



February 11, 2025

RE: Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Health and Medicaid

Adirondack Food System Network Written for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Health and Medicaid

Dear Senators and Assemblymembers of the Joint Budget Hearing on Health,

I write today on behalf of the Adirondack Food System Network, communities across the North Country, and agencies working to provide essential services with not enough. To this end, I ask for your support in addressing food and nutrition insecurity in New York State in the upcoming budget.

The Adirondack Food System Network is a collaborative regional food council. We are led by multiple organizations to better understand system-wide issues, identify gaps, and pursue realistic solutions to help cultivate a more resilient regional food system through collective, equitable partnership. AFSN serves as the North Country's food policy council, serving all 12 counties in or partially within the Adirondack Park, the state's largest council by geography.

The bottom line: communities throughout the North Country and the entirety of New York State are struggling to make ends meet, to put food in the ground, and on the table. Too long we have operated in a broken and fragile system, one that has been easily dismantled in a matter of weeks by the federal government. New York can do better.

Like other regions throughout the state, the North Country experiences significant amounts of food insecurity that is compounded by disappearing grocery stores, distances between markets and consumers and the lack of affordable farmland compound the issues of food insecurity. The rising living costs paired with the limited resources within our rural geography often make the Adirondacks a last mile for services and support. But nonetheless, our communities are resilient but resilient in the face of such adversity.

The rising costs of living in the North Country are further stressing a broken system. High costs of goods and lack of access to affordable groceries continues to remain a barrier for emergency food providers and communities in many areas of the North Country. Many pantries in the area have reported an **increase of 40-50% in households** regularly attending their services. From Port Henry to Old Forge, Plattsburgh to Saratoga, our food pantries are filling in the vital and often life-saving gaps left by our food system.



Specifically, we are asking for your support in ensuring that the **Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) is funded at \$75 million, Nourish New York is funded at \$75 million**, and that you work to **secure the 40-year long precedent of supporting food pantries, food rescues, meals programs**, in addition to food banks with any increases to these programs.

HPNAP has been a lifeline for many emergency feeding programs in the North Country. While the increased funding toward food purchasing has been needed, increasing the operational and administrative support through this funding is just as crucial.

Increasing funding to Nourish New York will provide much needed support to farmers and communities through increasing procurement from local producers and also support the high costs of operation and administration. Importantly, supporting these programs ensures that this funding serves our communities by staying in our communities. Food pantries need direct, local support. Increasing the ability for individual contracts with providers, not just food banks, **will better strengthen the local food economy.**

By supporting these programs, we can invest in meeting the immediate needs so that our communities survive. Additionally, AFSN calls on your support to fund the **Double Food Bucks Program at \$2 million, raise the minimum SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) benefit to \$100 for all New Yorkers, and fully fund the NOEP (Nutrition Outreach Education Program)**, making sure all of our communities have access to healthy food education. It is critical to ensure all in NY have access to assistance.

AFSN is excited to see a commitment to provide healthy and universal meals to our children and the continued support of the Farm to School Grants and 30% Farm to School Reimbursement programs. These programs are critical to providing healthy and fresh options for children in schools and supporting local food economies. Additionally, these programs incentivize and offset the purchasing of local food directly within and from our communities.

The uniqueness of our environment directly relates to the health of our communities. We applaud Governor Hochul's Executive budget proposal to raise funding for clean water infrastructure to \$6 billion and continued support for the Environmental Protection Fund at \$400 million. Both of these programs are critical for Adirondack communities and the natural beauty. As we discuss continued threats from climate change, AFSN asks the legislature to further expand programs to protect the natural and agricultural environment. Programs like Farmland Protection, our Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and Cornell Cooperative Extension services provide much needed support to businesses, farms, and communities throughout the state.



As a state and a region, we cannot continue to fund at the same levels despite rising financial and structural burdens and expect the same result. At AFSN, we firmly believe that we must approach our food system holistically, supporting the increase in emergency feeding program funding, while promoting and advocating for systemic change on the state and federal levels that aims to strengthen our local economies.

As a proud member of the Alliance for a Hunger Free New York, we stand with our colleagues and communities across the state in saying we can do more. New York can lead by example, underscoring our resolute belief that everyone has a right to healthy food in our state. Funding these programs is the first step.

We appreciate your leadership and are grateful for your support.

In health,

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Proud member of The Alliance for a Hunger Free New York

www.alliancehungerfreeny.org/