



A NOTE FROM CEO, MELISSA CHERNEY

Dear Friends and Partners,

The 2025 Status Report on Hunger report captures a pivotal moment for Rhode Island and for hunger relief efforts across the country. Rhode Island households entered 2025 already under significant strain from rising housing, food, and health care costs. When the federal government shutdown occurred in the fall – disrupting federal nutrition programs in the process – it exposed just how fragile food security remains for tens of thousands of our neighbors.

It is through that lens that we plan for the future at the Food Bank and across our network of 137 member agencies.

This year's report looks different than those we have published in the past. Historically, we have anchored our analysis in the food insecurity rate from **The RI Life Index**, an annual statewide survey conducted by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island (BCBSRI) and the Brown University School of Public Health. While that research remains an important tool, the survey was fielded from March through July 2025, before the federal government shutdown and the SNAP disruptions took effect. That critical window of need, and our corresponding response, cannot be ignored. Instead, this report highlights patterns in demand, impacts on the charitable food system, and policy changes that influenced hunger in Rhode Island in 2025.

As someone new to Rhode Island, I have had the unique perspective of stepping into this role during a moment of crisis. As the new chair of Feeding America's Policy Engagement and Advocacy Committee, I hear consistently from my colleagues across the country that food banks are experiencing record demand, increased reliance on purchased food, and growing pressure on charitable systems as federal supports falter or shift. Rhode Island is not an outlier, but as the data in this report makes clear, the consequences of federal instability are deeply local.

This report also looks ahead. In 2026, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank will undertake our statewide hunger study - conducted every four years - to provide a deeper, more comprehensive look at who is experiencing hunger, why, and what barriers households face in accessing food and benefits. That work will allow us to pair system-level data with the lived experiences of our guests and communities across the state.

We offer this report as both a snapshot and a call to action. Hunger is solvable. With a united vision, bold ideas, and courageous collaborations, we can advance new solutions to truly end hunger.

I hope you'll join us.



ACTIONS TO END HUNGER

So, what can we do to mitigate this crisis and work to end hunger in Rhode Island?

Protect and strengthen federal nutrition programs, including SNAP, WIC, CSFP and school meals to ensure they help individuals thrive.

Create and mobilize a Governor's Taskforce on Food Insecurity to develop coordinated, statewide solutions that address both food insecurity and its root causes.

Increase state investment in hunger relief efforts, including funding for local food purchasing, storage, and distribution to stabilize the charitable food system.

Prepare for SNAP policy changes now by investing in outreach, benefit navigation and emergency food capacity to mitigate anticipated benefit losses.

Food insecurity in Rhode Island worsened in 2025, not because of a sudden economic collapse, but because federal nutrition supports failed to function as intended. A prolonged federal government shutdown and high costs of necessities, coupled with disruptions to SNAP and other nutrition programs, forced tens of thousands of Rhode Islanders to turn to the charitable food system to meet basic needs, many for the first time.

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank and its statewide network stepped up. So did our incredible community of donors. But our work isn't done. Data shows historic highs in people served far exceeding pre-pandemic norms and surpassing already-elevated 2024 levels.

This year reinforced that no one entity can solve hunger alone; it will take the intentional collaboration of public, non-profit, and private entities working side-by-side. Without policy intervention and sustained investment, the gap between need and available resources will continue to widen. **Only together will we be able to move the needle on ending hunger.**



Source footnotes can be found at rifoodbank.org/2025-status-report/ or by using the QR code at left.



2025 Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island



KEY FINDINGS

- Demand for emergency food assistance reached historic highs in 2025**, with more than 102,000 Rhode Islanders seeking help during the fall federal government shutdown alone, which led to a pause in SNAP benefits.
- Food insecurity affects one in three Rhode Island households**, remaining significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels and disproportionately impacting Hispanic/Latino and Black households.
- Federal nutrition program disruptions directly increased reliance on the charitable food network**, forcing the Food Bank, pantries and meal sites to serve as the safety net of the federal safety net.

- The charitable food system has undergone a structural shift**, with purchased food now the largest source of inventory, reflecting sustained demand and the limits of donated supply.

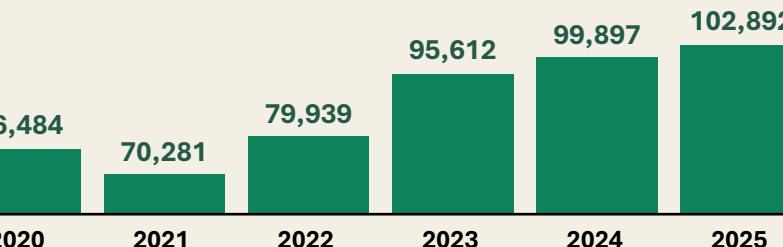
- Upcoming SNAP policy changes threaten to increase hunger and demand further**, shifting costs to states and removing and reducing benefits for thousands of households beginning in 2025 and into 2026.

