



**Testimony of City Harvest**  
**Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee**  
**Oversight Hearing – Hunger and Food Insecurity**  
**April 3, 2025**

Thank you, Chairwoman Diana Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee for holding today's Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity. My name is Jerome Nathaniel, and I am the Policy & Government Relations Director at City Harvest, New York's first and largest food rescue organization.

Today's hearing comes at a critical time for New Yorkers. As we shared in our testimony on the Mayor's FY26 Preliminary Budget from March 17, more New Yorkers than ever are turning to food pantries to help make ends meet. These resilient New Yorkers that use our pantries are mostly working adults, parents, women, seniors, and a disproportionate share of Black and Latine New Yorkers who are working hard to stay afloat amidst an affordability crisis. Unfortunately, we are all trying to balance the rising costs of housing, childcare and other essential costs in an environment in which food prices may become increasingly unpredictable due to uncertainty on the federal level. Even more alarming is that our ability to navigate destabilized food costs may be further compromised due to rollbacks on federal funding for programs that support low-income New Yorkers. That is why it is even more important that our local government strengthens and protects programs that build food security. I am confident that the City Council understands the importance of supporting emergency food programs and thank all of you for your continued investments in the Food Pantry Initiative and, most recently, including \$100M in baselined funding for the Community Food Connections Program (CFC).

For this hearing, in addition to reiterating City Harvest's FY26 NYC budget asks, I would like to spend more time unpacking the current state of hunger in New York City.

**The State of Hunger & Food Insecurity in New York City**

Recent data underscores that New York City faces significantly higher rates of food insecurity compared to the rest of the state. Nearly 1 in 7 New Yorkers face food insecurity (or 1.3M), including 1 in 4 children. When we compare recent data to pre-pandemic rates from 2019, that is a 30 percent

increase in food insecurity for all New Yorkers. Food insecurity disproportionately affects Black and Latine New Yorkers. According to Feeding America, 1 in 4 Black and Latine New Yorkers, compared to 1 in 10 of White New Yorkers, face food insecurity<sup>1</sup>. This means Black and Latine New Yorkers are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity. The effects of this crisis are far-reaching, not only leaving families hungry but also perpetuating cycles of poverty and racial disparities.

Changes in food insecurity rates inevitably lead to an increased demand for emergency food. Compared to 2019, City Harvest is seeing 81% percent more pantry visits, or 1 million more visits per month, across our citywide network of food pantries. Despite increasing the food, we deliver by 30 percent this year, or 83 million pounds of mostly fresh produce to 400 pantry partners, we cannot and are not designed to fully meet a demand that has been exacerbated by policy choices.

### **Root Causes of Hunger**

Often, efforts to build food security develop separately from efforts to address some of the root causes of hunger. We believe that this hinders well-rounded and equitable policy making. Backed by insights from community surveys of thousands of New Yorkers and hundreds of food pantry leaders, City Harvest strongly believes in the importance of an intersectional approach to addressing hunger. We must address New York's affordability crisis, particularly the rising costs of housing and childcare, in concert with investing in food access programs.

The importance of a multifaceted approach is very evident when we consider child food insecurity rates and childcare unaffordability. Food insecurity rates for young New Yorkers is 24%, compared to 15% for all New Yorkers. Studies show that children who do not have consistent access to nutritious meals are at a higher risk of mental health challenges and chronic illnesses.<sup>2</sup> This situation becomes even more dire when families are also struggling with the rising costs of rent and unaffordable childcare. According to the most recent True Cost of Living report, income has not kept up with rising cost of childcare, leading to childcare being unaffordable for 80% of New Yorkers. For example, Queens saw increases in childcare costs as high as 22% in recent years while median earnings only increased by about 9%.

Similarly, the rising cost of rent continues to exacerbate food insecurity. Families experiencing housing instability had 40% higher odds of experiencing food insecurity, while families experiencing food insecurity had 62% higher odds of experiencing housing instability.<sup>3</sup> As rents continue to rise, many New Yorkers are forced to make impossible choices between paying for food, housing, or childcare.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cityharvest.org/reports-on-hunger/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/child-hunger-facts#:~:text=Increased%20health%20problems,conditions%20like%20anemia%20and%20asthma.>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cityharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/The-Hidden-Cost-of-Living-A-Memo-on-how-Housing-Instability-Drives-Food-Insecurity-in-NYC.pdf>

This intersection of food insecurity and the financial burdens of housing and childcare places an immense strain on New York's working families. Twice as many working New Yorkers rely on pantries today than they did pre-pandemic, amounting to 2 out of 3 pantry participants engaging in the labor market. Unfortunately, these resilient New Yorkers had a median earning of \$34,000. Meanwhile, it costs at least \$100,000 for a family of four to afford to live in New York City without income supports and benefit programs.<sup>4</sup>

### **FY26 NYC Budget Asks**

City Harvest submitted testimony at the General Welfare Committee's executive budget hearing. Our testimony raised the urgency of passing a budget that truly reflects our city's values by investing in food security for all New Yorkers. Based on our expertise and insight from pantry partners and food system's leaders in the NYC Food Policy Alliance, we believe that the following budget asks are vital for our local government to support New Yorkers, especially as we all continue to face uncertainty on the federal level:

1. **Strengthen and protect New York City's food pantry system** by increasing and baselining Community Food Connection at \$100 million, increasing the City Council's Food Pantry Initiative, and establishing an emergency fund.
2. **Combat older adult hunger** by investing \$57 million in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers and restoring \$100+ million in cuts to NYC Aging's overall budget in FY26.
3. **Support community-led solutions to food insecurity** by creating a Food Justice Fund, as proposed in the Mayor's 10 Year Food Policy Plan.
4. **Restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs** by maintaining funding for the Groceries to Go Program.
5. **Apply a food security lens to housing stability and affordable childcare**, thereby addressing root causes of hunger by providing more funding for programs that keep New Yorkers in their homes and puts affordable childcare within reach for millions of New Yorkers who are forced to choose between food, housing, and childcare.

### **Conclusion**

Addressing hunger and food insecurity in New York City must be a priority for the City Council. It is not just a matter of nutrition; it is a matter of justice. We urge you to invest in long-term solutions that address the root causes of hunger, such as rising housing costs, lack of access to affordable childcare, and systemic inequalities. While the disparities and scale of hunger in our city should not be viewed as a new issue that only exists in the context of pre- and post-COVID, today's threats to food security should not be viewed as business as usual. With federal threats to anti-hunger programs that have already been felt by program leaders who have lost FEMA dollars for emergency food or saw state and federal grants for emergency food procurement freeze on multiple occasions,

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cityharvest.org/true-cost-of-living/>

it is imperative that our local leaders take bold steps to protect New Yorkers and invest in food security.

We thank the City Council for their partnership and concern for New Yorkers facing hunger over the years. We remain committed to working with all of you on budget efforts and policy solutions that help New Yorkers become more food secure.

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