

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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Thursday, April 3, 2025

Start: 10:09 a.m.

Recess: 2:13 p.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: *Hon. Deputy Speaker, Diana I. Ayala,
Chair*

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Alexa Avilés

Chris Banks

Tiffany Cabán

Chi A. Ossé

Lincoln Restler

Kevin C. Riley

Althea V. Stevens

Sandra Ung

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S

Jill Berry,
First Deputy Commissioner of New York City
Department of Social Services (DSS)

Scott French,
Administrator of the Human Resources
Administration (HRA)

Molly Eckerle,
Policy Associate at the Metropolitan Council on
Jewish Poverty

Joseph Rosenberg,
Executive Director of the Catholic Community
Relations Council

Lakesha Morris,
Division Director for Food and Housing
Stability, Community Outreach Services for
Catholic Charities Community Services

Lynette Brown,
Food Resource Coordinator for Catholic Charities
– Brooklyn and Queens

Shirley de Peña,
Director in the Central Office of Student
Affairs and Liaison to the Campus Resource
Centers and Food Pantries at The City University
of New York (CUNY)

Eric Lee,
Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of
America Greater New York (VOA-GNY)

Rachel Sabella,
Director of No Kid Hungry New York

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Lo Anderson,
Student Engagement Coordinator for CUNY Cares
at The City University of New York (CUNY)

Deborah Berkman,
Project Director of the Shelter and Economic
Stability Project at the New York Legal
Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Naima Dahir,
Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC)

Kim Moscaritolo,
Director of Communications & Advocacy Hunger
Free America

Nicholas Buess,
Director of Food Bank For New York City

Stephen Grimaldi,
Executive Director of New York Common Pantry;
Representative of The Roundtable: Allies for
Food Access

Anita Kwok,
Policy Analyst United Neighborhood Houses (UNH)

Jeanette Estima,
Director, Policy and Advocacy Citymeals on Wheels

Jenny Veloz,
Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Leah Eden,
Executive Director of Equity Advocate

Debipriya Chatterjee,
Senior Economist at the Community Service Society
of New York (CSS)

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Martina Santos,
Board Member of the West Side Campaign Against
Hunger (WSCAH)

Liz Ward, M.P.A.,
Senior Program Assistant, New York Health
Foundation

Angie Vega,
Assistant Director of the Children's Health Fund

Alex Hughes,
Senior Director of Hunger Prevention and Advocacy
at Project Hospitality

Marcus Jackson,
Aging Friendly Community Organizer at Encore
Community Services

Christopher Leon Johnson,
Self

Sharon Brown,
Self

William Flynn,
Director of Government Benefits Unit; Disability
Advocacy Unit; LGBTQ+/HIV Advocacy Project;
Veterans Justice Unit at Legal Services NYC

Adriana Beltran,
Senior Deputy Director of Programs at Woodside on
the Move

Andrew Sta. Ana,
Interim Co-Executive Director at Asian American
Foundation (AAF)

Pernell S. Brice, III,
Vice President of Policy & Advocacy for
Children's Health Fund

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Barbara Hughes,
Executive Director of City Beets Kitchens at
Project Renewal

Jacob Zychick,
Community Advocacy Director at the American Heart
Association

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2 SERGEANT LEWIS: Mic check, mic check, this is a
3 mic check for the Committee on General Welfare.
4 Today's date is April 3, 2025 in the Committee Room –
5 recorded by Walter Lewis.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet down, please. Good
7 morning, and welcome to today's New York City Hearing
8 for the Committee on General Welfare. At this time,
9 we ask that you silence all electronic devices.

10 At no time is anyone to approach the dais. If you
11 have questions throughout the hearing, or would like
12 to sign up for in-person testimony, please see one of
13 the Sergeant at Arms.

14 Chair Ayala, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [Gavel]

16 Good morning, everyone, and welcome to today's
17 hearing. My name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy
18 Speaker of the New York City Council and the Chair of
19 the General Welfare Committee.

20 Today, we holding our annual oversight hearing
21 Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in
22 New York City.

23 We will also be hearing three bills:

24 The first intro, Introduction 245, sponsored by
25 Council Member Hudson, is A Local Law that would

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2 require the Department of Social Services to report
3 on the feasibility and creation of a universal
4 benefits application for local public benefits
5 programs.

6 Next, Introduction 1028, also sponsored by
7 Council Member Hudson, would require DSS to create a
8 system to automatically enroll individuals in City-
9 created benefit programs, like Fair Fares NYC, and to
10 notify individuals about the system including how to
11 opt out.

