



**Testimony of Equity Advocates
Before the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the FY 2025-FY 2026 Executive Budget
Topic: Agriculture/Parks and Recreation**

**Assembly Committee on Ways & Means, Assemblymember Gary Pretlow, Chair
Senate Committee on Finance, Senator Liz Krueger, Chair**

**Assembly Committee of Social Services, Assemblymember Maritza Davila, Chair
Senate Committee on Social Services, Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Children and Families, Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi, Chair
Senate Committee on Children and Families, Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Aging, Assemblymember Rebecca A. Seawright, Chair
Senate Committee on Aging, Senator Cordell Cleare, Chair**

January 27, 2025

My name is Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director of Equity Advocates. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Equity Advocates builds the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and systems change. We accomplish this through policy development, advocacy education and training, and coalition leadership. We also provide coalition leadership for the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a multi-sector network of 60+ food system stakeholders from across New York that engage collaboratively and intentionally across sectors to foster relationships, advance education, and advocate for policies that ensure equitable access to a healthy, just, resilient, and sustainable food system.

Food insecurity is increasing both in New York and nationwide. Last October, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) revealed that food insecurity in 2022 grew at its fastest one-year rate since 2008, the height of the Great Recession while 2022 Census data showed that child poverty more than doubled after the expanded Child Tax Credit expired. Closer to home, the New York State Department of Health recently reported that nearly one in four adults (24.9%) in the state experienced food insecurity over the past year.

To combat this alarming rise, we must strengthen New York's food system by addressing food insecurity *and* supporting the agricultural sector. New York's farmers play a critical role in feeding our communities, contributing to the state economy, and ensuring a resilient local food supply. Yet, many farmers face significant economic challenges due to rising costs, climate impacts, and supply chain disruptions.

We cannot address food insecurity without supporting those who grow and produce the food that sustains us. By prioritizing these dual goals in the FY25-26 budget through the following recommendations, New York State can create a stronger, more equitable, and more sustainable food system.

Fully fund statewide hunger relief programs, Nourish New York and the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) at \$75 million each. Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) supports a network of over 2,600 emergency food providers, offering grants for food purchases and operational expenses. As of December 2024, Nourish New York has helped emergency food providers distribute 100 million meals featuring fresh, nutritious, New York-grown produce to families across the state. To build on these successful programs, we urge full funding of HPNAP and Nourish New York at \$75 million each, with a combination of direct and indirect grants tailored to organizational need and capacity.

Maintain full funding for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) at \$5.503 million plus a cost-of-living adjustment, sustaining previous years' \$2 million add-on for expanded services. NOEP is the state's flagship program to ensure all who are eligible receive federally-funded SNAP benefits. We urge you to maintain this investment to sustain access to SNAP navigators statewide.

Maintain funding of \$2 million for the nutrition incentive program, Double Up Food Bucks NY (DUFBNY). DUFBNY matches SNAP purchases dollar for dollar, between \$5-\$20 per day, to spend on fresh fruits and vegetables, with an emphasis on local produce. The program is a win-win-win, increasing accessibility and affordability of local, fresh produce for families, increasing economic opportunities for farmers, and supporting local economies.

Expand the 30% NYS Reimbursement Incentive and Maintain \$10 Million in funding so that school food authorities that spend 30% of total reimbursable meal costs on New York food products are eligible to receive an additional 25 cent per school lunch reimbursement and expand the 30% program to include the School Breakfast Program (SBP). The state should also maintain \$1.5 million for the Farm to School Grant program.

Maintain \$1 Million for the Urban Farming and Community Garden Grant, \$4 million for the Socially and Economically Disadvantaged Farmers Grant, \$1 million for the Beginning Farmers Grant to support new and BIPOC farmers and community gardeners.

Additionally, New York should take the lead on eliminating child poverty. We proudly stand with a coalition of anti-poverty, public health and farming organizations in support of Healthy School Meals for All and the Working Families Tax Credit – both of which would increase the health of hundreds of thousands of New York children.

Establish and fund a permanent, statewide Healthy School Meals for All program that provides school breakfast and lunch at no cost to all students in schools participating in the National School

Lunch Program. In her FY2026 Executive Budget proposal, Governor Kathy Hochul announced full funding for Healthy School Meals for All as part of her affordability agenda. We applaud this historic investment, which will expand access to free school meals to an additional 280,000 students in nearly 600 schools across New York. The State Senate and Assembly have championed universal school meals and included full funding in their respective FY2024 and FY2025 one-house budgets. We thank the Legislature for its longstanding, bipartisan advocacy for this critical policy. Providing universal school meals alleviates food insecurity, supports learning, and bolsters children’s mental and physical health, all while saving families an estimated \$165 per month per child in food costs. New Yorkers overwhelmingly agree; polls show 77% of registered voters support Healthy School Meals for All. With strong support from the Legislature and Governor Hochul, this can be the year Healthy School Meals for All becomes a reality for New York’s students. We urge lawmakers to ensure this historic investment is fully funded in the FY2026 Enacted Budget.

Create a new Working Families Tax Credit that streamlines and expands existing tax credits—including the Empire State Child Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit, and dependent exemption—providing increased cash assistance to NY’s neediest families (S277B/A4022B).

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the State legislature and the Governor to achieve these goals in the upcoming budget. If there are any questions, please reach out to Leah Kabran Eden at Leah@nyequityadvocates.org.