

# SUFFOLK & NASSAU COUNTIES

Our county priorities include:

**Commending Nassau County Executive Bruce Blakeman** for proclaiming that fighting food insecurity is one of his Administration's top priorities for 2023.

**Thanking the Nassau County Legislature and County Executive Blakeman for their ongoing support.** We currently contract with Nassau County to support mobile outreach in partnership with Nassau County's Department of Social Services. This funding also goes to support the great work being done out of our Bethpage and Freeport community satellites. It is important we thank the County for its recent investment to support our new community satellite in Valley Stream.

**Thanking the Suffolk County Legislature and County Executive Steve Bellone for their ongoing support.** We currently contract with Suffolk County's Department of Social Services to provide them with grocery staples and baby products to support low income County residents visiting their facilities for assistance. We hope to maintain this partnership and develop a new partnership designed to expand the reach of our innovative homeless outreach program.

**Strengthening and expanding public transportation, especially for people with disabilities.** Transportation access continues to be a major challenge for low income Long Islanders, especially seniors on fixed incomes and people with disabilities. We are calling on legislators in both Suffolk and Nassau Counties to expand access to existing programs so that low income Long Islanders can get to work and necessary appointments. This includes access at nighttime and on the weekends.

**Investing in farmers markets.** Incentivizing the creation of farmers markets is a great way to expand access to locally grown, nutritious food and simultaneously support the region's farmers and economy. Furthermore, creating incentives to hosting farmers markets in food deserts can increase access to nutritious food and produce better local health outcomes. This is a great opportunity for local government to forge partnerships with local businesses dedicated to community service.

**Improving language access.** We are calling on both Suffolk and Nassau County to ensure that their websites, social service applications, and outreach materials are available in even more languages to reflect the changing demographics of our region. It is imperative that local health and social service divisions prioritize hiring staff who speak these languages and invest in translation technology so that people of all backgrounds can seek help.

**Requesting approval for step down programs.** We support both Suffolk and Nassau County governments SCDSS seeking OTDA approval for a step-down program where the removal of benefits is gradual when a client's income increases. This would alleviate the fear many people receiving assistance have about transitioning into work.

**Building cost of living allowances into all county contracts with nonprofits providing critical health and human services.** Suffolk and Nassau Counties should build annual cost-of-living allowances (COLAs) into all county contracts for nonprofit agencies that provide services to residents in need. This would help nonprofits to continue to carry out their critical work without interruption and not have to reduce services due to the fiscal constraints imposed upon them by high rates of inflation.

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# 2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES AGENDA

BECAUSE IT TAKES MORE THAN FOOD TO FEED THE HUNGRY



The Chapin Center for Public Policy of Long Island Cares determines the advocacy priorities for Long Island Cares, Inc.—The Harry Chapin Regional Food Bank. We support legislation designed to increase access to nutritious food for the diverse populations we serve through our agency network and an array of direct service programming.

Realizing that hunger in America, and especially on Long Island, is an extremely complex multi-tiered societal issue, we advocate for legislation which addresses the root causes of hunger, such as poverty and unemployment. As we are all aware that food insecurity is inextricably tied to income insecurity, it is our duty to go on record supporting legislation which preserves access to critical social service programs and promotes vocational/job training services for the populations benefitting from our services.

# Our Top Priorities for 2023

## FEDERAL

Our federal priorities include:

**Commending the Biden-Harris Administration for convening a White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health in 2022.** We are excited to work with all key stakeholders to achieve the Conference's overarching goal of an America without hunger by 2030. We are also interested in working with local healthcare providers to advance the Administration's goal of expanding Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries' access to "food is medicine" interventions.

**Passing a Farm Bill which strengthens the nation's emergency food system and increases nutrition access.** Every five years, Congress passes a Farm Bill which determines policy and funding levels for agriculture, food assistance programs, natural resources, and other aspects of food and agriculture under the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Our specific priorities for the next Farm Bill include:

- **Strengthening and modernizing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** We recommend updating the Low-Cost Food Plan to better reflect today's rising cost of living; reducing the benefit-cliff by improving the benefit-taper structure; as well as simplifying SNAP eligibility and improving the enrollment process.
- **Increasing funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and reducing barriers to eligibility.** Long Island Cares administers TEFAP on behalf of USDA for the Long Island Region. In 2022, we received 50 percent less TEFAP commodities than in 2021. We support strengthening TEFAP to ensure the nation's food banks have 2021 levels of commodity support to counteract the increased demand associated with inflation. We also stand with Feeding America in calling for TEFAP storage and distribution funding to be increased to \$100M so that the nation's food banks have the capacity to properly store and distribute USDA commodities. Lastly, we support streamlining the application process and reducing eligibility barriers.
- **Strengthening local and regional food systems** through investments in new and existing infrastructure; increasing access to local food through federal nutrition programs; developing innovative programs to reduce food deserts; and prioritizing access to resources for historically underserved Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) producers.
- **Increasing food recovery efforts** through investments in existing, high performing, food rescue programs and providing additional funding to incentivize the creation of new rescue programs to increase access to nutritious food for low-income Americans, reduce food waste, and protect the environment.



