

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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February 13, 2018

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HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm, 14th Fl.

B E F O R E: STEPHEN T. LEVIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ADRIENNE E. ADAMS

DIANA AVALA

VANESSA L. GIBSON

BARRY S. GRODENCHIK

ANTONIO REYNOSO

MARK GJONAJ

BRAD S. LANDER

RITCHIE J. TORRES

RAFAEL SALAMANCA, JR.

MARK TREYGER

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Grace Bonilla
Administrator of the New York City Human
Resources Administration

Sabrina Simmons
Office of Advocacy and Outreach under the HRA
Administration

Barbara Turk
Director of Food Policy at the Mayor's Office for
Health and Human Services

Marie Philip
Deputy Commissioner of Emergency and Intervention
Services, New York City Human Resources
Administration

Joel Berg
CEO of Hunger Free America

Rachel Sabella
Director of Government Relations and Policy at
Food Bank for New York City

Danny Stewart
Director of Operations and Finance at Safe
Horizons Street Work Project

Melissa Olson
Director of Nutrition at Community Healthcare
Network, CHN

Aaron Cyperstein
Director of External Affairs from Met Council

Ruben Diaz
Chair for Masbia Soup Kitchen

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Alexander Rapaport
Executive Director of Masbia Soup Kitchen

Arial Subranski
Representing the UJA Federation

Danette Rivera
Executive Director of JITA Community Outreach
Service Center in Jamaica Queens

Annette Jackson
Senior Citizen, Resident of Manhattan

Rachel Sherrow
Associate Executive Director and Chief Program
Officer of City Meals on Wheels

Laura Allen
Representing Masbia Soup Kitchen Network

Susan Welber
Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society

Daniel Reyes
Deputy Executive Director at the New York Common
Pantry, NYCP

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good afternoon

everybody. I'm Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the Committee on General Welfare. I am joined today by members of the committee; Mark Gjonaj of the Bronx, we have Diana Avala of Bronx and Manhattan, Barry Grodenchik of Queens, Adrienne Adams of Queens and we have former committee member and now Speaker of the council, Corey Johnson. So, I want to thank you all coming for our annual hunger hearing, it is a pleasure once again to chair the General Welfare Committee and this is our first oversight hearing of this term. I want to thank the Food Justice advocates and emergency food providers who work very hard every day to ensure that every New Yorker in need has access to a sufficient amount of nutritious food. I also want to thank members of this administration for their collaborative efforts with the provider community to ensure that every hungry New Yorker has access to safe and nutritious food. Today we are joined as I said by our Speaker, Corey Johnson and as I said he was also a member of this committee last term. I want to thank the speaker for his support and his passion to secure and enhance our city's safety

1
2 net programs including SNAP and the emergency food
3 assistance program also known as EFAP. Over the next
4 four years I look forward to working with our
5 speaker, our community partners and the
6 administration in making significant progress towards
7 reducing hunger, increasing funding for EFAP and
8 other food programs in extending access to healthy
9 food in every neighborhood across the city. Just one
10 note before I turn it over to the Speaker, when we
11 first spoke about me being reassigned to chair this
12 committee he said Steve I want to reassign you to
13 Chair the General Welfare Committee, the one thing I
14 want you to focus on is how we can enhance our city's
15 safety net program and, and also especially the
16 hunger programs in New York City. So, it, it is
17 manifest priority of this Speaker and we look forward
18 to all the great work that he's going to be doing on
19 behalf of the council to advance those objectives.
20 And with that I will turn it over to Speaker Corey
21 Johnson.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Good afternoon
23 everyone, I am Council Member Corey Johnson, Speaker
24 of the New York City Council and first I want to
25 thank my dear, dear, dear friend Council Member Steve

1
2 Levin for his... Grodenchik one day you will get three
3 dear, dear, dears, you're not... you have to be quite
4 for you to get those three dear, dear... that's never
5 going to... so, you're never going to get three dears,
6 Council Member Steve Levin for his dedication to this
7 topic over the course of the last four years as Chair
8 of the General Welfare Committee and it is my honor
9 to appoint Council Member Levin as Chair of this
10 committee for another four years. He has been an
11 incredible voice for vulnerable children, for
12 homeless New Yorkers, for people who rely on our
13 social service programs and our robust social safety
14 net here in New York City and I'm very, very proud of
15 him. I also want to thank the, the incredible
16 committee staff for their great work over the last
17 four years, they've done a great, great job and I'm
18 really grateful for all that they do for this council
19 and to really bring these issues to light for New
20 Yorkers. Lastly, I want to thank the advocacy and
21 provider community for being here today, your efforts
22 along with partners in city government provide
23 vulnerable New Yorkers with their most basic needs.
24 Today we're holding a hearing as Chair Levin said on
25 efforts to reduce hunger in New York City. There are

1
2 far too many people who don't know where their next
3 meal will come from. The meal gap for New York City,
4 the city's official measure of food insecurity is
5 nearly 225 million meals that is New York City
6 residents who experience food insecurity and fall
7 short of an adequate diet by 225 meals in a single
8 year. Approximately 339,000 New York City children or
9 approximately one out of every five, 19 percent rely
10 on soup kitchens and pantries and approximately
11 204,000 New York City seniors or approximately one
12 out of every five, again 20 percent of seniors rely
13 on soup kitchens or pantries. Anti-hunger initiatives
14 are a core component of the social safety net, an
15 estimated 1.4 million New York City resident rely on
16 emergency food programs including soup kitchens and
17 food pantries each year, the busiest soup kitchen I
18 believe in the city of New York and... I think on the
19 East coast of the United States is proudly in my
20 district, Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen, they are the
21 best and there are many other soup kitchens that do
22 similar work and I'm proud of them as well. One
23 point... in New York City 1.64 million people rely on
24 SNAP benefits to meet their most basic nutritional
25 needs. While SNAP is crucial in our fight against

1
2 hunger families often cannot stretch their benefits
3 to the end of the month and must turn to our city's
4 network of merely 1,000 food pantries and soup
5 kitchens to fill the gap. The Trump Administration
6 wants to make devastating cuts to SNAP and
7 potentially institute one of the biggest shake ups in
8 this life saving programs of five-decade history and
9 the Trump tax bill provides benefits to those at the
10 very top at the expense of the most vulnerable. We
11 saw some of the hits that HUD is supposed to take in
12 the budget that was released yesterday and other
13 anti-poverty initiatives. The federal government
14 should be a partner in finding solutions to
15 homelessness and the hunger crisis not be a partner
16 that is exacerbating a crisis and making it worse.
17 The New York City Council is committed to fighting
18 hunger in a variety of ways; securing three straight
19 years of funding increases to EFAP, the emergency
20 food assistance program and Council Member Levin,
21 Chair Levin and Council Member Grodenchik deserve an
22 enormous amount of credit for their leadership in
23 that fight, supporting school pantries, funding SNAP
24 enrollment and directing dollars to support food
25 purchases and operations at food pantries and soup

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2 kitchens across the city. We as a council continue to
3 be committed to reducing food insecurity and fighting
4 against hunger, poverty and undernutrition in New
5 York City and I hope this hearing is the beginning of
6 a conversation on how we can all work together to
7 ensure and expand access to food, healthy food to
8 every single individual in New York City. I'd like to
9 thank again Chair Levin and the advocates and the
10 providers once again for their work on this important
11 topic. I'm very happy to see my friend Barbara Turk
12 who I think has done a fantastic job the past four
13 years in working with providers in the community in
14 thinking about ways to get healthier food in
15 supporting community gardens and doing all this
16 important work. I was really proud to work with her
17 when I was Chair of the Health Committee and I'm
18 grateful that she continues in this position, she's
19 been a really wonderful partner to work with and all
20 of you I want to thank you as well. I, I just want to
21 finish by saying that the numbers are really, you
22 know devastating across the board and I think they're
23 really hard actually for the vast majority of New
24 Yorkers to comprehend. When I gave a speech at, you
25 know ABNY two weeks ago, the Association for a Better

1
2 New York, I mentioned, and I think folks in that room
3 were pretty floored by it that 22 percent of New
4 Yorkers are living below the poverty line, that's 1.7
5 million people. When you walk down the streets of New
6 York City one in every five people are living in
7 poverty and then when we look at the meal gap as we
8 just talked about that affects many people who aren't
9 even considered to be living in poverty but don't
10 know where their next meal is coming from. With the
11 homeless crisis that the city's facing 61,000 people
12 in the shelter system last night that's just a DHS
13 shelter doesn't come out... doesn't count HRA domestic
14 violence shelters or DYCD youth shelters, we're close
15 to 70,000 people who are in shelters and then almost
16 5,000 unsheltered New Yorkers who are living on the
17 streets of New York City. And so, when the wealthiest
18 city in the world with many industries that could be
19 partnering with city government and with the
20 incredible non... I see Joel Berg here... with the
21 incredible non-profit organizations that do this work
22 day in and day out, we have to do better, we have to
23 reduce hunger and poverty has remained very steady in
24 New York City since the 1980's, it's been stuck at
25 around 20 percent. So, my hope is to of course look

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2 at the very important work that you all are doing,
3 understand the funding gaps that we're potentially
4 going to see now with federal cuts to SNAP and to the
5 other social safety net programs that support the
6 most vulnerable and to figure out how we in a fulsome
7 way figure out how we reduce that number, how we get
8 that stubborn 20 percent number down and we get more
9 people fed, we lift people out of poverty and I know
10 that hunger doesn't exist in a vacuum it has to do
11 with housing cost and health care costs and education
12 and a variety of factors that play into this very,
13 very important issue. I don't raise this issue
14 because it's like mom and apple pie, you know it's
15 easy to talk about hunger, I raise this issue because
16 I live not too far from Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen and
17 when I walk by every single day or the days that I do
18 walk by there when you see the lines, people lining
19 up three hours before the soup kitchen opens up, when
20 you see people stretched down two blocks, when you
21 see people going to get food for their children to
22 bring home or putting an extra meal aside to say... to
23 stay fed this is not academic, the providers in this
24 room know this that it's not academic, they know the
25 number of people that they serve, they know the human

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2 toll and impact that this has on people's lives and
3 so I really want to learn from you all, from the
4 administration who is doing this very important work
5 and from the providers who probably know of better
6 ways that we could be doing this work and the way
7 that the council and city government can step up in a
8 variety of ways whether it's through our land use
9 processes for getting more grocery stores that are
10 affordable in neighborhoods through land use, through
11 legislation on how we tackle this issue through
12 oversight in figuring out where city dollars could be
13 better spent and through the budget process to
14 increase EFAP to the amount of money that it needs to
15 be on what their actual need is. So, the myriads of
16 this committee Council Member Lander, Council Member
17 Gjonaj, Council Member Adams, Council Member
18 Grodenchik, Council Member Avala and the Chair are
19 all people who are deeply committed to this issue I
20 know and I know you all are as well, this is going to
21 be an issue that I am going to focus on with a laser
22 over the next four years because I want that number
23 to come down, the meal gap number, the poverty number
24 and anything that this council needs to do to
25 advocate to make that happen you have my deep and un-

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2 abiding commitment. So, again I want to thank you, I
3 look forward to your testimony and I want to thank
4 Chair Levin for having me here today and I apologize
5 for being late.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
7 Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to acknowledge Council
8 Member Brad Lander who has returned as a member of
9 the General Welfare Committee after a four-year
10 hiatus.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Very, very happy
12 to be back.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks Brad. And with
14 that I'll, I'll, I'll pick up the rest of my remarks,
15 thank you very much Mr. Speaker. So, according to the
16 latest USDA data and the speaker spoke to a lot of
17 this, an, an estimated 1.25 million New Yorkers or
18 nearly 15 percent were food insecure in 2015 compared
19 to... compared to 1.37 million New Yorkers or 16
20 percent the previous year. Despite this decrease New
21 York City's food insecurity rate is 11 percent higher
22 than the national rate and 18 percent higher than the
23 statewide rate. Furthermore, according to Feeding
24 America, the nation's leading hunger relief
25 organization, New Yorkers missed approximately 224.8

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2 million meals in 2015 which is also known as the meal
3 gap as the Speaker said. This is a, a decrease from
4 242 million the previous year but SNAP and, and SNAP
5 participation in New York City has also declined from
6 1.7 million to 1.64 million New Yorkers who receive
7 SNAP benefits. Despite these downward trends we
8 cannot ignore the fact that food insecurity remains a
9 very serious problem in our city. When examining food
10 insecurity the final stop gap of our social safety
11 net is the over 1,000 food pantries and soup kitchens
12 across the five boroughs and I just want to take a
13 second to acknowledge the great work that they do
14 because a lot of these programs are volunteer based
15 or they may have one or two staff people, they are
16 scraping by, they are doing whatever they can to get
17 good, quality, nutritious food to their neighbors and
18 that, that includes partnering with other community
19 organizations, partnering with faith based... faith
20 based institutions, working with city harvest and the
21 food bank and also raising funds themselves, raising
22 private funds that are... that are flexible so that
23 they can maybe hire part time staff or do
24 transportation, you know despite all of our efforts a
25 lot of our pantries and soup kitchens go above and

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2 beyond what the city is doing for them to ensure that
3 food gets to the hungry people that they serve. Back
4 to the prepared remarks, according to the food bank
5 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on pantries and soup
6 kitchens to meet their basic nutrition needs and
7 since the 2008 recession food pantries and soup
8 kitchens has seen an increased demand for their
9 services every single day. This means that for the
10 past ten years more and more New Yorkers sought
11 emergency food assistance because of their SNAP
12 benefits because their SNAP benefits were not
13 sufficient enough. As a result, pantries consistently
14 report having insufficient supplies to fill pantry
15 bags and having to turn people away when food runs
16 out. In addition to the current need we are facing
17 the possibility of the federal government putting
18 existing SNAP benefits at risk, we will do all that
19 we can to avoid this from becoming a reality but if
20 the federal government succeeds in cutting SNAP
21 benefits the city must be prepared to fill in the
22 gaps that may be left behind, just one note about
23 the, the, the President's budget plan as it relates
24 to SNAP, that is a grotesque proposal, we must do
25 everything we can to call it out for what it is which

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2 is a dismantling of the SNAP program as it's been
3 built up over the previous decades and we, we meet...
4 need to do absolutely everything that we can to work
5 with our members of congress to, to fight that
6 becoming a reality. I would like to acknowledge this
7 administration's efforts to increase food access
8 across the city through various programs including
9 ACCESS NYC where applicants can apply for SNAP
10 online, outreach campaigns to NYCHA residents and
11 seniors and the food assistance collaborative aimed
12 to build and expand the capacity of food pantries.
13 However more must be done to ensure that no New
14 Yorker goes hungry and to that end I'd be remiss if I
15 did not mention that in the Mayor's preliminary
16 budget again we saw not a baseline of the... of the
17 full allocation to the EFAP that we saw in the
18 adopted budget last year, that's very disappointing,
19 very disappointing. We... this is too important of an
20 issue, too vital of an issue for New York City to
21 make it a... you know the last remaining vestige of the
22 budget dance really, you know back during the
23 Bloomberg Administration we had dozens of issues that
24 wouldn't make it into the executive budget or the
25 preliminary budget and then... and then get put in by

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2 the council or through negotiations by the
3 administration at adoption, this is the last one that
4 we still do that with and its, its unacceptable, we
5 need to baseline this, this funding, we need to make
6 sure that it's there year after year, we do not want
7 to have a budget dance over hungry New Yorkers every
8 single year. I would like to thank the council staff
9 for their work in preparing for today's hearing;
10 Policy Analyst Tonya Cyrus, Nameera Nuzhat our
11 Finance Analyst, our Finance, Finance Unit Head
12 Dohini Sompura and I'd also like to especially
13 acknowledge and welcome our new council to the
14 committee Amita Kilowan [sp?], yah and our Legal
15 Fellow Rafia Qaseem [sp?], welcome Rafia. lastly, I'd
16 like to thank my Chief of Staff, Jonathan Boucher and
17 Communications and Budget Director Edward Paulino.
18 I'd also like to welcome Council Member Vanessa
19 Gibson of the Bronx, a member of the committee and
20 now I would like to swear in the representatives from
21 the administration before giving your testimony. If
22 you can raise your right hand, please? Do you affirm
23 to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but
24 the truth in your testimony before this committee and
25

1
2 to respond honestly to Council Member's questions?

3 Thank you, okay, you may begin, thank you.

4 GRACE BONILLA: Good afternoon and thank
5 you Chairman Levin and members of the city council's
6 General Welfare Committee for inviting us to testify
7 and respond to committee questions today. My name is
8 Grace Bonilla and I am the Administrator of the New
9 York City Human Resources Administration. Before
10 beginning my testimony, I would like to take a moment
11 to welcome the new members of the council as well as
12 those members new to this committee. I look forward
13 to our partnership as we work together to improve the
14 lives of low income and vulnerable New Yorkers and
15 thank you Speaker Johnson for being with us today.
16 This committee's annual hunger hearing is a welcome
17 opportunity to discuss many of the initiatives and
18 programs that this administration has undertaken to
19 address hunger, food insecurity and access to
20 nutritious food. HRA plays a pivotal role in
21 minimizing hunger and ensuring that food assistance
22 remains a vital ready, readily available support for
23 low income individuals and families. However, our
24 work is not done in isolation and today I'm joined by
25 Barbara Turk from the Mayor's Office of Food Policy

1
2 as well as my HRA colleagues Lisa Fitzpatrick, Chief
3 Program Officer and Marie Philip, Deputy Commissioner
4 for Emergency Intervention Services. It is an
5 unfortunate truth that we live in the time... at a time
6 of declining wages coupled with the rising cost of
7 rent, food, transportation, and other commodities
8 with... which contribute to food insecurity and hunger.
9 These factors are exacerbated by under and... an
10 unemployment which culminate in persistent income
11 inequality. Food insecurity isn't only about hunger,
12 hunger impacts health including a high prevalence of
13 preventable illnesses and as it so often the case our
14 youngest and oldest neighbors are the most vulnerable
15 when it comes to food insecurity. There are negative
16 impacts on school attendance, academic outcomes and
17 behavior challenges for children and seniors who are
18 unable to meet their nutritional needs face an
19 accelerated deterioration in health and quality of
20 life from conditions such as cardiovascular disease,
21 stroke and increased slip and falls. At HRA we
22 provide essential programs and supports to low income
23 New Yorkers that reduce hunger and decrease the
24 threat of food insecurity but also work to eliminate
25 the root causes. Every day in all five boroughs HRA

1
2 works to ensure that our services and benefits
3 provide low income New Yorkers the assistance they
4 need through a wide range of supports including cash
5 assistance and employment services, employment
6 nutrition assistance program otherwise known as SNAP
7 or food stamps, eviction prevention and rental
8 assistance to name a few. However, despite our
9 efforts as we testify each year hunger, food
10 insecurity and lack of access to nutritional food
11 options continue to be a serious problem in New York
12 City. The reality remains too many of our fellow New
13 Yorkers find themselves in the position of having to
14 choose between paying for vital expenses such as rent
15 or purchasing nutritious food. These food insecure
16 households routinely report the food they buy does
17 not last long enough or they cannot afford a balanced
18 diet or are forced to skip meals or eat less despite
19 still feeling hungry. According to the latest
20 available data 1.25 million New Yorkers or 14 percent
21 of New York population were food insecure at some
22 point during 2015 and while this shows a decline from
23 the year before there's still far too many New
24 Yorkers who don't know where their next meal will
25 come from. Thanks to the launch of the poverty

1
2 tracker in 2012, an initiative of Robinhood in
3 partnership with Columbia's University's population
4 research center data was collected across five
5 boroughs to quarterly surveys of 6,000 city residents
6 over the past two years. This allowed for the
7 collection of telling information from a
8 representative sample of New York City residents.
9 From this data we've learned roughly 16 percent of
10 New York City households experienced persistent
11 ongoing food hardship, race predicts higher food
12 insecurity regardless of income and other factors.
13 Food insecurity is significantly higher for non-white
14 populations. Food hardship is tied to poverty and to
15 other material hardships like trouble paying bills or
16 housing hardships. Having children and being a single
17 parent household are each separately significant
18 drivers of food insecurity and being a female head of
19 household increases the chances of food insecurity.
20 Having lower levels of education is tied to higher
21 rates of food hardship. In an effort to address the
22 devastating effects of food insecurity increasing
23 access to and retaining benefits have been a
24 cornerstone of HRA's mandate as part of the De Blasio
25 administration. Our goal over the previous four years

