

## NOTES

### RI Interagency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council (IFNPAC)

#### Q4 Meeting

Tuesday December 13<sup>th</sup> 2022 9:30 – 11am

RI Commerce Corporation, 315 Iron Horse Way, Suite 101  
Providence (Narragansett Room, 1<sup>st</sup> floor)

*IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to serve as a coordinating body between 7 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, [Relish Rhody](#), the Council has served as a coordinating Council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include: preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries; enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses; ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and minimizing food waste in the waste stream.*

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#### Pre-reading:

- Q3 meeting minutes
- Proposed changes to IFNPAC meeting structure and responsibilities

#### Council Members in attendance:

**In person:** Aleatha Dickerson, Dana McCants Derisier, Juli Stelmaszyk, Randi Belhumeur, Caitlin Mandel, Silvana Mercado, Terry Macnamara, Maria Cimini, Ken Ayars, Terry Gray, Jessica Patroliia, Andrew Schiff, Amanda Cantrell, Libby Kimzey

**Virtual:** Nessa Richman, Allison Montagnon, Margaret Read, Dana Siles, David Dadekian, Diane Lynch, Jenna Simeone, Kate Balestracci, Nonie Drexel, Rebecca Kislak, Sharon Pavignano, Jenna Simeone

#### Agenda:

##### 1. Welcome & Introductions (Chair)

#### Director Gray:

- Welcome to the last Inter-agency Food & Nutrition Policy Advisory Council meeting of the year. For any new attendees, a bit of background on the Council. The IFNPAC was established by the general assembly in 2012 to operate as a coordinating body between 7 state agencies to examine regulatory and policy barriers to developing a strong sustainable food economy and healthful nutrition practices. Since the launch of the 2017 State Food Strategy, [Relish Rhody](#), the Council has served as a coordinating council to drive outcomes toward the Strategy which include:

*Preserving and growing agriculture and fisheries  
Enhancing the climate for food and beverage businesses  
Ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders and  
Minimizing food waste in the waste stream.*

- Minutes approved: Libby Kimzey, motions to approve, Council members approve

##### 2. New Council structure for 2023, needs approval

Juli:

- The Council's mandate is to examine issues and identify solutions to regulatory and policy barriers towards developing a strong sustainable and healthy food system. We are also meant to collaborate

with and serve as a resource to food policy councils. In order to maximize our effectiveness towards this goal, we would like to propose a way of organizing ourselves going forward which focuses on a few food system issues each year which we agree upon in Q4. See draft proposal. (Caitlin to link)

## Discussion:

Jessica:

- Makes a lot of sense to outline action steps but I worry about duplicative efforts
- Seems backwards, to have RI Food Policy Council (RIFPC) at the bottom. We may want to start with their recommendations. Then notice gaps and go from there

• Caitlin

- RIFPC working groups are more flexible

• Nessa - RIFPC

- Workgroups work together over the course of time, legislative priorities are identified in the Fall
- One thing that could be strengthened is the connection between the legislative liaisons and the working groups

• Randi

- From RIDOH's standpoint, the program subject matter experts would attend the relevant workgroup meetings and bring items back to the legislative liaison

• Juli

- How do you propose we modify this?

• Jessica

- starting with the RIFPC Priorities, perhaps they can brief us on the activities of their work groups. We can determine then what the state agencies can adopt based on gaps, then decide to form additional working groups if necessary

• Randi

- We can update this draft proposed structure and send it back out to IFNPAC Council members for approval

• Director Gray

- The way it's proposed is like a cycle. At what point do we jump on? Right now, we'd be between #4 and #1. RIFPC is ready to issue the state of the state of food systems, We can next pick up any state agency priorities and go from there
- So is it a question of the order, or wordsmithing?

- Jessica – in my eyes is the presentation of it. #1 happens only to the extent that it's not already happening in existing work groups

• Juli – do you agree we set priority areas first, THEN see what other working groups are doing?

- Libby – I like that. I'm hearing a split between 1A and 1B. 1A stands alone and 1B would reflect that other groups are already working on items

• Next Steps

- Share updated draft via email, reach consensus on draft, but vote in person at next meeting

• Ken

- Was there also discussion about adding membership?