12 Finally, Introduction 1148, sponsored by Council
13 Member Cabán, would require DSS to provide an
14 application receipt to any applicant for benefits of
15 service.

16 Moving on to our oversight topic for today, every
17 year, the Committee on General Welfare holds a
18 hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity, recognizing
19 the growing challenges around these issues for too
20 many New Yorkers. We know that poverty and food
21 insecurity overlap, and we also know that people of
22 color, as well as those living with disabilities and
23 chronic health conditions, are more likely to
24 experience food insecurity.

1 those who are working hard to feed New Yorkers in
2 need, and ways in which we can better collaborate to
3 make sure that no one goes hungry in New York City.

4 At this time, I well... I would have acknowledged
5 my colleagues, but they're not here yet. I'm sure
6 that they will be here anytime soon.

7 But I would like to acknowledge the Committee
8 staff who has worked hard to prepare this hearing.

9 Sahar Moazami, Assistant Deputy Director; Penina
10 Rosenberg, Legislative Policy Analyst; Julia Haramis,
11 Finance Unit Head; Elisabeth Childers-Garcia,
12 Financial Analyst, Anne Driscoll, Data Scientist; and
13 my finally my Chief of Staff, Elsie Encarnacion.

14 I will now turn it over to the committee counsel
15 to swear in the members of the Administration.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning, will you please
17 raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the
18 truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,
19 before this committee, and to respond honestly to
20 council member questions?

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes.

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, you may begin when
24 ready.
25

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Thank you.

Good morning, my name is Jill Berry, and I serve as the First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Social Services. I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and the members of the on Committee on General Welfare for holding today's hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City. I'm joined today by New York City Human Resources Administration Administrator, Scott French. We appreciate the Council's continued focus advancing food security for New Yorkers and the work that DSS and HRA pursue in lifting up New Yorkers food security.

If anyone listening is facing food insecurity, know there is help available. You can call 311 or visit foodhelp.nyc.gov to find nearby food pantries and community kitchens. Access HRA, our mobile app, and our benefits access centers service further where clients can apply for benefits. I also want to take this opportunity to encourage those clients receiving SNAP to learn more about the DOHMH food access initiatives including Health Bucks, Get The Good Stuff, and Groceries to Go. All assist in strengthening a network of healthy food options for New Yorkers.

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2 Food insecurity intersects with many aspects of
3 both individual and community well-being. From poor
4 school attendance and academic performance to poor
5 health outcomes including depression, diabetes, heart
6 disease, and other chronic diseases, greater food
7 insecurity results in disparate impacts on low-income
8 communities along multiple important dimensions of
9 our community's well-being. This is why our City's
10 ongoing efforts to serve as a strong partner in
11 aiding food insecure households matters.

12 Alongside DSS, our sister agencies and countless
13 community partners serve as part of the safety net to
14 assist food insecure households. Working with
15 colleagues at the New York City Department of Health
16 Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Mayor's Office of Food
17 Policy, as well as a panoply of community
18 stakeholders including neighborhood older adult
19 centers, our houses of worship, and community based
20 organizations, we work to tackle the challenges food
21 insecurity presents.

22 The Department of Social Services is responsible
23 for administering programs crucial uplifting food
24 security. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
25 Program, SNAP, helps approximately 1.8 million New

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2 Yorkers access nutritious food including
3 approximately 550,000 children and 545,000 older
4 adults. The Community Food Connection (CFC) funds
5 more than 700 food pantries and community kitchens
6 across the five boroughs. CFC served more than 21.5
7 million people, that's a duplicated number, in FY25
8 from July 2024 through December 2024. The CFC model
9 has created added flexibility for providers to
10 distribute the mix of foods that best meet the needs
11 of the communities they serve, including fresh
12 produce, Halal certified proteins, and Kosher
13 certified foods, among many other options. Formerly
14 known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program or
15 EFAP, CFC received \$57.2 million in funding for FY25.
16 From July 2024 through January 2025, CFC has
17 distributed more than 22 million pounds of food.

18 The federal government is a crucial pillar in
19 advancing the food security of our communities and
20 communities across the country. That is why we
21 continue to monitor developments in Washington, D.C.
22 closely and continue to underscore the importance of
23 the Farm Bill and SNAP. Proposals for federal cuts
24 would have profoundly negative impacts on vulnerable
25 households. The House Plan contemplates eliminating

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2 \$230 billion from agriculture funding, which would
3 severely impact SNAP benefits for New Yorkers. Any
4 reduction in SNAP would have a significant impact on
5 New Yorkers who access our and other essential food
6 security programs. To be clear, neither New York
7 City, nor New York State have the budget capacity to
8 replace crucial federal funding.

