



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

to the

Senate Finance Committee
and the Assembly Ways & Means Committee

Regarding health provisions included in the FY 2025 Executive
Budget

January 30, 2024

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.

While we applaud Governor Hochul and her commitment to creating a safer, more affordable New York, the proposed budget does not meet the needs of New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity. The State's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), one of the primary financial supports for food banks and emergency food providers, was cut by \$22 million from last year's budget.

Island Harvest Food Bank would be directly harmed by this cut in funding. While our standard HPNAP contract provides about \$300,000 in funding on an annual basis, last year's Legislative Add provided an additional \$1.2 million in funds that directly supported our neighbors in need and our network of 300 member agencies (food pantries, kitchens, and other emergency food providers).

The Department of Health released a report late last year that found a staggering 24.9% of adults experienced food insecurity, defined as "always, usually, or sometimes worried or stressed about

having enough money to buy nutritious meals in the past twelve months.”¹ In Nassau County 21.1% of adults experienced food insecurity while in Suffolk County 23.1% of adults experienced food insecurity.²

Although the Department’s report is based on data from 2021, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, our food distributions have not returned to pre-pandemic levels, and are on pace to exceed pandemic-levels of need. In 2019 Island Harvest Food Bank distributed 9.8 million pounds of food. In 2023 we distributed 17 million pounds of food, an increase of 74%. New York can only be an affordable place to live when New Yorkers no longer worry about their next meal.

The State Legislature understands this point and has held the line on HPNAP funding, last year adding \$22 million to the Governor’s budget. From this legislative add, Island Harvest Food Bank received \$1.2 million which allowed us to distribute more than 1.3 million pounds of additional, needed food to Long Islanders.

We, along with Feeding New York State and the nine other regional food banks, respectfully request that the State Legislature fund HPNAP at \$64 million in SFY 2025. We understand and appreciate difficult budget choices, but under no circumstances should funding be allowed fall below last year’s level of more than \$56 million.

Island Harvest Food Bank is a leading 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 mobile outreach program and supports a network of community-based nonprofit organizations and emergency feeding programs. We write today to respectfully request that the SFY2025 Budget include investments into critical programs and services that allow us to fulfill our mission in ensuring that individuals and families on Long Island have enough food to eat while also addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

Thank you again for the opportunity. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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¹ “Self-Reported Food Insecurity Among New York State Adults by County, BRFSS 2021” New York State Department of Health, 12/29/2023 - https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/prevention/injury_prevention/information_for_action/docs/2023-12_ifa_report.pdf

² Ibid

Island Harvest Hunger-Relief Impact

	Pre-Pandemic 2019	Post-Pandemic 2023	Variance
Number of Staff	35	70	100%
Number of Registered Volunteers	10,500	15,000	43 %
Headquarters Sq Footage	20,000	43,500	117 %
Number of Network Pantries	270	300	11 %
Total pounds distributed	9.8 million	17 Million	73.5 %
<i>Purchased</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>67 %</i>
<i>Donated</i>	<i>85%</i>	<i>75%</i>	<i>-12 %</i>

Overall Comparison of Pounds Distributed

	Pre-Pandemic 2019	Post-Pandemic 2023	Variance
Pounds Distributed LI Wide	9.8 million*	17 million	
<i>Distributed, Nassau</i>	<i>4,489,420</i>	<i>6,465,294</i>	<i>44 %</i>
<i>Distributed, Suffolk</i>	<i>6,118,660</i>	<i>9,774,796*</i>	<i>60 %</i>

* We distributed as much in 2023 in Suffolk alone as we distributed Island-wide total in 2019

Network of Member Agencies

	2022	2023	Variance
Total Network Partners	300	300	
<i>Soup kitchens, pantries, etc.</i>			
Total Visits by Adults, Nassau County	460,224	524,284	14 %
Total Visits by Adults, Suffolk County	606,806	705,948	16 %
Highlight of Special Populations			
<i>Mosques Supported</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>188 %</i>
<i>Shinnecock Reservation</i>			

Mobile Market Distribution Events

	2022	2023	Variance
Monthly Mobile Market Distributions	25	29	16 %

HIGHLIGHT of our Melville Market Distributions:

	2022	2023	Variance
Number Annually	51	81	59 %
Number of Visits by Adults (duplicated)	1,176	21,351	1,717 %