1
2 has been to be... make it easier for those New Yorkers
3 seeking benefits for which they're eligible to both
4 gain access to them and avoid losing them as a result
5 of bureaucratic red tape. SNAP or food stamps is the
6 nation's most important anti-hunger program, the
7 program assists more than 45 million low income
8 Americans 70 percent of whom are families with
9 children and more than one in four are households
10 with seniors or individuals with disability.
11 Currently nearly 1.64 million New Yorkers receive
12 SNAP including 569,000 children and approximately 424
13 seniors... 424,000 seniors. Of these nearly 1.64
14 million New Yorkers 398,749 of them also receive cash
15 assistance, an important safety net for children and
16 adults. Many SNAP recipients are employed but their
17 incomes are so low that they still qualified for
18 benefits and in addition to the direct support SNAP
19 provides families and individuals it is all... it also
20 injects approximately 5.4 billion dollars into the
21 local economy with most of these transactions
22 occurring at small businesses across the city but
23 hunger is not only about food between 2000 and 2014
24 the median New York City household income increased
25 by just 4.8 percent in real dollars while the median

1
2 rent increased by 18.3 percent in real dollars.
3 Meanwhile between 1994 and 2012 the city suffered a
4 net loss of about 150,000 rent stabilized units
5 combined these and other trends meant that by 2015
6 the city had only half the housing it needs for about
7 three million low income New Yorkers. As such New
8 Yorkers sacrificed a great deal to stay in their
9 homes and maintain their connections to their
10 communities. Some 360,000 New York City households
11 pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent and
12 utilities. Another 140,000 households pay more than
13 30 percent. That means... this means that a total of
14 half a million New Yorkers City... New York City
15 households are paying an unaffordable amount of their
16 income for housing. Additionally, according to a
17 report by the Association for Neighborhood and
18 Housing Development nearly 60 percent of New Yorkers
19 do not have enough savings to cover a minimum of
20 three months' worth of household expenses which in
21 stark terms means these households are a missed
22 paycheck away from the threat of housing instability
23 including eviction and homelessness. To address these
24 drivers of hunger HRA has expanded rental assistance
25 and emergency grants and in partnership with the

1
2 council has implemented the nation's first universal
3 access to counsel program, an unprecedented
4 investment in legal services to help New Yorkers stay
5 in their homes. Last month we announced residential
6 evictions by marshals had declined by 27 percent
7 since 2013 thanks to putting these preventative
8 programs in place. During this time there were also
9 two consecutive years of rent guideline board rent
10 freezes, all of this is part of a broader effort to
11 address income inequality and food insecurity because
12 when we are able to intervene to keep families and
13 individuals stably housed we're also addressing
14 hunger. We also know that higher wages, wage... jobs
15 and, and access to training and educational
16 opportunities, opportunities greatly improve food
17 security and can prevent homelessness by helping
18 families and individuals to achieve financial and
19 household stability. As we have reported, reported
20 previously in April 2017 HRA, HRA expanded and
21 improved its employment services by implementing new
22 programs that emphasized helping clients to proceed
23 on a career pathway and off public assistance
24 caseload. Evidence based research supports these
25 approaches, when clients are able to secure living

1
2 wage jobs and move up the career ladder families are
3 more likely to be able to secure the resources and
4 the means to avoid homelessness and permanently move
5 off the caseload and out of poverty and to address
6 the root causes of and close the gap created by
7 income inequality this administration has been laser
8 focused on additional anti-poverty initiatives. We
9 would be remiss not to highlight among them Pre-K for
10 all, increase affordable housing development, and
11 raising the minimum wage. This administration has
12 also expanded paid sick leave and resolve, resolve
13 expired municipal labor contracts. Each of these
14 investments is essential to lifting New Yorkers out
15 of poverty and thereby minimizing the risk of it's
16 collateral consequences; hunger, poor health, and
17 homelessness. HRA reforming the client experience.
18 Throughout the administration's first term HRA
19 reformed, streamlined, and eliminated bureaucratic
20 and linguistic barriers to enrollment and
21 recertification not only for SNAP but also for other
22 programs and vital services administered by the
23 agency. However, addressing access is only one part
24 of the equation, we are also addressing stigmas with
25 respect to asking for and receiving help whether real

1
2 or perceived. Through our outreach and advocacy HRA
3 in the... in partnership with CBO's across the city
4 continues to conduct outreach to SNAP, eligible
5 families and individuals with a focus on vulnerable
6 populations that are particularly susceptible to food
7 insecurity and to ensure that clients who are
8 receiving our benefits continue to get the support
9 they need we have implemented a number of reforms
10 aimed at enhancing the client experience. We've
11 implemented a series of reforms to provide reasonable
12 accommodations for clients with disabilities to
13 improve access to benefits. We have conducted agency
14 wide lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender questioning
15 and intersect cultural competency training in
16 addition to our long-standing customer service
17 training and HRA has trained, trained over 7,000
18 public facing staff on full day training entitled
19 Introduction to Disabilities and Overview of
20 Disability Awareness, Etiquette and Culture. And in
21 2017 HRA used telephonic interpretation services an
22 average of 1,000 times per day. In total HRA spent
23 3.6 million on language services in 2017. We have
24 also implemented through various waivers a range of
25 technology initiatives that have resulted in reducing

1
2 wait time, decreased visits to our centers and
3 immediate access to case information. I will now
4 spend a few minutes discussing the benefits of
5 reengineering technology improvements and other
6 efforts that impact our client's experience.
7 Continued improvement to enroll and, and stay on
8 SNAP. The goal of our reform is to remove real
9 barriers to access by creating a self-directed
10 service model that allows applicants and clients to
11 transact with the agency without the burden of having
12 to physically come into the... to an HRA location.
13 Launching access HRA; access HRA is an innovative
14 internet-based tool that allows New York City
15 residents to retrieve benefit information and or
16 apply and recertify for SNAP and other benefits. This
17 portal allows clients to create an access HRA account
18 to gain access to over 100 case specific points of
19 information in real time including application and
20 case statuses, upcoming appointments, account balance
21 and documents requested for eligibility
22 determination. Additionally, clients can make changes
23 to contact information, view eligibility notices,
24 notice electronically and opt into text messages and
25 email alerts. We continue to improve this tool to add

1
2 new functionality and now clients can submit their
3 SNAP periodic report online using access HRA. This
4 new feature allows clients to report changes in
5 household composition, income and other
6 circumstances. As of December 2017, there were more
7 than one million access HRA online accounts for SNAP
8 households and we receive over 24,000 online
9 applications and 2,500 periodic reports each month.
10 The change to online transaction has transformed the
11 way HRA interacts with our clients. Because clients
12 can do so many things from a PC outside of the center
13 and can easily call us for their interviews, SNAP in
14 the center foot traffic has declined 32 percent since
15 2014. Fortifying our partnership with community-based
16 organizations; the access HRA provider portal is an
17 online tool designed specifically for community-based
18 organizations to connect with the clients that they
19 serve. Through the access HRA provider portal
20 organizations can view real time benefit information
21 for their clients. Since the launch of the provider
22 portal tool in September of last year 185
23 organizations has... have signed up to utilize this
24 tool. Implementing on demand interviews allows
25 clients to conduct their SNAP eligibility interviews

1
2 on an on-demand basis at their convenience rather
3 than wait for a call during a four-hour window under
4 an old system or come into a center and wait for an
5 in, in person interview. The clearest success
6 indicator for on demand has been the channel shifted
7 interviews taking place in person at centers to
8 interviews being held over the phone at the client's
9 convenience. In October 2015 before the
10 implementation of the on-demand call center only 52
11 percent of the completed SNAP recertification
12 interviews were completed via telephone, we now have
13 76 percent of the interviews held by phone, a 24
14 percent increase. On demand interviews for SNAP
15 recertification have been fully in place for more
16 than a year, on demand interviews for new SNAP
17 applications began to be phased in during the fall of
18 2017. Roll out... rolled out the HRA mobile app; a
19 self-service mobile app to give clients the ability
20 to use their mobile device to better manage their
21 cases. Since the application's launch clients have
22 downloaded the mobile app 118,000 times and uploaded
23 over two million images. Providing on site self-
24 service; for clients who preferred to access our
25 services inside one of our centers we have a, a suite

1
2 of self service tools. These tools include self-
3 service checking kiosks, the PC bank to utilize
4 access HRA and a self-service scanning. There are
5 currently 15, 15 SNAP centers in 185 community-based
6 organizations across the city where clients can
7 quickly and easily scan and submit documents
8 electronically in addition 12 job centers have
9 scanners and 12 job centers have self service kiosks.
10 I would like to pause now to provide a demo on access
11 HRA and the provider portal.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For the record I'm
13 very excited to see this.

14 SABRINA SIMMONS: Good afternoon
15 everyone. So, as mentioned by Administrator Bonilla..
16 [cross-talk]

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm sorry, if you can
18 identify yourself for the record please.

19 SABRINA SIMMONS: My name is Sabrina
20 Simmons.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

22 SABRINA SIMMONS: Oh, okay, I'm sorry.
23 Thank you. Good afternoon everyone, my name is
24 Sabrina Simmons and I'm with the Office of Advocacy
25 and Outreach under the HRA Administration. As

1
2 mentioned by our Administrator I'll be providing a
3 demo on the access HRA website. So, the access HRA
4 website is a user-friendly website that allows
5 clients the ability to apply for SNAP benefits,
6 clients can recertify for SNAP and cash benefits as
7 well as, as of November of last year also submit
8 their SNAP periodic report, clients can check the
9 status of their current case status as well as see
10 the available information in the seven languages that
11 are available across our city. This is our access HRA
12 home screen and on this screen, you can see we have
13 our apply now button and that allows our clients to
14 apply for the benefits that they would like to apply
15 for. Under the view my cases section, clients are
16 able to see case details and I'll show that on
17 another screen however once clients... once clients
18 have created their account they're able to go into
19 the home screen and see draft applications that
20 they've previously submitted or need to submit to
21 HRA, they can see documents that they need to submit
22 to HRA in order to keep their cases open, clients are
23 also able to continue an application so if they start
24 an application at home and are having difficulty
25 completing that application they can go into either

1
2 an HRA center or any community based organization to
3 have that application continue under drafts. Under
4 this section as I previously showed in the view my
5 cases section this is just a case detail and what
6 that shows is just different areas on a... on a
7 client's case, clients are able to see EBT balances
8 as far as case details they can track payments that
9 are made on behalf of their EBT cards, clients can
10 see upcoming appointments, if they have a
11 recertification, if they are able to... under my
12 benefits they can see documents that they need to
13 submit, whether or not they've kept their interviews
14 and also if they have any kind of shelter payments on
15 behalf of the client they can see when the landlord
16 has received the check, cashed the check, all that
17 information is available. So, as mentioned by our
18 administrator we also have our access HRA provider
19 portal tool and it's also... it's a compliment to our
20 access HRA website on the provider portal providers
21 are able to see basically a case load of clients that
22 have granted access to that organization, they can
23 see upcoming appointments, recertifications that are
24 due as well as documents that they need to submit and
25 also be able to read notices on behalf of the clients

1
2 which we've found to be very... which we found to allow
3 providers to be proactive instead of reactive when
4 providing any kind of case assistance. That's all
5 that I have, thank you.

6 GRACE BONILLA: Thank you Sabrina. Okay,
7 each of these singular technological improvements
8 represents a reduction or elimination of, of the
9 significant barrier. Together they represent a
10 comprehensive change to the way in which clients
11 apply for and recertify for benefits ultimately
12 reducing the number of clients who do not receive
13 these vital SNAP benefits because it is too hard to
14 apply and recertify or the investment of their time
15 is too great. By mitigating the barriers to access we
16 can assure clients maintain their benefits and reduce
17 the trend of clients at recertification i.e. re-
18 application within a short period of time after case
19 closure which is the national problem. Now I would
20 like to discuss other initiatives and reforms that
21 are helping to reduce hunger and tackle poverty in
22 New York City. New York City SNAP participation rate;
23 economic improvement generally corelates to a SNAP
24 participation rate reduction not surprisingly as the
25 local economy continues to improve the SNAP

1
2 participation rate in New York City declines and the
3 decline from 77 percent in 2013 to 72 percent in
4 2016. In line with our prior testimony we believe HRA
5 SNAP participation rates should not be compared to
6 the state and national participation rates released
7 by USDA which this committee is familiar with. The
8 best metric for comparison of cross geographic areas
9 is a program access index calculated by dividing the
10 SNAP case load by the number of people below 125
11 percent of the federal poverty line. Based on the PAI
12 metrics SNAP coverage is higher in New York City than
13 it is in the... in the country and the rest of New York
14 State. Specifically, the New York City PAI is 84
15 percent for 2016 compared to 75 percent in the US and
16 82 percent in New York State overall. As I just
17 summarized under the administration we have taken
18 significant steps to ensure that all eligible New
19 Yorkers have unencumbered access to HRA benefits and
20 services and recent data shows positive trends that
21 we are pleased to report that application rejections
22 are down and successful case recertifications are up.
23 HRA supplemental nutritional assistance program
24 support services seek to educate the public about
25 SNAP benefits and eligibility, eligibility

1
2 guidelines. In addition, this unit prescreens clients
3 to determine eligibility and assist applicants with
4 the application process. In fiscal year '17 HRA SNAP
5 support services provided services at 1,841
6 individual events at 373 individual community site
7 locations and provided services at 175 sites on a
8 recurring basis. These are sites... these are sites
9 where services are consistently scheduled at various
10 frequencies throughout the year. HRA also partners
11 with 150 community... 54 community-based organizations
12 to provide SNAP outreach throughout New York City.
13 Among its many responsibilities this group is in
14 charge with ensuring that eligible, eligible
15 immigrants and or qualified members are enrolled in
16 the SNAP program and receive SNAP benefits. This
17 administration significantly expanded our outreach
18 services to immigrants as well as New Yorkers with
19 low literacy and limited English proficiency by
20 partnering with over 100 community-based human
21 services and government agency organizations with
22 proven track records of providing services to these
23 groups. Our most significant outreach effort is a
24 SNAP helps campaign that utilizes a special website
25 called Food Help dot NYC. Since the inception of the

1
2 SNAP helps campaign in April 2015, Food Help NYC has
3 seen approximately 230,500 lifetime users with
4 roughly 85 percent being new users. The SNAP helps
5 campaign encourages New Yorkers struggling to afford
6 food to seek help, target low income seniors and
7 immigrants. Additionally, there were approximately
8 71,000 click throughs from Food Help NYC to access
9 NYC. Emergency food assistance program; in FY '18
10 HRA's emergency food Assistance Program total funding
11 for food and administrative expenses is 18.7 million
12 dollars and includes a baseline of 11.5 million with
13 7.2 million dollars in funding added by the
14 administration at the time of adoption for FY '18.
15 The total EFAP budget in FY '18 is 19.5 million
16 dollars including the 800,000 dollars in, included by
17 the city... by the council. This funding is being used
18 to provide additional food and increase for warehouse
19 and transportation to build a capacity of the food
20 distribution system to distribute more food to New
21 Yorkers in need. Food distribution to those in need
22 remains our most important objective. In FY '17 EFAP
23 distributed more than 12.7 million pounds of food
24 include, including over 632,000 pounds of frozen
25 food. In the same period EFAP programs reported

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2 serving more than 14.8 million people, this is a
3 self-reported duplicate... duplicated statistic. The
4 actual purchase of these items is based on the
5 analysis of the needs and trends of the emergency
6 food network. EFAP provides over 40 food items and
7 purchases the most nutritious food items that also
8 meet the dietary and cooking needs of special
9 populations such as homeless New Yorkers, those with
10 HIV Aids and those that need kosher or halal diet.
11 Overall these items tend to cost more. In addition,
12 many of these food items are packaged differently
13 which increases the cost, more expensive and light...
14 and lighter package, packaged food can also result in
15 fewer pounds distributed. While working to ensure
16 that New Yorkers have a hot healthy meal we are also
17 working to reduce the prevalence of obesity, diabetes
18 and cardiovascular disease. Since 2008 EFAP has
19 required all food purchased with city funding to be
20 compliant with the New York City food standards
21 requirement and meet nutritional standards including
22 to but not limited to standards for sodium, sugar and
23 trans-fat. In addition, HRA requires that all 528
24 emergency food programs funded by EFAP provide SNAP
25 outreach services. These services include SNAP

1
2 eligibility screening, assistance with the SNAP
3 application process and guidance on making healthy
4 food choices. As in previous testimonies the
5 administration continues to recognize the work of the
6 New York City food assistance collaborative which
7 formed in 2015 with an investment from the Helmsley
8 Charitable Trust. In 2015 Ann the Director of Food
9 Policy in the Mayor's Office, HRA, New York State,
10 HPNAP and NYC emergency food distributors formed the
11 New York City Food Assistance Collaborative. The
12 collaborative came together to further the goal of
13 enhanced coordination among emergency food suppliers
14 in bringing new resources to support the important
15 work of over 900 community-based food providers. The
16 collaborative's work is focused on building capacity
17 and increasing the food supply in the city's most
18 underserved neighborhoods by establishing a common
19 metric, the supply gap, an information sharing system
20 to better match supply with need. The collaborative
21 was able to identify priority neighborhoods for
22 additional investment, increase food supply from
23 public to private resources, strengthen the pantry
24 capacity to distribute safe nutritious food including
25 starting new pantries where there were none,

1
2 upgrading storage especially for fresh food and
3 adding more distribution hours and using alternative
4 distribution methods, mobile vehicles for hard to
5 reach areas. The collaborative also leveraged a
6 technology to enhance pantry's ability to better
7 serve clients. This included enhanced feed NYC dot
8 org to share crucial information like detailed
9 information about food supply, building an app called
10 Plentiful, a simple mobile technology that enables
11 better customer service at pantries. Plentiful allows
12 pantry clients to reserve their place in line and
13 allows pantries to understand they're in... their
14 service statistics. Pantries have loved Plentiful and
15 we see rapid adoption, we have 100 registered
16 pantries and over 32,000 households served already.
17 The Food Assistance Collaborative set a goal to
18 distribute 10 million more pounds of food in it's
19 priority communities. The Helmsley Charitable Trust
20 investment of 9.8 million dollars funds
21 infrastructure and improvements and supports to
22 current and new pantries. Their investment also
23 includes a development of new shared data and mobile
24 app system. In order to supply food to meet this new
25 capacity this year's adopted budget included an

1
2 increase of 7.2 million dollars and 800,000 dollars
3 from the council which provided additional food and
4 other resources to pantries an additional support of
5 4.5 million dollars from City Harvest and United Way
6 have helped us achieve that goal. As you know the
7 preliminary budget was released while the federal
8 budget was still being negotiated and the current
9 federal, federal continuing resolutions runs until
10 March 23rd, 2018 and before the conclusion of the
11 state budget agreement that is due on April 1st.
12 Prior to the release of the executive budget we will
13 evaluate the impact of the federal and state budgets
14 as well as the result of the NYC food assistance
15 Collaborative initiative and I'm sure we will be
16 working collaboratively as we approach the executive
17 budget. ABAWD; in May 2014 New York City accepted the
18 state's ABAWD Waiver which allowed abled body adults
19 also known as abled body adults with, with, without
20 dependents who are not meeting the work requirements
21 to receive SNAP when they could not find at least 80
22 hours of work per month. Such waivers are permitted
23 for areas with high unemployment and as such New York
24 State has been covered due to the effect of the great
25 recession of 2008 however the improved economy since

1
2 then means some areas no longer qualify for a waiver.
3 At the 2017 hunger hearing we reported that the
4 borough of Manhattan below West 110th Street and
5 below East 96th Street was only part of the city's
6 impacted ABAWD requirement because the federal
7 government determined that it did not meet the
8 federal standard for a waiver. At last years... last
9 year we provided an update to the council at the
10 preliminary budget hearing that Queens with the
11 exception of community district 12 was no longer
12 eligible for the ABAWD Waiver due to improved
13 economic conditions. Given this change for New York
14 City HRA proactively reached out to all ABAWD's to
15 alert them of this important change and the impact on
16 their benefits. HRA sent multiple letters and
17 conducted robo calls instructing clients to report
18 that they met or were exempt from the work
19 requirement or how we could provide employment
20 services to maintain their SNAP benefits. As a
21 result, 1,312 came into HRA employment providers to
22 report changes to their status or to conduct... connect
23 with employment services to meet the ABAWD work
24 requirement. Six hundred and nine clients reported a
25 change in status and 508 met the work requirements to

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2 work in... work with employment providers or through
3 their own employment, 2,800 lost their benefit after
4 not meeting the federal ABAWD requirements. I will
5 now discuss efforts from our partners at the
6 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and their
7 work to contribute to the administration's efforts to
8 address food insecurity and hunger. Partnering with
9 DOHMH; in an effort to help clients close the gap in
10 their food budget DOHMH distributes Health Bucks
11 coupons which can be used to purchase fresh fruits
12 and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets. Health
13 Bucks represents a 40 percent increase for the
14 customer purchasing power. This benefits SNAP
15 recipients enabling them to buy high quality
16 nutritious produce and allowing them to support
17 regional and local farms which is an important link
18 as congress continues to try to decouple SNAP from
19 the farm bill. In 2017 more than 500,000 Health Bucks
20 were distributed at farmers markets through the SNAP
21 incentive and by community-based organizations as
22 part of the nutrition and health programing and by
23 elected officials and organizations that purchased
24 Health Bucks to hand out through their programs. New
25 York City DOHMH recently expanded this innovative

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2 program from five months season to a 12-month program
3 so that SNAP participants can stretch their
4 purchasing power year-round, the result is exciting,
5 and we are pleased to report customers spend what...
6 one million one, one hundred thousand 278 dollars in
7 SNAP benefits at Grow, Grow NYC farmers markets in
8 2018. We continue to report that EBT cards are now
9 accepted at more than 125 farmers markets across the
10 city. Outreach to older New Yorkers; since 2014 HRA
11 has employed benefits data trust proven model of
12 targeting outreach and application assistance using
13 enrollment data for the five boroughs and working
14 with HRA to compliment our own outreach. The New York
15 City benefit center implemented a phone and direct
16 mail campaign for seniors who are not receiving SNAP,
17 when seniors respond to this targeted outreach highly
18 trained staff from the New York benefit center guide
19 them through the process from beginning to end
20 offering application assistance, document support and
21 follow up services. In 2017 BDT began conducting
22 outreach to seniors for whom it submitted the
23 original application to assist with recertification
24 and leverage the automated interactive voice response
25 system process that many seniors are eligible for.