- Juli – yes Commerce isn't an official member. Executive Office of Commerce is putting together a legislative proposal to add Commerce RI and Department of Children Youth and Families so we can vote on items if it comes to that.

- We have to move this through the ranks

## 3. Release of new RI food system data dashboard (Nessa/RIFPC)

• Nessa:

- This [dashboard](#) will form the basis of an annual state of the state food systems report. This dashboard will be regularly updated and is always open to suggestion and improvements. Nessa is available for 1:1 conversations about the dashboard and how to use it
- A webinar will be held on January 12th, 12:30 – 1:30 to learn more about the dashboard and how to use it for your work. [Click here to register](#)
- Randi
  - Thanks to the RIFPC for this dashboard. I have used it, and it is extremely helpful
- Director Gray
  - DEM may reach out, we need to build a climate dashboard, and we'd like to see the demo and the webinar.

#### 4. Vision for future Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Program at RIDOH (Randi, RIDOH)

- Randi:
  - Under the leadership of our new Division Director, Kristine Campagna (Community, Health and Equity) and our Center for Chronic Care and Disease Management within the Division; Nancy Sutton leads that Center: the decision has been made to rebuild what was formerly known as the Physical Activity and Nutrition (PAN) program. That rebuild began with a strategic planning process over the spring and summer that many of you participated in. Juli can share with you the strategic plan with materials that go out after today's meeting. We decided to rebrand the program back to Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL), as we continue to look at terminology that is culturally sensitive and invokes a positive feeling. Another change that has been made is that the HEAL Program has moved over to the Center for Chronic Care and Disease Management, since that Center houses all of the chronic conditions that are closely tied to healthy eating and physical activity. Kristine and Nancy asked me to work on the rebuild of the program, and we are expecting the release of the next five-year round of funding by CDC, due out in January. This funding was lost five years ago when staff wrote for the grant back in 2018. I think we all recognize the importance of bringing this program back into the state. And there are actually six NOFO's due out between now and early January within the chronic disease space. Once the writing and submittal process is complete, I will turn my attention to looking at additional funding streams for the program, and funding streams that complement the work that you all do. As I've been reorienting myself to the work, I see the strategic plan as very high level, and what I am doing now is drilling down to create a work plan so that we can "actualize" the HEAL Strategic Plan. I plan to really create a landscape map of all of the good work happening across the state, while thinking deeply about our role as a state health department in this work. My belief is that we don't want to be duplicative. We want to support and leverage the good work that is happening. In addition, I plan to ask many of you for 1-1 meetings since not everyone was involved in that strategic planning process. Wanted to also share with you, at a very high level, what the former PAN program looked like in the past.
    - The program put forth evidence-based nutrition guidelines (similar to what has been done in schools) for use in work sites, ECE settings, within state gov't and within health care settings and we worked with partners towards the implementation of such guidelines by providing technical assistance and capacity building support
    - There is also a breastfeeding component to the work. Adopting breastfeeding friendly policies in hospitals and worksites
    - Working with health equity zones and cities and towns to revise their comprehensive plans that support safe and accessible physical activity, such as complete streets
    - With regards to complete streets, Nancy was successful in security some Prevention Block Grant dollars to begin working on complete streets capacity building with some of our health equity zones. We do have three complete streets already, that can be used as a model for other communities
    - The HEAL program's work definitely shifted to more of a policy framework over the past few years, and I would anticipate that the next funding opportunity will look similar and with an emphasis on social determinants

- Food systems will also be a part of the NOFO, and, as you know, staff such as myself, Juli and the FPC have continued to support the work within the food systems space
  - So be sure to send positive vibes in early 2023 as we all roll up our sleeves to bring this Cooperative Agreement back to RI. I'll be in touch with many of you over the coming weeks. Thanks so much.
- Any Questions?
  - Juli – when would the funding come through?
    - Randi – probably with a start date of Sept 30<sup>th</sup> (according to the forecast, could change)
  - Terry – if there's anything we can do to align with the active living component (bike paths, parks, etc.) please let DEM know
    - Randi – thank you, we will be in touch
  - Ken – is there an allocation for RI?
    - Randi – it's competitive. But there is talk for formula funding for all the states coming from the White House Conference on Hunger Nutrition.
  - Dana – I wanted to comment too on the Office of Healthy Aging and making sure our population is included
    - Randi – yes I want to leverage what is already being done and not duplicate, and consider other community programs like SNAP Ed. Seeing the NOFO will give us a direction – more guidance on what needs to be included, and also determine what other funding sources are out there.
  - Juli – we created a Teams channel so we can all more easily communicate. We keep a federal grant funding spreadsheet to keep track of what is available, what has been leveraged
    - Dana – agrees it's helpful
    - Randi – I agree, it's helpful to have this crosswalk for the food systems
    - Juli – this spreadsheet has been helpful, for example, some federal funding has gone to farmers but it will also help with food access

