

Senate Finance Committee

Re: In support of H S2237

Testimony in Support of S2237 (Funding for RI Community Food Bank)

Dear Chair DiPalma and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Dr. Alison Tovar, and I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the Brown University School of Public Health, where my work focuses on nutrition, food systems, and health equity. I am a resident of Providence. I write in strong support of Senator Mack's S2237, which would allocate \$3 million in state funding to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

My research over the past 15 years has focused on improving dietary behaviors in communities disproportionately affected by food insecurity. From a public health perspective, the evidence is unambiguous: food insecurity is a powerful determinant of health, linked to higher rates of chronic disease, poorer mental health outcomes, worse pregnancy and child development outcomes, and increased healthcare costs. Investments in food access are, fundamentally, investments in population health.

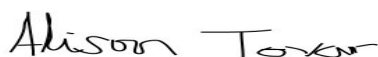
The Rhode Island Community Food Bank and its network of partner agencies are the backbone of our state's emergency food system. Yet the demand they are being asked to meet has grown dramatically in recent years. The Food Bank's most recent Status Report on Hunger documents that approximately one in three Rhode Island households is food insecure — a sharp increase from pre-pandemic levels — and partner agencies across the state continue to report rising numbers of families turning to them for help, often for the first time.

I am deeply concerned that this need will grow even further as the full impact of HR 1 takes effect. Cuts and structural changes to SNAP and other federal nutrition programs will shift more families onto an emergency food network that is already stretched beyond capacity. State investment is essential to prevent a serious gap between the need in our communities and our capacity to meet it.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass S2237 and increase state funding to the Rhode Island Community Food Bank, so that the Food Bank and its partner agencies can continue meeting the growing need across our state.

Thank you for your support of the Food Bank and for your leadership in reducing food insecurity in Rhode Island.

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