1
2 Last year the Robinhood Foundation and city enrolled...
3 rolled out a joint campaign to increase participation
4 in targeted benefit programs including SNAP, Women,
5 Infant and Children WIC and other earned income tax
6 credits all proven anti-poverty programs. This
7 campaign includes a mass media campaign which ran in
8 spring 2017 and community-based outreach and service
9 delivery for potentially eligible individuals. A
10 major component of these... this two-year campaign is
11 an expansion of the collaborative and targeted
12 outreach among HRA, BDT and Robinhood Foundation with
13 the launch of two new SNAP initiatives informed by
14 behavioral economics. The guardrail strategy sends
15 data driven robotexts and robodials reminding clients
16 to complete the necessary steps of the SNAP
17 application and recertification process and offers
18 full on assistance to those that need it most. The
19 Medicaid SNAP connection pilot launched in November
20 2017 works to connect Medicaid recipients of all ages
21 to SNAP. Preventing hunger in schools; we know that
22 it, it is difficult for students to thrive on empty
23 stomachs which is why this administration has been
24 focused on ensuring that every student is provided
25 with high quality and nutritious for breakfast lunch

1
2 and in many cases dinner. The following initiatives
3 are helping to ensure that most vulnerable New
4 Yorkers our... or... our children are able to have
5 nutritious meals regardless of the time of the day or
6 year. To accomplish this we launch a free school
7 lunch for all beginning this year, we launch
8 breakfast in the classroom in all elementary schools
9 in FY '18, made summer meals available for all, are
10 procuring local fresh and sustainable produce school
11 food, spent 26 million dollars on regional food in FY
12 '17, piloted meatless Monday in 15 Brooklyn public
13 schools, launched New York Thursdays to local... to
14 local... a locally sourced menu in partnership with New
15 York State's Agriculture and Markets and were awarded
16 a Farm to School Grant for our Garden to Café Program
17 which supports the use of edible school gardens in
18 the cafeteria and in classrooms. SNAP and emergency
19 food Assistance Program as well as other initiatives
20 detailed in this testimony will continue to provide
21 necessary nutrition assistance to New Yorkers in need
22 but more remains to be done to ensure that no New
23 Yorker wakes up or goes to sleep hungry as a result
24 of an inability to afford and purchase food. We are
25 proud of our work to expand access and remove

1
2 barriers to those essential benefits and services.
3 For clients it has resulted in shorter wait times
4 and... to complete their transactions and a better
5 client experience for our low touch population as
6 well as for our clients in need of a more in-depth
7 work intervention. Our workers are spending time
8 helping clients when needed rather than completing
9 the scanning task routine, routine clients man...
10 routing clients manually and data entry. We are also
11 working to protect against any proposed federal cuts
12 that threaten the SNAP program or the nations other
13 safety net programs as well as policies that may harm
14 our immigrant community. Not only would cuts to SNAP
15 be devastating to those New Yorkers who rely on this
16 crucial benefit it would also harm our local economy.
17 We look forward to continued collaboration as we work
18 with this council and advocates to protect the
19 enormous gains we have made in recent years under the
20 De Blasio Administration and to fight back against
21 any proposed budget cuts or policies and regulations
22 that harm low income New Yorkers. I welcome your
23 questions, thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
25 Administrator Bonilla and so I have questions but I'm

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2 going to turn it over to my colleagues actually to
3 ask questions first because I want to be
4 conscientious of their time. So, each Council Member
5 will have six minutes to ask questions and then if we
6 have to do a second round we can do a second round,
7 but I will start with Council Member Barry Grodenchik
8 for questions.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Good
10 afternoon, thank you Chair Levin and thank you for
11 your leadership on this issue. I am delighted to be
12 back on the General Welfare Committee again and
13 welcome all my new colleagues who have joined us.
14 It's good to see you Administrator, I, I kind of
15 think like Commissioner but I guess you're just an
16 Administrator, right so... [cross-talk]

17 GRACE BONILLA: Just the Administrator.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: So, good
19 afternoon and welcome and there's no question in my
20 mind the great work that has occurred under the first
21 four years of Mayor De Blasio's Administration but I
22 do want to cut right to the heart of the matter and
23 it was about two years ago in January one of my first
24 hearings when I was in first... informed of what I
25 described as the appalling number that we provide in

1
2 this city for emergency food and as you have heard
3 from the Speaker this afternoon and you will hear
4 from people who are here to testify on behalf of so
5 many different entities, I see the Food Bank from New
6 York City is here of course and Met Council and so
7 many others who are really the last line of defense
8 for hungry New Yorkers. So, it troubles me greatly
9 when I hear and when I read that in the preliminary
10 budget we are once again dancing with the
11 administration. Last year Chair Levin and I
12 circulated a, a, a letter that was signed by all 50
13 Council Members who are not the speaker so everybody
14 except for the former Speaker, Melissa Mark-Viverito
15 signed that letter, we cannot get all 50 members to
16 agree on what day of the week it is let alone sign
17 onto emergency food letter but that is how important
18 it is not only to me but I am certain... I, I don't
19 want to speak for everybody on this panel, but I
20 think I'm reasonably certain that everybody here
21 supports food pantry money and we as a council and
22 you heard the Speaker's testimony, I know he's very
23 busy and couldn't stay for the whole hearing, but I
24 would like you to take a message back to the
25 administration and I know... I love the people at OMB,

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2 I love the first Deputy Mayor, I worked with him in
3 Albany as well, but this really bothers me, it really
4 bothers me, and I don't know if you want to talk
5 about it but it just really cuts me to the quick so
6 to speak that we would be talking about this. I know
7 that the Chair and I have worked in the past two
8 budgets to increase funding from 11 million to 16
9 million and now over 18 million dollars and I know
10 that HRA spends... what's your budget?

11 GRACE BONILLA: Its significant... [cross-
12 talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: A lot
14 somewhere between a lot and wow... [cross-talk]

15 GRACE BONILLA: Nine billion.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: It's a lot of
17 money, it's, it's 15 percent of the city budget and I
18 could do the math very quickly but 19 million dollars
19 really in the grand scheme of things represents just
20 over two dollars per New Yorker, it won't even get
21 you on the subway but what it will do is fill... help
22 to feed 1.4 million New Yorkers so I would really
23 like you to take that message back to the
24 administration, the, the Mayor used to be Chair of
25 this committee, he understands it as well as anybody.

1
2 So, it, it, it bothers me greatly, but I would like
3 you to talk about that a little and your EFAP
4 efforts?

5 GRACE BONILLA: Sure, we appreciate the
6 concern that you have and the concern of this
7 council, we understand how important it is. I would
8 be remiss to say that it's... that it's not important
9 to us, it's very important to us but we also know
10 that there are a lot of unknowns, we don't know where
11 the federal budget is going to land, we don't know
12 where the state budget is going to land and a part of
13 our discussion and our collaboration and our
14 partnership is really to look at the whole and
15 figure... and figure this out so we will continue the
16 conversation, it's still early days, we have not
17 started the executive budget conversation and we
18 really look forward to working with this council to
19 figure out what the need is.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Okay, I'm
21 going to be nice because you're my constituent so I'm
22 going to be really careful here but I do want the
23 message to be heard and we have the press of course
24 is in this room, this council, this person is going
25 to do every single thing he can not only to make sure

1
2 that we get back to the number where we are in the FY
3 '18 budget but to get back to where... to even an
4 higher number because nobody and I think the Speaker
5 said this statement, nobody should be going hungry in
6 the city of New York. If you look around every single
7 corner of this city there is building going on, the
8 economy is booming here and yet in the shadow of
9 greatness we have hungry people, alright, you know
10 and that just can't be. I'm an immigrant to New York...
11 to Queens, I came from the Bronx, my family came from
12 the Bronx, so we immigrated from the Bronx but my, my
13 grandparents... my grandparents came here, the first
14 one came here at Christmas time in 1903, he sailed by
15 the Lady of the Harbor, we're still welcoming people
16 but nobody should go hungry in this city. So, I thank
17 you for your work, it's a pleasure to work with you
18 and your team and I look forward to the next four
19 years of working with you as we explore many, many
20 issues. Mr. Chair with that I yield my remaining 43
21 seconds.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
23 Council Member Grodenchik, I want to turn it over to
24 Council Member Adrienne Adams for questions.

25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you Mr.
3 Chair. Thank you so much for your testimony here
4 today, we really, really appreciate it, all of your
5 hard work and your efforts that you continue to do
6 for our great city for our constituents, I just want
7 to personally thank you for that. As a representative
8 from Southeast Queens I didn't take it very lightly
9 to find out that the... I believe it... your, your
10 acronym... your acronym is ABAWD Waiver, able bodied
11 adults without dependents, very noticeable that this
12 is a waiver that is applicable to those who are
13 unemployed or underemployed to receive SNAP when they
14 can't find at least 80 hours of work per month and
15 what's even more telling to me is that the, the
16 update that was made last year singled out Queens as
17 no longer being eligible for, for this... for this
18 waiver except for the area of community district 12
19 which happens to be the district that I'm responsible
20 for, one of them that I'm responsible for so it's
21 very, very disheartening to me to echo the sentiments
22 of my colleague in that in the year 2018 we are still
23 facing pretty much an epidemic of, of people that are
24 really, really in need of food and, and, and a hunger
25 epidemic here. With that said my district is very,

1
2 very diverse, we have very specific issues and I'm,
3 I'm very interested to know that we've heard from
4 providers that work with immigrant communities that
5 the fear of potential repercussions have had an
6 impact on undocumented families whose children
7 qualify for SNAP, is HRA taking any initiative to
8 work with or reassure clients that their children can
9 avail their SNAP benefits without a run in with ICE.

10 GRACE BONILLA: Thank you Councilwoman
11 for that question, like I said in my testimony our
12 outreach efforts are vast, we try to reach every
13 community where we think there may be any stigma, any
14 fear to come in and apply, it is the reason we work
15 with community based organizations because we
16 understand very clearly that the, the first line of
17 defense to many communities that may not want to come
18 in to a government office to apply for benefits,
19 those outreach... the outreach that we perform is
20 diverse for that reason.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you, just to
22 follow up, do we know what the current trend is right
23 now in Southeast Queens as far as new SNAP
24 applications, are we seeing an increase or a decrease
25 specifically in Southeast Queens?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: I'm happy to get back to
3 you with that specific.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thanks very...
5 [cross-talk]

6 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: ...much, thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
9 Council Member Adams, Council Member Diana Avala.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: Thank you Mr.
11 Chair. Thank you for your testimony today Grace. I
12 have a... I have a couple of questions because I... as a
13 former director of Constituent Services this is an
14 issue that is really important to me, as a former
15 child whose mother raised her on the, the SNAP
16 benefits, this is a program that's also really
17 important to me for personal reasons, it allowed my
18 mother the peace of mind in knowing that her kids
19 went to bed at night with a full belly but I have a,
20 a... some concerns so in my district we have residents
21 that are severely rent burdened and I wonder in your...
22 in the, the eligibility requirements are income
23 based, is rent calculated as part of that process?

24 GRACE BONILLA: I'll have our Chief
25 Program Officer answer that question.

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SABRINA SIMMONS: Hi, good afternoon.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: Good afternoon.

SABRINA SIMMONS: The shelter expense is considered when we're calculating the benefits for SNAP but for elderly and disabled individuals that threshold is much higher, there's no cap on the deduction that we allow. For regular earned income households there's a cap on the deduction so even if your rent is 1,000 dollars per month you won't get that full deduction as a consideration towards how much you will receive in SNAP benefits.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: Why is that?

SABRINA SIMMONS: These are the federal rules so... we administer the program but through the, the federal and the state government we have certain calculations that are authorized through a state computer system and our workers have to abide by the rules that are applied from the state of New York.

COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: And I kid you not just this afternoon I went by my district office prior to coming here and I was checking my mail and I received a letter from a mother who was asking me for assistance for her son who's a full time student who has a full scholarship and does not qualify for SNAP

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2 benefits because of that, she's a single mother on
3 SSI who cannot afford to supplement her son's income
4 monthly and she's very concerned that her son is
5 going hungry because he's being penalized for having
6 received a full scholarship to go to school and so my
7 question is what efforts is HRA, you know taking to
8 ensure that college students are not being penalized
9 in this way?

10 SABRINA SIMMONS: The student eligibility
11 rules are very similar to the rules that we have for
12 the able-bodied adults without dependents. If you are
13 a full-time student in order to receive food stamps
14 and these are the federal rules, these are not rules
15 that New York City gets to make determinations on but
16 if you are a student then you have to be in a work
17 study program, a federally funded work study program
18 or working at least 80 hours per month or... in order
19 to receive food stamp benefits. So, most... many of our
20 full-time students who are not working or
21 participating in a work program are not unfortunately
22 eligible for SNAP.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: Yeah, that's
24 unfortunate because I mean I haven't been in college
25 in a really long time but when I was there I know

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2 that the, the work study program was a very
3 competitive program and that often times if you
4 didn't get there quick enough you missed an
5 opportunity to benefit from it and my frustration
6 that... you know the frustration that you're seeing on
7 my face is not directed at HRA but rather at, you
8 know the continued barriers that the federal
9 government places on individuals that are most in
10 need and so I, I... it's obvious that we need... there's
11 a lot more that we need to do.

12 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, Councilwoman you
13 hit the nail on the head. I, I think that from our
14 perspective there is more that we wish we could do
15 and it... this is a space where there could be
16 collaboration with the council to make sure that we
17 are decreasing barriers to people that need this
18 benefit the most.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AVALA: I appreciate it,
20 thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council
22 Member Avala and I, I too share your frustration, I,
23 I... this is one of the things that raises my blood
24 pressure on a... on a very frequent basis with
25 constituents who get minimum benefits but are still

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well below the, the, the poverty line and you know we need to... and do everything that we can to truly minimize those barriers. I'm, I'm, I'm hopeful that ACCESS NYC will, will help to streamline some of this, will help to... if there are miscommunications in terms of reporting or misreported numbers that, that... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...people will then be able to know or if there's missing documentation, other barriers to people getting their benefits so that... quite frankly that it doesn't take Council Member Avala or Council Member Levin to call Administrator Bonilla on Friday afternoon at 4:35 and, and say what's going on with these benefits... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Right. Right, well I'm always... I serve at the pleasure so you... you're always... you can call me at any time but the ACCESS HRA tool is exactly that, it is an opportunity to give clients a window into their benefit so that they know exactly what documents we have, exactly when their next appointment is and I do want to thank some of the members of this committee because I know that

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you've been working very hard with our external affairs team to ensure that those tools are available in your offices and with the community.. [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...based organizations that you work with. So, it's... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's very important... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...a work in progress for sure... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: As you know Council Members get very frustrated on behalf of their constituents.

GRACE BONILLA: I'm personally aware, yes sir.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I'll turn it over to Council Member Brad Lander.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you Mr. Chair and it's... it is very good to be back on this committee with you and I just do want to reflect having taken four years off how different the conversation were having from my first term on this committee when you were not it's chair but you were

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2 on here with me and you know at that point we were
3 fighting against SNAP fingerprinting... [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes... [cross-talk]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Right, we were...
6 [cross-talk]

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The ABAWD Waiver...
8 [cross-talk]

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...dealing... huh?

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The ABAWD Waiver.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: The waiver, you
12 know we were dealing with the challenge that people
13 were being consistently suspended in very high
14 numbers for missed appointments which I know still on
15 occasion happens but that the move to so many online
16 appointments has helped a lot, you know and it felt
17 at that time that there was essentially an effort to
18 keep people from getting the benefits that they were
19 eligible for rather than build tools to expand the
20 ones that people are eligible for so... not that that's
21 all... [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Here, here... [cross-
23 talk]

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...entirely due to
25 your chairing this committee but... both to you and to

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2 the administration for the work that has gone in over
3 the last four years to make my coming back onto this
4 committee quite different than it was. And because
5 others of course shout out their local outstanding
6 emergency food providers I have to just give a big
7 shout out to Alexander Rapaport in Masbia for the
8 extraordinary work that they do in my district and
9 all around the city. Having said that I do... I just
10 need to add my voice on EFAP, you guys have done such
11 extraordinary work, you got this incredible record of
12 things that you've done, having you guys come here
13 and us have to say come on with EFAP like... it doesn't
14 serve anybody well, get it in the executive budget we
15 won't have to do it at the executive budget hearing,
16 this stuff should be baselined, it just... we... what,
17 what we want is right the... what... the fairest city in
18 the country, the fairest city in the country
19 baselines it's emergency food so let's just get it
20 done and then we can just focus on all the... all the
21 good work that you guys are doing and, and what it's
22 next steps are. One other EFAP question I want to ask
23 about, I guess is really from the view of making
24 things even a little easier still for the providers,
25 I know that one thing they're looking for is to have

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2 that be more order based rather than kind of random
3 distribution, it's my understanding that with federal
4 and state food that they can use the web to place
5 their orders from Food Bank that we're trying to get
6 there on EFAP but we're not quite there yet so
7 obviously you've done good work with Plentiful and
8 all this other technology, can you tell us... give me
9 an update on kind of how that... where that pilot is
10 and, and how soon it will be possible for folks to do
11 order, orders for their EFAP food?