## 5. (10:00am) Deep Dive: Responding to the Hunger & Nutrition Crisis (Juli/Caitlin)

- Juli:
  - In an effort to focus our quarterly meetings around a relevant food system issue, the next part of the meeting will center around the urgent issue of heightened food insecurity across the state. Caitlin Mandel, the Food Access & Equity Manager, a shared role between RIDOH and the RIFPC will be facilitating our discussion and guest presentations.
- Caitlin:
  - As Juli said, I work as the Food Access and Equity Program Manager and part of my role is to facilitate the Hunger Elimination Task Force, in partnership with the RI Department of the Health and the RI Department of Commerce. The Hunger Elimination Task Force was created in 2017 by IFNPAC and the Director of Food Strategy, as a component of the State's Food Strategy of ensuring food security for all Rhode Islanders. The Task Force has worked with so many incredible partners who help keep us updated on food access challenges experienced by our state's residents, as well as potential programmatic and policy solutions to these issues. We are joined today by Andrew Schiff, Chief Executive Officer of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank and Margaret Read Senior Manager, Policy and Research at Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry tell us about some of these challenges and potential solutions.

### ***2022 Status of Hunger Report (Andrew Schiff, RI Community Food Bank)***

- Andrew Schiff: In the [RI Community Food Bank 2022 Status Report](#) we provide numbers on the prevalence of food insecurity in the state, based on surveys from the RI life index (an initiative of Brown School of Public

Health). They survey 2,000 households in RI. We found this year that 31% of households surveyed could not afford adequate food. You can see the current rate of food insecurity is 3 times higher than before COVID. The rate of food insecurity is highest among households with children at 41.1% and for low-income households. Each month we are serving 10,000 more people than last year. The reason for increase is inflation, the rising cost of rent, utilities and the high cost of food. Additionally, federal support programs, the expanded child tax credit and school meals for all children have ended, which is driving up food insecurity. With the emergency allotment for SNAP, Congress made an additional benefit for SNAP recipients of about \$150 per month. This emergency allotment will end when the public health emergency ends, likely in Spring. But this will be a crisis for families.

- Director Gray
  - Does the rate of inflation track with food price inflation?
    - Andrew Schiff: Yes it's 13%
- Caitlin Mandel
  - Report shows that people are working but they still need food assistance. Can you comment on the best way to understand food insecurity?
- Andrew Schiff
  - In terms of SNAP enrollment in the state. Two issues – are eligible households enrolled? This is difficult to know. And are we ensuring that people get the benefit that people need? During COVID when extra benefits were available, we were actually meeting needs where people's SNAP benefits lasted through the month, and they were less reliant on food pantries. The cost of basic food items like bread and milk have increased so much that households have to cut back.
- Juli
  - I was curious about certain items being higher cost than others. Are you seeing a demand for certain products, for example fresh produce?
    - Andrew: we just completed a community needs assessment. We hear over and over that communities want fresh food and that's what they are having difficulty affording. They hope fresh produce is available at pantries.
- Randi – it's difficult to know how many eligible households are enrolled?
  - Maria Cimini – USDA does a report biannually called “Reaching the Hard to Reach.” It's on a two-year delay, they are able to look at data related to people in the community and their income thresholds and the percentage of people in a community likely eligible for SNAP. It's incredibly difficult, particularly due to the sample size of RI. SNAP isn't an eligibility criteria based on income alone. SNAP eligibility is based on point in time income. Even if you need a gross income test, households have to meet a SNAP income test. It's a complex calculation, with federal immigration rules. FNS does make a valiant attempt – RI is at 80-90% of SNAP participation. Tomorrow I am joining a national Governor's meeting because we have 64% of eligible seniors enrolled in SNAP.
- Ken:
  - We will talk about one solution. Beside maximizing benefit participation. What else Andrew should we be aiming for to create the best environment for those who are food insecure?
    - Andrew
      - I just keep coming back to the issue of income. The expanded child tax credit has been proven to help families afford all of their expenses not just food. We are arguing that these programs should permanent. RI did put into place an expanded child tax credit in the state.
    - Maria
      - Food insecurity among families with children did decrease because of P-EBT and the child tax credit. But food insecurity for older adults and people with disabilities never changed, they are kept living in poverty by federal regulations because these programs