9 We encourage the City Council and all
10 stakeholders to speak out on the importance of these
11 crucial tools for fighting food insecurity. These
12 programs need to be retained and augmented. Instead
13 of a conversation centered on cutting these vital
14 programs, we would like the federal conversation to
15 lift up the lived experiences of these vulnerable
16 households. Moreover, understand the multiplier
17 effect SNAP has in our communities. The U.S.
18 Department of Agriculture has estimated the benefit
19 of every dollar to assist households with SNAP
20 finding between an additional positive 80¢ impact to
21 \$1.79 impact on our community. That multiplier effect
22 supports employment, helps local businesses,
23 including local supermarkets and bodegas, and
24 contributes to a stronger more resilient economy.
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2 We would also like to draw the Council's
3 attention to a proposal within the Farm Bill that
4 deeply impacts food insecurity in New York
5 communities. The Thrifty Food Plan is the model used
6 to determine maximum SNAP benefits from a holistic
7 approach that accounts for fundamentally important
8 factors in determining benefit levels such as food
9 prices, dietary guideline changes, and purchasing
10 habits. The House Plan proposed doing away with the
11 Thrifty Food Plan. Without a Thrifty Food Plan that
12 includes those components, we lose a crucial pathway
13 for regularly updating SNAP benefits. In addition to
14 the annual cost of living adjustment, the COLA, the
15 Thrifty Food Plan provides a key avenue for regularly
16 accommodating the real needs of households.
17 Elimination of the Thrifty Food Plan would result in
18 \$30 billion less in SNAP benefits over ten years.

19 We appreciate the Council's partnership in
20 advocating for New York communities, and we would
21 like to draw your attention to the timeline of
22 expected federal budgetary action. Foremost on that
23 timeline are the April presidential FY26 budget
24 release, the July House and Senate FY26
25 appropriations bills release, and the September 30th

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2 deadline for Congress to pass FY26 appropriations or
3 a continuing resolution. Your ongoing advocacy is
4 needed to ensure we secure an all important pillar of
5 protecting New Yorkers' food security.

6 Outreach remains an essential component of our
7 work, upholding our obligation to both make
8 assistance available and make New Yorkers aware that
9 the City serves as a partner in food security. To
10 that end, the DSS Office of Community Outreach
11 conducts targeted outreach campaigns to organizations
12 serving specific populations including older adults,
13 the LGBTQI community, persons with disabilities, and
14 immigrant communities. The Office of Community
15 Outreach conducts presentations and attends resource
16 fairs, farmers markets, and other events to increase
17 SNAP awareness and engagement. In addition, DSS works
18 through various channels to educate the public about
19 SNAP benefits to maximize City's use of available
20 federal programs to increase the purchasing power of
21 low-income New Yorkers. The Office of Community
22 Outreach also provides SNAP trainings and
23 presentations, prescreens potentially eligible
24 applicants, and assists with the SNAP application
25 process.

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2 As I mentioned at the start of my testimony, New
3 Yorkers in need of assistance should call 311, visit
4 foodhelp.nyc.gov to find nearby food pantries and
5 community kitchens, or reach us through Access HRA or
6 one of our Benefits Access Centers. New Yorkers can
7 also be connected to a community based organization
8 to get help with SNAP enrollment as well as other
9 benefits by calling 311 or visiting the HRA website
10 and clicking on the "Find A Partner Organization"
11 section. In addition, DSS participates in monthly
12 SNAP task force meetings chaired by Food Bank for New
13 York City to provide updates and answer questions
14 from participating CBOs.

15 In 2024, DSS conducted a total of 80 trainings
16 which included 2,123 attendees in using these tools
17 to submit SNAP and other benefits to applications and
18 provide benefit case management via Access HRA.
19 Training attendees include staff from other municipal
20 agencies, community partner organizations including
21 older adult center staff. These trainings were also a
22 forum for questions and concerns from providers and
23 advocates working directly with HRA and DHS clients
24 including older adults.

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2 With regard to the legislation being heard today
3 before the committee are three bills:

4 Introduction 245, Council Member Hudson, proposes
5 a report on the feasibility of creating a universal
6 benefits app benefits application for local public
7 benefit programs and directive to develop a universal
8 benefits application as determined feasible by the
9 Commissioner of the Department of Social Services.

10 This bill would also codify Access NYC, which is a
11 screening tool for public assistance programs, direct
12 the incorporation of new and existing programs as
13 deemed possible, and require increased public
14 awareness efforts of such tools.

