



Public Testimony Presented by
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Island Harvest Food Bank

to the

Joint Legislative Hearing for Health

Regarding the Proposed Budget for State Fiscal Year 2027

February 10, 2026

Island Harvest Food Bank strongly supports Gov. Kathy Hochul's proposed State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2027 budget. The Governor's proposals represent strong starting positions, and the Legislature could provide meaningful additions to support our work to end hunger and reduce food waste on Long Island.

Island Harvest distributed nearly 10 million pounds of food per year prior to the pandemic. Last year, we distributed more than 21 million pounds of food, and we are on track to reach 22 million pounds of emergency food distributed this year. Food insecurity is getting worse, not better and we are grateful for the incredible bipartisan support we have received from New York State.

Providing Local Access to Essential Sustenance (PLATES)

As of the date of this testimony, Island Harvest is training its tenth cohort of students through our Workforce Skills Development Institute. Our Warehousing & Inventory Control program has successfully graduated 87 students with a 73% employment rate.

We know the path to ending hunger is not simply by providing food. Instead, the path to end hunger is through consideration of the whole person and ensuring they have the skills necessary to provide for themselves and their loved ones.

The Governor's inclusion of a \$10 million capital grant program through the Department of Health and the New York State Dormitory Authority provides the opportunity for Island Harvest to expand our course offerings to include Culinary Skills Development and Machine-Controlled Repacking programs. Implementing these programs requires

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extensive renovations to our headquarters and funding PLATES will help make our vision a reality.

Nourish New York (Nourish NY)

The Nourish NY program is an incredible success. Providing food banks and other emergency food providers funds to purchase food from New York State farmers and producers has been a lifeline for local businesses and our neighbors in need. The program is limited only by its funding.

The Governor has proposed flat funding of \$55 million in SFY 2027; Island Harvest respectfully requests that the Legislature increase funding to \$75 million. Every dollar invested in Nourish NY is utilized to purchase food from a New York farm, food producer, or business while helping New Yorkers in need to put food on the table.

Hunger Prevention & Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP)

HPNAP is the state's primary emergency food program, providing direct funding to food banks and emergency food providers to purchase emergency food from across the country.

The Governor's budget includes increased funding of \$15 million for a total of \$72.8 million; Island Harvest requests the Legislature increase that amount to \$75 million.

Emergency Food Support at the Human Level

Feeding America's *Map the Meal Gap* estimates more than 2.8 million New Yorkers lived with food insecurity in 2023 (the latest year data is available).¹ Island Harvest and Feeding New York State are advocating for \$150 million in this year's budget for HPNAP and Nourish NY.

This equates to asking the State to invest \$53.57 for each food insecure New Yorker. At less than \$55 *per year* per food insecure person, we consider this the floor, not the ceiling of investment in the emergency food system.

¹ Dewey, A., Hilvers, J., Dawes, S., Harris, V., Hake, M., and Engelhard, E. (2025). *Map the Meal Gap: A Report of Local Food Insecurity and Food Costs in the United States in 2023*. Feeding America National Organization.

<https://www.feedingamerica.org/research/map-the-meal-gap/overall-executive-summary>

<https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/new-york>

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School Meal Programs

We thank Governor Hochul and the entire Legislature for enacting universal free school meals for all students in New York. We are excited to see \$438 million included in this year's budget to maintain and improve the program.

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

The Governor has proposed level funding for WIC at \$26.2 million. Island Harvest requests the Legislature include \$30 million to support participation growth in WIC. Amid federal cuts to SNAP and Medicaid, WIC remains a critical nutrition security and public health support for over 450,000 New Yorkers. Participation has increased by 25% over the last four years; however, local WIC agencies have remained flat-funded, resulting in budget shortfalls that jeopardize access to services. Supplemental state funds will stabilize local WIC agencies so they can serve all eligible families. Funds will also support needed outreach to underserved communities and sustain recent modernizations that make NYS WIC more accessible and efficient.

Nutrition Outreach & Public Education Program (NOEP)

NOEP provides funding for one-on-one help for people applying for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits across more than 80 community-based SNAP navigators. By increasing SNAP participation, NOEP also helps more New Yorkers living with low-income to 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.

With new work requirements implemented by the federal government on people designated as "Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents" (ABAWD), SNAP application assistance will be more necessary than ever.

The Governor's budget includes \$3.7 million for NOEP; Island Harvest requests the Legislature add back funding that was included last year plus additional funding for a total of \$8.5 million.

About Island Harvest

Island Harvest Food Bank is a leading regional human services organization whose mission is to end hunger and reduce food waste on Long Island. Our work directly supports seniors, children, families, and veterans who turn to us in times of crisis through our direct service,

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mobile outreach program, and food distribution work. We also support a network of more than 300 community-based nonprofit organizations and emergency feeding programs across Long Island.

I am available to discuss this testimony with any member of these Committees, gregory@islandharvest.org at your convenience.

Thank you.