

**Minnesota Now (MPR) | Minnesota Now Report: Food insecurity rapidly increasing in Minnesota**  
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CATHY WURZER: Several bills dealing with the growing problem of hunger in Minnesota are up today in the state house. One bill would send \$5 million to food shelves, and it comes on the heels of a new report that shows there was a dramatic jump in the use of food shelves in Minnesota last year. Here to talk about the spike in demand and if state government can help is Colleen Moriarty.

She's the Executive Director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. That's an advocacy group that published the report. Colleen, welcome to *Minnesota Now*.

**COLLEEN** Well, thank you very much, Cathy. It's really fun to be here.

**MORIARTY:**

**CATHY** Well, I tell you, the subject matter, though, is not fun. It's really serious. And I was surprised to see in 2022 that  
**WURZER:** visits to food shelves in Minnesota were up by more than 50%? I mean, that is a significant spike. Were you surprised, too, by this data?

**COLLEEN** We weren't surprised as much maybe as the general public. Obviously, we're in communications with the food  
**MORIARTY:** shelves and we've seen this incredible reporting about what was happening on the ground level. I think that people probably wonder, why now? Why not during the most active part of the pandemic?

And the answer to that really is that there were supports put in place by the federal government that really kept the numbers down because it kept people with a number of programs like unemployment, and the child tax credit, and the SNAP benefit being increased. Those all worked to surround families with what they needed during the pandemic.

Those have peeled off now. So now, we find ourselves in the position that people have one option, and that's to go to the food shelves. And of course, it's set up as an emergency food system, not a maintenance. So it is alarming.

**CATHY** By the way, how has inflation factored into the rise in food shelf usage?

**WURZER:**

**COLLEEN** Well, of course, that has a tremendous impact, as it has an impact on everyone. But the cost of food, even with  
**MORIARTY:** the federal government commodities, they're more expensive. So our allocated funds, we can buy less. And that's really the mainstay of the food shelves.

In addition to that, there is the cost that the food banks have when they have purchasing programs and they're trying to get food. And they've struggled to keep enough food on the shelves. And then the food shelves themselves do some purchasing, either at wholesale or with local grocers.

And that, too, has been greatly impacted by the cost of food, not to mention the fact that people have just struggled with the cost of inflation. And that just makes the problem more alarming.

**CATHY** I want to ask who and where-- who is using the food shelves and where are they?

**WURZER:**

**COLLEEN** All over the state of Minnesota. We saw the biggest increases-- and that's always been true. I've been in this  
**MORIARTY:** position for 18 years and from the moment I started, it was clear that it was not just an urban issue. So every county had increases with the exception of two, and those counties really are small and don't have the visits go up or down a little bit, a couple of people, and it reflects as a percentage.

And there is one county where we have no reporting because we have no food shelf and the people are served by North Dakota. But it is definitely huge increases up in the Bemidji area, huge increases in Washington, Dakota counties, Sherburne-- just all over the state of Minnesota. Everyone is experiencing this in real time. And that is the lack of being able to afford food.

**CATHY WURZER:** You mentioned the Bemidji area, and I understand that this year's report was the first to include tribal nutrition programs. How much of this is due to including those food shelves in the report?

**COLLEEN MORIARTY:** Yes. And that area has always. First of all, we're so thrilled to be able to work with our colleagues in the tribes. They just are such a tremendous asset. And so that has been wonderful.

And also, they haven't really been served well by hunger programs in the past. And so the state has been terrific, the Department of Human Services has been terrific in rectifying that. But there always has been a high hunger rate in the Bemidji Grand Rapids area even before this.

**CATHY WURZER:** I've got about a minute and a half left here. And as I mentioned, the legislature, the house, is about to debate several bills here today that deal with hunger insecurity. And one bill in specific would send about \$5 million to food shelves around Minnesota. How should that money be distributed given what you've learned in the report?

**COLLEEN MORIARTY:** It will be distributed the same way that it has been distributed for 20 years. And that is the number of visits to food shelves is reflected in your ability to get funds. So we collect those statistics from the banks. We double and triple check them with our friends and colleagues at the Department of Human Services.

We make sure that they are accurate. And then the funds are distributed that way. This is quite a bit more money than they usually see during the year, which is good, because the only way that we're going to be able to really make a dent in this long-term is to have long-term sustainable funding to keep the emergency food system going.

And the reason why we didn't see the big lines, Cathy, that you saw in other states where people were lined up in their cars-- we didn't see that because we have such a robust system of food shelves, and hunger programs, and tribal programs-- almost 466 of them throughout the state. So people can go to their local community to get help. And that's what makes it work.

**CATHY WURZER:** All right. Colleen Moriarty, thank you so much.

**COLLEEN MORIARTY:** Absolutely.

**CATHY WURZER:** Colleen's the Executive Director of Hunger Solutions Minnesota. They released a new report that finds that visits to food shelves spiked last year. And as I mentioned, the Minnesota House is scheduled to discuss a bill that would send \$5 million in funding to food shelves. Other bills that they'll hear today would also deal with funding free breakfasts and lunches in schools and a grant program to turn lawns into legumes and pollinator habitat. All that later this afternoon.