



## Seniors Seek Food Assistance to Offset SNAP Cuts

Colette, 67, and Judith, 73, have lived in the same Woonsocket senior housing facility for over a decade and became fast friends. Both rely on fixed incomes and have historically depended on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to make ends meet. When the government shutdown delayed their November SNAP benefits, and recent SNAP changes took effect, even basic groceries became a challenge.

**“I went from \$229 of food stamps to \$23,” Colette said.**

On the recommendation of a neighbor, their first visit to the **Connecting for Children and Families** food pantry provided immediate relief. Fresh vegetables, pantry staples, and practical tips for stretching meals helped the friends weather uncertainty. Cooking is both a necessity and a joy: they use creative substitutes like spaghetti squash in place of pasta, share recipes and meals together, and freeze leftovers for when the fridge runs low. “It’s a thrill to eat an apple or something fresh,” Judith said, showing how small comforts lift spirits when budgets are tight.

Even with limited resources, the women prioritize rent and medication first, then rely on the pantry, their senior center, and each other to fill the gaps. “We’ll find a way,” Judith said. “We’ve been trying to stock up,” Colette added. Their friendship and resilience, paired with community support, show that older adults navigating delayed and reduced government benefits can still maintain dignity, nourishment, and hope.



## Food Bank Responds to Government Shutdown

On October 1, 2025, the longest government shutdown in U.S. history began, creating uncertainty across the country. Here in Rhode Island, 26,000 federal employees went weeks without pay. And as the month wore on with no clear resolution in sight, the fear that SNAP benefits would lapse in November became an unprecedented reality for 142,726 Ocean State SNAP recipients.

During this time, a record number of Rhode Islanders visited our member agencies, necessitating that the Food Bank adjust its food acquisition plan to address the increased demand.

Our supporters stepped in to donate food and funds at a critical moment. With the support of our community, the Food Bank was able to mobilize quickly to purchase and distribute the food our member agencies needed to keep their shelves stocked.

“I am so grateful to the team for always being ready to respond to the needs of the community” said Jen Tomassini, the Food Bank’s chief operations officer. “We shifted our purchasing plans overnight and distributed truckloads of additional pounds to replace the food our neighbors were missing.”

Though the shutdown ended after 43 days, and SNAP benefits were restored quickly back in November, our work isn’t done. Rhode Islanders receiving the benefit are still trying to make sense of the changes and reductions to the federal program that came with the HR1 bill, and our pantries are continuing to see an increased number of guests.



### Emergency Food Acquisition

In our FY26\* budget, we planned to distribute 14.5 million pounds of food.

In response to the fall government shutdown crisis, the Food Bank adjusted its food purchase plan for the year to acquire an

**additional  
4 million pounds.**

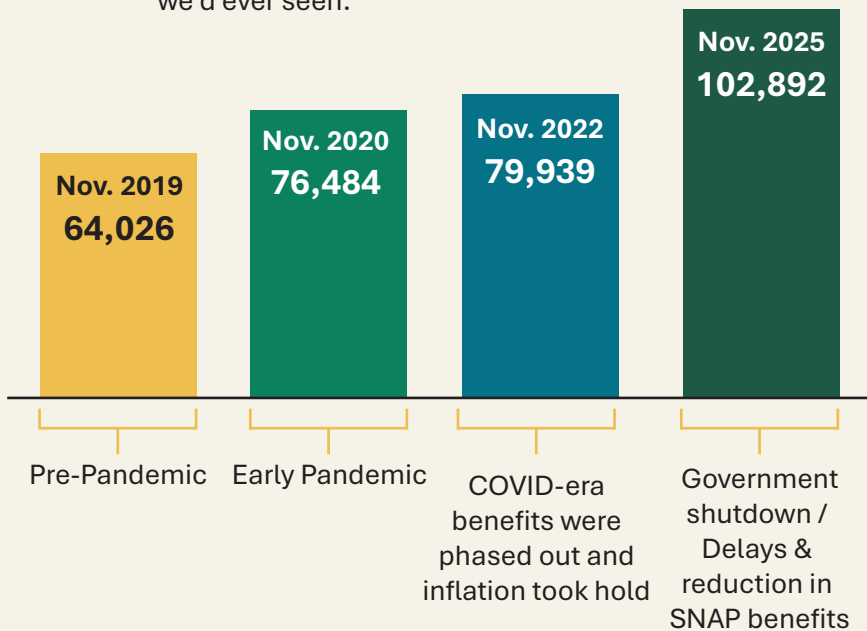
We’re now projected to distribute 18.5 million pounds of food this fiscal year, nearly meeting last year’s distribution...

**but the demand is HIGHER.**



### Guests Served: Critical Mile Markers

Each year, our 137 member agencies see a spike in visitors in November. But last November was like nothing we’d ever seen.



### Fall Weekly Food Distribution

While we expected to distribute 279,000 pounds of food per week, during this fall our distribution skyrocketed.

