to strengthen, expand, and coordinate Local Food Councils (LFCs) across the state.* This funding will provide the necessary infrastructure to bridge the divide between our producers, intermediaries, and consumers, ensuring that New York remains a national leader in resilient and sustainable local food economies.

If included, New York would be the first state in the nation to invest in a network of food systems experts whose work has already been proven to strengthen, expand, and improve food access, local agricultural economies, climate resilience, and racial justice.

While New York is home to 13 LFCs, more than half of our counties (35 out of 62) currently lack these vital councils. Many of these unserved regions face food insecurity rates as high as 15%, alongside overlapping challenges like housing instability and transportation barriers. A \$2 million investment would provide \$900,000 to stabilize and scale our 13 existing councils, \$450,000 to launch exploratory and planning work in underserved regions, and \$280,000 to expand a nationally-recognized participatory grantmaking model that shifts decision-making power directly to residents with lived experience of food insecurity. This is complemented by \$370,000 for

statewide network operations to ensure consistent communication, data sharing, peer to peer training, and administration of funding.

National research from Johns Hopkins University and Michigan State University demonstrates that LFCs are uniquely effective at breaking down silos between sectors like public health, transportation, and economic development<sup>8</sup>. Decades of work from Michigan State University's Center for Regional Food Systems documents how structural racism shapes land access, wages, transportation, zoning, market access, and procurement – and identifies community-rooted coalitions as critical infrastructure for correcting these inequities<sup>9</sup>. Collective impact models in food systems research reinforce that coordinated, cross-sector networks produce stronger outcomes in food access, local innovation, and community resilience than isolated efforts<sup>10</sup>. LFCs embody the core functions of *impact networks*: they foster deep community relationships, build alignment around shared priorities, and mobilize coordinated action. This structure allows regions to respond quickly to crises, innovate collaboratively, and drive long-term structural change.<sup>11</sup>

These councils do more than just distribute food; they address the upstream, structural drivers of hunger, such as transportation gaps, unaffordable and aging housing stock, economic instability, procurement barriers and market access, supply chain disruption, and racialized disparities in food and land access. while also strengthening food democracy, deepening civic participation, and breaking down silos between sectors. By fostering *impact networks*, LFCs allow regions to respond quickly to crises while driving the long-term changes needed to build community resilience. Investing in these councils also directly supports New York's goals under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA). With one acre of New York farmland capable of generating 1,000 meals per day, a coordinated network of LFCs is the infrastructure required to reduce food waste, lower greenhouse gas emissions through regional sourcing, and ensure our food system can withstand the shocks of a changing climate.

We have already seen what this community-led infrastructure can achieve. Within New York, LFCs have already advanced major wins: regional planning efforts, transportation coordination, support for Indigenous foodways, expanded local procurement, zoning updates, and anti-hunger programs. In Central New York, when an aquaculture business unexpectedly had 30,000 pounds of salmon at risk of waste, the Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance (SOFSA) mobilized partners in hours to redirect that protein to the Onondaga Nation and local households. The New York City Food Policy Alliance has also been a critical voice in shaping citywide food policy. It played a central role in informing New York City's first-ever 10-year food policy plan, *Food Forward NYC*, advocating for changes to the development process that ensured meaningful community engagement and incorporation of a racial equity framework. As a result, 25 of the plan's policy strategies (35%) were originally proposed by Alliance members, demonstrating our ability to translate community priorities into actionable city policy. In

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<sup>8</sup> [Characteristics of Regional Food Policy Councils in the United States, Johns Hopkins Center for a Livable Future, 2024.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Structural Racism in the U.S. Food System: A Review of the Literature](#)

<sup>10</sup> [Collective Impact Models of Food System Change](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Impact Networks: Create Connection, Spark Collaboration, and Catalyze Systemic Change](#)

Schenectady, the Food Council worked with local legislators to turn a community vision for vacant land into the Urban Farming Land Initiative, which was signed into law in 2024. Even in our most rural areas, like Tioga County, the mentorship of established councils is currently helping residents build their own LFC to address deep-seated food deserts. These examples prove that when we invest in the "backbone" of the food system, we get more than just emergency relief; we get innovation, coordination, and a stronger local economy.

New York's food system requires both immediate anti-hunger supports and the long-term structural transformation that only Local Food Councils can provide. This \$2 million investment ensures that every region of our state has the capacity to participate in shaping a fair, accessible, and resilient food system. It is a cost-effective, high-impact strategy to ensure that the state's anti-hunger programs are supported by a durable, community-rooted infrastructure. I respectfully request that you include this funding in the final enacted budget to secure a healthier, more democratic future for all New Yorkers.

