

Charities team up during shutdown

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Long Island's two largest emergency food distributors are joining forces to provide food to federal workers whose paychecks have been frozen due to the monthlong government shutdown — and Nassau County has pledged an extra \$50,000 a week to each of them to help their overall efforts during the shutdown.

Nassau County announced on Saturday it would ramp up its funding until the shutdown ends to aid in their effort to provide food assistance for Long Islanders.

On Monday from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Island Harvest and Long Island Cares/The Harry Chapin Regional Food Bank will provide fresh produce, proteins and shelf-stable goods to 500 furloughed and unpaid federal employees at Farmingdale State College, according to Long Island Cares CEO Katherine Fritz. Those affected by the Oct. 1 shutdown who wish to attend must register for an appointment online and provide their credentials when they arrive at the campus. Volunteers also will provide participants with information regarding further assistance through the nonprofits' partnering food pantries.

Monday's effort will mark the first time Melville-based Island Harvest and Hauppauge-based Long Island Cares have teamed up for an emergency food distribution "to my knowledge," Fritz said.

'A pivotal step'

"We decided that we could help more people if we partnered together," Fritz told Newsday in a telephone interview on Friday. "This is a bit of a historic moment for both of our organizations, but it is much needed. There are so many people who are hurting right now."

The partnership to help federal workers, who "are friends and neighbors," is "a pivotal step in helping the most vulnerable among us as this ongoing crisis continues to cascade," Island Harvest presi-

dent and CEO Randi Shubin Dresner said in a text message from a spokesperson.

Fritz and Shubin Dresner joined Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman in Uniondale on Saturday when the county official declared a "food emergency." The emergency declaration, Blakeman said, allows the county to "expedite" the \$50,000 weekly contributions to each organization, which will continue throughout the federal shutdown.

Blakeman said the county already had contracts with the two food banks. The additional \$100,000 in weekly spending will be tacked on to existing funding, and it is coming from a tranche of money the county has available when departments need to fund contracts, according to Nassau County spokesman Chris Boyle.

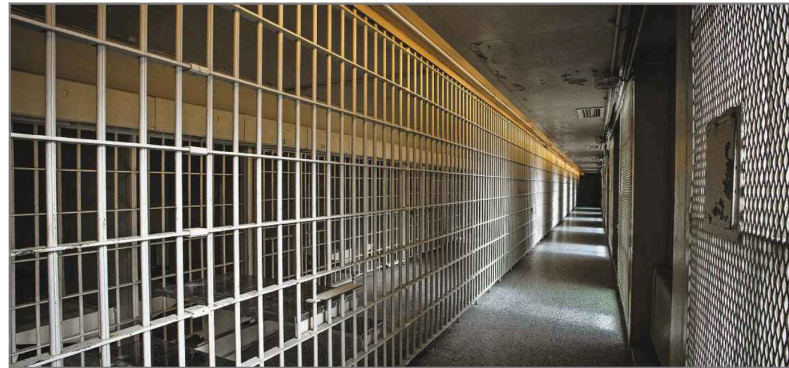
Paycheck away from crisis

"We have a contract line already with both organizations. We're just going to supplement that based on how long this crisis continues. Obviously, it's a week-by-week thing," Blakeman said on Saturday.

The partisan battle regarding health care subsidies in Washington has left the roughly 30,000 federal employees on Long Island struggling to put food on the table, Newsday has reported. On Oct. 23, Long Island Cares distributed food to more than 120 federal workers in Hauppauge, 99 of whom "had never been to a food pantry before," according to Fritz.

"That tells me that there are a lot more people who are living paycheck to paycheck than we ever could have expected," the nonprofit CEO said. "We are now seeing people who are just two paychecks [away from crisis]. People are making really tough decisions."

Both organizations feared that as the shutdown stretched beyond Saturday — the day funding expired for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that helps feed more than 165,000 Long Islanders — the demand for their assistance would spike, Newsday reported Wednesday.



The nearly decade-old case centered on Suffolk's detention of immigrants in the country illegally.

JURY TRIAL TO BEGIN IN LI CIVIL RIGHTS CASE

Will determine damages against Suffolk County

BY JOE WERKMEISTER
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A jury trial is slated to begin on Monday in a federal civil rights case to determine the damages against Suffolk County in a nearly decade-old case centered on the detention of immigrants in the country illegally.

A federal judge earlier this year ruled Suffolk County violated the constitutional rights of hundreds of immigrants held on U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement detainers between 2016 and 2018. The Second Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday denied the county's request to delay the trial.

Jury selection begins Monday in Brooklyn federal court before Judge William F. Kuntz II.

Jose L. Perez, deputy general counsel of LatinoJustice PRLDEF, a Manhattan-based advocacy group that filed the suit along with a law firm, said in a recent interview the trial will determine damages and one remaining claim of liability.

The county hired an outside law firm, Manhattan-based Dewey Pegno & Kramarsky, to

represent it on the case after the January decision.

A spokesperson for County Executive Edward P. Romaine declined to comment Saturday on pending litigation, although the county held a news conference on the case in January. "We will fight this all the way," the county executive said in January and added the county could be liable for \$60 million, which he decried as a burden on county taxpayers.

An attorney for Dewey Pegno & Kramarsky could not immediately be reached for comment Saturday.

Perez criticized the county for hiring outside counsel instead of pursuing a settlement, saying the firm has tried to relitigate old issues.

County Attorney Chris Clayton told Suffolk legislators at an Oct. 14 budget hearing the case was "a complex piece of litigation that's costing us a lot of money."

Kuntz ruled in favor of the plaintiffs in a Sept. 29 decision, denying a motion by the county to dismiss the complaint, according to court filings.

The case stems from Suffolk's policy under former Sheriff Vincent DeMarco to honor ICE detainers, a practice halted after a 2018 court ruling found it unlawful.

The original complaint was

filed in 2017 on behalf of Joaquin Orellana Castaneda, an immigrant from Guatemala, who had been stopped by Suffolk police for a traffic violation and booked on a driving while intoxicated related arrest. He was held on an ICE detainer for two days after his bail was posted on the local charge.

The lawsuit was given class action status, ultimately including 650 people, according to court filings.

The county's argument, Clayton said at the October budget hearing and as officials previously stated in a January press conference, was that the county is entitled to immunity because it acted under federal authority.

Kuntz's Sept. 29 decision said: "Local authorities who have a policy and practice of unilaterally honoring ICE detainers without a written agreement are not entitled to an unwaivable presumption of federal sovereign immunity."

Perez said they made a "good-faith settlement offer" to the county in summer 2024 but declined to specify figures due to confidentiality of settlement discussions.

A recent bond rating statement for Suffolk County lists the case in a summary of outstanding litigation and cites the plaintiff's demand in 2024 as \$14 million, exclusive of attorney's fees.