15 Introduction 1028, by Council Member Hudson,
16 proposes that the Commissioner of Social Services
17 create a system to automatically enroll individuals
18 in city-created benefits programs – like Fair Fairs
19 NYC.

20 Introduction 1158, by Council Member Cabán, would
21 require DSS to provide an application receipt to any
22 applicant for benefits or services.

23 We appreciate the goals of easing the benefits
24 application process, reducing the administrative
25 burden placed on applicants, and offering clarity to

1 applicants as to documentation required in a timely
2 fashion. However, DSS is obligated to adhere to the
3 rubric set out by State and federal authorities
4 governing applications, enrollment, documentation,
5 and timelines. For instance, the USDA Food and
6 Nutrition Service, FNS, has been specific about what
7 our website looks like and what is permissible and
8 impermissible with respect to application submission
9 – for example names, addresses, and signatures.

11 Next, given the multitude of benefits HRA
12 administers, not to mention other City benefits
13 administered by other agencies, it is difficult to
14 see the nexus between those diverse programs that
15 would create a common application that is streamlined
16 to support efficient application and assessment.
17 Certain programs, such as Medicaid, may require
18 protected health information to be submitted that is
19 protected by state and federal confidentiality
20 protections. Additionally, the federal government
21 closely monitors and protects the use of information
22 submitted in support of a SNAP application. State and
23 federal privacy laws currently bar us from sharing
24 data across certain agency databases without
25 authorization. Those privacy considerations preclude

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2 certain protected information from crossing certain
3 boundaries even within DSS, let alone aggregating
4 sensitive information about individuals' residence
5 history, income tax payments, or earnings histories
6 on the scale required for automatic enrollment.

7 Lastly, these bills would substantially impact
8 the processes and workflow DSS uses to assess
9 eligibility, process applications, and make a
10 determination on an application. Providing a receipt
11 and copies of documents submitted may seem like a
12 simple request at first. To the extent we can, are
13 providing receipts. For applicants using Access HRA,
14 a receipt which shows the date the application was
15 submitted is made available upon submission of the
16 application. For a client who comes in person and
17 applies for benefits, a receipt is made available
18 upon request. Our goal is to keep clients informed
19 throughout the application process. This includes,
20 when possible, making them aware of what
21 documentation is outstanding in Cash Assistance and
22 SNAP applications for instance. In other applications
23 we handle, this receipt and copies mandate is much
24 more complicated, such as for Medicaid applications
25 where a caseworker is conducting a home visit for a

1 client with a medical or mental health condition or
2 disability. The caseworker will not have the ability
3 to print a receipt, nor will they be able to scan and
4 provide copies of submitted documents while visiting
5 the client in their home. In many cases, the
6 documentation would need to be mailed to a client
7 once submitted. There are significant privacy
8 concerns, especially as it relates to sending
9 personal health information in the mail. Such
10 information could be varied as Social Security
11 Numbers, lab test results, diagnostic information,
12 notes from healthcare providers, referral and
13 discharge summaries, prescription details, or
14 information about health conditions. If such
15 documents get into the hands of the wrong person,
16 they could be used for nefarious purposes.

18 Our work to combat food insecurity, and more
19 broadly as the largest social services agency in the
20 country, would not be possible without the ongoing
21 generosity, partnership, and commitment of countless
22 fellow New Yorkers. Thanks is also due to the
23 tremendously hardworking staff at DSS/HRA/DHS and all
24 across government and our community partners who
25 dedicate their lives to uplifting the most

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2 vulnerable. We appreciate the General Welfare
3 Committee and the Council's ongoing contributions and
4 look forward to working in partnership to continue
5 that work. We also appreciate the opportunity to test
6 testify and welcome your questions. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I want to
8 acknowledge that we have been joined Council Member
9 Cabán, Council Member Avilés, Council Member Ossé,
10 and Council Member Ung.

11 And I will now turn it over to Council Member
12 Cabán for her remarks.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, Chair Ayala, for
14 the opportunity to speak today about Intro 1148 of
15 2024, a bill that I introduced to improve
16 transparency and accountability in our City's benefit
17 application process. This legislation would require
18 DSS and HRA to provide applicants with a receipt
19 whenever they apply for benefits or services.