### **Support Additional Programs to Ensure New Yorkers Can Access and Afford Food**

#### **Protect and Strengthen SNAP, WIC, and Other Food Security Programs**

Amid rising food insecurity and unprecedented cuts to federal nutrition programs, this year's budget must protect New Yorkers' access to SNAP, WIC, and other critical anti-hunger programs. We support Executive Budget proposals to transition to EBT chip cards, increase funding for emergency food programs, and expand access to summer nutrition programs—but more is needed to respond to the food security crisis at hand. The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York's network of SNAP navigators, will play a critical role in helping New Yorkers access and maintain SNAP benefits amid federal policy changes, but without additional state investment to backfill federal cuts, many communities will lose SNAP navigators when they are needed most. We urge the Legislature to fund NOEP at \$8.5M to sustain access to SNAP navigators statewide. We also ask the Legislature to provide \$30M in supplemental WIC funding to ensure local agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services and reach more of the approximately 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers. New York can also build on successful programs, including by increasing the minimum SNAP benefit, extending food benefits to families who are excluded from SNAP solely due to immigration status, and expanding Nourish New York, HPNAP, and Double Up Food Bucks. Together, these investments will support food security, health, and affordability for New Yorkers.

#### **Increase the SNAP Minimum Benefit to \$100**

New York should guarantee that all New Yorkers participating in SNAP receive an adequate minimum benefit level of at least \$100 per month, to make a strong local commitment to feeding New Yorkers in need. Following the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments, some New Yorkers saw their monthly benefits drop to just \$23 per month. Over 107,000 New Yorkers would benefit from this initiative—in particular older adults making around \$16,000 per year, including over a quarter of whom are actively participating in SSI. This proposal would benefit an extremely vulnerable population currently receiving less than \$1 per day. That is why a bipartisan coalition of legislators and 66% of New York voters support the idea. We urge you to appropriate \$70

million to ensure all New Yorkers have a monthly SNAP benefit of at least \$100 per month. ([A.1318](#) / [S.665](#))

### **HPNAP and Nourish New York**

Statewide hunger relief programs serve as a backstop for New Yorkers working to make ends meet, as well as families excluded from federal nutrition programs. Especially considering recent changes to SNAP access, ensuring all New Yorkers have consistent access to healthy food in their community must be a top priority. That is why New York must continue to support the work of hunger relief organizations by providing \$75M for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program and \$75M for Nourish New York in the FY2027 budget.

### **NOEP**

The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) is New York's statewide network of more than 80 community-based SNAP navigators who help connect potentially eligible families to SNAP through outreach, prescreenings, and application assistance. By increasing SNAP participation, NOEP also helps more low-income New Yorkers qualify for other interconnected programs, including WIC, Summer EBT, and free school meals. Last year, NOEP provided SNAP information to more than 158,000 New Yorkers and helped more than 30,000 families successfully enroll in SNAP. NOEP generates an estimated 25 to 1 return on investment for New York, as it draws down additional federally funded food benefits into local economies.

SNAP navigators are especially important amid the rollout of complex federal changes to SNAP eligibility, work reporting requirements, and budgeting rules. However, NOEP—which is funded through a combination of state and federal funds—will lose *half* of its federal funding due to cuts in H.R.1. Without additional state investment, NOEP will be forced to scale back SNAP navigators when New Yorkers need them most.

To ensure New Yorkers have continued access to SNAP navigators, we ask the Legislature to fund NOEP at \$8.5 million, a \$4.798 legislative add-on to the Executive Budget proposal.

### **WIC**

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is one of our nation's most effective food security and public health programs. Several decades of research shows WIC's many benefits, including healthier births, improved maternal health, improved developmental outcomes, and reduced disparities in infant health. WIC is also an important economic driver, drawing down federal funds into New York's local economies as families use their benefits to buy healthy food at WIC-approved grocery stores, pharmacies, and farmers' markets. Over the last five years, WIC participation in New York has increased by nearly 25%, with the program now serving over 462,000 infants, children, and pregnant and postpartum New Yorkers.

Despite the significant increase in participation, local WIC agencies have remained nearly flat-funded for a decade. Many agencies are operating far above their contracted caseloads and struggling to serve all eligible families who are seeking services. 93% of surveyed WIC agencies

reported that budget shortfalls are affecting their operations, with many reporting reduced access to services, including nutrition and breastfeeding support; staff reductions; and long wait times for appointments—all major concerns when providing nutrition and public health services during time-sensitive periods of development. Additionally, an estimated 200,000 New Yorkers are eligible for WIC but not enrolled, a missed opportunity to maximize federally funded food assistance amid rising food insecurity and an ongoing affordability crisis.

To ensure local WIC agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services, sustain modernizations that have helped boost participation, and conduct outreach to hundreds of thousands of eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers, we ask the Legislature to include \$30 million in supplemental WIC funding.

### **Conclusion**

It has never been more urgent than it is in this year's enacted state budget to ensure New Yorkers are protected and have access to food, regardless of their immigration status. New York has an unprecedented opportunity to care for its own residents through ensuring that individual families can buy the food they need to thrive in and contribute to our state, and to fund a network which would continue community food systems work to address ongoing issues with accessibility, affordability, and infrastructural challenges in the local food chain. We urge the legislature to include the initiatives to continue our legacy as a state that welcomes and supports New Americans, values their contributions to our society and communities, and supports its own local agricultural economy.