



December 12, 2023

Governor Ned Lamont  
210 Capitol Avenue  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Governor Lamont:

Thank you for joining us a few weeks ago at Bank of America Turkey Tuesday. We are so grateful for the support you show us not only during the holiday season, but year-round. As you mentioned when we were on the radio: Thanksgiving is just one meal, and it's critical that we not take our foot off the gas for the 364 other days of the year when 400,000 people in Connecticut continue to experience food insecurity.

The unfortunate reality is that hunger is a bigger problem now than it was even at the peak of the pandemic.

It's troubling to share, but right now we are seeing unprecedented lines and first-time visitors at food pantries across the state. In talking with our partner pantries, we believe this is happening for two reasons: increased cost of food and other essentials, and the end of the increased federal benefits that were so successful in helping people during the pandemic. Combined, this has created an untenable situation where our neighbors, many of whom are working one or more jobs, simply cannot make ends meet and are seeking support from our food pantries. As a result, the food pantry system has become strained, and Connecticut Foodshare simply does not have enough donated or government-sourced food available to meet the need. It has become clear that this is no longer a temporary spike in need that we can address through one-time major investments, but rather a systemic and persistent issue that will require long-term support.

Thankfully, Connecticut already has a program in place to address this crisis. The Connecticut Nutrition Assistance Program (CT-NAP) was created over 20 years ago to provide food to our food bank that is available at no cost to our network of partner pantries across the state. Codified under CSG Sec. 17(b)-791, CT-NAP is administered by DSS and is currently funded at \$850,000 annually. However, that amount is simply not sufficient given the gravity of the need our neighbors are experiencing. We believe it is time for the state to renew its investment in this critical program.

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In looking at neighboring states and comparable programs from around the country, Connecticut is falling woefully behind in its investment in nutritious food purchasing. For example, the State of Massachusetts provides \$35 million to its food banks for food purchasing. The State of New York provides \$34 million, and the State of New Jersey provides \$85 million directly to the Feeding America food banks in their states to purchase food for distribution at food pantries. Only the State of Texas spends less per capita on food for its local pantries than we do here in Connecticut. In a state like Connecticut, where we strive to balance the high cost of living with a high quality of life, it is essential that the state proportionally invest in programs like CT-NAP that serve our neighbors who are most in need.

As if this reality wasn't bad enough, we also do not anticipate that the USDA will continue to fund the LFPA program, through which we've purchased more than \$2 million worth of fresh produce from small Connecticut farmers. This abrupt loss of fresh Connecticut Grown product to pantries, and the resulting loss of a revenue stream for Connecticut farmers, would only increase the burden.

Based on our analysis of comparable programs in other states and the level of need in Connecticut we emphatically believe that the CT-NAP program should be ***funded at \$10 million annually to support local community pantries, vendors, and farmers.***

Attached is our recommendation for technical changes and enhancements to CSG Sec. 17(b)-791. This proposal does the following:

- Makes technical changes to existing statute to reflect the new legal name of our food bank following our 2021 merger.
- Updates language to highlight the purchase of fresh produce as a programmatic priority.
- Eliminates the requirement for us to take an administrative fee from the program (which in practice we do not currently charge).
- Requires that 15% of CT-NAP funds be used to purchase food directly from Connecticut farmers, which would maintain our Farm to Neighbors program even after the USDA eliminates LFPA funding.
- Fully funds the program at \$10M with a 3% annual increase to allow pantries to keep up with inflation.

Every day we hear from people who ask what more the state can do to provide more food resources to the pantries in their districts... and the answer is simply to enhance the state program that already exists. As you craft your proposed budget revisions for FY25, we hope that you will consider these statutory



# Connecticut Foodshare

Our Community, Our Food Bank

changes - and this increased investment - on behalf of our 500 local community food pantries across the state.

My team and I are happy to answer any questions that you and your budgetary staff might have about CT-NAP and our proposal.

With Appreciation,

Jason Jakubowski  
President & CEO  
Connecticut Foodshare

CC: Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz  
Secretary Jeffrey R. Beckham  
Commissioner Andrea Barton-Reeves  
Commissioner Bryan Hurlburt

AN ACT MODERNIZING AND ENHANCING THE STATE'S SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION COMMODITIES ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

That section 17b-791 of the general statutes be amended as follows:

Sec 17b-791. (formerly Sec. 17-598). Supplemental nutrition commodities assistance program. The Department of Social Services shall establish a supplemental nutrition commodities assistance program to provide funds for the purchase of produce, high protein foods or other nutritionally beneficial supplemental foods, ~~or both~~, for soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters. Such foods shall be purchased in bulk by ~~the~~ Connecticut Foodshare ~~Bank~~ through in-state wholesalers or brokers, or both, and allotted to existing soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters in accordance with the established policies of ~~the~~ Connecticut Foodshare ~~Bank~~. This program shall be funded at \$10,000,000 in FY2025 and shall be increased by three percent in each fiscal year thereafter; at least fifteen percent of such funds in each fiscal year shall be used to purchase produce and/or other products from Connecticut farmers. Such soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters may ~~shall be charged~~ ~~pay~~ a handling fee ~~charge~~ of up to five cents per pound in order to cover the costs incurred by ~~the~~ Connecticut Foodshare ~~Bank~~. The food shall be distributed free of charge by the soup kitchens, food pantries and emergency shelters.