



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Lea Webb

## Feeding Families and Addressing Affordability in the Southern Tier

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# SENATOR LEA WEBB

New York State Senate  52nd District

## Op-Ed Article

As I travel around our district, community members in Broome, Cortland, and Tompkins Counties have shared their optimism about manufacturing jobs returning to our region. There is much to celebrate with Binghamton recently named as a federal battery tech hub and Menlo Micro bringing jobs and a huge investment in microelectronic production to Lansing. The tech manufacturing boom will bring prosperity to our region and state, and I am proud of the federal, state, and local partnerships working together to ensure that the Southern Tier plays a central role in its development and ongoing success.

At the same time, our communities are still struggling, as we continue to rebuild from the pandemic, many families worry about everyday affordability. From the Town of Union, to the Village of Homer, working families across my district struggle to put food on their table, pay their rent or mortgage, and keep up with their utility bills.

Our region has some of the highest poverty rates in the state. 875,000 families in New York have experienced some form of food insecurity according to a recent report from the NYS Comptroller's office. This means that many of our neighbors experience mild to moderate food insecurity and lack consistent access to enough safe and nutritious food to sustain growth and development. For children and families experiencing food insecurity, this means living with hunger, but also increased levels of mental health struggles and chronic diseases like diabetes.

Food insecurity impacts 23.5% of the residents of Broome County, with 15,212 households relying on SNAP benefits to meet their basic needs (NYSDOH, 2023). This is why I fought to fund Double Up Food Bucks NY in this year's budget, an incentive program that matches every dollar that a SNAP recipient spends to purchase fresh fruit and vegetables. This program, which recently extended with VINES in Binghamton and launched at GreenStar Market in Ithaca, addresses food insecurity by providing access to healthy foods and also supports farmers and our local economy by ensuring that more customers are buying locally-grown produce.

Addressing this issue has always been a priority of mine. I recently delivered \$400,000 to support critical infrastructure upgrades for the Food Bank of the Southern Tier. This local institution feeds more than 31,000 food-insecure people every week and distributes 18 million pounds of food annually.

When everyone in our community has access to fresh, healthy food, kids will get the nutrition they need to learn and grow, teens and adults can better maintain employment, and families won't have to worry about being able to put food on the table. I will continue to fight for transformative programs like Free School Meals and Double Up Food Bucks because our communities grow stronger when our fundamental needs are met and we support our ability to thrive.

*Senator Lea Webb represents the 52nd Senate district, which includes Cortland County, Tompkins County, and part of Broome County.*

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