



March 3, 2023

Governor Kathy Hochul  
Executive Chamber  
Albany, NY 12248

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Majority Leader  
New York State Senate  
Albany, NY 12247

Representative Carl E. Heastie  
Speaker  
New York State Assembly  
Albany, NY 12248

Dear Governor Hochul, Speaker Heastie, and Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins:

With the expiration of pandemic-era federal funding for universal free school meals, more than 726,000 children in New York are currently at greater risk for food insecurity. The federal program was a crucial lifeline that provided students with access to healthy meals at no cost. New York families need this lifeline even more now as other pandemic-related benefits have expired despite grocery prices remaining at historic highs. We know that further federal action is not on the table, and the longer New York waits to solve this problem, the more kids go hungry. Other states, including California, Colorado, Nevada, Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Vermont, have already recognized this problem and moved to act – New York is behind.

One in seven children in New York experiences hunger, with food insecurity disproportionately impacting Black and Brown families. Now, children only qualify for free school meals if their household's income is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty level, an annual income of \$51,338 or less for a family of four – far below a livable salary for a family of that size.

This discrepancy between eligibility and the living wage means that many families struggling to make ends meet do not qualify for free school meals. Even more, students who do qualify fall through the cracks because of social stigmas against participating in means-tested free meal programs and language barriers that prevent their families from applying for the program. This further exacerbates existing disparities in education, health, and economic outcomes.

## The Solution

The [Healthy School Meals for All Coalition](#) is an alliance of over 250 anti-hunger, education, food, nutrition, health, and equity-focused organizations across the state. We are advocating that you, our leaders in Albany, fully fund the healthy school meals for all [policy](#).

Investment into this critical anti-hunger program would be a simple, streamlined solution to the needs of New York families and schools.

There is support among your constituents, with [89 percent](#) of New Yorkers agreeing that the State should make school meals free for all students.

New York has always been a leader, not a follower – we need action now.

## The Impacts

It is [proven](#) that free school-provided meals increase attendance, improve student mental and physical health, create an environment of equity, and reduce hunger by nearly four percentage points. In addition to these impacts, providing healthy school meals for all will:

- Provide 2,000 additional schools, including many small rural schools with high poverty rates, with universal free school meals.
- Eliminate an estimated \$24.9 million per year in unpaid school meal debt from districts' balance sheets.
- Remove social stigma and administrative barriers, guaranteeing more students are fed.
- Offer opportunities to invest in our agricultural industry for more farm-to-table options, resulting in healthier meals for all students.

We need Albany to champion this solution. Given ongoing [food insecurity](#) and higher-than-anticipated state [revenues](#), there is no reason not to act now. Every day we wait, students are going hungry, and families are struggling to make ends meet. **It is time for us to lead the way again by funding free school meals for all.**

Sincerely,

The Healthy School Meals for All NY Kids Coalition

## **Healthy School Meals for All NY Kids Supporters**

### **New York State Educational Conference Board:**

Association of School Business Officials of New York  
Conference of Big 5 School Districts  
New York State Council of School Superintendents  
New York State School Boards Association  
New York State United Teachers  
New York State PTA  
School Administrators Association of New York State

### **Statewide Organizations:**

2-1-1 NY Inc.  
Alliance of New York State YMCAs  
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network  
American Heart Association  
Association of School Business Officials of New York  
Association on Aging in New York  
Church Women United in New York State  
Coalition for Healthy School Food  
Community Food Advocates  
Conference of Big 5 School Districts  
Feeding New York State  
Hunger Solutions New York  
NAACP New York State Conference  
New York Agricultural Land Trust  
New York Farm Bureau  
New York Health Foundation  
New York School Nutrition Association  
New York State Academy of Nutrition & Dietetics  
NYS American Academy of Pediatrics, A Coalition of Chapters 1, 2 & 3  
New York State Association for Rural Health  
New York State Association of School Nurses (NYSASN)  
New York State Council of School Superintendents  
New York State Educational Conference Board  
New York State Network for Youth Success  
New York State PTA  
New York State Public Health Association  
New York State School Boards Association  
New York State United Teachers  
No Kid Hungry New York  
Prevent Child Abuse New York  
Rural Schools Association of New York State  
Teach NYS  
School Administrators Association of New York State  
Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy  
UJA-Federation of New York  
United Way of New York State  
WIC Association of New York State

