



THE LEGISLATURE
STATE OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

October 21, 2020

Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Governor
Executive Chamber
NYS Capitol
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Cuomo,

We are writing to you today to request your immediate assistance to address escalating rates of food insecurity in New York State. As you are aware, the term 'food insecurity' signifies a household's limited access to adequate and nutritious food due to a lack of money and other resources.

The Assembly's Standing Committees on Social Services, Agriculture, and the Task Force on Food, Farm & Nutrition Policy examined the impact of Covid-19 on food insecurity in New York State at a hearing on September 9, 2020. According to the experts that testified at the hearing, the following examples indicate the reality of food insecurity for many New Yorkers:

'In some families, the pantry is completely empty. In others, mom or dad skips dinner a few nights a week so the kids can have something to eat in the evening.' (No kid hungry)

One provider reported about their rushing to deliver an emergency food box to an older client who reached out with only about "two potatoes" left in the house. Similarly gut-wrenching, was the story of an older adult who had been surviving on cat food after fear and fatigue left her unable to get groceries. (Live On)

Another provider received a call from a 76 year old gentleman who said "I have one sleeve of Ritz crackers left. That's it. I am trying to figure out how long I can make this last." (Life Span)

Prior to the pandemic, over 1.2 million New Yorkers were food insecure. Current estimates are **over 2 million New Yorkers are now food insecure.**

Additional testimony revealed:

According to Census data in April–May 2020, a staggering 22.9 percent of New York State faced food insecurity, unable to afford enough food. That means that overall hunger doubled during the pandemic. (Hunger Free America).

There are stark disparities in food scarcity by race and ethnicity. Between 17% and 25% of Hispanic New Yorkers and 15% and 22% of Black New Yorkers experienced household food scarcity over the survey period. These percentages were three to four times higher than among white New Yorkers. (NYS Health Foundation)

Mass losses in employment in the State have curtailed New Yorkers' ability to afford food. Stay-at-home orders and social distancing measures have also cut off reliable pathways to food access, such as meals provided in community settings (e.g., houses of worship, senior centers) and schools. Many New Yorkers have been forced to choose between their need for food and their own sense of safety, given the risks of contracting or spreading COVID-19 while accessing food during the pandemic. (NYS Health Foundation)

In July, nearly 11% of New Yorkers reported that their households were accessing free meals or groceries. School programs and food pantries were the most used access points. If free meal and grocery programs were not available, rates of food scarcity would likely be higher, especially among communities of color. (Hunger Solutions)

Older adults — especially older adults of color — are among the most vulnerable populations, just as they are most at-risk during the current pandemic. In addition to malnutrition, food insecurity has been linked to greater rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and congestive heart failure, which is especially concerning given the role pre-existing health conditions play in the severity of COVID-19. (Live On)

Food insecurity rates are higher for children. Before the pandemic, 1 in 5 children in New York City faced food insecurity and with record jobs and wages lost, we estimate this number is now much higher. When kids don't get the consistent nutrition they need each day and throughout the year, it's harder for them to grow up healthy, happy, and strong. Consistent access to nutrition is linked to cognitive and physical development, test scores and long-term health and education outcomes. With the economic impacts of the coronavirus reverberating across the state, *an entire generation is at stake*. (No kid hungry)

Considering the magnitude of the challenges New Yorkers are facing and in order to ensure that these vulnerable populations receive every resource at New York State's disposal, we are requesting your administration immediately take the following actions:

1. New York State must immediately pay food relief organizations, non-profits that deliver food, and community-based organizations working to feed communities in need for services already provided.

Current contracting and payment delays are impeding these frontline organizations abilities to retain staff and deploy resources, resulting in layoffs and pushing non-profit providers toward insolvency. This is unsustainable for these organizations.

New York State is currently withholding \$2.3 billion appropriated from the federal government in the CARES Act, the largest economic relief package in American history. The CARES Act established the Corona Virus Relief Fund (CRF) designed to assist states and local governments in funding COVID-19 related expenses.

