



Thank you Representatives -

My name is Jason Harrison, I am the Colorado Food Pantry Network Manager for Hunger Free Colorado and am here today representing 102 food pantries across the state, the 132 local farmers and producers that partner with them, and the 86,000-plus clients impacted by their work across all 64 counties. I am asking that you vote in favor of HB20-1422, the Food Pantry Assistance Grants Program.

When this program first began, in 2018, the Food Pantry Assistance Grant was created to help alleviate the burden of food pantries across the state in order to provide healthy, nutritious food to their clients, while simultaneously supporting local farmers and ranchers. In that first year, half a million dollars was allocated and awarded to 94 pantries in the state - with requests for funding totaling over million dollars. The need was high then...

However, 2018 and 2020 look very different. And, the need has astronomically increased.

Over the past eleven weeks a grand total of 517,414 unemployment initial claims have been filed. 1,543 people have died due to or with COVID-19. And, communities across our state are demanding drastic changes to the systematic oppressions that have cost the lives of Elijah McClain, Michael Marshall, Jessie Hernandez, and De'Von Bailey as a result of economic, social and political systems that have marginalized certain communities since the creation of our country and our state.

Let me be unequivocally clear, the Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program is about justice. It is about addressing the socio-economic injustices that perpetuate a system of poverty. Throughout the state, communities are struggling. Struggling to pay rent. Struggling to navigate a health care system that is debilitatingly expensive. Struggling to educate our students. Struggling to ensure that there is enough to eat...

The Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program is a stimulus for our communities. It empowers food pantries to provide the types of foods that their clients want, are culturally relevant, and support nutritious diets - in order to provide the flexibility and security to ensure food pantry clients have access to healthy, affordable foods.

It is a boost for small and local producers and helps to provide a living wage to those who are the lifeline of our rural economies and make up over 60% of all farming operations - ensuring that Colorado farmers, ranchers and growers can navigate the uncertainties of closed market channels, trade mitigation, drought, and unfair subsidies that benefit few at the expense of most.

It keeps federal dollars in our state recirculating in spaces often absent of key resources. It reduces the impacts of climate change by minimizing the number of miles food travels. It provides key resources that break our dependency on multinational and transnational food conglomerates that exploit workers and lands in other nations. It is a win-win-win-win-win.

Furthermore, the Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program is an invaluable supplement to federal nutrition programs - addressing the gaps for communities that don't qualify for SNAP benefits, like our undocumented populations, or the pantries in our state that don't have the resources and capacity to participate in programs like The Emergency Food Assistance Program. In our shared fight for justice, this program is vital to our rural communities, our most impacted and vulnerable populations, our producers and the farm workers that serve as the backbone for our food system, and in addressing systemic failures that create the systems that enable hunger and poverty to thrive.

But this is our opportunity to create a more just world, or, in the words of one farmer who participated in the program, "We just believe that our food is medicine and that everybody should be able to somehow get a hold of our food... Working with the food bank, it makes it possible for low-income families to be able to access our products."

This is about justice, and today is the day that we continue the long fight to bend our collective arc towards justice. Please vote yes on HB20-1422, the Food Pantry Assistance Grants Program. Thank you for your time.

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