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January 27, 2025

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

I am writing to you on behalf of my organization, Dutchess Outreach, to ask for your support in addressing food and nutrition insecurity in New York State in the upcoming budget. 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.

Dutchess Outreach has been serving Dutchess County for 50 years and we are continuing to see the highest rates of utilizations than we have in the history of our organization. Prior to the pandemic we saw about 200-250 visits per month, and now we average 1,800 visits per month, (a 620% increase in utilization). We produce and distribute about 700-900 meals a day in our community meals program.

Our mission is to provide healthy food and compassionate support, and to advocate for food security and social equity.

New York State is experiencing an increase in food insecurity. This year the USDA ERS report released that 1 in 8 New York households are experiencing food insecurity. That is an increase from 1 in 10 in the year prior.

In conjunction with the dramatic 25% rise of food inflation from 2019, the pressure on direct providers to meet these needs is immense. Not only is it more expensive for families to shop at the grocery store, it's more expensive to keep pantry shelves stocked with healthy, nutritious food.

HPNAP/Nourish NY are vital avenues of support for putting food on our pantry shelves. Presently, this funding fills our shelves for one week each month and it is our largest single-source of food support.

Increasing the funding for HPNAP/Nourish NY would ensure more food reaches us throughout the month so that we do not have to turn people away. **Direct contracts** for these funds would free us to purchase our food from local farms and aggregators, fortifying our local agriculture and keeping people healthy with more unprocessed food available. It also affords us infrastructure support we desperately need. Funneling our funds through the *food banking system* is NOT the most efficient or effective way to provide us with support, and literally starves Dutchess Outreach, and similar organizations, of much needed infrastructure.

Food pantries need direct support, not centralized funding through the Food Bank system, to provide culturally appropriate, nutritious food with proper staffing and operations. Putting the funding directly into local communities' better addresses needs and builds a stronger, more reliable food supply chain.





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Additionally, we do not do this work alone. We're asking for this funding because we are part of a coalition of frontline community food providers (food pantries, community meals programs, etc.). We participate in The Alliance for a Hunger Free New York, and we lead the Dutchess County Coalition of Emergency Food Providers, because we know that we can do more together than any one of us can do alone.

We appreciate your leadership and are grateful for your support.

Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Renee S. Fillette". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Renee S. Fillette, PhD
Executive Director
Dutchess Outreach