did not cover this population. We need to address this as a state and through advocacy with federal partners

- Libby
  - How are you preparing for the end of the public emergency?
    - Andrew – Everyone is trying to prepare for the end of the public health emergency. The most important thing is informing SNAP recipients, making sure communications are clean and common sense, thank goodness for 211. Preparing for this in the spring.

***Policy Issue: Healthy School Meals for All (Margaret Read, No Kid Hungry)***

- Margaret
  - Share our Strength/No Kids Hungry focuses mainly on school meals but also other nutrition programs. We also provide grants to partners throughout the country. We have a lot advocacy work that we do. We need to see policy at the federal and state level to impact children.
  - Share our Strength has been working with the RI Food Bank and RI Healthy Schools Coalition to provide support for the great work they do. We are also newly working with mRelief they are a strong partner in RI.
  - Healthy School Meals for All, this is a name we use to discuss universal school meals. This name has been message tested and is more popular. This map shows the first year of implementation for healthy school meals for all, some that need to be extended. Yellow states have active funded campaigns to join the other states. Something that I am excited about is in NE we are leading the way compared to other parts of the country. VT, ME, MA, CT NY you can see they are already under operating and implementing this policy. RI is missing.
  - When we talk about school meals it's a three-tiered system. It's a struggle for people to understand.
  - The cafeteria is the only place we treat students differently, e.g. we don't do this for textbooks.
  - There is research-based evidence that when you are offering universal school meals, academic benefits, diet quality, food security, and attendance increases. The finances of the program don't increase, and it doesn't increase body mass indexes for the students. This is something we want for ALL of RI families.
  - Survey respondents: we are doing an evaluation in California and Maine to look at universal school meals in California and Maine.
  - Universal school meals mean decreased stigma and a reduction in unpaid meal debt which is a hot issue in RI.
  - The biggest concern for food service directors was operational. While we are working and want this policy in the state, the policy alone will not solve the issue. Besides finding the funds to pay for this, we also need to support food service directors with implementation.
  - Throughout COVID, meal reimbursement has increased, but it was temporary. Was this increase enough to support all of school meals? We learned it was not enough. What is the cost it would take to cover everything?
  - Average reimbursement issues we commonly hear about
    - Other supports are needed, more equipment, communications, marketing, awareness of the program. We can have great programs serving great meals.
  - Universal school meals can reduce administrative burden, but not immediately. School meal application will not go away, because it used to collect other information.
- Discussion:
  - Jessica
    - Since we have gone back to meal applications. 2022 vs. 2021, there has been a reduction in participation of 8 thousand breakfasts PER DAY, and 9 thousand lunches per day. 8 million and 9 million less meals per day because universal school meal program has ended.

