



Hunger is Unacceptable

Memo

To: Whatcom County Council

From: Mike Cohen on behalf of Whatcom Food Bank Network

Re: Food Insecurity in Whatcom County

Date: July 1, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to update the County Council on food insecurity in Whatcom County and to discuss a \$2,000,000 request for funding for food purchases to feed our community. Food insecurity is a growing public health concern for too many families and individuals in Whatcom County. The Whatcom Food Bank Network, a group of 13 food banks that spans our county, is seeing unprecedented numbers of people visiting our food banks.

Need

- 9,000 households visit Whatcom County food banks each **week**. This is a 127% increase since 2021, more than double the average increase in statewide food bank visits.
- 25% of Whatcom County households are eligible for SNAP (food stamps).
- Nearly 40% of some Census tracts in rural Whatcom County are eligible for SNAP.
- 25% of all youth attending K-12 schools in Whatcom County are eligible for free meals.
- More than 50% of students in Mt. Baker School District are eligible for free meals.
- Nearly 35% of food bank clients are children and 20% are seniors.
- A recent United Way of Whatcom County ALICE report found food costs to match or exceed housing, healthcare, and childcare as the top cost in the average family's budget.
- The same report found a significant increase in ALICE families, mirroring the dramatic growth in food bank visits over the past three years.

Rational for Request

The Whatcom Food Bank network distributes more than 8 million pounds of food to food insecure people each year. That's millions of pounds of healthy produce, infant formula, milk, eggs and protein that our county needs. Historically, the Whatcom County Food Bank Network has not sought significant support from the county. However, unprecedented need has let us to seek a significant investment in the network because:

- Addressing food insecurity is a successful public health strategy. Food insecurity is tied with chronic health conditions such as diabetes, obesity, immune-deficiency, and mental illnesses.
- Food insecure infants and children are less successful in school and food insecure adults are less productive at work and suffer from increased levels of absenteeism.
- The Whatcom Food Bank Network supports local growers and purchases significant amounts of food from local growers and businesses.

For these reasons and more, the Whatcom County Food Systems Committee recommends fully funding the Whatcom Food Bank Network.

We look forward to speaking with you about our request and the state of food insecurity on July 9th.