



# ULSTER COUNTY LEGISLATIVE NEWS

## ULSTER COUNTY NEWS INFORMATION

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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Legislative Report Examines Food Insecurity in Ulster County

**Kingston, NY** – From the first days of the COVID-19 pandemic local officials scrambled to address the immediate crisis of providing basic nourishment to families as food pantries, school lunch programs, soup kitchens, meals on wheels and other community food safety net programs were impacted by the shutdown. Like so many social programs, the pandemic pushed food insecurity to the forefront of public awareness.

Ulster County Legislator Eve Walter (D – New Paltz), Chair of the Health, Human Services and Housing Committee, released a report developed by Chelsea Villalba, a recent legislative intern who earned a master's degree in social work and political social action, that examines the problems and extent of food insecurity in Ulster County.

State and local representatives described the report as a comprehensive study of food insecurity in Ulster County and offers viable recommendations to enhance local efforts and programs.

"I am very proud of the work by Chelsea Villalba deeply examining food insecurity in Ulster County. This white paper not only shows us our current condition but provides clear directions for changes toward ensuring that all of our residents have access to healthy, affordable food," said Walter.

"This report shines a light on the very real crisis of food insecurity in Ulster County, and I thank Chelsea Villalba and Legislator Eve Walter for their incredible work to bring actionable recommendations forward that will help strengthen food access and the coordination of food resources for our community members in need," said Senator Michelle Hinchey. "As Chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, a top priority of mine is to connect the dots between the nutritious food grown by farmers right here in Ulster County and local families who face food insecurity. It is great to have partners at the county level who are advocating for food justice locally and elevating solutions that are in perfect complement to the work we're doing at the state level. Every person, no matter their financial means, deserves access to healthy locally-sourced food and an affordable place to shop for groceries in their community, but we can only solve the hunger crisis together, through a collaborative and holistic approach that will ensure equitable food access for all."

The report discusses the correlation of food insecurity and poverty and highlights US Census Bureau estimates that "one in every seven Ulster County residents lives in poverty (14%), with the highest rate among children under age 18 (16%)" and "Ulster County Community Health Assessment by the Department of Health reports that, in comparison with neighboring counties, Ulster County has historically had one of the highest rates of food insecurity and scored lowest amongst surrounding counties."



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The report also notes projections “that in 2021, around 21,954 people living in Ulster County (12%) were food insecure, with a 17% rate of child food insecurity. The top five municipalities in Ulster County with the highest rates of persons living below the poverty line are: 1. Shandaken (24%); 2. Shawangunk (21%); 3. Wawarsing (20%); 4. City of Kingston City (19%); and 5. Esopus (16%).

“This report illuminates the issues of food security and food access in Ulster County while simultaneously highlighting opportunities for the county, non-profits, municipalities, and small businesses to close the gap between access and need. As a county that prides itself on agriculture and farming, we can do better to ensure that our most vulnerable communities are well fed,” noted Legislator Megan Sperry (D-Esopus/New Paltz).

The report lists several free food pantries and other programs available in Ulster County. Since 2009 Family of Woodstock, in collaboration with the Rondout Valley Growers Association, UlsterCorps and the Hudson Valley Farm Hub, offers programs to addresses food insecurity by engaging local farmers to donate locally grown produce and train volunteers to safely collect, process and distribute nutritious food to the network food pantries, feeding programs and shelters throughout Ulster County.

Michael Berg, Executive Director of Family of Woodstock agrees more should be done. “Housing stability and food security are the most critical elements in the social determinants of health. While local efforts to address the need for affordable housing are underway, they are unfortunately years away. However, attention to the large number of our residents who are food insecure should be addressed immediately. This report thoroughly documents the need and gives us direction in how to help,” said Berg.

Later this month, Legislators will consider a resolution to use \$350,000 funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund (SLRRF) to address and implement some of the proposals outlined in the report and enhance community food assistance efforts. These funds would be earmarked to enhance services to families, seniors and single parents living below or near the poverty line and ensure opportunities to connect with food safety nets and other assistance.

The complete report, entitled *Addressing Food Insecurity in Ulster County*, is available on the Ulster County Legislative website at <https://legislature.ulstercountyny.gov/forms-reports>.

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