

# NYC Food Policy Alliance FY23 NYS Budget Sign On Letter

Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor  
State of New York  
State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Governor Hochul,

The NYC Food Policy Alliance (formerly known as the New York COVID-19 Food Coalition) is a multi-sector group of 40+ New York City based food system stakeholders that came together in March of 2020 to meet an immediate need for collaboration and advocacy during the peak of New York's public health and economic crisis. The Alliance's mission is to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to today's crisis, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system. We approach this work through an anti-racism lens to ensure communities of color and other systemically under-resourced communities benefit from the recovery.

The Alliance has become an influential political force, and together leveraging our deep food policy expertise we have collectively developed policy platforms and campaigns to inform the government's federal response to the COVID-19 crisis and to ensure the FY21 New York City and New York State Budgets included funding to advance food justice and equity. The Alliance was also a critical voice in informing New York City's first-ever 10-year food policy plan, Food Forward NYC.

The undersigned X# member organizations of the NYC Food Policy Alliance respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following budget recommendations in the FY23 State Budget. Over the next two years, billions of dollars in federal government funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) will flow into New York, presenting an incredible once in a generation opportunity to make investments in our food systems and address the underlying causes of hunger and food inequity. These investments, including an initiative to provide Healthy School Meals for all New York school students, will help advance equity, address some of the existing systemic inequalities exacerbated by COVID, and ensure that New Yorkers are well fed and supported as we continue to rebuild from these crises:

## AGRICULTURE

1) **\$13 Million to Support Farm to School in New York State.** We support the New York Grown Food for New York Kids Coalition's (NYGFNYK) request for additional funding to support Farm to School programs, including \$10 million for Farm to School Reimbursement Initiative; and \$3 million for Farm to School Grants, including a \$500,000 carve-out for Regional Coordinator program and one full time staff member to administer farm to school programs.

2) **We support the priorities and recommendations of Black Farmers United NYS to advance racial equity in New York's farming sector,** including: The creation of additional



sources of funding, including low interest loans and grants to support the purchase of infrastructure and equipment on black owned farms; The establishment of a \$10 million pool of funding for black farmers to be distributed by the Black Farmer Fund; The provision of full scholarships to all black students pursuing SUNY agricultural degrees; and Funding and support for urban agriculture to incubate black farmers in New York State.

**3) We urge the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets to go beyond providing a phone number and email address to build a relationship between the agency and BIPOC producers and implement the recommendations outlined in the April 7, 2021 letter to Commissioner Ball from Black Farmers United NYS and members of the Diversity & Racial Equity and Inclusion working group at AGM. (<https://tinyurl.com/3jb5hhnz>)**

**4) We support the Governor's call for funding for the Urban Farms and Community Gardens Grant Program** to help make local food accessible to more residents, including in food deserts and underserved communities, and to encourage more urban farming across the state.

#### BENEFITS ACCESS

**5) Increase funding for the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) by \$2M** so that community-based organizations can conduct outreach and increase participation in federal food benefits programs in all New York counties, and especially high needs areas. This program is currently funded at \$3.02M and includes a 50% federal funding share using SNAP dollars. Future RFP and/or guidance for NOEPs should offer specific resources/technical assistance and targeted outreach to immigrant communities and vulnerable populations that were impacted by COVID.

**6) Ensure that NYS utilizes the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Administrative SNAP funding in years 2 and 3 for SNAP access related initiatives and projects, as intended by congressional intent and USDA guidance.** FFY 2021 funds totaling \$15.9 million were allocated to districts proportionately based on statewide SNAP households and the increase of the number of SNAP households participating in SNAP. Funding will continue in FFY 2022 and FFY 2023. We recommend the following initiatives/projects related to SNAP access:

A. Advance racial equity in SNAP in NYS and reduce barriers to participation by underserved populations in the state. This could include work to assess existing racial disparities in SNAP and investments in public data reporting with a focus on equity (e.g. data dashboards with case closure by county, reason, and race, and participation rates for all age groups by county and race).

B. Invest in strategies to reach eligible immigrant-headed households. OTDA could develop consumer-friendly materials in several languages to actively myth-bust immigrant fears exacerbated by the former public charge rules.

C. Improvements to website, forms, and notices. Evaluate notices and forms, especially any notices that require affirmative client action to get or keep benefits, to see how well they work for clients, and improve their use of proven plain language and user-centered information design techniques as outlined USDA's guide.

D. Language access improvements that include that translation of critical notices and forms into additional languages, prioritizing the SNAP interim report and Recertification forms, the Verification Checklist, and any notices that require affirmative client action to get or keep benefits, and ensuring strong language access support in all counties of the state.

E. Develop and launch mobile friendly platforms with the same functionality as myBenefits and AccessHRA in all counties across NYS. Since 20-30% of all low income people rely on mobile phones for internet services, it is a critical equity issue to ensure that myBenefits and AccessHRA are mobile friendly and that users can apply for benefits through their



phones. This should include information, application submission, document uploads, recertification submission, notices, and the functionality to use SMS messaging to connect with SNAP recipients throughout NYS.

F. Statewide Call Center for all seniors including those enrolled in the Elderly Simplified Application Project (ESAP) or New York State Nutrition Improvement Program (NYSNIP).