- MA is seeing 65% participation and Maine is seeing 82% of participation. There are other issues and items that need to be address.
- Margaret
  - When you have healthy school meals for all, families can stretch their other dollars more (e.g. SNAP)
- Ken – the states that have passed the program – how are they funding them?
  - Margaret – they are funding them in all different way through state funds, ARPA dollars, etc. The slides link to legislation and includes how these programs are paid for. Keep in mind this has happened with bipartisan support in both republican and democratic controlled congress
- Juli – question about the costs. How does this work? Where does the state come in?
  - Jessica: The states fill the gap between the three reimbursement rates and gap. State is making up the difference. It’s important to consider legislation like this, write it in a way that maximizes federal investment. EG: Community Eligibility Provision or Provision 2 first, then fill in the gap, - helps with flexibility.
  - Juli – do we have a ballpark idea of what that would be?
    - Jessica – we do – it's very rough estimate. Worst case scenario no family SNAP data –the cost would be \$37.6 million a year. Will be high, we are seeing rate is lower than they anticipated. MA had to go back to ask for more money. There is the potential that the Child Nutrition reauthorization has been under consideration, and there are other small bills to maximize CEP
      - Libby – sounds like the \$37.6 was high end of range, if reimbursements hold steady
- Caitlin:
  - This year, the HETF has been following a \$20 million-dollar American Rescue Plan fund allocation in the state budget that was to be distributed as grants through the RI Foundation for nonprofit organizations focused on food and housing access, and behavioral health. The first round of these grants has been distributed and organizations providing food access received \$5,706,500 of the \$8.3 million dollars provided in this first round, over 68%. The RI Foundation advocated strongly that these funds would be allowed to be used for general operating expenses, items like staff salary, delivery trucks, freezers, food. This means that these organizations will be able to continue the critical services and partnerships they developed during the pandemic. This network will be creating a draft food security plan to capture these helpful programs and hopefully be able to help with finding longer term funds to support these programs. We are working with the RI Foundation to make sure all eligible food access organizations are aware of this grant and we can use this opportunity to capture these important elements in a food security plan.

## 6. 10:30 AM: Establish Priorities for 2023 (Juli)

- *Juli:*
  - We will move forward with choosing our priority issues for 2023. We can all put forth recommended ideas and should arrive at consensus on no more than three for the next year. This does not mean there is no room for examining other issues, but it will focus on energy as a council to leverage our collective resources towards addressing issues we feel are most pressing. I would like to propose two issues for us to focus on in 2023 for discussion. And invite members to suggest other policy issues for us to consider.
    - Healthy and local school meals for all – There are 145,342 kids enrolled in RI public schools. As Andrew shared, 41% of all households with children experiences food insecurity. There are 77,000 lunches served every day in schools across RI, the federal meal reimbursement rate is \$3.93 per lunch meal and \$2.52 per breakfast meal. We know kids can’t learn if they’re hungry. Additionally, there is an opportunity to leverage school food budgets to support our local economy while bringing more fresh fruit and vegetables to school menus. At least \$12 million a year in federal funding is spent on food for school meals in Rhode Island. I propose that in the next year the Council better understands this issue and determine regulatory or policy

interventions that would improve child nutrition and direct more school food budgets towards our local producers.

- Food waste diversion & recovery – According to the latest RI Resource Recovery waste characterization study, food waste is the top material by volume in Rhode island’s waste stream. While at the same time there are tons of safe edible food that could be redirected to feed people in need. It is also contributing to GHG emissions. Many opportunities to explore this issue.
- Discussion:
  - Director Gray – Food Waste Recovery and Diversion is timely. We are working with RIRC and hopefully funding a program with the EPA. We also would like a food security plan.
  - Juli - Yes we’ve been discussing a food plan as part of reactivating Relish Rhody 2.0. And we’ve seen other states release food security plans. This will be a priority.
  - Libby – What is the process for deciding these priorities? – how are we looking to reach consensus on this?
  - Juli – I think we decide. So far, we are within our limit
    - Randi – the emergency food plan will happen no matter what. We are on the path to get it done. I don’t know if it’s an issue we want to get behind, because we are doing it
  - Maria – How do we prioritize our work? Want to reflect the unique role we play as state agencies convening as state agencies. Considering the seats most of us fill at the table. Need to be aware of this when we sign onto this - what unique role do we play in these issues?
    - Libby – I agree, this is what’s going on my head. I can’t sit here and say DOA is in support of Healthy School Meals for All. If we had a vote I could abstain from, that could work. DOA is often more in the implementation role.
  - Juli – supporting healthy school meals for all is not necessarily signing a bill.
  - Maria – as state agencies we can go back to our team with proposals. Considering a regulatory role, what information can we share to support RIDE and their implementation? If it ends up as a legislative priority. Keeping in mind that we all have roles to play and sometimes the role to play is carefully defined.
    - Terry Gray – DEM has an advocacy role to support local agriculture and fisheries.
  - Juli – do we want to move forward with more discussion?
    - Libby – I would ask for drafted descriptions of these priorities so we can clarify our role – you can send out in notes and reflect on powers and duties by statute as well
      - Randi notes IFNPAC can be more action orientated.

Motion to adjourn