

# Change poverty level, help more people

Long Island is shortchanged by formula that doesn't recognize our cost of living

BY PAULE PACHTER  
Guest essay

I am often asked by elected officials, donors, and visitors to our food pantries why there are 220,000 Long Islanders struggling with food insecurity. Their next question is, "How do we reduce that number?"

I tell them that if the federal government is serious about reducing food insecurity, then it must adjust the way it devises the federal poverty level (FPL) to recognize economic diversity nationwide. The cost of living in Sayville is very different from Selma, Alabama, and the cost of buying a house in Levittown is twice as much as owning a home in Louisville. The federal poverty level for a family of four is \$31,200 a year. That number isn't adequate for even a single Long Islander when you consider the costs for rent, food, health care, education, utilities, transportation, and the cost of goods.

But there may be hope on the horizon.

A bill called the Poverty Line Act has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives and is gaining support from lawmakers. Joining them are more than 40 organizations comprised of anti-poverty groups, child care advocates, and food banks determined to modernize the way the federal poverty level is calculated.

In introducing the bill, Rep. Kevin Mullin (D-Calif.) said, "Since the 1960s we've gone into space, developed electric vehicles, and no longer rely on landlines for phone service. It's long past time that we brought the FPL into the 21st Century as well."

The Poverty Line Act would update the way the federal poverty level is adjusted to reflect real costs and regional differences. While \$31,200 might be sufficient for a family in Little Rock, Arkansas, it would be responsible to increase that amount to \$46,000 for a family in Long Beach. Without such an increase, some families that want to live here now are ineligible for



HOWARD SCHNAPP

**A Long Island Cares food pantry in Huntington. The organization favors changing the federal poverty level to assist more people.**

safety-net benefits such as Medicaid, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, supplemental nutrition benefits for low-income women, infants, and children, and others. These benefits would allow families to focus more on health care and other essentials so they can spend their paychecks on the food they need.

Long Island Cares recently hosted a virtual meeting about the legislation with congressional aides, New York State's 10 food banks, Feeding America, Feeding New York State, and local food pantries. Attendees expressed overwhelming support, and Long Island Rep. Tom Suozzi signed on as a co-sponsor.

Adjusting the federal poverty level isn't a partisan issue when food insecurity has

risen 30% to 50% since the pandemic ended. We expected a decrease. However, so far this year we have seen the number of people visiting our six satellite food pantries increase. During the first six months of 2024, we helped 100,989 people, compared to 75,252 people during the same period in 2023 — a 34% increase.

Similarly, between January and June 2024, Long Island Cares delivered 7.8 million pounds of food to our 335 food-assistance agencies — a 16% increase over the 6.7 million pounds distributed last year. The increase in need among our working poor is urgent and chronic.

The legislation to adjust the federal poverty level by region is a realistic step forward to reduce food insecurity. The Poverty Line Act will be high on Long Island Cares' list of legislative priorities for 2025.

■ **THIS GUEST ESSAY** reflects the views of Paule Pachter, president and chief executive of



Long Island Cares, Inc. — The Harry Chapin Regional Food Bank in Hauppauge.



RANDEE DADDONA

**The chicken coop at Andrews Family Farm in Wading River.**

ceived," Editorial, Aug. 23].

From Wading River to Southold, if the town approves hotel and resort zoning on Sound Avenue, 15 parcels of 100 acres apiece could be assembled through the acquisition of adjacent, smaller parcels, permitted under the proposed code.

So, per the proposed zoning, each 100-acre parcel would be permitted to have a 150-room hotel or resort built upon it. The land would be at risk of hotel development leading to the creation of 2,250 hotel rooms along this corridor, figuring 15 parcels with 150

rooms apiece.

Thousands of Long Islanders and city folk visit the North Fork for its scenic beauty and rural charm — not for its hotel rooms and parking lots. Long Islanders must help save Sound Avenue and its family-farm heritage. Protect our Long Island Sound shoreline, too.

My grandmother was born on a farm in Jamaica, Queens. That's gone. My father was born on a farm in Melville. That's gone! Don't add Riverhead's farmland to the list of places that have been destroyed. There will be no turning back the clock if we let this happen.

— JOAN REINHART CEAR, JAMESPORT

The community in Riverhead and its neighbors are alarmed by the prospect of resort developments along Sound Avenue.

Yet Riverhead Town officials appear to be favoring develop-

ers and not representing the wishes of the community. Local civic groups have organized, and the public response has been overwhelming: that people do not want hotels and resorts on Sound Avenue because this will destroy the area's rural and agricultural character.

The code change will encourage development and dramatically increase traffic along the Sound Avenue corridor. Additionally, there are no measures in the proposed code for protecting the fragile bluffs of Long Island Sound.

Imagine: fancy resorts and hotels on Sound Avenue. The tragedy will be forever losing our open spaces and rural

character — the last on Long Island.

— KAREN KEMP, CALVERTON

No! Developers are in it only for money. They couldn't care less about what is left in their aftermath. Estimated hotel room rates from \$600 to \$1,200 a night are not conducive to people seeking "experiences that were more real, more in touch with local communities," as a lead developer said — whatever that means. It can't be good for the rest of us.

The farmers were here first. Keep them here, and don't make their life any more difficult than it is by crafting zoning changes. It's crowded enough on our island.

— ANTHONY TANZI, MASTIC BEACH

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