

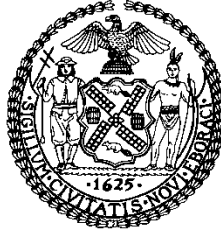
Committee Staff

Caitlin Fahey, Counsel

Emily Rooney, Policy Analyst

Dohini Sompura, Finance Analyst

Daniel Kroop, Finance Analyst



**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**BRIEFING PAPER OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION**

Jeffery Baker, Legislative Director

**COMMITTEE ON AGING**

Hon. Margaret Chin, Chair

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON SENIOR CENTERS**

Hon. Paul Vallone, Chair

**December 14, 2017**

**Oversight: Seniors' Access to Nutritional and Culturally Competent Congregate and Home  
Delivered Meals**

## **INTRODUCTION**

On December 14, 2017, the Committee on Aging, chaired by Council Member Margaret Chin, and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers, chaired by Council Member Paul Vallone, will hold a hearing on “Seniors’ Access to Nutritional and Culturally Competent Congregate and Home Delivered Meals.” The Committees expect to hear testimony from the Department for the Aging (DFTA), senior center and home delivered meal providers, advocates and interested members of the public.

## **BACKGROUND**

New York City is the largest provider of meals through its agencies and contracted service providers in the world.<sup>1</sup> In Fiscal Year 2017, DFTA alone provided over 11.7 million meals to seniors through its congregate and home delivered meals programs.<sup>2</sup> These programs receive funding from the federal government, from the State, and from local sources. Seniors across New York City rely on these meal programs. From 2013 to 2016, an average of 13.6% of New Yorkers over the age of 60 lived in a food insecure house.<sup>3</sup>

Providers of home delivered and congregate meals must abide by nutrition standards and other guidelines set by the federal government, the state, and the city. In 2008, Mayor Michael Bloomberg signed Executive Order 122 of 2008 into law which created City Agency Food Standards (“Food Standards”).<sup>4</sup> The Executive Order tasked the Commissioner of the Health Department and the newly created Food Policy Coordinator to develop nutrition standards for all

---

<sup>1</sup> The Public Plate in New York City: A Guide to Institutional Meals, New York City Food Policy Center (2014), available at <http://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/PUBLICPLATEREPORT.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Mayor’s Management Report, Department for the Aging, Fiscal Year 2017, available at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2017/dfta.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> New York City Department for the Aging, Annual Plan Summary 2018-2019 (September 2017), available at <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dfta/downloads/pdf/reports/DFTAAnnualPlanSummary2017.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> N.Y.C Office of the Mayor, Executive Order No.122 of 2008, available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/food-executive-order-122.pdf>.

meals or food supplies that are purchased, prepared or served in agency programs or other relevant settings.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the Executive Order required that all food served by City contracted services abide by the Food Standards. The Food Standards apply to both meals and snacks are part of a strategy to reduce the prevalence of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, and to reduce the rates of health disparities among New Yorkers. The Food Standards were updated in 2014 and include the regulation of calories eaten in a day, the sodium content in food, the quantity of food served, and restrictions on sugar per meal. Agencies are also encouraged to consider purchasing locally sourced food.<sup>6</sup>

In order to monitor its contracted food providers, DFTA has an in-house Nutrition Unit under its Bureau of Community Services (BCS).<sup>7</sup> DFTA's Nutrition Unit is staffed with dietitians and nutritionists who serve as experts for DFTA's providers when developing menus for home-delivered and congregate meals.<sup>8</sup> They provide technical assistance on meal planning, recipe development, food safety, and ensure that providers abide by the food guidelines set by the federal and state governments as well as the Food Standards.<sup>9</sup> DFTA has also developed a web-based tool to streamline the nutrition menu planning process.