12 GRACE BONILLA: So, if I'm understanding
13 your questions correctly Council Member we did have a
14 pilot, pilot through the city council that looked at
15 how we can order food in a different way, I believe
16 that took place for a number of years, when that
17 pilot ended and the... and the money was baselined we
18 were subject to the procurement of rules that any
19 other city agency is subject to and we do use DCAS to
20 purchase food, that said my understanding from the
21 team is that we are looking at... we're talk... we're
22 speaking to different pantries and like anyone else
23 in New York City they each want different things so
24 for those that would prefer an online platform we are
25 speaking to them to see what that would look like,

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2 others prefer to buy... purchase the food the way
3 they're purchasing it now. So, we are doing a deep
4 dive to see where we can get to a more uniform
5 process.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, well if you
7 could just keep giving... you know give me some updates
8 on that I know at least... again I mean most of what I
9 know here comes either from CHIPS or from Masbia but
10 I know Masbia's able for their city and state
11 provided food through the food bank to do online
12 ordering and that makes it a lot easier for them and
13 if they could do that for EFAP it would make it
14 easier for them to manage their food and connect that
15 to the meals so I hope that's something we'll be able
16 to either resume doing it, if we need to find some
17 procurement work around please talk to us and we'll
18 see if there's ways that we could work together but,
19 but... to do that... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: And we're, we're happy to
21 reach out to the provider as well and see what the
22 barriers are.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER Okay... [cross-talk]

24 GRACE BONILLA: So, I thank you... [cross-
25 talk]

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you...

[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...for letting us...

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And if you could just talk a little about what you're doing in the, the context on federal immigration to make sure that immigrant New Yorkers know they can access emergency food without fear, obviously we... you know in every aspect of government service right now we want to make people know... make sure people know they're welcome, they can keep coming, we don't turn their information over, we don't let ICE officers walk into our city facilities, we want to make sure... I think people know that, I guess I don't know whether you've had a dialogue with the emergency food providers about what they're supposed to do if ICE shows up at the door, what are we doing to protect immigrant New Yorkers and make sure they know that emergency food access is there... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: So... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...for them...

[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...like I, I've said in my testimony we are making sure that our outreach plan

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2 is diverse so that we are reaching out to every
3 possible community that feel, feels that they cannot
4 come in for whatever reason, immigration or other
5 reason, the reason that the ACCESS HRA platform is so
6 important is because communities that may fear coming
7 in don't have to actually come in, they can actually
8 apply and call us for on... their on demand interviews,
9 submit documents so all of the reasons that you're
10 stated that may cause people not to come in there's
11 actually another way to get this done and we are...

12 [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But... [cross-talk]

14 GRACE BONILLA: ...getting the word out
15 there that that is a platform that people should use.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, but I don't
17 know if that's the best... I mean I guess I'm not sure
18 for folks who fear... you know who are undocumented and
19 who are fearing to make themselves more visible puts
20 them at risk that that... I mean I'm all for ACCESS...

21 [cross-talk]

22 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...HRA and I think
24 it solves a lot of problems but I'm not sure it's the
25 best way to get undocumented folks access to

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2 emergency food at a time when they rightly fear the
3 federal government is... has an increased appetite for
4 deportation, I mean the, the numbers are way up we
5 heard from the NYPD last week so...

6 GRACE BONILLA: We are working with our
7 providers to make sure that we are having a dialogue
8 around immigration and status.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, I guess if
10 I'd, I'd love to know a little more what... you know
11 and if you want to follow... you know provide it by
12 follow... [cross-talk]

13 GRACE BONILLA: We can follow up... [cross-
14 talk]

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ...up... well I know
16 it sounds... you know I, I don't... I don't need it at
17 this minute, it's not a question of the extra minute,
18 I, I just... you know this is something I feel like
19 everybody has to be paying attention to, that's your
20 providers as well as you, this is a scary time and we
21 don't want to make people more scared but we want to
22 make sure people have the information they need and
23 that we're just being thoughtful in each place we
24 didn't think ICE would start coming into the courts
25 but they are. I don't want to like scare people, I

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2 don't think they're starting to come into our
3 emergency food providers at the same time I want to
4 make sure our systems are really thoughtful to make
5 sure we're communicating with people in a real
6 productive way and we just... you know put folks at
7 ease and make sure nobody's going hungry out of fear
8 of ICE.

9 GRACE BONILLA: Okay.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you, thank
11 you Mr. Chair.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council
13 Member Lander, Council Member Chaim Deutsch.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Thank you Chair.
15 First of all, I don't want to be put in the same
16 position as my colleagues, so I want... if you... the
17 panel could affirm that you don't live in my district
18 you're not constituents please and... that was... that
19 was a joke, but it definitely is... it definitely is
20 today a beautiful Wednesday, is it Wednesday?
21 Tuesday, okay I have to disagree with... okay. So,
22 during your testimony we also... you mentioned that,
23 you know we don't know what kind of federal and state
24 funding we will have but first of all when it comes
25 to hunger I don't think we should rely... that... only on

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2 federal and state that if we don't get the resources
3 we need from the federal and state government we need
4 to continue making sure that here in the city level
5 that whatever needs to get done to funding and
6 resources that go for those that, that go hungry and
7 those less fortunate should continue and we should
8 not even go back and, and to even mention that
9 because we need to make sure that as our jobs and as,
10 you know we are the ones that they look for, for the
11 resources that they need to survive each and every
12 day but I was looking at the beautiful presentation
13 on your online portal and my question is, is that we
14 have 60,000 plus homeless people in this city..

15 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh..

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: ...and you have a
17 beautiful, beautiful portal but when it comes to
18 60,000 people who don't have access to computers, you
19 know when you have 60,000 people who don't have a
20 return address, when you have 60,000 people that
21 don't have access to a phone and when you have 60,000
22 people that are living out there in the streets so
23 when the.. one of the first things you do when it
24 comes to a person that is homeless is to give them
25 the kickstart and that kickstart is to.. for them to

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2 apply to SNAP so this way they could survive with
3 those resources but without a mailing address this...
4 it's impossible for them to receive any type of
5 benefits so what is HRA doing.. HRA doing in order to
6 reach out to those 60,000 people to make sure.. making
7 sure that they have access to SNAP?

8 GRACE BONILLA: So, thank you for your
9 question, I think that one of the huge benefits of
10 the integration of HRA and DHS is that we are working
11 better together to figure out how we get this to
12 providers that are working with our homeless
13 community. So, you should know that we have a, a huge
14 number of people in the DHS system that have access
15 to our benefits and as far as the provider portal
16 that we also featured in the demo it is a, a critical
17 touch points especially for providers that are
18 working with homeless families because now they have
19 a partner that is helping them manage their account.
20 So, what we do know about homeless families is that
21 they, they do have access to mobile phones, we also
22 know that providers have access to actual phones
23 that.. and they've been helping them through, through
24 this process. So, part of our.. or... of our external
25 affairs plan is really to work with DHS homeless

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2 providers so that they have access to these tools
3 because we recognize in fact that our DHS New Yorkers
4 are... folks that are in the DHS system are the ones
5 that could use it the most. So, we are very much have
6 them top of mind when we're thinking about these
7 tools.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, how do they
9 receive benefits?

10 GRACE BONILLA: So, a homeless... someone
11 who is homeless provide... applies for benefits like
12 anybody else, we actually have a, a team that goes
13 out as part of their move out portfolio, they go out
14 and help people apply for benefits, many of our
15 homeless clients have p.o. boxes that they use
16 providers assist them with... [cross-talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And how many of
18 the 60,000 plus people have an address where they can
19 receive the benefits, do you have a number on that?

20 GRACE BONILLA: I will have to get back
21 to you but... we don't... one second... [cross-talk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Could you take a
23 guess or an estimate, would it be ten out of 60,000?
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SABRINA SIMMONS: You don't actually have to have a residential address in order to receive food stamps...

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: Yeah, but how do you... [cross-talk]

SABRINA SIMMONS: Food stamps... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: ...receive... but you need... still need to receive some type of documentation that you'll be getting the benefits.

SABRINA SIMMONS: So, through ACCESS HRA we think that it's actually better for homeless individuals because they can track what's happening with their cases, they can track their notices from HRA, they can see their appointments... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: And how can they track... [cross-talk]

SABRINA SIMMONS: ...so... through the system. So, if you don't... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, if someone's... [cross-talk]

SABRINA SIMMONS: ...have... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: ...living in the street how can they track it through the system?

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SABRINA SIMMONS: They can go to a library to... we go to community-based organizations, some of our shelters I believe also have computer systems available as... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, if you have someone sleeping in the street for let's say two weeks and hasn't taken a shower and you think the library is going to be easy access for them to come inside to use the computer?

GRACE BONILLA: So, so Council Member one of the things that I do want to recognize is that the majority of our homeless population is not... is not living on the street, right, we do know thanks to the team here we have 43,500 people out of the 60,000 that you mentioned that are currently receiving SNAP benefits, so we know that it's accessible to them. We also know that the homeless population is diverse, we have families, we have singles, we have folks with mental illness and each of them require a different type of outreach, but I can tell you that with 43,000 people receiving SNAP benefits that... who are homeless currently we are reaching the lion share of families, children and singles that need this benefit.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, what happens
3 to the other 17,000?

4 GRACE BONILLA: We still have in office
5 services, they can come into our offices to receive
6 services. The beauty of having the tool that
7 decreases the foot traffic is that we can really zero
8 in on the population that actually needs it so if we
9 were to have someone that in your... in your
10 description was street homeless we always still have
11 a presence in, in the community, we also have a
12 presence through our CBO's.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER DEUTSCH: So, just for the
14 record I just want to state that from the 17,000 if
15 you service 43,500 out of the 60,000 so the rest of
16 the people, 17,000 approximately that are still out
17 on the street they can reach out to an agency or come
18 into a library but we don't have a number and
19 obviously you don't have a number of, of... from those
20 17,000, I believe it's a lot more than 17,000 that's
21 beside the point but from those 17,000 so we don't
22 know if those people have any type of SNAP benefits
23 or services so I just want to mention for the record
24 that there are thousands of people out there living
25 in the streets that we have no clue if they receive

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2 SNAP and the... they're forced to beg on the streets
3 and to, to go around... and those are the people you
4 might see standing on the highway, standing on the
5 street corners who don't receive these benefits,
6 thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council
8 Member Deutsch, Council Member Mark Gjonaj.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you
10 Chairman, certainly there's quite a bit of passion
11 under, understandably why. I do want to echo, most of
12 the questions have been asked by my colleagues but I
13 do want to echo some of their comments when it comes
14 to baselining this into the budget. I think we can
15 take this political football and put it to rest and
16 do what's right by all New Yorkers especially when it
17 comes to something so important as making sure
18 everyone has an opportunity to participate in and
19 take advantage of these programs, thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council
21 Member Gjonaj. Okay, so I'm going to start on, on, on
22 my questions, so I just want to make it clear for the
23 record what the preliminary budget does with regard
24 to EFAP and this... I got to admit I have some... I find
25 it challenging sometimes to follow the numbers so I'm

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2 going to break it down. For the last, say two fiscal
3 years and then we'll talk about prelim '19, okay, if
4 that's alright? Fiscal '18, we have a total of
5 20,636,000 dollars spent on EFAP, that broken down is
6 8.573 million dollars in baseline city funding, that
7 is 2.888 million dollars in federal funding, that is
8 4.9 million dollars in one-year funding by the
9 administration and that is 3.68 million dollars in
10 council funding that's FY '17 and that total is
11 20,636,000. That's a significant jump from the FY '16
12 so I just want to put that on the record. So, '16 the
13 total was 15,468,000 so that was... that was over a
14 five million dollar jump and that was in one time...
15 that... the, the, the line share of that was in one-
16 time administration funding as well as, as one-year
17 council funding, we can only do one-year council
18 funding we can't baseline. So, FY '18 it increased by
19 a little over two million dollars again, this is the
20 same 8.573 million baselined funding, the same 2.888
21 million in federal funding, the one time non
22 baselined Admin funding, 7.2 million so that was up
23 from 4.9 to 7.2 from Fiscal '17 to '18 and then the
24 council increased... or no, the council... sorry, had a
25 small decrease to 3.275 from their previous year of

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2 3.68, that total then is 22,936,000 and that's a
3 total FY '18. So, prelim FY '19 what is it as
4 proposed in the... in the prelim?

5 GRACE BONILLA: As I stated in my
6 testimony Council Member it is not proposed in the
7 prelim, it will be part... we will discuss this as part
8 of the executive budget process.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But the 8.573 that's
10 baselined, that's in the prelim?

11 GRACE BONILLA: That is in the prelim.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right and then the
13 federal funding is in the prelim, so what's not in
14 the prelim is the 7.2 plus the council funding. So,
15 obviously that's very disappointing so I'm going to
16 quote a very wise sage person here, the most striking
17 thing to me is in terms of, of EFAP, now we've heard
18 I think some very powerful statistics from advocates
19 and from providers about the continued need, in fact
20 the increased need for food assistance. I think we
21 all agree that there is a troubling economic
22 situation brewing in our city, we could certainly
23 see... we're certainly seeing the impact in our city
24 budget. Now... so I can't believe that the situation of
25 hunger in the city is going to naturally get better

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2 in the coming year, unfortunately I fear it's going
3 to get worse. The preliminary budget... sorry, I'm
4 skipping ahead, the preliminary budget allows for 9.8
5 million dollars, 9.885 million dollars for emergency
6 food programs and that is a very noticeable reduction
7 from what was actually spent in the last fiscal year
8 just over 13 million... excuse me, 13 million I believe
9 and even more striking is the comparison to 2006
10 where 17 million was spent so, we see we have gone
11 now... we're not quite half of where we were in 2006 in
12 terms of spending on emergency food where at the same
13 time the problem is certainly not getting better and
14 I fear it's getting substantially worse. Skipping
15 ahead, the council has always been willing to be a
16 part of the solution here, I think you know it's been
17 a priority for us, we are not the executive branch
18 and my concern here is that there's a substantial
19 reduction over the last few years in emergency food
20 funding where again the problem is getting worse.
21 Skipping ahead and as, as you said in November the
22 federal situation is very troubling, the federal
23 commitment to these programs has reduced in the last
24 few years, I'm not saying there's... it isn't a fiscal
25 problem to be addressed I just don't understand why

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2 hunger issues are not such a priority, there's a lot
3 of valid needs but I can't think of any more
4 fundamental as hunger as an issue, we have to address
5 so I'm just not clear unless you're telling me that
6 there's some new additional source of federal source
7 of funding that's filling this gap it seems to me
8 that, that this is something that needs to be
9 adjusted in the executive budget. That is former
10 Chairman of this committee, Bill De Blasio in March
11 2008. So... you can applaud our, our Mayor for his... for
12 his prescience. So, I recommend we, we heed the
13 advice of then Council Member Bill De Blasio and
14 rectify this in the executive budget, the numbers
15 that we were talking about sadly are not all that
16 different than they were back then, and we've seen
17 obviously the cost of housing as you noted in your
18 testimony go up so significantly since, since then
19 ten years ago. We need... we need to baseline this
20 funding in the executive budget, you know I would
21 like Council Member De Blasio to be very proud of
22 Mayor De Blasio in such an action.

23 GRACE BONILLA: The preliminary budget is
24 at the beginning of a conversation as you know, and
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we will continue that conversation, we understand the importance of this.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you, I'd just like to thank Rafia Qaseem who is our legal fellow for finding that, that testimony... or finding... going back into the, you know the old files. So, okay. So, questions around EFAP, how, how does HRA look at the EFAP... you mentioned before about the purchase of EFAP food is based on analysis of the needs and trends of the EFAP network, what analysis... what is this analysis and how is that analysis conducted and what metrics are being used?

GRACE BONILLA: Sure. I'd like to turn it over to Marie Philip, our Deputy Commissioner.

MARIE PHILIP: Good afternoon. Good afternoon. So, EFAP basically provides over 40 different food items and as was stated it's done through an analysis which is done through the food network which is talking with our providers, talking with our community-based organizations who are a part of the network to determine the needs for the particular communities. In terms of actual metrics, we can probably get that to you, we don't have that specifically here but it's through communicating with

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2 our food networks and determining the particular
3 needs for those communities.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, for the overall
5 picture another words what goes into the preliminary
6 budget, the baseline amount for, for, for EFAP what
7 metric is used to determine that amount year after
8 year, obviously it hasn't... it hasn't changed year
9 after year so is there... is there a, a consideration
10 for on the ground data in terms of where the needs
11 are in terms of the meal gap, I mean are, are, are
12 you... I mean that's... so that's a big picture question?

13 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Citywide?

15 GRACE BONILLA: It's certainly part of
16 the conversation, we, we can get back to you to see
17 what it... what the exact metrics are.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, in terms of how
19 the actual distribution of EFAP is determined what
20 metrics are used for that, another word is you... are
21 you coordinating meal gap data to EFAP distribution
22 outcomes?

23 MARIE PHILIP: The information that we
24 use is combined with food collaborative information
25 as well as EFAP distribution information in terms of

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2 what we actually do. So, Barbara can talk about the
3 supply gap a little bit more, but we are looking also
4 again at our providers, our EFAP membership and how
5 they are able to distribute food as well. So, a lot
6 of our programs though we, we have a range of
7 programs those that can do at a high level of
8 distribution and those that are not able to, it's
9 also based on capacity issues, the ability to store
10 the food and the ability of those programs to
11 distribute the food, we have small programs and we
12 have larger programs that actually are more organized
13 and structured in terms of having staff to distribute
14 food and we have small storefront providers also who
15 use volunteers and so may be quite limited in terms
16 of their ability to distribute at a higher level and
17 to store the food as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, can I ask then a
19 hypothetical question because you spoke about
20 distribution, capacity, you know ability to supply
21 the food or pass along the food of these particular
22 providers, what if you were to have in a community
23 district subdistrict a, a high meal gap as evidence
24 by the analytics that you were to do or that the food
25 bank were to do to identify a meal gap and then in

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2 that same community subdistrict you have a provider
3 that does not have that type of capacity so aside
4 from... aside from being able to build up their
5 capacity which I, I think one thing that we would
6 look to do and I know that Barbara's been working on
7 that and, and aside from just advancing their
8 capacity how then... are you... is, is more food going to
9 meet the need, I mean are, are you... are you
10 contemplating need in that equation as well not just
11 capacity and you know distribution ability?

12 BARBARA TURK: So, for the record my name
13 is Barbara Turk, I'm the Director of Food Policy in
14 the Mayor's Office. And Council Member what you're
15 describing is very similar to the approach that the
16 food assistance collaborative is now taking, you know
17 when you sit around and talk about... just to give you
18 a little bit of an overview as... you know when you sit
19 around and talk about a... the number of people who are
20 food insecure being 1.25 million and you think about
21 the meal gap being as high as it is and you think
22 about what goes into those metrics and how they're
23 built they really are not grandular enough or they're
24 not as grandular as we would like them to be, they
25 are useful but they're not as grandular as we would

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2 like them to be. In order to actually make delivery,
3 you know planning, do planning for where we need more
4 capacity and so what the food assistance
5 collaborative did is it's first goal together was
6 just that, figure out what a common denominator would
7 be that we could actually see increase or decrease
8 and make some judgements about what neighborhoods
9 were undersupplied because you also know I think
10 everybody here knows that the food, food supply is...
11 you know it's... these are volunteer organizations for
12 the most part, there's some very large ones that
13 distribute a large share of the food in New York but
14 there are a lot of... you know there are hundreds of
15 smaller ones and they change, they come, they go and
16 as we look at what's happening with supply in New
17 York City we have neighborhoods that do pretty well,
18 when we look at the, the, the meal gap and we
19 subtract the amount of food that's going in there in
20 a snapshot that we've created we can say oh the, the,
21 the meal gap... you know the food supply gap is not as
22 great and then there are neighborhoods across the
23 city where it is actually profoundly large and the,
24 the group decided that what they would do is set a
25 target and they would say okay, what's the average

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2 meal gap across the city and which neighborhoods are
3 above that or the average supply gap, what
4 neighborhoods are above that supply gap and what
5 neighborhoods are below it and we have a long list,
6 we haven't finished it, you know but we were in 12th,
7 we want to do more. The funding for EFAP this, this
8 is the first time... I, I would just offer you a little
9 history here which is we can go back and take a look
10 at what metrics were used to build the... that number
11 but I don't know that they exist because this has
12 been a discretionary program since its inception in
13 the early 1980's and at this... so we've been guessing,
14 right, so now we actually have something to hang a...
15 hang our hats on and even still I would go out on a
16 limb in this hearing and say that when we look at
17 what it would take to fully close those gaps it's,
18 it's, it's much, much larger than what we will able...
19 you know that... then what we've been supplying, yes
20 but what... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And... [cross-talk]

22 BARBARA TURK: ...it's very significantly
23 larger and then raises questions about whether we
24 have the distribution capacity to do that overnight,
25 but we've added 90... we've either built out the

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capacity of or added an additional 90 pantries in the course of this effort and we will continue on that road.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: We have a good roadmap here, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The, the, the neighborhoods that you've identified that have a greater supply gap than other neighborhoods that may be facing similar challenges in terms of the number of people living in poverty is, is... some neighborhoods will have less of a supply gap because of existing capacity so there just happens to be a, a pantry that is well established and has... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...you know greater access to refrigeration and... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: And there's a long history, you know in neighborhoods like Southeast Queens and specifically in Jamaica, in Central Brooklyn, in Bed Stuy... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...there are a lot of churches in particular and organizations, faith-based

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2 organizations that have done this, been doing this
3 for a very long time.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But there are some
5 neighborhoods... [cross-talk]

6 BARBARA TURK: But that may or may not
7 track what's going... what's, what's... where people are
8 that need that kind of support.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you able to
10 identify or share with us neighborhoods that do have...
11 some of the neighborhoods that have a higher supply...
12 [cross-talk]

13 BARBARA TURK: Well I... [cross-talk]

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...gap... [cross-talk]

15 BARBARA TURK: ...can tell you the 12
16 neighborhoods that we are in now.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And those are the
18 ones identified as having high supply gaps in this
19 area... [cross-talk]

20 BARBARA TURK: Yes, correct... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

22 BARBARA TURK: ...and I can give you that
23 list, be happy... [cross-talk]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have them...
25 [cross-talk]

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BARBARA TURK: ...to do it... I... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...off the top of your head?

