

RESOLUTION NO. _____

**AFFIRMING THAT FOOD SECURITY IS A PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITY AND THAT
WHATCOM COUNTY SHOULD PURSUE LOCAL, STATE, AND FEDERAL FUNDING TO
SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOOD SYSTEMS PLAN**

WHEREAS, inadequate access to healthy, culturally appropriate food results in long- and short-term health and nutritional hardship, negatively affects overall well-being and quality of life of individuals and communities, and exacerbates growing housing and child care affordability disparities; and

WHEREAS, the United States Department of Agriculture [defines](#) food insecurity as a lack of consistent and equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods that promote optimal health and well-being; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County is experiencing a longstanding and drastic increase in food insecure households, with 9,000 households visiting Whatcom County food banks each week, representing a 127% increase since 2021, more than twice the state average increase; and

WHEREAS, food insecurity is associated with numerous adverse health outcomes, including malnutrition and obesity, chronic nutrition-related diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular conditions, exacerbated mental health issues and eating disorders, and compromised immune systems, thereby increasing healthcare costs and burdening healthcare systems; and

WHEREAS, Children and seniors are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, as approximately 35% of Whatcom County Food Bank Network (WCFBN) clients are children or infants, and nearly 20% are seniors; and

WHEREAS, families with young children are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, as highlighted in the recent [United Way of Whatcom County report](#) on Asset Limited Income Constrained, Employed (ALICE) households in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Refugee, Immigrant, and Migrant (RIM) communities are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity, with an estimated 40% of WCFBN clients being from BIPOC or RIM communities; and

WHEREAS, Indigenous Peoples residing within Whatcom County are [twice as likely to experience food insecurity](#) than all other U.S households and suffer high rates of nutrition-related diseases that are directly related to past governmental policies; and

WHEREAS, food security and tribal treaty rights are connected, as federal, state, and local governments have treaty responsibilities to ensure Tribal foraging, fishing and hunting rights, as outlined in the Point Elliott Treaty of 1855; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County remains committed to working with Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe to uphold treaty rights; and

WHEREAS, people with disabilities may have lower incomes, higher healthcare costs, and additional barriers in accessing grocery stores and other food sources, with the USDA [finding](#) that households that include adults not in the labor force because of a disability are five times more likely to be experience very low food security than those that do not include adults with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Whatcom County is a rural county with over 24,000 residents living in USDA-designated food deserts, and, as Whatcom County's [2018 Community Health Assessment](#) cites: "Low socioeconomic status and isolated geographic locations limit access to healthy food," and "[I]n recent years, a number of grocery stores have closed, resulting in food deserts in both rural and urban areas and frustration related to disparities in food availability;" and

WHEREAS, more than 30% of rural east Whatcom County residents receive food assistance, and nearly 54% of Mount Baker School District students qualify for free or reduced cost school meals, according to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction; and

WHEREAS, the high cost of housing in Whatcom County restricts residents' ability to purchase healthy food, [with over half of renters cost-burdened \(spending more than 30% of their income on housing\) and over 30% of renters severely cost-burdened \(spending more than 50% of their income on housing\)](#); and

WHEREAS, a wide range of strategies are needed to expand access to food resources throughout Whatcom County, including support for mobile food banks, scaled-up food recovery efforts, staffing support to coordinate existing food systems work, better communications and connections with agricultural producers, and programs that mitigate the impacts of and eliminate the causes of food deserts; and

WHEREAS, a secure and sustainable food system is a vital aspect of both a thriving healthy community and a vibrant business and entrepreneurship economy, and providing greater access to locally-grown food will support a more robust local agriculture sector; and

WHEREAS, we recognize that increased access to food does not ensure that it is affordable, and the [10-Year Food System Plan](#) highlights an urgent need to invest in programs that make healthy food more affordable for more people; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Council and Executive have received numerous food system-related funding requests, including those from the Whatcom County Food Bank Network, Food System Committee member organizations, and community organizations representing tribes, schools, senior centers, healthcare providers, and social service providers; and

WHEREAS, the WCFBN request for sustainable funding is consistent with Goal 4.3.1 of the Whatcom County Food Systems Plan, "[A]dequately fund the Whatcom County Food Bank Network to meet the dramatic increase in food insecure individuals;" and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Council acknowledges budget challenges but remains committed to working collaboratively with the County Executive and food system partners in efforts to fund the Food Systems Plan; and

WHEREAS, federal and state food distribution programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) do not adequately address the localized public health crisis we are facing in Whatcom County; and

WHEREAS, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has had a 50% reduction in funding over the past two years; and

WHEREAS, the Whatcom County Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) utilization rate is only 54% due to inadequacies in the program and barriers to participation; and

WHEREAS, the WCFBN faces ongoing challenges with unstable food supply from free or low-cost redistributors like Food Lifeline and Northwest Harvest, and statewide redistributed food supplies dropped over 20% in 2023, impacting food banks as household visits rise; and

WHEREAS, people's experiences and how they cope with food insecurity have been extensively documented by public health professionals, sociologists, researchers, and anthropologists, and, in Whatcom County, by the Whatcom County Food Assessment (2011, 2017, and 2022), the [2022-2026 Community Health Improvement Plan](#), the [2021 Foothills Food Access Plan](#), the [2019 East Whatcom County Food Landscape Assessment](#), and the Whatcom County 10-Year Food System Plan, which all include community strategies to address this urgent need for both emergency resources and systems improvements; and

WHEREAS, adopting a regular funding plan to support preexisting, community-based infrastructure that directly distributes healthy food to the public is crucial to achieving the goals outlined in Whatcom County's 10-Year Food System Plan, including ensuring access to healthy food for all.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council affirms that food security is a public health priority, and that Whatcom County should pursue local, state, and federal funding to support the implementation of the Food Systems Plan; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Whatcom County Council respectfully requests that the Executive:

1. Support efforts to increase access to nutritious and affordable food for all residents, particularly vulnerable populations such as children, seniors, disabled people, immigrants and refugees, and ALICE households.
2. Collaborate with local organizations, including the Food System Committee and the WCFBN, to develop and implement short- and long-term strategies aimed at reducing food insecurity and its associated health impacts.
3. Collaborate with the Food System Committee and local organizations in seeking additional state and federal resources and foundation grants to supplement local initiatives and enhance the capacity to create conditions for community food security as called for in the 10-Year Food System Plan.
4. Support the Food System Committee and other local organizations in efforts to increase the portion of food bank funding that is directed to purchasing food directly from Whatcom County producers.

5. Leverage county resources to build capacity and assist with Food System Plan implementation efforts, planning, grant solicitation, and coordination across county food systems and partners.
6. Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and programs aimed at alleviating food insecurity and adjust strategies as needed to achieve desired outcomes; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that a copy of this resolution be transmitted to relevant stakeholders, including local, state, and federal government officials, community organizations, healthcare providers, and the public, to raise awareness of the importance of addressing food insecurity as a critical public health issue.

APPROVED this ____ day of _____, 2024.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

Barry Buchanan, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

Civil Deputy Prosecutor