



Written Testimony Presented by  
Gregory A. May, Director of Government & Community Relations,  
Island Harvest Food Bank

to the

Senate Finance Committee  
and the Assembly Ways & Means Committee

Regarding Elementary & Secondary Education provisions included in  
the FY 2025 Executive Budget

February 1, 2024

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Good afternoon, Chairpersons Kruger and Weinstein, Ranking Members O'Mara and Ra, my name is Gregory May and I am the Director of Government & Community Relations at Island Harvest Food Bank. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the SFY 2025 Executive Budget during the Joint Legislative Hearing on Elementary & Secondary Education.

We respectfully request that the Committees include universal free school meals as championed by the the Healthy School Meals for All campaign, A1941/1678-A introduced by Member of Assembly Jessica González-Rojas and Senator Michelle Hinchey, in the SFY 2025 Budget.

Last year the State Legislature, working with Gov. Kathy Hochul, made an historic investment of more than \$130 million to expand access to free breakfast and lunch for students across the state. Based on data compiled by Community Food Advocates and Hunger Solutions New York, provided by the State Department of Education, we know more than 347,000 students now have access to healthy, nutritious food at no cost through their schools.

However, based on the same data we know more than 320,000 students have been left behind and of that number more than 145,000 of those students live on Long Island. An estimated addition of \$90 million to the budget, about \$220 million total, will feed every student in New York. With a proposed budget of \$233 *billion*, universal free school meals is a bargain.

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We know there is a perception that Long Island is a wealthy region of the state, but while there are communities of affluence here, that's true everywhere. Last year Island Harvest Food Bank distributed more than 16,000,000 pounds of food across every Assembly and Senate District on Long Island. Food insecurity exists in every corner and community of New York.

The central theme of the Governor's State of the State Address was making New York a more affordable place to live. A universal free school meal program is expected to save an average of \$150 per student per month for our families. Including universal free school meals in the SFY 2025 Budget is one more step in the right direction.

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, 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](mailto:gregory@islandharvest.org) at your convenience.

Thank you.

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