



April 10, 2023

Minnesota Senate
Finance Committee
Room 3235, Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Marty and Committee Members:

On behalf of the team at Second Harvest Heartland, our region's largest food bank, I am writing to encourage you to include vital funding for the prepared meals grant program to support Minnesotans facing hunger in the omnibus Health and Human Services budget. This funding will help launch a prepared meals grant program, which, while not at the funding amount we had initially requested, still represents a strong first step toward supporting this work in the long term in Minnesota.

As you all likely know, hunger in Minnesota remains at a record high due to the ongoing consequences of the pandemic, elevated grocery costs, and sunseting federal benefits. Visits to food shelves topped 5.5 million last year, more than 2 million more visits than in 2021. However, our research shows that 15% of those who are food insecure don't have the home, health, or ability to cook for themselves, meaning that a food shelf is not the best source of food assistance. Even with existing state and federal meal programs, too many Minnesotans aren't getting the support they need.

Other food security provisions such as increasing base funding for the Minnesota Food Shelf Program, providing one-time support for infrastructure investments at hunger-relief organizations, and supporting Tribal food security will all go a long way to realizing Second Harvest Heartland's mission of ending hunger together. However, a prepared meals grant program, targeted to those who aren't eligible for existing meal programs, will help ensure the continued growth of this work in Minnesota. This funding will also build on the successful distribution of American Rescue Plan funds to support the distribution of prepared meals over the last year, reaching communities in all corners of the state. We look forward to working with the legislature to fund this grant as we face record rates of hunger in Minnesota.

Thank you for your support and for the investments you've made in addressing food insecurity in our state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allison O'Toole".

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland