

Written Testimony of Julie Bancroft

Chief Executive Officer, Feeding Pennsylvania

Lowering Consumer Grocery Costs Hearing

Submitted to the PA Senate Democratic Policy Committee

July 30, 2026

Chair Miller, Leader Costa, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today. I'm Julie Bancroft, CEO of Feeding Pennsylvania. We are the state association of nine Feeding America-affiliated food banks serving neighbors in all 67 counties of the Commonwealth. I appreciate the opportunity to share what Pennsylvania's charitable food system is experiencing as families, farmers, grocers, and food banks all face record-high food and transportation costs.

Our network's goal is simple: reduce food insecurity. But every year, the number of neighbors turning to food banks continues to rise. At the same time, our network is being asked to do more with less, while federal policy changes, including implementation of H.R. 1, have increased pressure on families and on the charitable food system.

Food Insecurity in Pennsylvania

Earlier this week, Feeding America released its Map the Meal Gap report, which measures food insecurity across America. This will be the last report using current data methodology, due to the USDA's cancellation of the annual Household Food Security report, marking the end of 30 years of national food insecurity benchmarking.

The Map the Meal Gap report, reflecting 2024 data, shows how widespread the challenge has become. Pennsylvania's food insecurity rate was 13.5% in 2024, up 15% over two years. That means more than 1.7 million Pennsylvanians don't have enough food to meet their nourishment needs. More than half a million children are food-insecure. Almost 20% of our Commonwealth's children don't have enough food to eat. That obviously impacts their ability to learn and grow. PA seniors and older adults experience food insecurity at rates of six and ten percent, respectively. Every single county and district in the Commonwealth has people experiencing food insecurity, and 44% of food-insecure Pennsylvanians live above the SNAP eligibility threshold.

That means many people earn too much to qualify for SNAP, but too little to afford the food they need. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, grocery prices increased 33% between 2019 and 2026, the largest jump in 50 years. Map the Meal

Gap shows the average meal in Pennsylvania now costs \$3.74, and food-insecure households need an additional \$23.16 per person per week to meet basic food needs.

The neighbors our network serves are often one rent increase, medical diagnosis, or car repair away from needing help. Many are working parents or seniors on fixed incomes who are being priced out of grocery stores and forced to make impossible choices about rent, medicine, utilities, transportation, and food.

Cost Pressures on Families and Food Banks

These pressures do not stop with consumers. High food and fuel costs strain the entire food system: the farmers who grow our food, the trucks that move it, the grocers who sell it, and the food banks trying to offset the burden for families.

For example, Central Pennsylvania Food Bank, which serves the largest area in our network, has seen steady increases in popular food staples it distributes to its agency partners. Ground beef costs 42% more than it did in 2021, green beans cost 22% more, and corn costs 17% more.

Transportation costs add another layer. The Mid-Atlantic Regional Cooperative, a Feeding PA program that supplies produce to 37 food banks in 14 states along the Eastern Seaboard, has seen delivery costs rise sharply. The cost to ship a truckload of produce from Philadelphia to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank increased from \$1,475 to \$1,775 in one year's time, and the average cost per pound of produce rose from 22 cents to 30 cents.

All of this leaves food banks scrambling to do more with less, just as the families they serve are doing the same.

Impact of Federal Policy Changes

H.R. 1 has further intensified these challenges. SNAP waiver reductions, increased work requirements, and additional administrative burdens pushed more than 200,000 Pennsylvanians off the SNAP rolls, representing an 11% decrease in SNAP participation in Pennsylvania over one year.

When people lose SNAP but still cannot afford groceries, they turn to the charitable food network. That network is essential, but it was never designed to replace the scale and reach of federal nutrition assistance.

Importance of State Support

I want to thank the Shapiro Administration and the General Assembly for preserving critical funding for food banks and farmers. The State Food Purchase Program helps

food banks keep their shelves stocked with staples. The PA Agricultural Surplus System helps food banks purchase nutritious local fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and proteins from Pennsylvania farmers and distribute them to families who need them most.

Stable funding for these programs, complemented by SNAP Emergency Relief Funding during the federal SNAP payment halt, has been essential to meeting increased need while supporting Pennsylvania's farm economy. Navigating these economic conditions and food system strains would be nearly impossible without the support of these State-funded programs. Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to share the experience of our food bank network and the families it serves.

Sources

- [Feeding America, Map the Meal Gap, 2024 data](#), including Pennsylvania food insecurity rates, county-level food insecurity, meal cost, and food budget shortfall estimates.
- [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index data](#) regarding grocery price increases between 2019 and 2026.
- Feeding Pennsylvania network data, including Central Pennsylvania Food Bank staple cost increases and Mid-Atlantic Regional Cooperative transportation and produce cost data.
- [PA Department of Human Services Pennsylvania SNAP participation data](#)