#### EMERGENCY FOOD

7) **\$14.1 million to support NYSOFA-funded Home Delivered Meals for older adults.** The home delivered meals (HDM) program, often referred to as "Meals on Wheels," offers crucial support for older adults across the state. Nonprofit HDM providers deliver a daily nutritious meal to homebound older adults who are unable to prepare their own food, while also providing support to combat social isolation. HDM has been significantly underfunded for many years, with the COVID-19 pandemic putting even greater strain on the system. Challenges include difficulty hiring drivers and delivery staff at low wages, rising costs of raw food, significant growth in the state's 65+ population, difficulty recruiting and retaining volunteers as a result of COVID, and higher food insecurity for older adults throughout the pandemic. \$14.1 million is needed to alleviate the pressures on this system and ensure older adults can continue receiving meals and social supports. These funds should be allocated through NYSOFA's Community Services for the Elderly (CSE) or Wellness In Nutrition (WIN) budget lines.

8) **Increased funding for Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) to \$54 Million.** In addition to a funding increase for this important program, emergency food providers request some changes to the administration of HPNAP, including: Opening up the bidding for more contractors in HPNAP (currently contracts are renewed every 5 years) to allow more and smaller food banks to acquire HPNAP contracts and distribute food through the program; Change HPNAP rules to prioritize procurement of more local produce and produce from BIPOC farmers; Flexibility to allow food banks and pantries to spend HPNAP funds on staffing, program administration, nutrition education and infrastructure, including funding for pantries to acquire cold storage equipment; Less frequent reporting to NYS (biweekly at most) and shift reporting from Tuesdays to later in the week, such as Thursday (as was the case in NourishNY rounds 1 & 2). Even if weekly reporting cadence were to be maintained, a Thursday deadline would allow vendors and administrators to more accurately compile sales data for submission.

9) **\$85 Million to continue the Nourish New York Program.** Food Banks and pantries in the Alliance applaud Governor Hochul for committing to support for this incredibly impactful program. We also encourage the Administration and the Department of Agriculture and Markets to commit to engaging in outreach and providing technical assistance to BIPOC farmers to encourage them to participate in the program.

10) **\$10 Million for a Capital Funding Program for food banks across NY State to meet the need for equipment replacement.** With the increased demands for emergency food created by the pandemic and the increased volume of fresh products coming into food banks from Nourish NY, the aging infrastructure of the food banking system can not keep up with the demands being placed on it. There is a need for new capital equipment including warehousing and refrigeration for both food banks and food pantries.

11) **\$25 Million to continue the Restaurant Resiliency Program** to provide grants to restaurants that offer meals and other food-related items to New Yorkers within distressed or underrepresented communities.

12) **Continued funding for food infrastructure, wealth and economic development projects in New York City's frontline communities**, including funding for: The creation of more community-owned farmers markets; Support for BIPOC-owned vertical farming and hydroponic businesses in frontline communities; Funding to establish and support BIPOC GreenWorker Cooperatives in food and other ventures; and Funding to support food hub development, warehousing, cold storage, distribution and community owned retail in frontline communities.

13) **\$3 Billion to refund the Excluded Workers Fund** (<https://dol.ny.gov/EWF>) and re-open the application process at the Department of Labor.

14) **Pass S1175A /A5081** (<https://tinyurl.com/nhb4heu9>) to legalize and decriminalize sidewalk vending without a permit across the State and ensure that the City of New York will create a fair and equitable street vending license system without caps on street vendor permits. This law is expected to bring revenue to the City and State of New York through new license fees as well as sales tax revenue from newly legalized street vending operations.

#### SCHOOL MEALS

15) **Expand access to school meals by providing Healthy School Meals for All in New York state**. Adopt statewide Community Eligibility Provision across New York State to allow implementation of a statewide universal school meals program.

16) **\$1.2 Million to support the Model State School Wellness Policy Mandate (S810A/A5159)** for schools created through the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, including \$200,000 for a health and wellness position(s) at the State Dept. of Education and \$1 Million for a pilot program to bring nutrition education and wellness policies to life in schools across the state

17) **\$10 Million to Support the Hunger Free Campus Act, S01151/A06881** (<https://tinyurl.com/3c9hhmv7>) This \$10 million competitive grant program provides funding for colleges and universities to build the campus infrastructure to better meet student needs. In order for campuses to obtain funding, they would have to meet these requirements: establish a hunger task force, designate a staff member to support SNAP enrollment; require campuses establish food pantries, a meal credit sharing program, or expansion of food vouchers. It also requires that campuses perform outreach and conduct student surveys.

18) **Support the passage of the New Deal for CUNY Bill** (<https://tinyurl.com/4sawetdh>) , a **\$1.47B initiative to make CUNY free for all in-state undergraduate students**, hire more mental health counselors and academic advisors, increase the ratio of faculty to students and provide funding to improve CUNY.

Thank you for your support over the years as Lieutenant Governor and now as Governor. We welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your team to discuss these recommendations as you develop the FY23 State Budget. We look forward to working with you to address food insecurity and inequity across the state in the coming years.

Sincerely,

 [gus.birkhead@gmail.com](mailto:gus.birkhead@gmail.com) (not shared) [Switch account](#)



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Full Name

Your answer

Email Address \*

Your answer

Organization \*

Your answer

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