BARBARA TURK: Off the top of my head I can name three or four of them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure, if you have... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Because we've been in... we've been in, in Corona is one, Jackson Heights is one in Queens, East Harlem and Washington Heights...

[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...are a couple in Manhattan and the Bronx, there's neighborhoods in the Bronx, there's neighborhoods in Brooklyn... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: And then we have three... this is exciting because this is what is exciting to us, we have two... it is actually really wonderful, we have two mobile pantries now in Staten Island because in an area that's less dense it makes sense to have a mobile operation and so we now have week, weekly deliveries that are being coordinated with two organizations in Staten Island.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How are... how is that being coordinated with recipients to the food, how are they... how are they ensuring that they're standing in the right place at the right time?

BARBARA TURK: There's a truck.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right...

BARBARA TURK: There's a truck and it's... you know and we just... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They call the truck driver and say... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: No, no, no, there's, there's, there's specific stops that people go to... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh...

BARBARA TURK: And this is another way that we can use the Plentiful app which is we can broadcast those, those stops to people... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...we can text them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how many people already got... have the Plentiful... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: The word... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...app... [cross-talk]

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BARBARA TURK: ...of mouth has been very impressive. As of today, there are 153 pantries that are actually using Plentiful and there are 118,627 clients who are using it and you can track our progress daily at www dot plentiful app dot org.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright and that's available on android?

BARBARA TURK: Available on android and SMS.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so, so not on... not on I... not on I... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Not on I-phone... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...apple... not on apple... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Not on the apple but you know you can also use... you can... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...do the SMS... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...you can... yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...if you have an apple phone you can do the SMS, okay.

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BARBARA TURK: Yeah and so you know when you go to some of these pantries and soup kitchen... soup... pantries, you know people are not choosing a time that they will show up and they're not standing outside in the cold, it's a big deal.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that's seen... and you've seen a real impact in that?

BARBARA TURK: Oh yeah, we've, we... and we have heard so many... you know all the... I... you know ask any... I can give you a list of the pantries that are now up and running and the ones that are taking, taking reservations and all of the pantry directors, this has been a big... this has been a game changer for them.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

BARBARA TURK: And we've given them... you know if they don't have mobile hot spots we give them a mobile hotspot, so it works because they're in a basement or what... you know whatever it is, right...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh...

BARBARA TURK: This is all very... we have a group of people who goes out and holds everybody's hand as they're getting on, on board and onto the program.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great.

BARBARA TURK: And it's been really exciting to see how many people are so... are, are excited about this, this project.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And if there's a pantry out there that's either here in this room or watching on our live stream... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Watching on our live stream, yes...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How, how would they go about signing up for like... coordinating with the Plentiful app?

BARBARA TURK: Well all of the... all the, the, the pantries that have been offered this are the ones that we've expanded... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...and so they know about it... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...and one of the future planning... the immediate planning tasks of the collaborative is figuring out how we scale Plentiful... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

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BARBARA TURK: ...and, and fund it going forward because it... you know... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Cost money... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Apps, apps tend to cost money to maintain and update, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Great, thank you.

BARBARA TURK: Yeah, thank you for those great questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I might come back... how, how is... how has... how has EFAP been affected by HPNAP cuts or how is the, the... our emergency food distribution program, programs been affected by HPNAP cuts and can you just for the record quantify what the HPNAP cuts are, what HPNAP is and what the HPNAP cuts are?

BARBARA TURK: So, I can... I'll, I'll give you what I know about this so far and there may be other people who testify today to speak to this. Some organizations in New York lost HPNAP funding, some gained it, so... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: HPNAP is the state emergency food... [cross-talk]

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BARBARA TURK: That is... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...distribution...

[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...correct... that is correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And it's... and it involves fresh fruits and vegetables... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: It's, it's... yes, it is the healthy food nutrition food program, assistance program, right?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And also, some of the funding is available... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Yeah, some of it's available for, for... also for... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...flexible... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...staff.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Staff, right.

BARBARA TURK: So, there were... there are at least two organizations I know of that have contacted me that were concerned about the loss of, of, of their HPNAP funds.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because the... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: And... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...contract to EFAP
just reposted so no, EFAP buys food exclusively not...
[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Not, not... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...you can't do...
[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...not... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...staff with it or...
[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Yeah, the only way you can
do staff... yeah, the only way you can do staff is if
you... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Put them up front...
[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...front the money and we do
have a way to do that but that's something we want
to... we're looking at.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

BARBARA TURK: So, I don't want to get
down that road yet.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure.

BARBARA TURK: Or, or... you know to be...
[cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In the future...

[cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...continued on that in the future... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

BARBARA TURK: But what I do want to say is that, you know if you call... those pantries... when those pantries called EFAP not for their staff issues but when they called EFAP and they said we lost this EFAP, you know EFAP's response was we'll... you know we'll, we'll take care of you on food so, you know that's... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But not the fresh foods because everything EFAP is shelf stable for the most part except for some... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: That's... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Refrigerated... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: It's, it's canned, yeah but it's... you know again it's, it's... yes, it has to be able to stay in the... in the warehouse for a period of time, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh.

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BARBARA TURK: Do you want to talk about that?

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MARIE PHILIP: Right, so the EFAP foods are stored, either frozen foods or foods that can be stored in the warehouses and through EFAP we will also give administrative grants to assist our pantries so that have lost that HPNAP funding...

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[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: ...they may have been able to apply for the EFAP administrative grant and receive additional funds.

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BARBARA TURK: That's true.

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GRACE BONILLA: Yeah and also, also it's important... I don't know if City Harvest is here today, but you know City Harvest... it's not as if it... you know you get EFAP, you only get healthy food if you get HPNAP... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: You know EFAP food is shelf stable but that doesn't mean it's full of salt, sugar and... you know... fresh fruits and veggies are primarily supplied by City Harvest and so I just want to add that, and they have a... they'll tell you about

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2 their planning commitment to increase that as a share
3 of what they deliver.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: On EFAP on the...
5 there's an RFP out, I don't want to speak
6 specifically about the terms of the RFP, is that
7 right there's...

8 GRACE BONILLA: I don't believe that's
9 accurate, I don't think there's an RFP out.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is there an RF...
11 [cross-talk]

12 GRACE BONILLA: We can get... [cross-talk]

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is there... [cross-
14 talk]

15 GRACE BONILLA: We can get back to you on
16 that, but I don't think there is an RFP out on EFAP.

17 MARIE PHILIP: Uh-uh, there's no RFP.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There's no RF... so,
19 the contract right... the current contract on EFAP is
20 spanning when to when?

21 MARIE PHILIP: I think you may be
22 referring to the warehouse contract.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Correct, yeah.

24 MARIE PHILIP: That there's... there is a...
25 the bid process I believe is in... at this point but

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2 there's no RFP at this point as yet but there's a bid
3 process going on.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, there's a bid
5 process, it's not an RFP?

6 MARIE PHILIP: It's not an RFP as yet,
7 right.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, because it's
9 pre-RFP?

10 GRACE BONILLA: Yes.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Was there a concept
12 paper released on this?

13 MARIE PHILIP: I am not aware of a
14 concept paper, Grace?

15 GRACE BONILLA: No, I... we'd have to go
16 back and, and see if there was one.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

18 GRACE BONILLA: Yep.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Because this is... this
20 is an area where... you know in terms of, you know how
21 procurement works with EFAP it's something that, you
22 know we've heard from providers over the years and as
23 you may know we... there was a portion... there was a
24 period of time when there was a portion of EFAP that
25 the council provided and then had a different model,

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2 procurement worked a different way because it was not
3 done... [cross-talk]

4 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...it wasn't done in a...
6 it's was an advanced, advanced purchase by DCAS, it
7 was... you know food bank was able to do a more
8 flexible type of ordering... [cross-talk]

9 GRACE BONILLA: Correct, that was...
10 [cross-talk]

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...program with, with,
12 with providers and we heard at the time that
13 providers liked that flexibility because it allowed
14 them to buy things that they wanted when they wanted
15 it and not, you know... you know get the... whatever it
16 is, the... you know the, the many cans of corn when
17 they really need beans or whatever so my, my question
18 is just that I... I, I... with this particular bidding
19 process I was expecting that there might be some
20 public input into how it was configured so that, you
21 know potential flexibility might be optimized or
22 utilizing technological advancements that Barbara's
23 been working on or things, things that could, could,
24 could improve the current distribution and
25 warehousing, could be... could be written into a

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bidding process in a way that if there was something like a concept paper with a comment period could... you know could allow for something like that.

GRACE BONILLA: Council I unfortunately I don't have the details on that and I, I would ask for... to give us an opportunity to go back and...
[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...see where we are in the process... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: I would just also add, I believe the program that you're referring to Councilman is an older program that is no longer...
[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... no, I know...
[cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: ...in place right... [cross-talk]
talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It got... because it got... because the money got baselined and it all went over to DCAS... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: Correct... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...and we heard...

[cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: Correct... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...from providers that they said, you know shucks we liked it the way that it used to be because... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: Right... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...we were... had some flexibility so, I think... I mean at... my, my point is that that flexibility was lost when that... when that... when those funds got baselined and you know if there's a new RFP that were to be going out or this contract were to be... is, is, is being reissued in a competitive process often times... I mean like when HRA did, you know the employment plan, you know an extensive concept paper with public comment period was put out it allowed for a lot of input that input was incorporated into the RFP and you know I don't know what the status is with the stages I just first heard about this yesterday but you know if there was an opportunity for public input so that there's, you know adjustments that could be made instead of just reissuing the same... you know basically the same

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2 contract that was in effect during the previous
3 contract round.

4 GRACE BONILLA: So, let... give us an
5 opportunity to go back... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure... [cross-talk]

7 GRACE BONILLA: ...and see where we are in
8 the procurement process and we will give you a more,
9 more accurate response.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, just going
11 back to the meal gap, does, does HRA... do you guys
12 index the meal gap or do you... do you... you know do you
13 have a... [cross-talk]

14 BARBARA TURK: When you say index, what
15 do you mean?

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Or do you... do you
17 quantify the meal gap in a per... and, and in terms of
18 neighborhood and, and... when you said grandular how
19 grandular do you get?

20 BARBARA TURK: So, the meal gap is...
21 [cross-talk]

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-oh... [cross-talk]

23 BARBARA TURK: That's it.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's it your lights
25 out.

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BARBARA TURK: The meal gap was developed by feeding America, food banks team has... because we are such a dense city, has done a closer look at the meal gap and how it's spread out around the city and that information is available for all of you to see in a map that is found in the food metrics report that we produce for the city council annually, it's on our website. We were able to get information at a neighborhood at an NTA level and I always have to remember what NTA stands for but it's a neighborhood level that's less than a zip code and it's... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I believe it's Neighborhood Tabulation Area, is that right... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Yes, it is Neighborhood Tabulation Area because when I hear it yeah, that's correct. So, it's in a neighborhood tabulation level and when we did all the, the prioritization where we had a couple of adjacent NTA's that were... you know we sometimes merge them into a clearer community and so forth and so on but we did that and that's how we've tried to take the, the meal gap and understand it in relationship to the supply that's going out already

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because the meal gap, you know it has a lot of economic metrics in it, it's hard to turn... you know unless you turn that into pounds and do some modeling, right and we can certainly take that through... you know take you through that what we did, we've done that technical briefing before and I don't know that we've ever done it for the city council but I would offer that to you if you want to see it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You reminded me about pounds so the food assistance... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Don't forget the pounds.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, so the Food Assistance, Assistance Collaborative... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Then pounds translate into dollars, you know it's a thing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But you're... so the goal is to distribute ten million more pounds?

BARBARA TURK: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Now and I went back and, and before the testimony the current EFAP pounds distributed per year is 12 million so that... so the goal is to essentially double where the Food Assistance Collaborative the goal is to almost double... [cross-talk]

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BARBARA TURK: Almost, yeah... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the, the, the amount... the number of pounds to go out... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many more pounds have... are going out as of today since the inception of Food Assistance Collaborative?

BARBARA TURK: I'd have to look at that, do you have that?

GRACE BONILLA: I thought you did... we'd have to look at that...

BARBARA TURK: Oh, I want to just... I don't want to... I don't want to give you the wrong number.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

BARBARA TURK: But the idea was do... you know was to in some cases create the capacity of and take those pounds so we went from neighborhood to neighborhood and ground some of the stuff, we walked in the pantries and we said, you know our targets tell us that we need to put three or 400,000 more pounds into this neighborhood could you take... what would it take for you to take 50,000 or 100,000 and then we found four or five pantries who could do that

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and then we also asked, you know in Jackson Heights we asked, you know Make the Road, you know how would you like to run a pantry and they said yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What'd they say, they said yes.

BARBARA TURK: Of course, they did and, and some people said no but most people said yes, most non-profits said yes. So, that's basically how we did this, this has been very shoe leathery... a shoe leather process of really doing organizing among pantries and figuring out where... who can take more... who could take more if they had what and then grant proposals come before the, the, the group, before the food assistance collaborative for the hard cost of building out that capacity and then we get it done. That's how it goes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I'm just going to hop around a little bit here, Food Help dot NYC, so, I, I... it was a little bit unclear to me from the testimony, what, what does Food Help do, what is it... what's... if you were to go to Food Help... who goes to Food Help and why do they go and what does it do for them?

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GRACE BONILLA: Essentially it was a campaign to build awareness on all the diverse food resources that are out there, SNAP being one of them. I'm... do we know what...

MARIE PHILIP: It also gives the list of pantries throughout the neighborhoods, so people can see where they can go to a food pantry and it, right, links the SNAP information as well.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And it links to ACCESS HRA?

MARIE PHILIP: Correct... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: It does... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: ACCESS HRA and through 3-1-1.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, I'm really excited about this ACCESS HRA, I mean this is... this has... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: I'm very excited about it.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...great potential.

GRACE BONILLA: Yes, great... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...great potential.

BARBARA TURK: Very much so, it's a great program.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if somebody has an issue recertifying they can do it all through ACCESS HRA?

GRACE BONILLA: Yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. They get a letter saying, you know your SNAP benefit was discontinued... somebody calls me and says what, what happened to my SNAP benefit I can... instead of... instead of calling administrator Bonilla at 4:45 on Friday I can first go with them through their ACCESS HRA and see what it's saying to them and it'll flag you might be missing this piece of documentation.

GRACE BONILLA: That's correct, the one piece that we've also removed a barrier on is the interview, so they would still have to call and have their interview but instead of coming in person, instead of having it be a face to face... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...it's now through our call center specifically for SNAP app... applicants and recipients.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, this is a little bit outside of the jurisdiction of this committee hearing but the same goes for, for public

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assistance, cash assistance and, and Medicaid or no just... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Well Medicaid is a little more complicated as you know... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...there's the, the state through the exchange accepts applications, the city is still speaking to the state about how the, the rest of the cases will move over to the state and there's no said deadline on that, with cash assistance... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if you have... I'm sorry, so if you have a Medicaid case you can't... you can't find your docs on, on ACCESS HRA?

GRACE BONILLA: For recertifications and for... just... yes, different hearing but... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah, sorry... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...for... it's okay... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We'll get there.

GRACE BONILLA: For disabled, aged and blind and for folks that are recertifying they would still come to... through HRA... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...for new applications they're now going to the exchange and are part of the state system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, but those that have it through HRA are still with HRA?

GRACE BONILLA: They are still with HRA... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And their... and their... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: They are still... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And their info is on their ACCESS HRA?

GRACE BONILLA: No... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...it's not. So, part of the state taking over the program is that there'll be a state platform if they so choose to do that so Medicaid, there... for the last number of years since 2015 I believe, 20... 2015... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can the state... can the state... I'm sorry but can the state give HRA the authority to have somebody's Medicaid case on ACCESS

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HRA, I mean is that something that you can negotiate...

[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: That is a much... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...with OTDA... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...longer conversation... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh...

GRACE BONILLA: And I believe the state has their own platform, the exchange is that platform... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...so it is... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: It is separate.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Except for those that... but... so then there's a... there's a gap there for those that enrolled in Medicaid with HRA not with the state but like, you know they're not on the state exchange they're... they got their Medicaid through, through the city, those that have had Medicaid for more than five years... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: So, we... the... it's still a state benefit that we would administer...

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: The thinking is that it's a, a program that would be administered less and less by the city so the... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But those cases that you are still administering they don't have access to their info... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: Not of their Medicaid...

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[cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...through this...

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GRACE BONILLA: ...only, no they do not.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

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GRACE BONILLA: Yeah and it's a much longer complicated conversation that I'm, I'm happy to engage you with.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: For cash assistance it is... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: ...different, there's still a face to face, this... while you can open an ACCESS

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2 HRA account and have information on your account...

3 [cross-talk]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: ...there are still things
6 that you're going to have to come in and, and apply
7 for... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if it tells you
9 you're over income it'll tell you... will it tell you
10 why you're over income, because this is a big pet
11 peeve of mine?

12 GRACE BONILLA: Will it tell you why
13 you're over income...

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How over income you
15 are, why you're over income? If you're living off of
16 750 dollars a month in SSD with two kids and it says
17 you're over income, you know it'll tell you why
18 you're over income?

19 GRACE BONILLA: So... well I'm, I'm going
20 to let our Chief Program Officer answer, I don't
21 think we should get into the specifics of any case..
22 [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's a... that's a...
24 that's a... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: ...but that is... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...hypothetical...
[cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: I, I appreciate that
hypothetical so...

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SABRINA SIMMONS: The client connects
sends HRA notices on ACCESS HRA, cash assistance
clients can submit their recertifications from the
comfort of their homes through ACCESS HRA, in order
to apply on H... ACCESS HRA they have to come in to one
of our facilities... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

SABRINA SIMMONS: ...or a community-based
organization that has an HRA staff member out
stationed at the facility.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

SABRINA SIMMONS: The information about
case specifics is on ACCESS HRA... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

SABRINA SIMMONS: But we do not upload at
this point the state notices so what you're referring
to would be a state notice, the state client notice
system notices and that notice tells people exactly

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the reason for the closing and it should have a calculation of the budget, that information has not yet made it to ACCESSS HRA, the... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But hopefully it will?

SABRINA SIMMONS: Yeah, we're still working and negotiating with the state to see what notices we can upload but all of our HRA generated notices are in the system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, the more collaboration I think the better in terms of the client experience, you know...

GRACE BONILLA: We're certainly in constant conversations with OTDA... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...to enhance this particular tool... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...so, we are in those conversations.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. So, there are people that are not online as Council Member Deutsch said, point of service SNAP enrollment that is...

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what's happening there, is that expanding, is that staying the same, is that being reduced?

GRACE BONILLA: Are you talking about our footprint and, and... from a SNAP perspective?

