



Hunger is Unacceptable

Memo

To: Tyler Shroeder, Deputy County Executive
From: Mike Cohen, Executive Director
Re: American Rescue Plan Act Request
Cc: Whatcom County Council
Date: June 29, 2022

On behalf of a network of food banks supporting food insecure people in Whatcom County we are following up on the presentation we made to Whatcom County Council on June 21, 2022. During the meeting our request for \$500,000 of ARPA funds for food purchases was discussed. This memo describes how the funds would be used if a contract is issued and attempts to answer as many questions as possible regarding the use of those funds.

Need. Food insecurity in Whatcom County is a real and concerning public health issue. Numerous national and statewide [studies](#) demonstrate that food insecurity grew during the first two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. As pandemic benefits began to diminish at the beginning of 2022 and families began to feel safer going to public spaces, food banks in Whatcom County saw visits increase dramatically. Bellingham Food Bank was more than 100% busier in May 2022 than it was in February 2020 and the Foothills Foodbank has seen a 55% increase in households served since March 2021. The network of food banks in Whatcom County are now supporting 5,000 households each week. Many Whatcom County food banks are regularly running out of foods like eggs, milk, and frozen proteins. The challenges faced by families and food banks has recently been compounded by inflation which is adding to food costs for food banks and low-income families.

The Request. The following food banks are requesting \$500,000 in ARPA funds for food purchases:

- Point Roberts Food Bank
- Blaine Food Bank
- Project Hope Food Bank (Lynden)
- Foothills Food Bank (Deming)
- Ferndale Food Bank
- Everson Nooksack Valley Food Bank
- Nooksack Tribal Food Bank
- Lummi Nation Food Bank
- Salvation Army Food Bank
- Bellingham Food Bank

The network of Whatcom County food banks requests that \$500,000 of ARPA funds be made available for food purchases as soon as possible and that they be available until December 31, 2023.

All of the food banks source as much free food as possible from local donations, grocery rescue efforts, and from food distributors such as Northwest Harvest, Food Lifeline, and the USDA Commodity Foods program. Despite these efforts all food banks are in need of significant amounts of purchased foods to meet the demand. It is worth noting that programs like USDA Commodity Foods program is forecasting massive reductions in food. In 2021 Whatcom County received food valued at \$1,580,000, in 2022 Whatcom County will receive \$1,142,594 worth of commodity food and in 2023 it is forecasted to receive just \$504,400 in food value.

If the food bank network receives a contract to purchase food, it is impossible to outline exactly what will be purchased each week with ARPA funds. Each food bank's needs are different as we all are visited by families with varying food cultures. Additionally, each week we have access to varying types and amounts foods from Food Lifeline, Northwest Harvest, the commodity food program and other sources. We can confirm that the food that will be purchased will be a mix of foods such as frozen proteins, fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy items, eggs and other nonperishable staples. Food banks will be strategic and opportunistic with food purchases looking for good pricing and meeting a particular week or month's most pressing food needs.

We believe using ARPA funds for food purchases is a good and reasonable use of those dollars and will benefit thousands of families struggling with food insecurity brought on by COVID-19. The impact COVID -19 has on local food insecurity is not over and is actually increasing. As food support and other benefits diminish and inflation continues to grow, we anticipate need will continue to grow for many months if not years. An infusion of ARPA funds will help address the current immediate need and give the food bank network and our community an opportunity to strategically address the food insecurity needs that will continue to persist beyond the expenditure of ARPA funds.