

April 3, 2025

Rhode Island House Committee on Finance
RE: HB5404: TAX CREDIT FOR FOOD DONATION

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am an Associate Professor in the Department of Behavioral and Social Sciences at Brown University's School of Public Health. For the past 15 years, my research has focused on preventing food insecurity and chronic diseases, particularly among historically marginalized communities. I also serve as a Board Member of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank. I am writing today in strong support of HB5404: Tax Credit for Food Donation.

According to ReFED, 43% of Rhode Island's surplus food was produced by industries such as farming, foodservice, manufacturing, and retail businesses in 2022. This surplus amounted to an alarming 119.1 million pounds of unused food. Yet, of this surplus, only 7% was donated—despite food donation being recognized by the Environmental Protection Agency as one of the most effective methods of preventing waste.

The statistics are staggering:

- 22,450 tons of food were discarded into landfills, equivalent to the weight of over 7,000 elephants.
- 20,650 tons of methane gas, roughly the weight of 6,800 elephants, were emitted as a result of this waste.

As we know, food insecurity is at crisis levels both nationally and locally. More and more families in Rhode Island are struggling to afford sufficient and nutritious food. In the past year, the rate of food insecurity among households with children in Rhode Island surged to 38%. Simultaneously, food pantries and meal sites, many of which are members of the Food Bank, have seen a dramatic increase in demand. While food pantries are essential, they cannot bear the full responsibility for addressing this growing crisis. We urgently need policy action to help reverse these trends.

HB5404 offers a valuable opportunity to address both food insecurity and food waste simultaneously. By incentivizing food donations, this legislation would significantly reduce food costs for local organizations. Food donations would supplement their food supplies, enabling them to allocate more resources to other critical human service programs, thereby maximizing the impact of tax dollars and better fulfilling their missions.

Additionally, Rhode Island continues to face significant challenges related to food access. According to United Way, in 2020, Rhode Island had the highest rate of food deserts in the U.S., with 91% of low-income areas lacking sufficient access to supermarkets. The most severe food insecurity is found in Woonsocket, where 19.2% of residents live in poverty.


Beyond its social and economic benefits, increased food donation would also help mitigate the environmental impact of food waste in Rhode Island. As food spoilage in landfills produces methane—25 times more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas—HB5404 would help reduce these emissions and extend the life of the Central Landfill, which is projected to reach capacity by 2046. In fact, Rhode Island's food waste in landfills is 12.6% higher than the national average, and our state is one of the fastest-warming in the U.S., as reported by Climate Central.

In conclusion, HB5404 presents an innovative and urgent solution to address food insecurity, reduce environmental harm, and support the sustainability of our local organizations. I strongly urge lawmakers to pass this bill and to prioritize the health and well-being of our community members and our environment.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Alison Tovar

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison Tovar". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Associate Professor^[1]

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