### Home Delivered Meals

DFTA's Home Delivered Meals programs provide nutritional meals to older home bound New Yorkers five days a week.<sup>10</sup> These programs are designed for seniors who have difficulty

---

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> New York City Food Standards, Meals/Snacks Purchased and Served, *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/cardio/cardio-meals-snacks-standards.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>10</sup> Weekend meals are funded through Citymeals on Wheels. See <https://www.citymeals.org/about-us/what-we-deliver/weekend-meals>.

preparing their own meals.<sup>11</sup> In order to receive home delivered meals, a senior must receive authorization from a DFTA case manager following an assessment of the senior by the case manager.

In order to be assessed by DFTA's case management program, a person must be 60 years of age or older, be cognitively or functionally impaired, which results in a need for assistance with at least one Activity of Daily Living ("ADL"), such as bathing, grooming, dressing, washing, feeding, toileting, mobility, and transferring.<sup>12</sup> Alternatively, an older adult over the age of 60 must need assistance with at least two Instrumental Activities of Daily Living ("IADL") such as shopping, laundry, meal preparation, and cleaning. Eligibility for services is determined during the client's assessment at the intake stage.<sup>13</sup> The assessment must occur before home-delivered meal services or home-care can be arranged.<sup>14</sup> In certain cases, DFTA emergency home-delivered meals can be arranged before the assessment takes place.<sup>15</sup> Older adults who are assessed by their case manager as capable of reheating their own meals have the choice of either a delivery of frozen meals twice a week or a hot meal delivered daily.<sup>16</sup> Clients are also screened by a nutrition counselor for nutrition risks and if a client is deemed a high risk they receive nutrition counseling.<sup>17</sup>

DFTA requires its home delivered meals providers to comply with DFTA's Home Delivered Meal Standards.<sup>18</sup> The Home Delivered Meal Standards indicate that providers are required to submit three or six months of menus (known as a menu cycle) to DFTA eight weeks

---

<sup>11</sup> DFTA Case Management Concept Paper (April 8, 2015), *available at* <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/CaseMgmtProgramConceptPaper033115.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.*

<sup>18</sup> NYC Department for the Aging, Home Delivered Meal Standards, *available at* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/cma\\_hc\\_hdml\\_sads.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/cma_hc_hdml_sads.pdf)

in advance of the cycle.<sup>19</sup> When providers submit menus, they must include a professionally-prepared nutrient analysis for each menu cycle. If the provider is unable to give a nutrient analysis, the provider must list the recipes and nutritional content of each product used in meal preparation. In turn, providers must give home delivered meal clients copies of the approved menus one month prior to delivery.<sup>20</sup> The meals must meet at least one-third of Dietary Reference Intake (DRI) and adhere to federal and state guidelines and the Food Standards. Any changes to menus must be approved by DFTA. The provider is permitted to ask the client for a voluntary contribution when meal delivery is taking place, however a meal cannot be denied to a client because they do not make a monetary contribution.<sup>21</sup>

Religious and other culturally relevant meals may be provided, but they must meet federal, and state guidelines as well as the Food Standards. Cultural meals may come at a greater cost than standard home delivered meals because they require different levels of preparation that may increase costs.<sup>22</sup> For example, in DFTA's home delivered network, Kosher meals are \$1.38 more than non-Kosher meals.<sup>23</sup>

The New York City Food Policy website notes that specialized meals are available to seniors with specific nutritional needs who are too ill to cook for themselves due to HIV/AIDS, cancer, or other life-altering illnesses.<sup>24</sup> These customized meals are currently offered by God's Love We Deliver, a meal delivery organization staffed with registered dietitians who develop

---

<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

<sup>20</sup> *Id.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.*

<sup>22</sup> N.Y.C Council, Committee on Aging April 26, 2017, Testimony of Molly Krakowski

<sup>23</sup> NYC Department for the Aging, New DFTA Funding Addresses Rising Food Costs, *available at* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/press\\_release/dfta\\_food\\_budget\\_pr.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/press_release/dfta_food_budget_pr.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> N.Y.C Food Policy, Meals for Seniors: Home Delivered Meals, *available at* <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/foodpolicy/help/meals-for-seniors.page>.

individually-tailored meals for the most at-need home-bound seniors.<sup>25</sup> At this time, medically tailored home delivered meals are not part of DFTA's contract for home delivered meals.

### Congregate Meals

In Fiscal Year 2017, DFTA's over 250 senior centers provided 7.2 million congregate meals, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner.<sup>26</sup> The number of meals served in fiscal year 2017 was 5.3% less than the meals served in fiscal year 2016.<sup>27</sup>

Any individual over the age of 60 is permitted to access senior center services and services, including meals, and will only be denied under specific reasons. Senior centers require meal participants to "sign in" in order to receive a meal. Upon signing in, meal participants may be given the option to make a voluntary, anonymous contribution.<sup>28</sup> However, meals cannot be denied if a senior refuses to make a contribution.<sup>29</sup>

Congregate meals must adhere to federal guidelines, the Food Standards, and DFTA Senior Center Guidelines.<sup>30</sup> Senior center providers must develop menus and submit them to DFTA through DFTA's web based menu application. Providers can submit menus seasonally: winter, spring, summer, and fall.<sup>31</sup> Alternatively, providers can submit menus in a six month cycle, either fall/winter or spring/summer. According to DFTA's rules for senior center providers, menus must be appropriate to accommodate participants' cultural backgrounds and include meals to celebrate cultural holidays and celebrations.<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> God's Love We Deliver, About Us: Nourishing Those Too Sick To Shop Or Cook

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* at 2.

<sup>28</sup> NYC Department for the Aging: Senior Center Standards, *available at* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/senior\\_centers\\_standards.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/community/senior_centers_standards.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> *Id.*

In the Fiscal Year 2018 budget, \$1.2 million in funding was baselined for the weekend congregate meals program, which allows low-income seniors an additional meal from their neighborhood senior center on the weekends.<sup>33</sup>

### Cost of Meals

Historically the cost of food has risen faster than reimbursement rates to meal providers.<sup>34</sup> Advocates have periodically asked DFTA to raise the amount that DFTA uses to calculate congregate meals, but senior centers have complained that, by the time they receive additional funding for meals, the cost of goods has already increased again.<sup>35</sup> Nutrition standards have contributed to growing cost of goods. Many senior centers do not have kitchens and therefore find it difficult to transition to fresh whole foods.<sup>36</sup> Staff at DFTA have also reported that centers have difficulty identifying breads that meet the whole grain, fiber, and sodium requirements at prices they could afford.

In Fiscal Year 2015, DFTA increased its congregate and home delivered meals budget to help bridge the gap between the amount that DFTA reimburses meal providers and the true cost of food. DFTA reimbursements increased by an additional \$.50 for kosher meals and \$.25 for congregate and non-kosher home delivered meals.

At an April 2017 Aging Committee hearing, the Jewish Association Serving the Aging, (JASA) testified about food costs. JASA testified that they served 486,250 meals annually and more than half are kosher meals.<sup>37</sup> JASA also testified that kosher meals cost an additional \$1.35

---

<sup>33</sup> New York City Council. Council Members Chin, Vallone & Rosenthal Declares Victory for Seniors and Human Services Organizations (June 12, 2017), *available at* <https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/NewsArticles/Councilmembers-Chin-Vallone-Rosenthal-Declares-Victory-for-Seniors-and-Human-Services-Organizations.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> See N.Y.C. Department for the Aging, New DFTA Funding Addresses Rising Food Costs, *available at* [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/press\\_release/dfta\\_food\\_budget\\_pr.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dfta/downloads/pdf/press_release/dfta_food_budget_pr.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* at 22.

per meal and estimated that, for FY 2017, JASA had a budget deficit for meals of \$157,000.<sup>38</sup>

JASA also testified that it explored the cost of providing halal meals and one bid was for \$15 per meal.<sup>39</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The Committees expect to hear testimony regarding DFTA's congregate and home-delivered meal programs, including how the City can increase seniors' access to nutritious and culturally relevant meals.

---

<sup>38</sup> *Id at 22.*

<sup>39</sup> *Id at 22.*