

ASSEMBLY, No. 5884

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 9, 2021

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman CRAIG J. COUGHLIN

District 19 (Middlesex)

Assemblyman VINCENT MAZZEO

District 2 (Atlantic)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes Office of Food Insecurity Advocate.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 6/14/2021)

1 AN ACT establishing the Office of Food Insecurity Advocate and
2 supplementing Title 52 of the Revised Statutes.

3

4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6

7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 (a) Over one million people are estimated to be food insecure in
9 New Jersey and more than one-third of them are children;

10 (b) The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic is projected to cause
11 a disproportionate increase in the rate of food insecurity in this
12 State compared to the national rate and neighboring states;

13 (c) Several departments are responsible for administering
14 different food insecurity programs in the State: the Department of
15 Human Services administers the New Jersey Supplemental
16 Nutrition Assistance Program; the Department of Health
17 administers the New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Program for
18 Women Infants and Children; and the Department of Agriculture
19 and Education administer the United States Department of
20 Agriculture's school nutrition program in New Jersey;

21 (d) The State's food insecurity programs are currently operating
22 in silos and, in some cases, they may all cover the same families,
23 yet not all eligible families are enrolled into each program; and

24 (e) Establishing an Office of the Food Insecurity Advocate by
25 statute will help coordinate the administration of the State's food
26 insecurity programs, advocate for the food insecure, and develop
27 new policy initiatives to combat hunger and facilitate greater access
28 to food relief programs.

29

30 2. As used in this act:

31 "Food insecurity program" means a nutrition program in this
32 State that provides nutrition assistance to individuals without
33 reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food
34 and includes, but is not limited to, the New Jersey Supplemental
35 Nutrition Assistance Program, the New Jersey Supplemental
36 Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children, and the United
37 States Department of Agriculture's school nutrition program.

38

39 3. There is created in the Executive Branch of the State
40 Government the Office of the Food Insecurity Advocate. For the
41 purpose of complying with the provisions of Article V, Section IV,
42 paragraph 1 of the New Jersey Constitution, the Office of Food
43 Insecurity Advocate is allocated to the Department of Treasury, but
44 notwithstanding this allocation, the office shall be independent of
45 any supervision or control by the department or any board or officer
46 thereof, in the performance of its duties. The office shall have the
47 duty to:

48 (a) coordinate outreach for food insecurity programs, including
49 developing new initiatives and outreach campaigns and identifying

- 1 best practices to increase enrollment in the State's food insecurity
2 programs;
- 3 (b) establish a 24-hour toll-free hunger hotline to assist in
4 making information about the State's food insecurity programs as
5 widely available as possible;
- 6 (c) support grant application processes related to food insecurity
7 for in-state providers and State departments by monitoring available
8 grants, recommending grant applications, and assisting with the
9 grant application process;
- 10 (d) coordinate communication with and between food banks;
- 11 (e) establish best practices for food banks to reduce food waste
12 and to distribute more fresh produce and proteins to food insecurity
13 programs and food banks;
- 14 (f) collaborate with research organizations and universities to
15 monitor ongoing gap analysis that identifies areas that are
16 undeserved by current food insecurity programs;
- 17 (g) collaborate with State and community partners to develop a
18 strategic plan to address identified gaps in areas that are undeserved
19 by current food insecurity programs;
- 20 (h) oversee the development and implementation of public-
21 private partnerships to address food insecurity;
- 22 (i) provide support in coordinating assistance to address food
23 insecurity during federal or State declared states of emergency; and
- 24 (j) coordinate food insecurity programming and initiatives for
25 institutions of higher education with the Office of the Secretary of
26 Higher Education.
- 27
- 28 4. The administrator and chief executive officer of the office is
29 the food insecurity advocate, who shall be a person qualified by
30 training and experience to perform the duties of the office. The
31 food insecurity advocate shall be appointed by the Governor and
32 shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor during the Governor's
33 term of office and until the appointment and qualification of the
34 food insecurity advocate's successor. The food insecurity advocate
35 shall devote time entirely to the duties of the position and shall
36 receive a salary as determined by law. Any vacancy occurring in
37 the position of the food insecurity advocate shall be filled in the
38 same manner as the original appointment; except that if the food
39 insecurity advocate dies, resigns, becomes ineligible to serve for
40 any reason, or is removed from office, the Governor shall appoint
41 an acting food insecurity advocate, who shall serve until the
42 appointment and qualification of the food insecurity advocate's
43 successor, but in no event longer than six months from the
44 occurrence of the vacancy, and who shall exercise during this
45 period all the powers and duties of the food insecurity advocate
46 pursuant to the provisions of this act.
- 47
- 48 5. The food insecurity advocate, as administrator and chief
49 executive officer of the office, shall:

