



March 14, 2022

Dear Legislator,

As the regional food bank and public health organization serving thousands of residents in your district, we are writing today to communicate our top legislative priorities for the year ahead that will have a profound impact on the food security and health of those whom we serve.

Foodlink continues to respond to the rise in need in our communities, which includes a 13% increase in food insecurity for Monroe County residents in 2021, when compared to pre-pandemic times. **Last year, we distributed a record 26 million pounds of food.** We also prepared more than 800,000 healthy meals and snacks for students and continued to push forward with programs and initiatives that address the root causes of food insecurity in Rochester and the 10 counties we serve.

As we learned more than a decade ago in the wake of the Great Recession, recovery after an economic downturn is not equitable – particularly for those who were already trapped in the cycle of poverty. Food insecurity rates often take longer to fully retreat to pre-crisis levels. The need for our services – and the services of our network of nonprofit food providers – continues to be critical to the health and wellbeing of Rochester-area residents.

As a result of this unprecedented need, **we are asking you to support a broad spectrum of legislation to bolster the emergency food system and expand economic opportunities for all of your constituents, especially impoverished communities.** Below is a high-level overview of Foodlink's priority areas. In addition to this letter, you will find a more specific list of Foodlink's current legislative priorities.

ENSURE NO ONE GOES HUNGRY

New York State has been a national leader in supporting food banks – historically through the creation of the **Hunger Prevention & Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP)**, and recently through the implementation of the **Nourish New York** program. As federal assistance programs taper off, it is critical that New York provides an adequate safety net to support food banks and our partners.



IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD IN SCHOOLS AND LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

We cannot build healthier communities without prioritizing the proper nourishment of our children. The government can improve institutional food service to students through the implementation of a values-based procurement process for meal vendors, and by incentivizing locally sourced and nutritionally sound options in cafeterias across the state. Foodlink also supports several changes related to the state's administration of food-assistance programs, including verbal-only attestation to receive TEFAP-funded foods, increased support for SNAP and WIC outreach, and including healthy food as an eligible Medicaid expense under the current 1115 waiver.

ELIMINATE THE ROOT CAUSES OF HUNGER

The fight against hunger and the fight against poverty are one and the same. In urban, suburban and rural areas, we have spoken with food pantry clients who seek higher wages, secure housing, and affordable health care. As a food bank, we ensure that we are putting food on the table today, but hold a higher responsibility to ensure these other critical issues are addressed. Legislation that would set the region's minimum wage at \$15/hour and index growth based on inflation, extend the Empire State Child Tax Credit, and eliminate asset testing for most forms of public assistance are just a few examples of ways we can take a more proactive approach to reducing food insecurity and poverty across the state.

Attached to this letter, you will find a more specific, detailed list of Foodlink's current legislative priorities. Thank you for your time, and for your consistent support of Foodlink and the work that we do. We look forward to engaging with you and your office in the upcoming session to collaboratively advance our mission of ending hunger and building healthier communities for *all* Rochester-area residents.

In gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Julia Tedesco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julia Tedesco
President & CEO