

## Highlights from 2023

### Legislative Highlights

- Hunger Free New Jersey advocated for introduction and passage of a bill that created a new, state subsidized \$50 monthly minimum SNAP benefit (the federal minimum benefit is currently \$23).
- This legislation was further expanded in February and signed into law when this monthly minimum was nearly doubled to \$95 for all households. The state supplements the federal minimum benefit to bring the minimum up to \$95.
- In August, Governor Murphy signed a bill that ensures all households receiving SNAP benefits can receive benefits for the longest allowable period before recertification.
- HFNJ has been leading advocacy efforts to expand access to free school meals in NJ. In June, a bill was introduced that would increase income eligibility for free school meals up to 250% of the poverty level. This bill passed the Assembly in June and now heads to the Senate for a vote.

### Other State Advocacy

- HFNJ participated in an on-going food security working group convened by NJ Assembly Speaker Coughlin. This group is comprised of the Office of the Food Security Advocate, AARP, the Food Banks, and other advocates that work together to strategize solutions to food insecurity on the state and county levels.

#### ***Addressing College Hunger***

- HFNJ convened the NJ Hunger Free Campus Network, a coalition of faculty, staff, and students from two and four-year colleges across the state working together to develop solutions to campus food insecurity. Working with this coalition, HFNJ developed a communication tool kit for colleges to use to inform students about SNAP.
- HFNJ worked with the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority (HESAA) to perform direct SNAP outreach to students. Using FAFSA information, HESAA was able to send monthly emails to likely eligible students, informing them about SNAP and how to apply.

#### ***Improving Access to SNAP***

- HFNJ convened quarterly meetings of the SNAP Alliance, a statewide coalition of SNAP navigators working together to identify barriers to SNAP and to strategize solutions.

- HFNJ implemented a pilot project to educate low-income seniors in Bergen and Ocean counties about the new state SNAP minimum benefit, incentivizing income-eligible older adults to apply for benefits. This project engaged low-income seniors in focus groups to identify key barriers to SNAP and to learn what the best means of communications are to the senior population. The research was used to create a communication and marketing plan and materials designed to educate seniors likely eligible for SNAP about the new state SNAP minimum benefit.
  - HFNJ partnered with Bergen and Ocean County Area Offices on Aging, senior housing units, NJ Advocates for Aging Well and Legal Services of NJ to engage frontline staff in SNAP outreach to seniors and to provide SNAP application training to staff so that they can help eligible seniors to apply. Working with front line agencies, HFNJ’s message reached over 9,000 seniors in the two counties and resulted in over 1,600 seniors applying for SNAP. Outreach materials are now being shared statewide.

### ***Expanding Access to Child Nutrition Programs***

- HFNJ established the School Meals for All New Jersey Steering Committee to expand access to free school meals for all in New Jersey. Through the work of the Steering Committee, we have crafted a School Meals for All work plan and communications plan and will launch our campaign in the new year.
- HFNJ continues to work with partners throughout the state to expand access to summer meals. HFNJ participated in a press conference with the Department of Agriculture to celebrate New Jersey’s success in summer meals, outlined in the 2023 FRAC report, [Hunger Doesn’t Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status](#), which names New Jersey as the top state serving the highest rate of summer meals to school year meals (35.5 summer lunches for every 100 school year lunches).
- HFNJ continues to work with partners across the state to expand access to the At-Risk Afterschool Meals program.

### **Federal Hunger Solutions**

Worked with our national, state, and local partners on Farm Bill advocacy.

- HFNJ was invited to participate as a featured speaker in a virtual Town Hall hosted by Senator Booker, discussing how we can best protect SNAP benefits in the coming Farm Bill.
- Held meetings with legislative staff from the offices of Senator Booker, Reps. Gottheimer, Kean, Norcross, and Payne, discussing the Farm Bill and advocating for sign on to marker bills that would expand access to SNAP and to advocate for supplemental funding for WIC.

- HFNJ hosted a Farm Bill Roundtable on Capitol Hill with legislative staff from the New Jersey congressional offices to educate them on the importance of SNAP and to highlight priorities in the Farm Bill.

### Local Food Security Work

- This year HFNJ convened, co-convened, and/or participated in various county and local food access coalitions/food policy councils through the state, working with school districts, municipal governments, community and faith-based organizations and other local stakeholders to improve access to healthy food in their communities.
- Working with the Live Healthy Salem County Coalition and Salem County Inter Agency Council of Human Services, HFNJ hosted a community convening with the Office of the Food Security Advocate so that the Salem County community could share their ideas about food access and security with OFSA.

### Reach

This year, HFNJ has reached thousands of people across a variety of channels.

- Our monthly newsletters reach over 3,000 people, and this year through HFNJ's action alert system over 1,000 emails have been sent to State and Federal representatives on numerous pieces of food-security legislation.
- Our tweets garnered over 25,000 impressions, and we gained over 100 new followers on Twitter and over 200 new Facebook likes.
- HFNJ has also been featured in print and on television this year, with coverage from NJ Spotlight News, NJ Monitor, NJ Advanced Media, NJ 101.5, WFDU, Patch, and NorthJersey.com.

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