1 a. administer and organize the work of the office and establish
2 therein such administrative subdivisions as the food insecurity
3 advocate may deem necessary, proper and expedient. The food
4 insecurity advocate may formulate and adopt rules and regulations
5 and prescribe duties for the efficient conduct of the business, work
6 and general administration of the office. The food insecurity
7 advocate may delegate to subordinate officers or employees in the
8 office such power as the food insecurity advocate may deem
9 desirable to be exercised under the food insecurity advocate's
10 supervision and control;

11 b. appoint and remove stenographic, clerical, and other
12 secretarial assistants as may be required for the proper conduct of
13 the office, subject to the provisions of Title 11A of the New Jersey
14 Statutes, and other applicable statutes, and within the limits of
15 funds appropriated or otherwise made available therefor. In
16 addition, and within funding limits, the food insecurity advocate
17 may appoint, retain, or employ, without regard to the provisions of
18 Title 11A of the New Jersey Statutes or any other statutes, any
19 officers, financial managers, social workers, or other professionally
20 qualified personnel on a contract basis or otherwise as the food
21 insecurity advocate deems necessary;

22 c. maintain suitable headquarters for the office and such other
23 quarters as the food insecurity advocate shall deem necessary to the
24 proper functioning of the office;

25 d. solicit and accept grants of funds from the federal
26 government and from other public and any private sources for any
27 of the purposes of this act; provided, however, that any such funds
28 shall be expended only pursuant to an appropriation made by law;

29 e. serve as the liaison between the Office of the Food
30 Insecurity Advocate and the Departments of Agriculture, Education,
31 Health, and Human Services; and

32 f. perform such other functions as may be prescribed in this act
33 or by any other law.
34

35 6. Pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968,
36 c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), the food insecurity advocate and the
37 Commissioners of Agriculture, Education, Health, and Human
38 Services may adopt any rules and regulations necessary to
39 effectuate the purposes of this act.
40

41 7. This act shall take effect immediately.
42
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44 STATEMENT
45

46 This bill establishes the Office of the Food Insecurity Advocate
47 in, but not of, the Department of Treasury. The office will have the
48 duty to: coordinate outreach for food insecurity programs,
49 including developing new initiatives and outreach campaigns and

1 identifying best practices to increase enrollment in the State's food
2 insecurity programs; establish a 24-hour toll-free hunger hotline to
3 assist in making information about the State's food insecurity
4 programs as widely available as possible; support grant application
5 processes related to food insecurity for in-state providers and State
6 departments by monitoring available grants, recommending grant
7 applications, and assisting with the grant application process;
8 coordinate communication to and between food banks; establish
9 best practices for food banks to reduce food waste and to distribute
10 more fresh produce and proteins to food insecurity programs and
11 food banks; collaborate with research organizations and universities
12 to monitor ongoing gap analysis that identifies areas that are
13 undeserved by current food insecurity programs; collaborate with
14 State and community partners to develop a strategic plan to address
15 identified gaps in areas that are undeserved by current food
16 insecurity programs; oversee the development and implementation
17 of public-private partnerships to address food insecurity; provide
18 support in coordinating assistance to address food insecurity during
19 federal or State-declared states of emergency; and coordinate food
20 insecurity programming and initiatives for institutions of higher
21 education with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education.

22 The bill provides that the administrator and chief executive
23 officer of the office will be the food insecurity advocate, who will
24 be a person qualified by training and experience to perform the
25 duties of the office. The food insecurity advocate will be appointed
26 by the Governor and will serve at the pleasure of the Governor
27 during the Governor's term of office and until the appointment and
28 qualification of the food insecurity advocate's successor. The food
29 insecurity advocate will administer and organize the work of the
30 office and serve as the liaison between the Office of the Food
31 Insecurity Advocate and the Departments of Agriculture, Education,
32 Health, and Human Services.

33 Over one million people are estimated to be food insecure in
34 New Jersey and more than one-third of them are children. The
35 coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic is projected to cause a
36 disproportionate increase in the rate of food insecurity in this State
37 compared to the national rate and neighboring states. Several
38 departments are responsible for administering different food
39 insecurity programs in the State: the Department of Human
40 Services administers the New Jersey Supplemental Nutrition
41 Assistance Program; the Department of Health administers the New
42 Jersey Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and
43 Children; and the Department of Agriculture and Education
44 administer the United States Department of Agriculture's school
45 nutrition program in New Jersey. The State's food insecurity
46 programs are currently operating in silos and, in some cases, they
47 may all cover the same families, yet not all eligible families are
48 enrolled into each program. It is the sponsor's intent that
49 establishing an Office of the Food Insecurity Advocate by statute

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- 1 will help coordinate the administration of the State's food insecurity
- 2 programs, advocate for the food insecure, and develop new policy
- 3 initiatives to combat hunger and facilitate greater access to food
- 4 relief programs.