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

GRACE BONILLA: We will always have a footprint in the community that footprint may look slightly different depending on what the... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: By different you mean the same size but configured differently or smaller... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Configured differently... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not smaller... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Configured differently... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, no reduction... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...that is part... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...of funds that has... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: ...of the conversation... so, part of the conversation and what we're learning through... again in this particular process it is still early days, we've only seen a reduction in our foot traffic on the SNAP side last year, what it will continue to look like we will... we will see, it gives us an opportunity to look at more vulnerable populations to see who needs what in what neighborhood, right... as you know neighborhoods have changed so those are all conversations that we are having as far as making sure that we are where our clients are.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you in every senior center in the city for SNAP enrollment?

GRACE BONILLA: We are not in every senior center in the city, I can tell you that we have worked in the last year with 52 senior centers part... again I know that I keep talking about ACCESS HRA but part of our campaign with the senior community is really to teach the folks that are at these senior centers how to use these tools, how to have a provider portal and how to assist the seniors that are accessing senior centers the benefits that we know that they, they should be able to get. So,

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2 that is an ongoing campaign in collaboration with,
3 with the council as you know, I can also report back
4 that we were at 172 different events targeted to
5 senior last year to make sure that they know and are
6 aware of, of the SNAP benefit.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How many seniors
8 receive SNAP?

9 GRACE BONILLA: Give me one second and I
10 will let you know...

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And my next question
12 is how many seniors are eligible for SNAP?

13 GRACE BONILLA: 424,000 seniors receive
14 SNAP.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, 420... [cross-
16 talk]

17 GRACE BONILLA: 24,000...

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay and how many are
19 eligible... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: And that was in December
21 of 2016... '17. So, they're 26 percent of the caseload.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, do we have a
23 sense of how many seniors in New York City are
24 eligible for SNAP?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: I could probably get you
3 that number... well actually what we do know is from...
4 it's, it's from a smaller amount, we have looked at
5 seniors that are on Medicaid and not on SNAP that
6 could be eligible for SNAP and we have aggressively
7 done outreach to those seniors.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And how many seniors
9 have we determined that...

10 GRACE BONILLA: I'd have to get you that
11 number, yeah, I don't know that... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What are the
13 identified barriers for seniors to not sign up for
14 SNAP if they are eligible for SNAP, what's, what are...
15 have, have we identified what, what the hurdles are?

16 GRACE BONILLA: I, I cannot sit here and
17 say that I know all the hurdles, we know that one of
18 the hurdles is a digital divide which is why we are
19 very excited to move a large portion of our caseload
20 to an online portal freeing up a lot of our
21 eligibility specialists at centers to assist seniors.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

23 GRACE BONILLA: So, we are trying to have
24 a multiprong approach knowing that there is a digital
25 divide among seniors. The other barriers I, I... we'd

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2 probably have to do a little bit more research on
3 that.

4 MARIE PHILIP: I would just add two
5 things to the barriers, one is the stigma that's
6 often attached with receiving this benefit that it's
7 seen as a handout... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

9 MARIE PHILIP: ...and it is quite real
10 amongst this population and the other is mobility.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh. How about
12 the, the value of the SNAP benefit is that seen as
13 something that's... you know not worth the trouble?

14 GRACE BONILLA: We have seen that as a
15 barrier among our underemployed... [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

17 GRACE BONILLA: ...population or it's like
18 the application is just not worth it but the reality
19 is that because it is a federal benefit there's very
20 little that we could do at the city level other than
21 advocate which we are happy to do in partnership with
22 the city council to change... to change benefit levels.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do... I... is it... do
24 other states supplement SNAP for seniors, do you know

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2 of anything like that happening elsewhere in the
3 country?

4 GRACE BONILLA: I'm currently not aware
5 of such a program in another state.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I mean I've
7 heard that I think some other states might do that
8 for senior population, that might be something to
9 think about. Can you speak to the overall success
10 rate of, of the, the overall success rate of SNAP
11 recerts, recertifications?

12 GRACE BONILLA: The... what we do know is
13 that since implementing some of the modernization
14 tools that we are talking about we have seen less of
15 a turn so people are recertifying and not having to
16 come back and reapply because they missed a date or
17 they missed a notice or because they couldn't... they
18 were waiting for hours for a call from us as they
19 have in the past. So, we have seen folks that are
20 recertifying with less barriers than they did before.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we have a... do we
22 have a, a numerical percentage of the success rate?

23 GRACE BONILLA: Do we have that? We can
24 get that back... we can get back to you on that.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you have a... do you have a target; do you think you have a maximum that you think you could have it go to with the right processes in place?

GRACE BONILLA: Well I... the, the... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The right tools in place... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...goal and the federal obligation is that everyone that's eligible recertify on time as long as they have all their documentation, right, so there's not a goal, the, the, the requirement is that as long as we have everyone's information and they, they have... we have a 30-day window to, to have people recertify but that is a federal goal. The barriers... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, the goal is 100 percent?

GRACE BONILLA: The goal is always 100 percent with federal requirements, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What, what additional tools do you think could... I mean, and do you think that, that, that the current tools that are in place are sufficient to get those recertifications to their

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2 maximum or to that 100 percent? So, if you got to get
3 to 100 percent than what's, what... [cross-talk]

4 GRACE BONILLA: Right... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How do you... how do
6 you go about doing that... [cross-talk]

7 GRACE BONILLA: And that 100 percent is,
8 is a moving target, right... [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

10 GRACE BONILLA: ...we do have folks that
11 because the economy is better they are no longer
12 eligible, so our 100 percent is to ensure that we are
13 looking at every application or every recertification
14 in the federal requirement... it doesn't mean that
15 you're actually going to get SNAP, right, there are a
16 portion of people that may fall off because they're
17 no longer eligible... [cross-talk]

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's okay... [cross-
19 talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: Right. The... what we do
21 know is that some of the fixes that we have put in
22 like the mobile app, right, which means you can take
23 a picture of your document, you can upload it to
24 ACCESS HRA and give us an opportunity to look at it
25 without having you come into the office have made

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2 things better but again it's a... it's a... it's a
3 process and we're learning from that process and as
4 we identify other barriers we're having conversations
5 with our state partners to figure out ways that we
6 can remove those barriers.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you compare New
8 York City's recertification success rate to other
9 districts in... around the state?

10 GRACE BONILLA: The state does provide us
11 with that information, yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so that's,
13 that's OTDA provides... [cross-talk]

14 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...that to you, can you
16 provide that to us?

17 GRACE BONILLA: We can... we can take a
18 note of that.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are you able to
20 characterize that comparison at this point?

21 GRACE BONILLA: Not at this point, I'm
22 sorry.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, maybe if we
24 could have that as a, a follow up to this hearing or
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2 you know certainly by the time that we have our
3 budget hearing in, in late March?

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GRACE BONILLA: Sure, we, we will look
5 into what it would take to get you that.

6

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. We've heard
7 some issues around Infoline and people having long
8 wait times or getting busy signals, what... how does
9 HRA maintain the data around capacity and the extent
10 to which it is over capacity right now... [cross-talk]

11

GRACE BONILLA: Sure... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...and, and by how much
13 and how does... [cross-talk]

14

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

15

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...that... is that a
16 relationship that you have with DoITT as an agency or
17 how is that... how is that situation being examined...
18 [cross-talk]

19

GRACE BONILLA: Sure... [cross-talk]

20

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...and addressed?

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GRACE BONILLA: So, Infoline is the call
22 center for DFS... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: ...so both for HRA and DHS...

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[cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...we do keep very tight numbers on service levels, wait time, abandonment rate so we do have that information. I am... we are aware of the wait times, we've heard from our constituents and providers about the wait time and... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How long is the average wait time?

GRACE BONILLA: I'm not sure about the average wait time at Infoline, I would have to look into that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: If I were to call Infoline right now would I get a busy signal?

GRACE BONILLA: You would go... probably be moved to into our IVRS system which will give you a line of, of information that you need, it is in all the local law languages and if you needed to talk to an operator that's when your wait time would, would start to get measured.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Would you get one right now, it is a Tuesday at three o'clock, we're a little bit better on Tuesdays at three o'clock.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh, better than
at... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Better than Monday at
nine o'clock.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh...

GRACE BONILLA: Right, so it does... it's
the ebbs and flows of when people call us so what I
am happy to report... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Actually, what I'd be
interested in seeing is an average... you know that,
that on a line graph basically of what you're... what,
what... throughout the course of the week what your
average wait time looks like.

GRACE BONILLA: Sure, but to answer your
larger question... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...we are in the middle of
being, being approved for a capital campaign to
improve our technology and we're also in the middle
of figuring how to add staff so we are responding to...
[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, the capital
campaign is that... is that a... is that a part of the

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preliminary budget in your capital or is that... how
does that capital campaign... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: We're in... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...funded... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...we're in conversations
with OMB to... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, it's not... [cross-
talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...to conduct... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...in the prelim?

GRACE BONILLA: It's not in the prelim.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Hopefully in the
exact, is that, that right... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: That's correct.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that will be a, a
buildout of, of your... the Infoline capacity?

GRACE BONILLA: I'm, I'm not going to
pretend to understand the backend of RT capacity...
[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...but that is the, the,
the goal.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And is that something
that's done by DoITT or is that an HRA... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: It's done... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...capital... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...in partnership with DoITT.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Yeah, I, I mean I, I, I think that we're going to really like to see some robust report, reporting in data on, on wait times, abandon... call abandonment, you know busy signal responses all of that stuff, if there's... I mean I appreciate you might not have it today, we'd love to honestly to see whatever you have with regards to, to that overall situation.

GRACE BONILLA: Sure.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to turn it over to Council Member Grodenchik for a follow up question and then I have a couple more to, to round out... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you Mr. Chair. I just want to add my voice to those who have added praise for the Plentiful app which is helping. In fact, I had a meeting this morning with a provider before I came here, the Samuel Field Y and they, they also run the Central Queens Y and I've also had

1
2 discussions with Met Council, it's not only cutting
3 down on food waste because you get a bag of food and
4 you, you know some people don't like peanut butter,
5 some people are allergic to peanut butter, you know
6 but, but when you're able to order it also provides a
7 level of dignity for people that unfortunately is
8 certainly lacking at many times where people are
9 forced to wait on line so they're able to order it
10 and pick it up and that really is groundbreaking and
11 so... well... it's not your program?

12 BARBARA TURK: I just have to be honest,
13 it's not quite how our app work, works... [cross-talk]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Well... [cross-
15 talk]

16 BARBARA TURK: ...because, because Met
17 Council I think is using something that United Way is
18 developing but we... yes, that is the... that is another
19 goal... [cross-talk]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Take... you
21 know I learned from my old boss Nettie Mayersohn when
22 somebody offers you credit you take it and you smile...
23 [cross-talk]

24 BARBARA TURK: I know... I know but...
25 [cross-talk]

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COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: But, but
that's... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...I just don't want to
confuse... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: ...okay, I
appreciate your honesty... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: ...things here... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: ...very much.

BARBARA TURK: I think... I think United
Way should get... and Met Council should get some
credit for what they've done.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I think it's...
is it UJA, I think it's UJA but... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: Yes, that's right, it's
their... it's one of their 100-year projects.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: It's a great
idea and it really... [cross-talk]

BARBARA TURK: And it's modeled after a
couple other pantries... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: And it's cut
down on waste and expense because I think... and that
means that our dollars go... our dollar, our tax
dollars go further and to me it's in, in keeping with

1
2 it, you know a tradition of just making sure people
3 have as much dignity as possible.

4 BARBARA TURK: I, I will... I will take
5 credit for the fact... [cross-talk]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Take it...
7 [cross-talk]

8 BARBARA TURK: ...that the new pantries
9 that we're expanding our, our creating are all choice
10 pantries so that does mean that people choose what
11 they want to take and not get a bag just handed to
12 them.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: So, same idea
14 different technology. Thank you very much Mr.
15 Chairman.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
17 Council Member Grodenchik. I'm sorry, so just
18 following up on the... on the RFP conversation so I
19 just... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...my staff... the
22 committee staff just supplied us with the information
23 that the bid was actually due on January 4th, 2018,
24 bid... this is from, from HRA... this is language from
25 HRA, bid was for... is for emergency food warehousing

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and delivery for EFAP came out in November, HRA is looking for a contract to store and deliver 15 million pounds of food for EFAP program, the contractor will perform substantial part of EFAP operation, so...

MARIE PHILIP: So, I think that, that... we had to do the bid over again, I think at some point last year so if that's the final information then I guess that is what ECHO has out on the... on the site at this point.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But bids are all in then, is that correct?

MARIE PHILIP: So, now... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Actually... [cross-talk]

MARIE PHILIP: I... ECHO would have to confirm that.

GRACE BONILLA: We'll go back and, and discuss it with our colleagues.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I'm going to... I'm going to talk about... well I'm going to talk about this offline, but we had heard something about this process that I'd like to speak with you about.

GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That might, might not be appropriate for this forum. In terms of... sorry, a couple more subjects and then... and then I'm going to let you guys go. On demand technology, how... what has been the... what's been the response from clients, how, how have you been able to collect feedback from clients on this, is there a mechanism to do that?

GRACE BONILLA: We have... I don't believe we've done an official survey on the response from clients, what we do know is that it, it really puts the control back in the client's hands. For recertification on demand it has... it is now across the city, we have... in 2015 we had an average of 85 percent from May through October that used the on-demand system for recertification, so we know that it is popular and it... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh, sorry can you repeat... I'm sorry, can you repeat that number?

GRACE BONILLA: 85 percent of our recerts... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...for May to December went... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

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2 GRACE BONILLA: ...through, through that
3 system.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

5 GRACE BONILLA: For on demand application
6 we have... we are... we've started with Brooklyn, so
7 Brooklyn is now on demand application which means
8 that you can apply on ACCESS HRA and you can call for
9 your interview.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And so that's in
11 addition to doing it through, through ACCESS HRA or
12 that's... so if 85 percent are doing it through on
13 demand then they're not doing it through ACCESS HRA...
14 [cross-talk]

15 GRACE BONILLA: I'm sorry... [cross-talk]

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...right?

17 GRACE BONILLA: Actually, 85 percent was
18 before we started on demand and went up to 92 percent
19 once we started recertifications on demand.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so 92 percent
21 of SNAP clients are doing their recerts on demand?

22 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh and 92 percent is
23 the correct number.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, then what
25 percentage are doing it through ACCESS HRA?

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GRACE BONILLA: Well it's, it's two separate pieces, right... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, this is the interview and that's... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Yes, that is... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the paperwork... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...the interview... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...is that right... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...so, the paperwork is through ACCESS HRA, the interview... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Two-step process... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...is on demand calling, yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Got it... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...it is a two-step process.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

GRACE BONILLA: And like I said we're now moving to on demand applications, it's the same

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thing, you can still apply for ACCESS HRA and call for your interview... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...to our on-demand hotline.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How are... how are you communicating with clients that this is... that this is available to them?

GRACE BONILLA: Every client is being notified if they're already our client so for example everyone... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How are they being notified?

GRACE BONILLA: Through the mail and robocalls... so, for the applications it's hard to know who's going to apply so that is information that we will have at our centers for example but for recertification it's through direct mailing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. One question about ACCESS HRA that you, you had mentioned that there's, you said a million unique users have signed up, is that right or did... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: I believe that's right, yeah.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that reflects how many households, is it one, one per household or is that...

GRACE BONILLA: I'd have to go back and see how many households that... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You said there were more than a million ACCESS HRA accounts... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...for SNAP households as of December and you received 24,000 online applications.

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, that means... so, if the overall SNAP universe... SNAP... universe of NYC SNAP recipients is one point... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Six...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Six million so over 50 percent have actually signed up for an... for an ACCESS... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: So, what I want to... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...HRA... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: ...make sure is so the data point that we are describing is, is comparable, right, so it's... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...1.6 individuals... [cross-talk]]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...the one million I'd have to go back and see and remember we could... you could also have a cash case on ACCESS HRA...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah but you... I'm sorry... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Right... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...your testimony said that one, one million ACCESS HRA online accounts for SNAP households so... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: So, cash clients also could also receive... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Could receive SNAP... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...SNAP... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...households, right... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: So, I want to make sure that they... that we are... that those numbers reflect just SNAP clients or SNAP clients that also receive cash.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, I mean it's, it's all honestly, I think from my purposes it's also that they could be counted as well... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Sure... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...if you're both benefits that's, that's okay as well, there's a greater... there's, there's fewer cash assistance recipients not accessing SNAP than the other way around, SNAP if you... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Sure, yes... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, most cash... if you're able to qualify for cash you're most likely... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: You would... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...able to apply for SNAP?

GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And you should be getting it obviously, right, there's no reason in the

1
2 world why somebody should have a, a cash case and not
3 receive SNAP that I can think of.

4 SABRINA SIMMONS: Immigration status.

5 GRACE BONILLA: Immigration status.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry?

7 GRACE BONILLA: Immigration status would
8 be... [cross-talk]

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Immigration status.

10 GRACE BONILLA: So, I see that you're
11 puzzled, I will explain that. So, for example you
12 could be on safety net depending on your immigration
13 status, right but not necessarily on SNAP which is a
14 federal benefit... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Federal benefit, got
16 it, okay. So, not... so, safety net not TANF?

17 GRACE BONILLA: Right...

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Correct. Okay.

19 GRACE BONILLA: So, I'm being whispered
20 to in my ear... [cross-talk]

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's okay.

22 GRACE BONILLA: So, one of the other
23 issues on ACCESS HRA that we're trying to also fine
24 tune is we can't stop people from starting... having
25 multiple accounts... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...so it's not a, a, a very
good comparison to look at... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: They forgot their...
[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...individual... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...password just
didn't... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...they forgot their
password... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I know, it's sort of...
[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, I know it's like
banking it's tough.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, write it down
somewhere safe. Does any of my colleagues have any
additional questions, Council Member Adams? Okay,
last question, this is... this is an easy one. What is
the agencies position on the Trump Administration's
budget proposal with respect to the use of box... food
boxes?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: I was wondering when that
3 was going to come up...

4 MARIE PHILIP: Yeah... [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: Obviously we are... I mean
6 I think personally our colleagues and I were having a
7 discussion about this and the fact that people who
8 are many of them employed, many of them low income
9 are not respected enough to have their own choice,
10 it's pretty disgusting... [cross-talk]

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

12 GRACE BONILLA: So, we are troubled by
13 this recent news from Washington for sure and it just
14 increases the list of things that we have to work
15 together to combat on behalf of low income New
16 Yorkers.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, the official
18 position of this administration is that you are
19 opposed to this budget proposal?

20 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, unequivocally?

22 GRACE BONILLA: Unequivocally.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you, so
24 are we. Okay, with that I want to thank you very much
25 for your time... [cross-talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: Thank you... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...and your patience for answering our questions, we really appreciate it, thank you. So, we're going to take a one-minute break and when we return we'll have Joel Berg from Hunger Free America, Rachel Sabella from the Food Bank, Susan Welber from the Legal Aid Society and Danny Stewart from Safe Horizon. Okay, welcome back, welcome to this panel, whoever wants to begin feel free to go ahead, we're, we're doing three minutes give or take.

