



March 14, 2024

Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee:

As you know, 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 like 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 HF 4150 (Hemmingsen-Jaeger), 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

Virginia Merritt, ED

Shaye Moris, President/CEO

Second Harvest Heartland Channel One Food Bank Second Harvest Northland

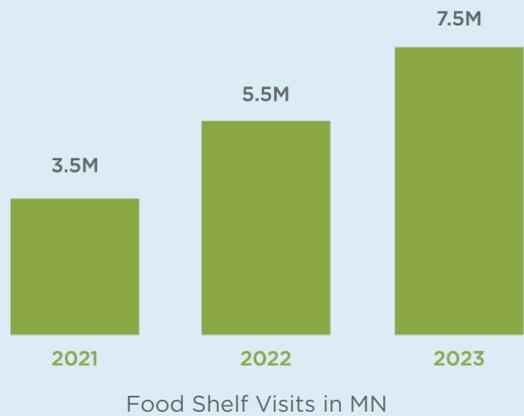
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• HELP MAKE HUNGER HISTORY •



After back-to-back years of record demand for emergency food assistance, Minnesota’s network of food banks, food shelves, and food distribution programs are stretched beyond capacity. Because food banks rely primarily on large donations of food, when donations are down and costs are high —as is the case right now— a greater portion of their budgets go towards food purchasing. Unlike donated food (and food coming from government programs), purchased food comes at some cost to food shelves, further straining their limited budgets.

• THE MN FOOD BANK PROGRAM •

HF 4150 (Hemmingsen-Jaeger) / SF 4185 (Gustafson)

The Minnesota Food Bank Program would help address these challenges by creating a long-term, reliable source of funding specifically for food purchasing and distribution - providing an infusion of much-needed food at no cost to Minnesota’s food shelves. Food Bank Program dollars cannot be used to cover administrative costs.

As proposed, \$5 million would be allocated annually beginning in the current fiscal year to the state’s six food banks, using the federal TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) distribution formula already in place. This formula has a disproportionately beneficial impact on food banks serving Greater Minnesota, where the need is high and resources are harder to come by.





CONTACT INFORMATION
 For more information on how to support this proposal, or to have your name added as a co-author, please contact:

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