### **Local & Regional Organizations:**

A Single Bite  
Adirondack Foundation  
Adirondack North Country Association  
Agape Apostolic Church of Deliverance  
African Services Committee  
APNA Brooklyn Community Center  
Aramark  
Ascienzo Family Foundation  
Beyond the Sanctuary  
Bread of Life Food Pantry  
Broadway Community, Inc.  
The Brotherhood Sister Sol  
Bulk Book Warehouse  
Cafeteria Culture  
Care-n-Share Food Pantry  
Catholic Charities Community Services  
Catholic Charities Community Services of Rockland County  
Catholic Charities of Herkimer County  
Catholic Charities of Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties  
Center for Agricultural Development & Entrepreneurship  
Center for the Integration and Advancement of New Americans, Inc. (CIANA)  
Chilis on Wheels  
Citizen's Committee for Children of New York  
City Harvest  
Citywide Oversight Committee  
Common Threads  
Coordinated Children's Services Initiative Citywide Oversight Committee  
Corning Foundation  
Cortland Food Project, Food Policy Subcommittee  
Council of School Supervisors & Administrators  
CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute  
Cutchogue New Suffolk Free Library  
Dietitians of Northern New York PLLC  
Dietright  
Dutchess Outreach  
East End Food Institute  
E.A.T.S. Program  
Edible Schoolyard NYC  
Equity Advocates  
Expecting Relief  
Family of Woodstock, Inc.  
Feeding Broome  
Feeding Westchester  
FeedMore WNY

Finger Lakes Health Care FCU  
 Food Bank For New York City  
 Food Bank of Central New York  
 Food Bank of the Southern Tier  
 Foodlink, Inc.  
 FREE: Families for Real Equity in Education  
 Ginsberg's Foods, Inc  
 Gowanus Apiary  
 Grace Care Ministries  
 Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association  
 Greater Southern Tier BOCES  
 Green Education and Legal Fund  
 Harrisville Free library  
 Hartwick Food Pantry  
 Health and Welfare Council of Long Island (HWCLI)  
 Healthi Kids Coalition  
 Holy Church of Christ  
 Hudson Valley Community Services  
 Iris House, Inc.  
 Island Harvest Food Bank  
 Justice & Peace Office, Catholic Charities of  
 Chemung/Schuyler  
 Karing Kitchen  
 Keeping Ladies and Men Motivated  
 Land to Learn  
 Lansing Lunchbox  
 Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy,  
 Teacher College Columbia University  
 L.E.A.D. Mentoring Inc.  
 LIFE at Resource Center for Independent Living  
 Live Well Kingston  
 Long Beach Soup Kitchen  
 Long Island Activists  
 Long Island Cares, Inc.  
 Long Island Connections  
 Long Island Housing Services, Inc.  
 Long Island Immigrant Alliance  
 Long Island Strong Schools Alliance  
 Lunch 4 Learning  
 Lunch 4 Learning Parent Caucus  
 Margaret Ostrander Nutrition  
 Maximizing Independent Living Choices  
 Mohawk Valley Community Action Agency  
 Mosholu Montefiore Community Center  
 Munching Moose  
 Nachas Health & Family Network, Inc.  
 Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association Inc.  
 National Organization of Wayne County  
 Neighbors Supporting Neighbors Babylon Inc.  
 New York Center For Interpersonal Development  
 Olean Food Pantry Inc  
 Ossining Padres Hispanos Inc.  
 Partners in Nutrition LLC  
 Perry Public Library  
 Police Athletic League Inc.  
 Prosperity in the Hood, Inc  
 Red Hook Public Library  
 Red Rabbit  
 Regional Food Bank of Northeastern New York  
 Reservoir Food Pantry  
 Restaurant Opportunities Center of NY  
 Resurrection House, Inc.  
 Rock Steady Farm  
 Rural Health Network of South Central New York  
 Saratoga Immigration Coalition  
 Saving Grace Outreach  
 Schenectady Community Ministries  
 SDC Nutrition, PC  
 Sephardic Community Foundation  
 Show Up Long Island  
 South End Children's Cafe  
 Spencer Van Etten Community Food Cupboard  
 St. Joseph Catholic Church Outreach Center  
 St. Jude Parish Outreach  
 St. Lawrence County Health Initiative, Inc.  
 St. Peter's Episcopal Church Love Pantry  
 Suffolk Progressives  
 SUNY Oswego Health Promotion and Wellness  
 Department  
 Syracuse Grows  
 Syracuse-Onondaga Food Systems Alliance  
 Tabernacle UMC  
 Teens for Food Justice  
 The Campaign Against Hunger  
 The Florence M. Muller Foundation  
 The Innovative Daycare Corp  
 The Sylvia Center  
 The YMCA of Greater Rochester  
 Together We Will Long Island  
 Town of Southeast  
 United Neighborhood Houses  
 United Way of Buffalo & Erie County  
 United Way of Dutchess-Orange Region  
 United Way of New York City  
 United Way of the Greater Capital Region  
 United Way of Tompkins County  
 United Way of Westchester and Putnam  
 Upper Room Ministries  
 Volunteers Improving Neighborhood Environments, Inc.  
 Wayland Food Pantry at Lighthouse  
 West Harlem Group Assistance, Inc.  
 West Side Campaign Against Hunger  
 Westchester Rockland Dietetic Association  
 Western New York Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
 Women Empowerment Against Poverty of Nepal  
 (WEAPoN)  
 Yoga For Peace, Justice, Harmony With the Planet  
 YWCA of Rochester and Monroe County