**Week of October 19: 334,349 pounds**

**Week of October 26: 374,157 pounds**

**Week of November 2: 464,096 pounds**

**Week of November 9: 449,366 pounds**

**Week of November 16: 472,276 pounds**

\*Fiscal Year 2026 is July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026.

## Giving New Meaning to Community Outreach

The Food Bank's community outreach team works throughout Rhode Island to connect guests with the resources they need to improve their lives. From helping potential applicants fill out their SNAP application, to finding heating, rental or even legal assistance, our team is a valued resource in the community. And during this fall's federal government shutdown and delay in SNAP benefits, the team was critical in providing information and support during a tumultuous time. We caught up with the team and asked for their thoughts on what they were seeing during the shutdown and how their team collaborated to meet the moment.



**Lihna Agostini**  
Director of  
Community Outreach

"The government shutdown crisis left many with limited resources, straining our local food pantries. It highlighted the importance of government programs, the need for backup plans, and the power of community support for those in need."



**Wilson Flores**  
Community Outreach  
Coordinator

"Our team collaborated closely with member agencies and community partners to keep everyone informed about changes to SNAP. We also connected families with additional resources and services to support them through this challenging period."



**Jailine Ortiz**  
Community Outreach  
Coordinator

"During the shutdown, I spoke to several seniors who were really scared. Many were in tears because they were already experiencing hardship and now, they were wondering how they were going to stretch their tight budgets to put food on the table."

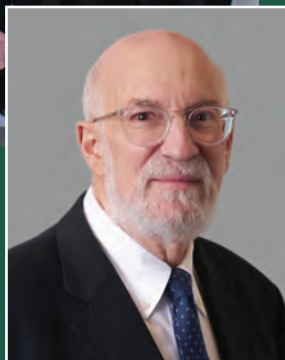


**Miguel Sanchez**  
Community Outreach  
Coordinator

"People were really concerned about access to food, and they were starting to panic because there was no end in sight. They were asking questions like, who can help me? Where can I get food? When will benefits resume?"



Above: Silver's family accepts the Andrew Schiff Leadership Award on his behalf. Pictured here are Silver's son, Andrew Silver (left), with wife, Jenna Silver (center); Silver's wife, Katherine Haspel; son, Nathaniel Silver, with partner Christopher Shughrue (right); and granddaughters Caroline and Sophie Silver. At right: Paul A. Silver, Hinckley Allen



## Paul Silver: A Legacy of Philanthropy

In July of 2025, long-time Food Bank board member and respected attorney, Paul A. Silver, passed away suddenly, leaving behind a legacy of kindness and philanthropy.

A partner at Hinckley Allen for nearly five decades, Silver served on the board of the Food Bank from 2020, until his passing in 2025, providing legal expertise as well as sound guidance on financial stewardship and strategic direction.

"Paul offered valuable perspective on financial matters with clarity and care, as well as being a steady, compassionate presence in the room," shared Christine Cannata, Food Bank Chief Financial Officer. "His insights helped shape the direction of the Food Bank and his impact will be felt for years to come."

At the Food Bank's 2025 annual meeting, CEO Melissa Cherney presented Silver's family with the *Andrew Schiff Leadership Award* for his commitment to our values and mission.

## When Demand Doubled, Community Stepped Up in Providence's West End

**"The problem was big, but our community was bigger." - Denise Green, ED, West End Community Center**



Juan, a guest at West End Community Center's pantry, shops the shelves.

Throughout most of 2025, Providence's **West End Community Center** food pantry, a member agency of the Food Bank, was running at capacity. New guests were arriving each month, and families who had previously relied on the pantry only occasionally were turning to the Center for support more regularly.

But during the fall federal government shutdown, demand surged beyond anything Denise Green, executive director of 8 years, had seen before. When uncertainty around SNAP benefits set in, pantry attendance quickly doubled. On the busiest days, as many as 200 people lined up for food, with guests arriving earlier and earlier. Increased pantry use meant a strain on food supplies, which meant difficult conversations about food availability, portion sizes that fit family size, and frequency of visits. Staff worked continuously to reassure guests while managing a pantry stretched thin.

**"The hardest part wasn't keeping up with the demand," Denise recalled. "It was trying to manage people's fear and uncertainty when we didn't have answers ourselves."**

**But the west end community responded in powerful ways.** Local churches and neighborhood groups organized food drives. Donors new and old called out of the blue, offering support. Partners in the for-profit sector stepped in with contributions. And guests themselves found ways to help, carrying boxes, offering encouragement, and even bringing homemade food from their own limited supplies to thank the staff.

"Seeing guests help restock shelves or take out the trash because they knew how busy we were is something that really stuck with me," Green recalled. Despite the strain, the pantry never closed its doors or let anyone leave empty handed. Working closely with the Food Bank, the West End Community Center's strong operational structure held even as the crisis mounted, allowing the team to continue serving people with dignity and consistency. We're so grateful to our partners there for taking such good care of our community during a difficult time.



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