JOEL BERG: Okay. Okay, I'll take. I'm, I'm Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America, thank you for the council having this hearing today, it is Thursday if you're watching FOX for those. I, I, I want to commend the administration's testimony particularly their focus on housing cost, the more work I do on this the more I'm convinced that lack of food is just a symptom and it's the broader affordability, you know crisis so council can, you know triple EFAP as it should as much as possible but as long as housing costs are through the roof and child care costs are through the roof we're going to be on a treadmill going in reverse. Rather than, you

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2 know repeat my voluminous written testimony I'll just
3 hit on a, a few points. I do want to respond to the
4 issue about ICE enforcement that Councilwoman Adams
5 raised. Right now, under federal law they cannot hold
6 against an immigrant family getting SNAP or other
7 benefits but just to be clear there was a recent news
8 report in a very reputable entity Rueters, Reuters
9 that the Trump Administration is considering the
10 proposal that would basically restrict immigration
11 access to legal immigrants based on receiving SNAP or
12 Medicaid and that would be unconscionable attack
13 against the Statue of Liberty and our history of
14 immigration and considering my mother came here two
15 months old and my family would have been wiped out if
16 we weren't allowed in, I'm one immigrant's son who
17 doesn't forget our history and I hope none of us do
18 including the Trump family. A few other points about
19 our, our recommendations, obviously the
20 administration should, you know fully fund in its
21 executive budget both EFAP and, and SNAP outreach. I
22 stood with the then, then General Welfare Committee
23 Chair Mr. De Blasio and then Public Advocate De
24 Blasio many times lasting preliminary budgets that do
25 not include this funding, this is as they say a no-

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2 brainer. Two, the city should even though it's
3 limited which students can get SNAP, it really should
4 work with CUNY to ensure that it's equal... equitably
5 distributing work study funds and if it means using
6 some city funds to pick up the gap and some more
7 students get less in work study just if you get one
8 hour of work study that means you're at least work
9 eligible for SNAP and so I think there's a lot the
10 city can do to do that through CUNY and then make
11 students aware of that and so that does trigger SNAP
12 eligibility. Frankly, we support pantries on campus
13 but increasing SNAP participation is a much better
14 way to go, it... in the long term. Obviously HRA's been
15 doing a great job on increasing access to a number of
16 programs with the technology, we'd urge them to
17 accelerate that and as you know Councilman Kallos has
18 been pushing this for a number of years, we strongly
19 support efforts to combine access with non-HRA
20 programs such as section 8, such as, as, as WIC, the
21 city's already ahead of the rest of the country on
22 this but I've written extensively about that and can
23 provide more details on how to do that. Obviously,
24 the Mayor should accelerate some of the efforts to
25 bring in classroom breakfast to every classroom in

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2 the city including high schools and middle schools.
3 we should support the state; state legislatures
4 attempt and the Governor's attempt to mandate
5 breakfast in the classroom and lastly oppose with
6 every fiber of our being and then some fibers not in
7 our being the outrageous Trump Administration's
8 attempts not only to cut 200 billion dollars but to
9 take away food choice. They are against government
10 intervening in the personal lives of corporations who
11 want to pollute but when it comes to low income
12 people not only do they want government on their tops
13 they want them on their bottoms, their backs and
14 their fronts and only Trump Administration could take
15 200 billion dollars away from low income people and
16 somehow manage to increase federal bureaucracy, thank
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Joel.

19 JOEL BERG: Three minutes and change.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: By the way if you... it
21 would be great to see if you can get Mr. De Blasio to
22 stand with you again at this executive budget.

23 JOEL BERG: He has an open invitation, I
24 am going to the state of the city tonight I will not
25 heckle but should I see him I... [cross-talk]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'll let you work
3 your... [cross-talk]

4 JOEL BERG: I'll be glad... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...magic... [cross-talk]

6 JOEL BERG: Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

8 RACHEL SABELLA: It's always hard to go
9 after Joel, I will not be as comical, but I will say
10 we are as adamant in our battle against hunger. My
11 name is Rachel Sabella, I'm the Director of
12 Government Relations and Policy at Food Bank for New
13 York City. Food Bank is the city's largest major
14 hunger relief organization, this year we celebrate
15 our 35th anniversary and from the start of our
16 organization we have partnered with the city of New
17 York, we are grateful for the partnership with HRA,
18 we are grateful for the partnership with the council,
19 we look forward to continuing that. I know... I'm going
20 to be very brief today, you have my very long written
21 testimony along with policy priorities and our
22 updated meal gap map with city council district
23 information so really excited, very much looking
24 forward to meeting with new members of the council
25 and to continue working with our two champions here

1
2 today. I also want to say we are really thrilled that
3 there are so many members of our network in the room
4 today that are going to testify and I'm excited for
5 you to hear firsthand from these dedicated emergency
6 food providers about what they're seeing in terms of
7 hunger. I just want to respond to two quick things
8 from the testimony earlier, one about Food Help NYC,
9 it's a tremendous resource. One of the things we
10 think there is growth for is for now that it has EFAP
11 pantries. So, if there are other pantries in the
12 city, a really great opportunity to put other ones on
13 there so people have access to that information and
14 two, I've talked with some of you about this but the
15 Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program HPNAP
16 is what was referred to during the earlier testimony
17 as well, there was an RFP related to that funding,
18 New York City was awarded 44 percent of that funding
19 which is historically lower than where it's been so
20 happy to continue offline conversations about that,
21 just want to be mindful of the topic at hand. The two
22 quick things that I want to talk about is one, we are
23 all in agreement that the White House budget proposal
24 is absolutely dangerous. Information is continuing to
25 come in but what we do know that the structural

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2 changes would slash funding by 213 billion dollars
3 over ten years, those cuts mean a loss of 40 billion
4 meals over ten years and I'm reading that because
5 that information is literally coming in as we're
6 talking. When we see what that number means, when we
7 see... with New York City's meal gap of 225 million and
8 we put that on top, we want to be united as a city as
9 with the council, with the De Blasio Administration,
10 with all of the anti-hunger providers in fighting
11 that. I also want to... this is not a budget hearing
12 and I'm very much looking forward to the General
13 Welfare budget hearing in March but I wanted to share
14 our deep concern over the proposal as the preliminary
15 budget does have a minus number with funding, the
16 EFAP baseline food funding is now listed at 8.2
17 million and... which reduces it by 7.3 million that
18 reduces meals in the city by 6.8 million meals,
19 that's a huge amount and we stand to work with the
20 council, we are excited about the passion and
21 commitment from the Speaker, he's going to be
22 addressing our conference on Thursday and really
23 thrilled to work with all of you. So, thank you for
24 your continued support.
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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Rachel. I

want to turn it over to Council Member Grodenchik for a moment for... to make statements...

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you Mr. Chair and thank you all for being here today. I, I do have to go, I actually am a Chairman now so... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SABELLA: I'm so excited but glad you're still here with us.

COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Well I'm delighted to be here especially with Steve, he's done such a wonderful job and this issue as you know is very near and dear to my heart so, I want to thank you for being here today, all of you that are here, you know feeding people there's nothing more important, I learned that lesson from my parents and you know people would come to my house and I say you have to take something, my mother will consider her day ruined if she can't feed you. So, I want to thank you all, it's, it's not really a joking matter, we, we joke about it just to keep the levity in times but the fact that anybody's going hungry in this great city is really to the detriment of every single New Yorker. So, Mr. Chairman with that I'm going to take

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2 leave of you and I know... I hope... hopefully I'll get
3 back here before the hearing is over but if not thank
4 you all for the work that you do, it is critically
5 important in the lives of millions of people who
6 you're never going to know but you are affecting
7 people's lives in the most positive way so with that
8 I thank you and I look forward to continuing to work
9 with you on this budget and the years ahead.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council
11 Member Grodenchik, you're, you're always here in
12 spirit. Whoever wants to continue.

13 DANNY STEWART: Hello, thank you very
14 much for your time today and this afternoon. My name
15 is Danny Stewart, I'm Director of Operations and
16 Finance for Safe Horizons Street Work Project. I'm
17 here today to provide testimony to the impact of our
18 food and nutritional services program of Street Work.
19 Street Work is a program from home... for homeless
20 youth and young adults up to the age of 25, we have
21 two drop in centers one in Harlem, one on the Lower
22 East Side both are soup kitchens as well as a pantry...
23 community pantry program. We have a late-night
24 community outreach program that goes throughout New
25 York City every night of the week as... and we also

1
2 have a crisis shelter for runaway and homeless youth,
3 a 24-bed facility in Harlem. So, I... we're one of the
4 programs that did not receive renewed funding with
5 HPNAP, the Hunger Prevention and Nutritional
6 Assistance Program with the state. The... this loss of
7 the funding which is 150,000 dollars has dramatic
8 impact on our program. So, as you can imagine
9 homeless youth one of the basic needs is food, right,
10 coming in hungry everything else goes out the window
11 if you cannot meet the basic needs. So, food
12 insecurity is a real, real issue but it's more than
13 just about that, it's more than just providing a meal
14 it's how we do it. So, the meal that we provide it
15 communicates our respect, their dignity, and what we
16 value in them and a novel concept of love, so we
17 lovingly provide food to them and take into
18 consideration what they want in, in the meal so it's
19 not just providing the meal, it's our engagement into
20 their lives and how we can connect them to other
21 services that we provide. Last year we provided
22 35,000 hot meals and 25,000 food pantry meals through
23 our drop-in centers and the meals that we provide is
24 one of the... is one of the cornerstones of our
25 program. If you think about your own home, when you

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walk in and you smell a meal being prepared you feel welcome, we firmly believe every person should have a place to belong and feel like that they belong to, the meal says that, that they're welcomed into our home and, and we do that because they deserve that. So, we graciously request your support in helping to support our meals program of 150,000 dollars. So, thank you very much for your consideration.

SUSAN WELBER: Good afternoon, I'm Susan Welber, I'm a Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society which is a large legal services provider here in the city, we have offices in every borough. I want to thank Chairperson Levin and the rest of your committee and staff for holding this hearing and for giving us a forum to speak. As you know probably through work with the Legal Aid Society, we really like to get into the nitty gritty of what HRA is doing and so we had in, in terms of that nitty gritty we had three recommendations that we wanted to present to you that are outlined in our testimony but that I'll repeat. The first one is for the city council and your committee to, to play a role even beyond what you're doing at this hearing today in helping to improve communications between HRA and

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2 your constituents. We think that there is room for
3 improvement there's a lot of technology that you
4 heard about from the agency but it doesn't always
5 work, when it works it's great but when it doesn't
6 work people are left with really little guidance as
7 to how to address their basic needs and particularly
8 with the SNAP program that results in hunger, hunger
9 that's avoidable because people are eligible. So,
10 there are four areas in which communications could be
11 improved. One is with respect to applications and
12 recertifications which you heard quite a bit about.
13 We hear that the on demand technology doesn't always
14 work, a lot of people as you heard aren't signed up
15 for ACCESS NYC, there are a lot of people who are
16 SNAP only who receive SSI because of severe
17 disabilities who have a hard time using the
18 technology and they need the ability to communicate
19 with the agency with live people not through an IVRS,
20 the Infoline that takes 20 minutes to get through but
21 to be able to call a caseworker and to, to speak to
22 someone live. Same for the recertifications and you
23 know I think what would be great if you could follow
24 up with the agency and get a better sense of beyond
25 this 100 percent goal, where are they in terms of

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2 having people recertify and the outcomes of those
3 recertifications and how many are abandoned. What we
4 hear is that people have to reapply and re-recertify,
5 and they ultimately get accepted which indicates that
6 those repeats were avoidable in the first place.
7 There's also difficulty in communicating in the
8 context of required client reporting so with the
9 ABAWD you heard administrator Bonilla say that 2,800
10 people had their case... their, their benefits cut
11 because they didn't fulfil the ABAWD requirements
12 that coupled with the fact that there's an
13 acknowledged problem with the Infoline and that
14 people can't get through, how many of the people who
15 got there, their benefits cut in the ABAWD were
16 people who couldn't get through the Infoline, does
17 the agency know that and is there something they can
18 do about that? And finally, there are affirmative
19 requirements... formative needs to communicate with the
20 agency in the case of emergencies such as lack of
21 food, housing emergencies and various other
22 emergencies. So, we'd like that... that's our primary
23 recommendation to the city council to get even more
24 involved in this, perhaps have another oversight
25 hearing that's really drilling down on these, these

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2 issues. The other two recommendations, one is, and I
3 think Commissioner... the Administrator Bonilla
4 recognized this that all the benefits compliment one
5 each other... one another and so that ongoing problems
6 with cash assistance affect hunger because many of
7 our clients who receive both cash assistance and SNAP
8 need to dip into their cash assistance to, to bridge
9 the gap that they, they have for food. We've outlined
10 some ongoing problems that the agency continues to,
11 to encounter despite lots of improvements and we hope
12 that there could be even more improvement in those
13 areas. And then finally we think that the agency
14 needs to... we're, we're concerned about the
15 preparation for changes in the public charge rules
16 that could be coming down the pike rather... you know
17 in the next six months or so and you know we, we
18 think the city council can play a role, we know that
19 you passed an amendment to the charter that requires
20 a, a convening of agency heads, we don't know that
21 that, that group has actually convened and we hope
22 that you can push the city agencies to get together
23 and figure out how to prepare for this. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
25 for your testimony and, and I, I... we certainly

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2 obviously will be examining all of your testimony in
3 full, the written testimony to make sure that we're
4 being responsive during the budget season to
5 recommendations that may require a budget allocation
6 but then obviously a lot of the operational issues
7 and I think you're right we should be maybe looking
8 to do an oversight hearing to really drill down on
9 these operational aspects of HRA client, client
10 services and so yes, I want to just all... thank you.
11 I, I... one thing just in regard to that... to your
12 testimony I think you made reference to this and, and
13 Council Member Lander made reference to it earlier
14 that yes it is... it's, it's almost unrecognizable from
15 where we were four and a half years ago in terms of
16 the orientation of, of the agency towards these
17 benefits that they're, you know entrusted with
18 providing to people but, but that doesn't mean that
19 there is no need for improvement, you know need for...
20 you know candid self-examination on, on... you know on
21 part of the agency to, to really be clear as to
22 what's working and what's not working and if it's not
23 working how do we make it better, you know I
24 certainly feel an urgency being that I will be out of
25 office in, you know three years and 11 months and so

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2 I, I, I... we need to do everything that... you know I
3 need to make sure we do everything I, I can over the
4 next couple of years so certainly need that
5 collaboration with you all to make sure that that is...
6 that we're do... making every stride that we can and
7 leaving no stone unturned so... thank you. Next, next
8 panel Alexander Rapaport from Masbia Soup Kitchen
9 Network, also from Masbia Ruben Diaz, Masbia Queens;
10 Aaron Cyperstein from Met Council on Jewish Poverty
11 and Melissa Olson, Community Health Care Network.

12 Hello.

13 AARON CYPERSTEIN: Hello.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Welcome everybody.

15 Whoever wants to begin.

16 MELISSA OLSON: Okay, I'll start. Thank
17 you, Chairperson Levin and members, of the General...
18 of the Committee on General Welfare for the
19 opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is
20 Melissa Olson, I'm the Director of Nutrition at
21 Community Healthcare Network or CHN, we're a non-
22 profit network of 13 federally qualified health
23 centers including two school-based health centers and
24 a fleet of medical mobile vans and we provide
25 affordable primary care, dental, behavioral health,

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2 and social services to 85,000 New Yorkers annually in
3 Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. As has
4 been stated many times 1.25 million New Yorkers
5 experience food insecurity and this issue especially
6 impacts low income communities especially where our
7 clinics are, nearly 65 percent of CHN patients live
8 at or below the federal poverty line and many reside
9 in communities with limited access to full scale
10 grocery stores. Many of the neighborhoods our clinics
11 serve possess some of the highest rates of meal gaps
12 per person particularly East New York, Washington
13 Heights, Harlem and the South Bronx. Our patients
14 tell us that cost, distance, and convenience are some
15 of the biggest barriers to food security. CHN is
16 taking on a variety of initiatives to address hunger
17 in these communities, for over eight years our
18 nutrition team has participated in the Health Bucks
19 program and we use this program as an opportunity to
20 tell our patients that they are eligible to use their
21 EBT card at any farmers market in the... in the city
22 and receive increased purchasing power to buy fresh
23 produce. We also host educational walks to nearby
24 farmers markets to show patients how easy it is to
25 use the program, but one barrier's utilization is

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2 limited patient time, some patients tell us they
3 can't take time out of their schedule to travel to
4 farmers markets on scheduled market days. In response
5 to the location and time challenge we partnered with
6 Corbin Hill Food Project to implement a weekly
7 vegetable box program at our clinics in Crown Heights
8 and Williamsburg. In contrast to the traditional farm
9 share model which involves a significant financial
10 commitment up front our vegetable box program allows
11 patients and community members to purchase fresh
12 local and in season produce on a weekly basis,
13 accepts EBT cards as a form of payment, our weekly
14 vegetable box costs 15 dollars and participants can
15 decide to opt in or opt out each week depending on if
16 they have enough funds. Even better this year, Corbin
17 Hill received a grant to subsidize the cost of the
18 program reducing the cost to ten dollars per box now.
19 This program has been popular with our Brooklyn
20 patients, we have about 125 participants that rotate
21 in and out weekly averaging ten to 25 boxes per site
22 each week and we're hearing very positive feedback
23 from the participants. So, we have expanded the
24 program to our Long Island City health center this
25 year as well. Our nutritionists also conduct outreach

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2 at local food pantries educating community members
3 about healthy eating and referring them to our
4 nutritional program and we refer low income patients
5 to our social work team to help to help sign up for
6 SNAP benefits but many of our patients frequently run
7 out of benefits by the end of the month as you've
8 been hearing and that prevents them from having
9 consistent access to food. Nearly 60 percent of, of
10 SNAP recipients use their benefits within the first
11 week of issuance leaving many participants struggling
12 to eat by the end of the month. We've also observed
13 that patients who are undocumented frequently
14 experience food insecurity as their immigration
15 status generally makes them ineligible for SNAP
16 benefits. We're seeking new ways to address these
17 challenges and we would look forward to partnering
18 with the council to identify, identify additional
19 solutions. Thank you for your time.

20 AARON CYPERSTEIN: Thank you Chair very
21 much, we're very happy at Met Council that you're
22 chairing this General Welfare and we're also very
23 happy that you have as one of your committee members
24 Barry Grodenchik. Barry Grodenchik is actually a
25 person who I went personally on many weeks before the

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2 Sabbath and give out food with an organization called
3 Tonsachavis [sp?], which is a, a... an organization
4 that gets from EFAP and gets from Met Council. So,
5 they have people, committee members that actually
6 gave food out and to see empty pantries in their home
7 and to see the homes where they live is a passionate
8 committee and I'm sure that the job will get done and
9 I, I saw from the questions that you gave HRA it's
10 getting there. My name is Aaron Cyperstein, I'm the
11 Director of External Affairs from Met Council and a
12 little bit what Met Council did in FY '17 just in FY
13 '17 we aided 205,000 New Yorkers in the fight against
14 poverty and hunger, we provided more than seven
15 million meals through emergency food, we aided in
16 more than 10,000 households with SNAP benefits and we
17 distributed more than 500,000 dollars in food
18 distribution cards, those are actual cards, a
19 dignified way of people to go into a store, a regular
20 store and not waiting on lines and they're able to
21 get the food that they need before the holidays and
22 even before a Sabbath, it's very dignified. We know
23 you've already heard that there's 1.3 million people
24 who are food insecure in New York, 300,000 people
25 live in poor and near poor Jewish households that

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2 observe Kosher dietary laws, for many of our clients
3 the high cost of Kosher food prevents a unique...
4 presents a unique challenge. While statewide most
5 families run out of SNAP benefits by the third week
6 each month, a family that keeps Kosher runs out by
7 the second week, we've heard about the third now it's
8 the second week because of the amount of money that
9 it cost to buy Kosher and halal food. To be
10 successful in our fight against hunger we rely on a
11 strong emergency food system and we ask that the city
12 council support a fortified EFAP through a baseline
13 increase in funding to 22 million for FY '18. We also
14 ask that the city council support a policy of cost
15 neutral preference of Kosher and halal products
16 within the EFAP system ensuring that clients with
17 religious dietary restrictions have equitable access
18 to emergency food. Thank you very much.

19 RUBEN DIAZ: Gracias and thank you very
20 much for having us. My name is Ruben Diaz and I'm the
21 Chair for Masbia Soup Kitchen. I've been working with
22 Masbia since 11 years ago in different positions
23 right now I'm Masbia Queens and for my part and I'm
24 being in the kitchen food pantry working directly
25 with people, with customers. Before we had some

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2 trouble cooking all the fresh vegetables because all
3 the food that we provide is fresh, we cook everything
4 at the same day also to complete the, the food pantry
5 package because as you know the, the, the... my plate
6 chart so... the number of points the, the last six
7 months we got thousands of pounds of tilapia and a
8 lot of frozen meals, a lot of frozen vegetables that
9 help us to finish all the cook in the kitchen because
10 our workforce is volunteers, sometimes we don't have
11 it... sometimes we don't have time to peel all the... to
12 peel all the potatoes but we got huge help has been
13 easy for us and also to complete the pantry, to
14 complete all the pounds for, for the customers and as
15 we'll be quite brief for us and a huge help. Thank
16 you.