**Passing a Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill.** The Child Nutrition Reauthorization Act authorizes all of the federal child nutrition programs. These programs reach millions of children each day and promote educational achievement. The current law, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, expired on September 30, 2015. It is imperative Congress passes a Child Nutrition Reauthorization bill which adequately funds these programs (i.e. National School Lunch Program, Summer Food Service Program, Afterschool Meal Program) and revises eligibility requirements to ensure food insecure children have access to these vital programs, especially Summer EBT which was recently recognized as a permanent, nationwide program.

**Addressing hunger and poverty on college campuses.** We support the Basic Assistance for Students In College (BASIC) Act (S.2004) and the Student Food Security Act (S.1569), which ensures that the basic needs of college students are met, diminishes poverty on college campuses, and sets low-income students up for academic success.

**Offering more support to food insecure military personnel and veterans.** We commend Congress for recently passing the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, which expands the Basic Needs Allowance by raising the income eligibility limit to 150 percent of the federal poverty level, an increase from the current 130 percent limit. In order to reach even more low income service members, we recommend excluding the military housing allowance as income in determining eligibility. Furthermore, the housing allowance should no longer be factored in when food insecure service members apply for SNAP. We also recommend in the next appropriations cycle that Congress provide the Department of Veterans Affairs with additional funding to conduct increased outreach to address veteran homelessness, mental health issues, suicide, and food insecurity.

**Modernizing and regionalizing the Federal Poverty Level.** We are aware that the cost of living has dramatically increased, with some regions experiencing a greater impact than others. We fully support regionalizing the Federal Poverty Guidelines to be more reflective of the cost of living in specific areas across the country. This would ensure that greater numbers of Americans in need would have access to necessary governmental supports and benefits.

**Alleviating financial burdens for working families through permanent tax incentives** like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), which help lift families out of poverty. The benefit of these programs goes beyond the direct monetary assistance families receive. These incentives build economic security, improve longer-term health and well-being, as well as boost state and local economies.

**Implementing more comprehensive immigration policies.** This includes appropriating funds to reduce backlog at the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and fund humanitarian relief efforts such as asylum, U visas, T visas, and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA); developing an earned pathway for citizenship for DREAMers; and investing in case management programs for arriving migrants as an alternative to detention.

**Strengthening and protecting Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid.** These programs are vital to protecting citizens, especially senior citizens, from poverty and crippling medical debt.

## STATE

Our state priorities include:

**Increasing the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP)** budget from \$56.5M to \$63M. We stand with Feeding New York State in requesting this 11 percent increase to address the rising cost of groceries. HPNAP supplies food to nearly 3 million New Yorkers experiencing hunger and food insecurity, many of whom are excluded from federal nutrition programs. Furthermore, with the end of SNAP Emergency Allotments looming, many New Yorkers will lose a significant portion of their SNAP benefits and seek additional assistance at food banks, pantries, and emergency food providers. This extra funding is necessary for food banks to keep pace with increased demand and rising costs.

**Funding Nourish NY at \$75M.** Nourish NY provides the State's food banks with funding to purchase locally sourced produce, proteins, and dairy. In addition to offering food banks increased access to these locally sourced commodities, this program offers economic stimulus to local farmers.

**Establishing a Healthy School Meals for All program.** At the start of the 2022-2023 school year, over 726,000 students lost access to no-cost school meals. Students experiencing hunger may find it difficult to focus, have lower attendance than their peers, and are more likely to experience mental and physical health problems. The Healthy School Meals for All program would provide breakfast and lunch at no cost for all NY students. This program would ensure that each child in New York will have access to nutritious meals; remove the administrative burdens which prevent eligible families from participating; relieve families of an estimated \$25 million in school meal debt; and advance children's health, education, and equity.

**Investing in Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP).** This program helps to ensure all eligible New Yorkers are aware of and able to participate in federal nutrition programs. Through this program, coordinators assist New Yorkers with the application process for programs like SNAP, WIC, CACFP and school meals. They also provide information on other programs that address food insecurity and poverty.

**Providing \$10M for a food bank capital fund.** This funding could be used to expand refrigeration and freezer capacity, increase technological capacity, or to even purchase additional warehouse space.

**Passing Values Based Food Purchasing Legislation (S.7534 / A.8580).** This would allow municipal institutions to spend up to 10 percent more to source food from vendors who meet specific values-based criteria, such as environmental sustainability, racial equity, fair labor practices, nutrition quality, and animal welfare.

**Providing increased support for formerly incarcerated individuals.** Formerly incarcerated people are twice as likely to suffer food insecurity as the general population. For this reason, we are calling on the state legislature to establish SNAP pre-registration for people leaving the criminal justice system. This transitional period is vital, and successful reintegration can lead to lower recidivism rates. To ensure success, we support additional investments in financial literacy and workforce development programs for this at-risk population.