



**Written Testimony Presented by
Island Harvest Food Bank**

**Before the:
ASSEMBLY HEALTH &
SENATE HEALTH COMMITTEES**

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing
On Health
SFY 2023-2024**

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Good afternoon. My name is Randi Shubin Dresner, and I am the President and CEO of Island Harvest Food Bank. Chairperson Gustavo Rivera, Ranking Member Patrick Gallivan, Chairperson Amy Paulin, and Ranking Member Josh Jensen, thank you for hosting this Joint Legislative Hearing on the Health portions of Governor Kathy Hochul's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

Island Harvest Food Bank has prepared this testimony advocating for increasing the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) budget. HPNAP provides money for food banks, like Island Harvest, to purchase healthy food, including fresh produce, to provide to our network of partner agencies. Last year, HPNAP was allocated \$56.5 million, a historic level of support from New York State.

Island Harvest and our partner food banks in Feeding New York State advocated for an 11% increase in HPNAP for this coming year. We recognize that an 11% increase in any budget for any line item is a significant increase. However, everyone, not just our neighbors in need, has experienced the same hike in *costs* to their family food budget owing to the effects of inflation.

We also understand that it is the job of the Governor and the State Legislature to balance the myriad worthy, but at times competing, interests vying for financial support. However, the current proposal funding HPNAP at \$34.5 million, a 39% *decrease*, will return food banks and our partner agencies to *pre-pandemic* funding levels.

The COVID-19 Public Health Emergency expires on May 11, 2023. Therefore, Island Harvest has transitioned to *post-pandemic* thinking. We know from our preliminary data that while the need has *decreased* from the height of the pandemic, the overall demand has *increased* from what we saw in 2019 and years prior.

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We see similar funding trends from the federal government. The SNAP (or “food stamps”) Emergency Allotments end the day of this Joint Session. The Emergency Allotments were a response to COVID to shore-up family budgets against the uncertainty caused by the pandemic. Many families will experience a \$289 monthly reduction in SNAP benefits after returning to pre-pandemic funding levels.¹ Imagine the damaging effects on any family if they lost \$3,468 over one year.

One of the hardest lessons we learned during the pandemic was how inadequate our food insecurity and hunger relief programs were in responding to the needs of our neighbors. So let us not return to the *pre*-pandemic way of thinking about HPNAP specifically and food insecurity and hunger, generally. Instead, let us together forge a new path forward, recognize that \$34.5 million is the bare minimum needed for this program, and find a way to increase funding as much as this budget will allow.

¹ <https://hungersolutionsny.org/federal-nutrition-programs/snap/end-of-snap-ea/>

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