UNPRECEDENTED NEED

Many Rhode Islanders entered the year already strained by housing, food, and health care costs, but federal nutrition program disruptions in the fall of 2025 exposed the fragility of the safety net in profound ways. **During the federal government shutdown in November, more than 102,000 Rhode Islanders sought food assistance from the Rhode Island Community Food Bank's statewide network of 137 member agencies.**

November consistently represents the peak month for individuals served. Comparing November 2020 to November 2025, there was a 35% increase. In November 2024, the network served 99,897 individuals and in November 2025, it served 102,892 individuals: an increase of 3%. While the year-over-year increase appears modest, it occurred on top of already historically high demand, signaling that elevated need has become consistent rather than episodic.

Comparative Snapshot: November Demand



FOOD INSECURITY IMPACTS 1 IN 3 HOUSEHOLDS



One in three Rhode Island households experience food insecurity, according to The RI Life Index, a study conducted by Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island and the Brown University School of Public Health. The survey, fielded from March through July 2025, found that 34% of households are food insecure, an increase of 8.8 percentage points since 2020, despite a modest decline from last year.

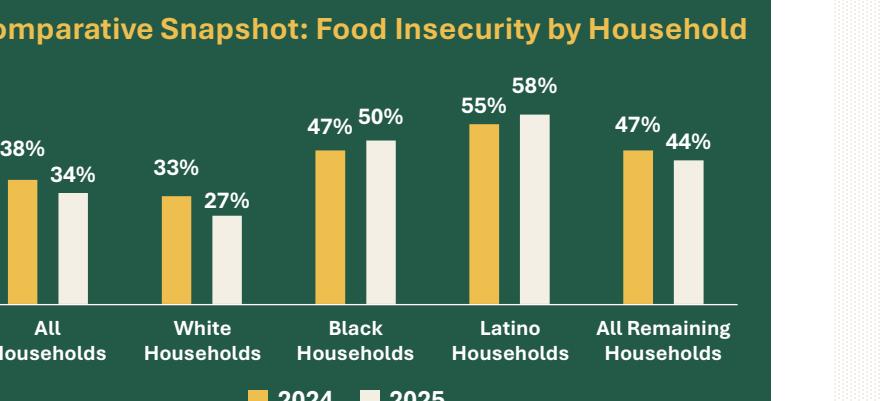
Food insecurity continues to disproportionately impact households of color. In 2025, 58% of Hispanic/Latino households and 50% of Black/African American households reported inadequate access to food, compared to 27.3% of White households.

It is important to interpret these findings in context. Because The RI Life Index survey was conducted prior to the federal government shutdown and the most severe SNAP disruptions in the fall of 2025, it does not capture the subsequent surge in need. Demand across the charitable food network increased later in the year, underscoring how quickly food insecurity can worsen when federal support is disrupted.

Food Insecurity Questions from The RI Life Index:

Respondents were asked to rate these two statements as always true, true most of the time, sometimes true, or never true for the household over the last 12 months:

- We worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more.
- The food we bought just didn't last and we didn't have money to get more.



All remaining households include Asian, Native American / Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander, and more than one race / ethnicity.

FEDERAL DISRUPTION AND THE SNAP CRISIS

Federal nutrition programs are designed to act as the first line of defense against hunger. By providing stable food assistance, this safety net helps families meet basic needs before they reach a crisis point. Programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Women, Infants & Children (WIC), Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP), and school meals reduce food insecurity at scale and ease pressure on emergency food providers.

When SNAP benefits were disrupted during the federal government shutdown, that first line of defense weakened, and families were forced to turn to the charitable food network at record levels.

As a result, the Food Bank and the charitable food network became the safety net of the federal safety net, absorbing a sharp increase in demand. The surge in need underscores a critical reality: charitable food assistance plays a vital role, but it cannot replace federal nutrition programs.

FEDERAL BENEFITS BY THE NUMBERS



Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, 2025)

143,670	\$29 Million	\$6.53
Rhode Islanders receive SNAP – 13% or 1 in 8		Average SNAP benefit per person, per day

Women, Infants & Children Services (WIC, FY24)

17,987	\$60.88
WIC participants in Rhode Island	Average WIC benefit per person, per month



THE NEW NORMAL: PURCHASING FOOD

Over the past decade, the composition of food acquired by the Rhode Island Community Food Bank has shifted dramatically. Donated food, once the primary source of inventory, has steadily declined as a share of total supply - from a high of nearly 60% ten years ago to less than 30% today. During the same period, purchased food has increased significantly, outpacing both donated food and federal commodities.

