



January 25, 2023

Minnesota Senate
Health and Human Services Committee
Minnesota Senate Building, Room 2107
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Wiklund and Committee Members:

On behalf of the team at Second Harvest Heartland, our region's largest food bank, I am writing to urge you to support SF71 to provide an emergency infusion of \$5 million to Minnesota food shelves and hunger-relief programs.

At Second Harvest Heartland, we partner with a network of 423 food shelf and nonprofit partners and 1,115 hunger-relief programs to support those in our region facing hunger today. On average, we provide 94.1% of all food distributed by our partners, and this relationship gives us a close look at the challenges faced by Minnesota's food shelves, particularly over the last few years as the pandemic has disrupted operations and increased need.

Unfortunately, Minnesota's food insecurity rates are trending in the wrong direction, and organizations on the front lines of the hunger fight face much of the burden for meeting this growing demand. Over 813,000 people reached out for assistance in our service area in 2021, and the number of visits reported by agency partners in Second Harvest Heartland's service area increased 29% in the last year, surpassing the highest levels from early in the pandemic. Statewide, visits to Minnesota food shelves exceeded 5.7 million in 2022.

The same financial pressures that drive more people to food shelves also affect the emergency food system's ability to meet that need. Across the board, prices for foods sourced by Second Harvest Heartland are 20% higher than last year, and the amount of food we've needed to purchase is up 50%. Over the past year, the price of the milk we purchase has soared 30% while demand for milk at food shelves has increased 40%. We're not only sourcing to meet the increased demand but must fill a 7-million-pound gap left by a 40% decline in foods provided by federal commodities programs.

In recognition of the challenges faced by Minnesota's food shelves, in 2022 we made over \$1.8 million in grants available to help our partners adjust to the increasing need and to support changes in how the network operates. These grants helped support partners as they continue to address pandemic-era and inflationary pressures, increase their capacity, and provide services in new ways to support neighbors. But our ability to fund hunger-relief programs isn't enough to fully compensate for the scale of the need, and more resources are required.

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It is vital that this year's state budget supports our state's emergency food system to help us end hunger in Minnesota. A strong starting point is for the legislature to quickly pass one-time, \$5 million in support for food shelves, as outlined in SF71, to provide them with the resources needed to distribute food effectively to our neighbors in need.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and your support for Minnesotans experiencing food insecurity.

Sincerely,

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

Allison O'Toole
Chief Executive Officer
Second Harvest Heartland

