



April 4, 2024

Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

Minnesotans visited food shelves more than 7.5 million times in 2023, two million more visits than in 2022 – the previous high-water mark. This is due to a combination of factors, including the expiration of COVID-era emergency food supports and financial assistance, the rising cost of food, and inflation in other areas eating up more and more of our neighbors' budgets.

Investments made in 2023 will help in both the short- and long-term, but the reality is that the emergency food system is unable to meet current demand and 2024 figures are already outpacing last year. Therefore, we write to respectfully request your support for SF 4185 (Gustafson), which would establish a new Minnesota Food Bank Program and provide critical resources to each of the food banks serving our state.

Food banks like ours form the backbone of the emergency food relief system, but currently receive no direct funding from the state. Given record demand, now is the time to establish this reliable and permanent source of funding for food purchasing and distribution, our top priority. At \$5 million/year, this alone will not be enough to meet current needs, but it will help ensure fewer Minnesotans go hungry – a shared goal that we think is more than worthy of state investment.

We are also advocating for and would enthusiastically support additional one-time funding to support food purchasing and distribution as well as further investments in our state's network of food shelves to fully meet this moment. Hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans and their families are relying on us, but without additional support from our elected leaders, the emergency food system will continue to be unable to keep up with high – and still rising – demand.

Thank you as always for your consideration. We hope to have your support this session as we work to reduce hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Allison O'Toole, CEO
Second Harvest Heartland

Virginia Merritt, ED
Channel One Food Bank

Shaye Moris, President/CEO
Second Harvest Northland

Susie Novak Boelter, ED
North Country Food Bank

Melissa Sobolik, CEO
Great Plains Food Bank