**National Organizations:**

Agudath Israel of America  
Center for Science in the Public Interest  
FoodCorps  
Food Research and Action Center  
Global Food Solutions  
Hunger Free America  
National Food Group

**Schools:**

Alfred-Almond Central School  
Archdiocese of New York- Catholic Schools  
Beaver River CSD  
Berlin CSD  
Brasher Falls Central School  
Broome Tioga BOCES  
Brushton-Moira Central School  
BT Boces  
Buffalo Public School District  
Canisteo-Greenwood CSD  
Capital Region BOCES Shared Foodservice  
Catholic Academy of Niagara Falls  
Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council  
Cobleskill-Richmondville CSD  
Community Education Councils NYC 2, 7, 29  
Corinth Central School  
D75 Presidents' Council  
East Rochester UFSD  
Education Council Consortium  
Francis Lewis High School PTA  
Frontier CSD  
Gananda Central School District  
Gates Chili Central School District  
Geneva City School District  
Gouverneur CSD  
Greater Southern Tier BOCES  
Greenwich CSD  
Haverstraw-Stony Pt CSD  
Hoosick Falls Central School  
Ithaca School Food Service  
Johnson City CSD  
Kenmore Teachers Association  
Kingston City School District  
Lake Placid Central School  
Lansing Central School  
Leroy Central School District  
Little Falls City School District  
Lyndonville CSD  
Manhattan High Schools Presidents Council  
Marcus Whitman CSD  
Mechanicville City School District  
Menands School  
Middle Country CSD

Middleburgh Central School District  
Millennium High School  
Mohonasen CSD  
Nassau-Suffolk School Boards Association  
New Hartford Central School District  
Newfield Central School District  
Niagara Wheatfield School District  
North Babylon UFSD  
North Colonie Food Service  
Notre Dame High School  
Phoenix Central School District  
Pine Plains CSD  
PS 811X at Bronx High School for Visual Arts  
PS3 NYC PTA  
PTA of High School for Environmental Studies  
Queens High School Presidents' Council  
Red Hook CSD  
Rhinebeck CSD  
Rotterdam-Mohonasen Central School District  
Salamanca City Central School District  
Salmon River Central School  
Saranac Lake Central School District  
Schenectady City School District  
Schoharie Central School District  
Seneca Falls CSD  
Seton Catholic School  
South Seneca Central School  
Southampton School District  
Stillwater CSD  
Sweet Home CSD  
Temple Beth-El  
Ticonderoga Central School  
Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga BOCES School Board  
Association  
Watervliet City School District  
Wells Central School  
West Canada Valley CSD  
West Seneca Schools  
Wheatland-Chili School District  
Wilson CSD  
Windsor Central School District

Cc:

Betty Rosa, Commissioner, New York State Education Department

Richard Ball, Commissioner, New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets

Senator Liz Krueger, Chair, Senate Finance Committee

Senator Shelley Mayer, Chair, Senate Education Committee

Senator Michelle Hinchey, Chair, Senate Agriculture Committee

Senator Rachel May, Chair, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources

Senator John Liu, Chair, New York City Education Committee

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair, Senate Social Services Committee

Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda, Chair, Senate Committee on Cities 1

Assemblymember Michael Benedetto, Chair, Assembly Education Committee

Assemblymember Maritza Davila, Chair, Assembly Social Services Committee

Assemblymember Jessica González-Rojas, Member, Assembly Social Services Committee

Assemblymember Donna Lupardo, Chair, Assembly Agriculture Committee

Assemblymember Edward Braunstein, Chair, Assembly Cities Committee

Assemblymember Angelo Santabarbara, Chair, Legislative Commission on Rural Resources