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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the Division of Budget for the 2008-2009 Executive Budget. My name is Beth Slater and I am the Public Affairs Officer for the Food Bank of Central New York.

Hunger continues to be a prevalent problem in this state. A USDA study released this month estimates that 9.8% of New York State residents are classified as “food insecure”, meaning they are struggling against hunger, ranking us 33rd in the nation. The Food Bank’s study, “Hunger in America 2006” showed that hunger is also expanding. Overall, 75% of food pantries and 67% of soup kitchens have seen an increase in the number of people accessing these services since 2001. When looking at people accessing these services, 36% of recipients are children under the age of 18, 39% of households have a least one working adult, and 73% of households have annual incomes below the federal poverty line; 49% of which had an annual income below \$10,000.

The Food Bank of Central New York is a not-for-profit organization working to eliminate hunger through nutritious food distribution, education and advocacy in cooperation with the community. As an affiliate of America’s Second Harvest – The Nation’s Food Bank Network, we serve eleven counties throughout Central and Northern New York, providing over 9 million pounds of food, or over 7 million meals, each year. The Food Bank has 585 member programs, nearly 300 of which are emergency food programs, namely food pantries, soup kitchens, and emergency shelters. As the primary food supplier to these agencies, the Food Bank serves as the hub of the emergency food network and is integral in New York State’s fight against hunger.

Currently, the biggest source of funding for the Food Bank is through the NYS Department of Health’s Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP). Established in 1984, HPNAP provides funding for nutritious food, food safety and sanitation supplies, food service equipment, food service operating costs, and nutrition education for food banks, food pantries, soup kitchens and emergency shelters. As the chosen DOH contractor of this program, the Food Bank allocates lines of credit to purchase food for 288 agencies in our eleven counties in 2007. Additional grants are available to help with operating costs, such as staffing or utility bills, and to purchase new equipment, such as refrigerators, freezers, and shelving through this program.

Since 2003, HPNAP had been flat funded at \$22.8 million. In 2007-2008, the Governor and the State Legislature passed a \$5.15 million increase in funding to the program statewide. In 3 months we have already seen a 15% increase in pounds and meals served by our agencies to our neighborhood hungry. Clearly, with more resources, we can greatly expand our work.

Last Wednesday, the Governor announced he will provide another \$5 million in funding through the HPNAP program for the 8 food banks of NYS and the United Way of NYC to be spent by June 30. This brings the total of HPNAP funding to nearly \$34 million, a large increase from only a year ago. Therefore, I respectfully ask this committee to **maintain** this level of HPNAP funding in the 2008-2009 budget. At this level, we can continue to provide our emergency food programs with the resources they need to stock their shelves with food and serve all who come to them for help. With this increased funding, all of the 8 America’s Second Harvest affiliated food banks can ensure that no one in New York State will go hungry on our watch.

Thank you.