Using the Corona Virus Relief Funds to pay these frontline food relief organizations during the pandemic is permissible under the federal guidelines for use of CRF funds.

New York State has a moral and fiscal obligation to support the organizations that are providing food relief during this pandemic, and must use the CRF to immediately pay our frontline food relief organizations.

2. Allocate another \$25 million for the Nourish New York Program

In May, your administration announced the \$25 million Nourish New York initiative which provided \$25 million for food banks and providers most impacted by COVID-19. Connecting food banks to NY's food manufacturers and NY farmers directly, Nourish NY provides a benefit to our families who are food insecure, but also provides an economic benefit for the communities this food is coming from.

Through the multi-agency Nourish New York effort, food banks and other emergency food providers are purchasing New York State milk, yogurt, cheese, vegetables, fruit, and more.

We are grateful for the work of the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance, the Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Health Department for quickly getting this program up and running.

Our food pantries and soup kitchens are the last line of defense against hunger for many families. We have seen emergency food providers forced to close their doors across the state and those that are able to stay open are seeing an overwhelming number of clients.

To date New York State has spent \$15 million, the remaining funds are expected to run out at the end of October. When this happens, New York State must immediately allocate another \$25 million.

Honorable Andrew Cuomo, Governor
October 21, 2020
Page 4

We appreciate the recent efforts of your administration to address food insecurity in New York State, particularly the outstanding work of the Office of Temporary Disability Assistance during the pandemic. We look forward to working with you to immediately implement these actions in order to assist the over 2 million food insecure New Yorkers struggling to survive this pandemic.

Sincerely,



Andrew Hevesi
Michaëlle Solages
Assembly Chair, Social Services



Assembly Chair, Agriculture



Donna Lupardo
Assembly Chair,
Food, Farm and
Nutrition Policy

Signatories:

Fred W. Thiele, Jr., A.D.1
Michael J. Fitzpatrick, A.D. 8
Taylor Darling, A.D. 18
Aravella Simotas, A.D. 36
Michael G. Miller, A.D. 38
Steven Cymbrowitz, A.D. 45
Simcha Eichenstein, A.D. 48
Jo Anne Simon, A.D. 52
Charles Barron, A.D. 60
Robert J. Rodriguez, A.D. 68
Al Taylor, A.D. 71
Harvey Epstein, A.D. 74
Rebecca A. Seawright, A.D. 76
Michael Blake, A.D. 79
Karines Reyes, A.D. 87
Ellen Jaffee, A.D. 97
Chris Tague, A.D. 102
John T. McDonald, III, A.D. 108
Billy Jones, A.D. 115
Barbara Lifton, A.D. 125
William B. Magnarelli, A.D. 129
Karen McMahan, A.D. 146

Steve Englebright, A.D. 4
David G. McDonough, A.D. 14
David I. Weprin, A.D. 24
Catherine Nolan, A.D. 37
Catalina Cruz, A.D. 39
Mathylde Frontus, A.D. 46
Félix Ortiz, Assistant Speaker, A.D. 50
Jaime R. Williams, A.D. 59
Linda B. Rosenthal, A.D. 67
Inez E. Dickens, A.D. 70
Carmen N. De La Rosa, A.D. 72
Richard N. Gottfried, A.D. 75
Latoya Joyner, A.D. 77
Jeffrey Dinowitz, A.D. 81
Thomas J. Abinanti, A.D. 92
Aileen M. Gunther, A.D. 100
Jonathan G. Jacobson, A.D. 104
Patricia Fahy, A.D. 109
Christopher S. Friend, A.D. 124
Al Stirpe, A.D. 127
Harry B. Bronson, A.D. 138
Joseph M. Giglio, A.D. 148

Signatories (cont.):

Roxanne J. Persaud, S.D. 19
Senate Chair, Social Services
Liz Krueger, S.D. 28
Alessandra Biaggi, S.D. 34
Rachel May, S. D. 53

Andrew Gounardes, S.D. 22
Diane J. Savino, S.D. 23
Luis R. Sepúlveda, S.D. 32
Jen Metzger, S.D. 42
George M. Borrello, S.D. 57