17 ALEXANDER RAPAPORT: Thank you Council...
18 Chair for, for having us and for having this meeting,
19 this important meeting. Just a shout out to Laura
20 who's also with our staff over there and so I'll... as,
21 as Chef Ruben... I'm Alexander Rapaport with the Masbia
22 Soup Kitchen Network, we have three soup kitchens
23 around the city, one in Borough Park, one in Flatbush
24 and one in Forest Hills. I'll, I'll try to explain a
25 little bit... elaborate a little bit more of how the...

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2 what Chef Ruben was talking about connects to what we
3 were hearing from the people that were sitting here
4 before. So, we did see a very positive increase,
5 it's, it's good to... as an organization to always ask
6 for more, ask for more but we also need to celebrate
7 what we did achieve. I think the past six months we
8 saw a huge increase in food coming from EFAP, it was...
9 Chef Ruben was talking about was a lot of the frozen
10 food it happened to be Kosher, one of the items that
11 are supposed to be cost neutral is Kosher is tilapia
12 fish, the chicken EFAP has is going to be hard to get
13 Kosher for a good price so to speak but frozen
14 tilapia was something that we had, things like that
15 was a huge help. We also... two of our kitchens are
16 part of the collaborative so we... the... that receive
17 food collaborative and we did through them see a huge
18 increase and we got equipment to be able to increase
19 capacity so we're here today to kind of celebrate
20 what we have done last year and try to hold it and
21 even grow it for this year. We, we definitely did see
22 in every level in our... in, in our distribution week
23 by week we were able to meet goals and I remember two
24 years ago there was a New York One at our place all
25 day because we had empty shelves, it was so bad in

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2 the winter, we're now with the increase of EFAP this,
3 this is... the, the food is available, it's there, yes
4 we could fix a little bit more abilities of Kosher or
5 the ordering that Council Member Brad Lander was
6 speaking about is still an issue but I believe
7 they're all working on it. So, I'm here today to
8 celebrate EFAP and hold what we did last year so we
9 could do it this year again.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you just to, to
11 this panel obviously the work that you guys do every
12 single day is, is the essential... the essential
13 component, you know without this incredible network
14 of many volunteer based organizations or small CBO's,
15 you know we really... you know many, many, many New
16 Yorkers would be cut off from the services that even
17 just by the best of intentions could not get to them.
18 So, we, we need you... we need you to be, you know
19 solvent, we need you to be able to pay your bills and
20 you're your lights to be able to pay your staff, we
21 need you to have... we need to be able to get your
22 feedback as we're going through the budget process
23 and, and, and you know even... you know we're going to
24 have rallies and everything to, to, to baseline and
25 restore the EFAP funding but I, I almost, you know am

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2 nervous to do that because I don't want to take you
3 away from the good work that you're doing in the
4 communities every day. So, thank you for that, I look
5 forward to continuing to work with you, let's get
6 this EFAP baselined as Aaron said all 22 million,
7 let's get it all baselined, the whole thing and you
8 know make sure that we're not going through this
9 ridiculous budget dance again. This is the last
10 remaining vestige of budget dancedom that we have
11 really banished to the, the dustbins of history for
12 the most part and this seems to be the last one and
13 it's... that's, that's wrong. So, let's, let's continue
14 to work together. Thank you. Next panel Danette
15 Rivera from is it JITA Community Outreach Center;
16 Annette Jackson from Action Food Board; Daniel Reyes
17 from New York Common Pantry and Ariel Seronski from
18 EJA Federation. Subranski. Whoever wants to begin.

19 ARIAL SUBRANSKI: Good afternoon, my name
20 is Ariel Subranski, I'm representing UJA Federation
21 of New York. Thank you for holding this hearing
22 Chairperson Levin and other members of the committee
23 that were there, we really appreciated their
24 thoughtful questions. So, you have a copy of my
25 written testimony and a lot of it echoes what my

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2 colleagues discussed, my colleagues have already
3 mentioned some of what is mentioned so I'm just going
4 to echo my support for increased funding for EFAP as
5 well as continuing to invest and expanding access to
6 SNAP as HRA spoke about some of their efforts before.
7 I'd also like to encourage the city to think about
8 ways to increase access to meals especially Kosher
9 meals as was discussed on the previous panel. It is
10 essential that the city invest resources in ensuring
11 that food pantries are equipped with enough food to
12 serve their clients especially culturally competent
13 foods such as Kosher and halal foods. In line with a
14 focus on seniors that HRA discussed, it is imperative
15 that the city invest in the agencies that run
16 congregate or home delivered meal programs. And
17 lastly, I'd like to thank Barbara Turk and Barry
18 Grodenchik who brought up UJA's digital choice food
19 pantry that we're investing a lot of time and effort
20 in this year for our centennial initiative. And we'd
21 like to urge the city to think creatively about ways
22 to support our efforts here. so, UJA Federation of
23 New York is amplifying our current anti-poverty
24 efforts and investing in more efficient, effective
25 and dignified ways to serve the most vulnerable in

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2 our community and foster systemic change. Our vision
3 includes creating a digital choice food pantry system
4 and two community resource hubs, one in Brooklyn and
5 the other in Queens. The central focus of the
6 Brooklyn hub is food given the overwhelming poverty
7 in this neighborhood. The Brooklyn and Queen's hubs
8 will both offer onsite access to the digital choice
9 food pantry system with food orders delivered from
10 Met Council's nearby warehouse throughout the day.
11 The Brooklyn hub will also feature nutritional
12 counseling and a demo kitchen to teach clients how to
13 prepare healthy meals with the food they receive from
14 the pantry. One of the biggest challenges our food
15 pantries continue to face is the procurement of
16 Kosher protein and Kosher fresh produce. We urge the
17 city council and the administration to think
18 creatively about ways to increase access to Kosher
19 protein and produce for food pantries so that we can
20 ensure our clients have the nutritious food they
21 need. We also recommend exploring ways to open the
22 city procurement process to those entities operating
23 under Kosher supervision so that agencies purchasing
24 Kosher food can benefit from economies of scale.
25 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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2 DANETTE RIVERA: Hello, my name Danette
3 Rivera and I am the Executive Director of JITA
4 Community Outreach Service Center in Jamaica Queens.
5 Thank you, Chairman Levin the General Welfare
6 Committee, for spending time today to hear more about
7 how the community-based organizations like my own
8 partner with New York City to address food need in
9 our communities. JITA provides services to the
10 community including a twice weekly food pantry, we
11 are a member of Food Bank for the New York City and
12 rely on resources including New York City's Emergency
13 Food Assistance Program, EFAP to alleviate hunger for
14 the people that come to our door. Each week I am a
15 witness of this fact firsthand as thousands of my
16 client's men, women and children including seniors
17 repeatedly find hunger relief at my community center.
18 EFAP is important to our Queens community not only
19 because it provides food but because by assisting low
20 income households with this essential item it helps
21 relieve financial burdens such as housing and other
22 necessities for families in need. Furthermore, the
23 food service EFAP provides to our community center
24 allows us to be a trusted space to offer a variety of
25 resources that reach people at the core of their

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2 need. For low income households every meal counts,
3 EFAP coincides with our... with other important
4 programs like SNAP as well as school meals. I asked
5 one of the people that visits our center to tell me
6 what our program means to her, she wrote me a short
7 letter that I'd like to share with you, her name is
8 Natasha Baloy [sp?] and she is a single mom of two
9 who currently lives in a shelter five blocks away
10 from my community center. This is what she had to
11 say, quote, "the EFAP program has helped to put food
12 on my table for my boys and me when I didn't have
13 anything else. There were many days when I didn't
14 know how I was going to feed my kids but when I
15 walked to the pantry I found exactly what I need to
16 put warm... a warm meal on our plate. Without the EFAP
17 program I wouldn't know how to make it work
18 sometimes, if we lost this program many families
19 including mine are going to bed hungry. This program
20 has helped me in so many ways and that is why it is
21 so important to keep it up and running. So many
22 single mothers and poor families from our communities
23 don't have to worry about how they are going to feed
24 their children when SNAP benefits run out", end
25 quote. For Natasha EFAP helps her family be hunger

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2 free. Thank you for fighting for her and all people
3 served by New York City's anti-hunger program. I urge
4 you to fight the good fight and keep... and make EFAP
5 stronger knowing that you will not allow hunger to
6 win. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Miss
8 Rivera.

9 ANNETTE JACKSON: Good afternoon everyone
10 and thank you for inviting us to give testimony,
11 okay. My name is Annette Jackson, I am a retired
12 senior citizen after a career in advertising and a
13 Board of Education. I am a United State citizen, I am
14 a registered voter in New York City and I live in the
15 borough of Manhattan. I am proud to be a Food Action
16 Board Member with Hunger Free New York City formally
17 known as New York Coalition Against Hungry... oh I'm
18 sorry, Against Hunger, okay. This organization
19 advocates on behalf of low income families in New
20 York, I am also a volunteer with the Food Pantry at
21 Westside Campaign Against Hunger on West 86th Street
22 in Manhattan. I have been there for five years,
23 during these years I've seen thousands of hungry
24 people and families come into the pantry to get food
25 for a week and to eat at our soup kitchens. I have

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2 been struggling since 1960 when I came... when I moved
3 from North Carolina to New York City, today I'm a
4 widow and still struggle for myself, I know how hard
5 it is to make ends meet, I have been there and this
6 is the reason I volunteer here at the pantry to help
7 others avoid what I've gone through when I was
8 raising my family while working and earning minimum
9 wage. Back then and still today there are many
10 challenges for the low-income people in New York,
11 please, please do not cut the programming, we need
12 all the vital services to feed the hungry. There are
13 too many families and people living in poverty in
14 shelters and in food... and in food security. I see
15 senior citizens, unemployed people, immigrants from
16 many countries, veterans, disabled people and single
17 mothers with families come into the pantry, they all
18 need to eat and they all need to be fed. If SNAP,
19 food stamps as well as funding for food pantries and
20 soup kitchens, kitchens are cut or discontinued it
21 would be devastating for so many people trying to
22 feed their families and children. I believe that the
23 inability to give enough to eat will increase so many
24 other problems in the city because without food
25 everything becomes harder. Food is a necessity;

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2 senior citizens will be more vulnerable to this
3 problem. I'm here today to tell you we need our SNAP
4 program, okay, food pantries and soup kitchen. I see
5 hundreds of families who survive from this program, I
6 see homeless, immigrants and low income New Yorkers
7 from all... from all over the boroughs who are in need,
8 okay. I am a grandmother who knows how important
9 these programs are for low income families and for
10 anyone who is in need of these great programs in our
11 city. Now my question to you all, okay, what is going
12 to happen if this, this... these programs are cut for
13 low income families, how will they eat? This is
14 America the greatest country in the world, what's
15 going to happen, okay? Again please, please don't cut
16 the program, okay.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
18 Miss Jackson.

19 [applause]

20 DANIEL REYES: Hello, my name is Daniel
21 Reyes, I'm the Deputy Executive Director at the New
22 York Common Pantry. Thank you to the city council
23 especially Speaker Corey Johnson and General, General
24 Welfare Chair Steve Levin for giving me the
25 opportunity to speak on behalf of the thousands of

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2 families that the New York Common Pantry serves. Last
3 year we served over six million meals to New Yorkers
4 across the five boroughs out of our locations in East
5 Harlem, Mott Haven, Longwood and through our mobile
6 teams that travel across the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn
7 and Manhattan. At NYCP our strategy is to alleviate
8 food insecurity through access to healthy food,
9 wellness, nutrition education and the acquisition and
10 management of resources like SNAP, health insurance
11 and rental assistance. We are grateful that the city
12 council has prioritized anti-hunger... anti-hunger
13 programs including three years of increases to the
14 Emergency Food Assistance Program, EFAP as well as
15 the expansion of universal free lunch in nearly all
16 NYC public schools. at NYCP we are gravely concerned
17 that even though New York City is facing a meal gap
18 of 225 million meals the preliminary budget for
19 Fiscal Year 2019 proposes a cut in EFAP food funding
20 to 8.2 million. EFAP provides a vital supply of
21 nutritious food to soup kitchens and food pantries
22 across the city and to the 1.4 million New Yorkers
23 who rely on the emergency food network to put food on
24 their table. New York Common... New York Common Pantry
25 continues to expand, expand... extend its reach across

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2 the city to ensure that no family or individual goes
3 hungry, but we cannot do this alone. Due to the
4 continued scale of need we confront we are committed
5 to continue our investment to expand services to
6 reduce hunger for all New Yorkers in need. This
7 investment starts with dollars raised from our
8 private supporters that are leveraged with government
9 resources to drive impact. We opened a new choice
10 pantry site in the Bronx in April 2017, increased the
11 capacity and reach of our Health 365 case management
12 program through a New York State award from the
13 Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance in 2016
14 and increased the capacity and reach of our... excuse
15 me, and increased the visibility and presence of New
16 York Common Pantry throughout New York City from
17 partners sites and mobile programs. This has result,
18 resulted in a significant rise in meals and resources
19 accessed for our guests over the past three years.
20 Our ability to keep on track will require continued
21 support from the city of New York through EFAP,
22 council discretionary dollars and other funding
23 streams. For the families of NYCP and for all New
24 Yorkers every meal counts and increasing funding to
25 EFAP is essential to ensure emergency food programs

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2 can serve every New Yorker in need. Please prioritize
3 increased funding to EFAP in the Fiscal Year 2019 New
4 York City budget, it is absolutely vital to our
5 ability to serve all families who turn to us in need
6 of food support. Thank you for your continued
7 support, we look forward to working with you to
8 ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
10 Mr. Reyes. I... so I just... the same that I said to the
11 previous panel I want to say it to you all as well,
12 we absolutely need you and we rely on you as a city
13 and you're an essential... your, your organizations are
14 essential, your volunteers are essential, you are
15 essential and it is the least that this committee can
16 do and that this city government can do to, to match
17 your commitment or aspire to match your... match your
18 commitment and, and, and we just, you know honor the
19 work that you do. Thank you.

20 ANNETTE JACKSON: We thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Last panel; Rachel
22 Sherrow from City Meals on Wheels; Jordan Rosenthal
23 from Boom Health and Laura Allen from Masbia. And if
24 anyone else wants to testify just fill out a slip and
25 you can join this panel.

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2 RACHEL SHERROW: I'll be very quick,
3 Rachel Sherrow, City Meals on Wheels. Heard a lot
4 about hungry New Yorkers, I'm hungry myself right now
5 we've been here for a long time. Heard a little bit
6 about older adults who have trouble with mobility
7 accessing SNAP and other benefits. So, I'm here to
8 talk about homebound elders who can't access
9 sometimes benefits, if case management... if there's a
10 wait list which there is currently and there has been
11 for years in addition to healthy nutritious food
12 options. So, it's an issue, what City Meals does is
13 we supplement with some extra programs and mobile
14 food pantry because we literally need to bring the
15 food right to their doors but it's not enough funding
16 and we know that there's a greater need. There's also
17 been a huge increase not only in the elder population
18 but in the elder hunger population and we're talking
19 about people who are literally choosing between rent,
20 medication and food because they are living on fixed
21 incomes, we don't have to go into the entire Trump
22 budget that could be coming down the pike but that
23 could be absolutely devastating for our population.
24 We're feeding over 18,000 people a day. I know you
25 asked about how many are eligible in this city, we

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think... we also use sort of Medicaid eligibility, we think there are probably 36,000 people who are eligible for Meals on Wheels so we need to figure out how to feed them but can't do it if we don't have the money or the system so... that's my spiel, thank you again for obviously holding this important hearing and maybe next time we can have a larger room so more people can be here.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Rachel I just want to

ask... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: Sure... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ..City Meals on Wheels

your funding is derived from where?

RACHEL SHERROW: 90 percent is private

donations from 50,000 New Yorkers and beyond and we get ten percent from the city, part city council mostly DFTA now because a lot of our council money has thank goodness been baselined but part of our funding does... so, for every meal that's funded by City Meals the federal government sends 67 cents back to DFTA to reinvest into the program through a cash in lieu of commodities program through Department of Agriculture, we're not sure what's going to happen with that... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: ...if it doesn't... if it does get cut that's... those are huge dollars and it could mean tens of thousands of fewer meals for folks every year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And you have 14... 14,000 clients... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: 18,000... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 18, I'm sorry... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: 400...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: 18,400 clients every single day.

RACHEL SHERROW: Every single day, five boroughs.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And your meals are delivered by?

RACHEL SHERROW: Local meal providers, you know yours is in Brooklyn RiseBoro and Heights and Hills is your case management agency... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

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RACHEL SHERROW: ...it's... you know local CBO's doing this and walking routes, vehicles, you name it every day.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah and you have... and I know this... you have... your relationship with your clients are much more than just dropping off a meal?

RACHEL SHERROW: It is absolutely more than a meal, I mean it's... you know if anybody has the luxury of getting I don't know Blue Apron or one of those things they leave it at your door, Meals on Wheels there's actually a person delivering the meal, knocking on the door, checking on the person to make sure that the person is okay and if there has been... if they notice that there has been a decline then case management is notified immediately.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, which is also an essential component and we at the city council... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: And there's a wait list... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...support the... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: Right... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the case management
but obviously it... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: which was fantastic but
now we're back to a wait list.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes, okay, well thank
you so much... [cross-talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: Sure... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...for the... [cross-
talk]

RACHEL SHERROW: Of course... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...obviously for the
work that you do every day.

RACHEL SHERROW: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

LAURA ALLEN: Good afternoon, my name is
Laura Allen and I'm representing Masbia Soup Kitchen
Network and I was going to discuss the Plentiful app
and how beneficial it has been to us, okay. We're
using the Plentiful app obviously for the pantry and
before that I would have to take the forms that had
the zip codes and the... you know just data that we, we
collect but... you know and enter into our database,
enter it into the system so that we have an idea of
how many households we've served and what they... what

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2 they... what their composition was. With the Plentiful
3 app as far as the backend makes my job easier and
4 faster to the point where sometimes people, Alex,
5 thinks I'm not working, okay. Scheduling is of course
6 easier, it's better to be able to communicate and
7 have and have an interface so we can let them know
8 about when the pantry is... if there's a change and of
9 course now we can better serve the communities that
10 we're in by adding different pantry dates now, before
11 that would have just been... we'd been deluged with
12 paperwork and so the, the ease of use is that it's
13 absolutely great on the backend. My volunteers who
14 are... some... we have them at each location that are in
15 charge of doing that part with the Plentiful app,
16 they have also expressed that it is easier for them.
17 What I will say is that as far as the clients there
18 was... there have been sometimes issues of hesitation
19 where they may not want to get the information that
20 we would require for them to register, which is
21 basically name, phone number, household make up and..
22 [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

24 LAURA ALLEN: ...because of the ICE issue..
25 [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

LAURA ALLEN: ...people are afraid when things are electronic about giving their information which ironically, I see that we were trying to get onto that with the HRA representatives here and they kept talking about the portal and they weren't making that relation that people do not want to give their information electronically... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh, uh-huh...

[cross-talk]

LAURA ALLEN: ...because of these fears but luckily, we do have our, our volunteers and other people that speak different languages and we're usually able to push through that. So, I just wanted to thank everybody for the, the Plentiful app and I, I think it's absolutely awesome and I thank you for having this hearing, it's much needed and I'm glad to be here just in general, I'm also glad to be here representing Masbia however I am sad that I'm not here to be... just here as a regular constituent because every single thing that we spoke on today I have firsthand knowledge of and I would have loved to have testified about it.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Guess since you mentioned about Plentiful... [cross-talk]

LAURA ALLEN: Yeah...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How, how long have you been using it?

LAURA ALLEN: We have been using Plentiful, it is... I believe almost a year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

LAURA ALLEN: It has definitely been quite... it's almost a year.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay...

LAURA ALLEN: ...that we got the training which was very good, we do have good customer service as far as if we need any help or we have any questions.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay and that, that's with the, the Food Collaborative, it's all through the Food Collaborative?

LAURA ALLEN: The Food Collaborative and... yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And so, it'd be... it would be beneficial to, to have that expanded to every program that wanted it?

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LAURA ALLEN: I believe so, yes and that's both as someone who's using it at the backend and someone who would be able to use it at the frontend as well, yes.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, well thank you so much for the work that you do every day and, and again to, to this panel totally essential, key component.

LAURA ALLEN: Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much.

Does anyone else wish to testify? Alright, seeing nobody else at 4:44 p.m. this hearing of the General Welfare Committee is adjourned.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date

February 26, 2018