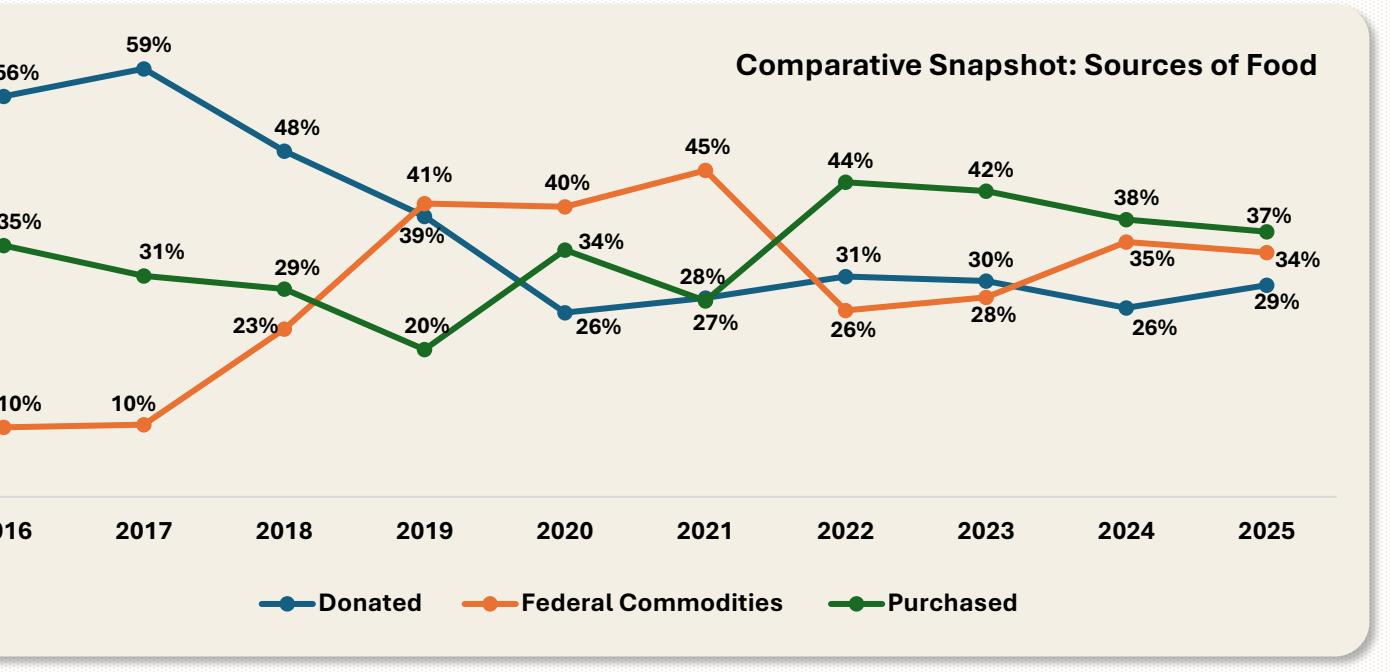
Historically, food banks relied predominantly on donated food to meet community need. However, in the post-COVID landscape, a new normal has emerged. **Since 2022, purchased food has become the largest single source of inventory.** Nationally, donated food has decreased, due in part to increased efficiencies at manufacturers, technological advances in inventory systems, advancements in infrastructure and other changes to the food production and supply systems. While purchasing food carries a higher cost, it provides greater stability, flexibility, and choice, allowing the Food Bank to respond more effectively when donations and federal food sources cannot keep pace with need.

For every \$1 donated, we can purchase roughly 1 pound of food.

SNAP CHANGES AHEAD

Recent federal policy changes represent the most significant restructuring of SNAP in history. In July 2025, Congress passed HR1, a sweeping budget reconciliation, which makes extensive changes to SNAP, including eligibility guidelines and responsibility of program costs. Some of the changes went into effect in November 2025, some will start in February 2026, with a staggered timeline for the cost shift to the states. The changes include:

- 1 **Expanded Work Requirements:** Adults aged 18-64 must now work, train, or volunteer 80 hours per month to be eligible for benefits. Previously, this only impacted those up to age 54.
- 2 **End of Exemptions:** Veterans, homeless individuals, former foster youth, and parents with children age 14+, are no longer exempt from work requirements.
- 3 **New Citizen Eligibility Rules:** Eligibility is now limited to US citizens and lawful permanent residents (green card holders, certain immigrants from Cuba/Haiti, and Compact of Free Association citizens).
- 4 **State Cost Shifts:** States must cover more administrative costs and a portion of SNAP benefit costs starting in 2026 and 2027, causing significant impacts to state budgets, including Rhode Island's, in excess of \$50 million.
- 5 **Qualifying Expenses:** There has been a change in how utilities are calculated for SNAP benefits, causing a decrease in household benefits.



As the SNAP changes continue to roll out, thousands of households will see their benefits cut completely or reduced. Taken together, these changes are expected to increase demand on the charitable food system at a time when it is already operating at or beyond capacity.