20 For years now, chronic underfunding and
21 understaffing under the Adams Administration has left
22 our City agencies inadequately equipped to meet New
23 Yorkers everyday needs. And as a result, when they
24 try to access lifesaving benefits, our residents have
25 struggled with bureaucratic hurdles and systemic

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2 barriers that have resulted in unnecessary delays,
3 confusion, and rejections. That's why the Receipts
4 Act would require each applicant to get a receipt
5 with important details such as the date of the
6 application, a list of the documents submitted, a
7 copy of the application, and an explanation of
8 whether the application is complete or if further
9 steps are needed. This simple, but ultimately very
10 important step, would help to ensure that New Yorkers
11 facing some of the most challenging moments of their
12 lives can navigate the process with greater clarity
13 and confidence.

14 The testimony we're going to hear from advocates
15 and organizations today, who serve populations that
16 rely on these services, will demonstrate clearly that
17 this bill is not redundant. It would streamline and
18 expand the mechanisms that currently exist for
19 transparency in the application process. And
20 crucially, this bill would fill important gaps in the
21 application process, strengthening these mechanisms
22 and guaranteeing greater confidence among applicants.
23 Our constituents need this, and I look forward to
24 working with DSS to address their concerns about
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2 implementation and make the receipts act work for our
3 community.

4 This bill is about making sure our constituents
5 can access the basic resources they need to survive.

6 So I hope you'll join me and the two dozen of my
7 colleagues that have already signed on in supporting
8 this important measure, one that will ensure our

9 neighbors are treated with respect and dignity they
10 deserve when applying for critical public benefits.

11 And I hope we'll be able to work collaboratively with
12 the Department to make sure it is implemented

13 effectively and helps plug the existing

14 administrative gaps in our City's essential social
15 welfare system. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Okay, I am going to
17 ask a few questions, and then... I don't know if any
18 of the other council members wanted to a questions?

19 Okay, great.

20 Good morning. Can you tell us how many providers
21 are currently in the CFC network?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We currently
23 have over 700 food pantries and community kitchens in
24 the CFC program across the five boroughs.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Are those providers given a
3 set of food grant allowances per month or per year?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We do two
5 allocations for six months each. And providers have
6 the flexibility to spend the allocation during that
7 six month period as works for their program.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How do you determine how
9 frequently the grant is provided?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I'm sorry?

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So the... you're saying that
12 you give the... The allowance is granted two per
13 every six months?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: One allowance
15 per provider every six months, so two per fiscal
16 year.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So how do you determine
18 that?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So the... we
20 primarily rely on the food, the supply gap analysis
21 that we run that looks at what is the supply of food
22 in the neighborhood and what is the relative need of
23 food in the neighborhood. We have also taken into
24 consideration unemployment rates, the presence of
25 vulnerable populations in particular neighborhoods

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2 such as recipients of SNAP, recipients of cash. For
3 example, we take into consideration the Task Force On
4 Racial Inclusion and Equity Neighborhoods that have
5 been targeted for needs needing additional services.
6 We took into consideration in the last round of
7 allocations the reduction in SNAP benefits. So during
8 COVID, SNAP benefits were set at an elevated level
9 and then they came down at the end of COVID. So we
10 looked at those neighborhoods where populations had a
11 larger loss of SNAP benefits during that time. And
12 lastly, we took into consideration neighborhoods that
13 had large numbers of new emergency shelters that were
14 sited in the neighborhoods and we gave an extra
15 allocation to those.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: For those communities that
17 don't benefit from brick and mortar locations, do the
18 few organizations that are, you know, in the program,
19 do they receive more funding?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: All the
21 providers that are in neighborhoods that that have
22 these criteria get slightly more funding than that
23 they're it's weighted a little bit higher to give
24 them more funding when they meet these conditions.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And if the CFC providers
3 need more food than they have been allocated, what is
4 the process and the time frame for them to get an
5 approval to order more food?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So any community
7 food provider that needs an additional allocation
8 should reach out to the CFC Program to let us know
9 that that an additional allocation is needed.

10 We recently had an additional \$2.9 that was
11 allocated through OMB to the food program. Last month
12 we distributed \$2.5 million of that funding
13 specifically to pantries that were in a... still had
14 a high supply gap and had spent all or most of their
15 allocation so far. So I think it was about a third of
16 the food providers got an extra allocation last
17 month.

18 We still have another \$400,000, plus any other
19 additional unallocated funds that we will reallocate
20 to pantries in need next month. One of the criteria
21 we're looking at is any food pantries that lost
22 federal funding due to federal cuts so far. That has
23 not affected the CFC program yet, but we know it has
24 affected some pantries, and we are going to look to
25

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2 see what we can do to assist those pantries in
3 particular when we do reallocation next month.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So just to get clarity, and
5 thank you for that, what is the timeframe from the
6 moment that the request is made to the time that it
7 is approved?

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So, we don't...
9 (CROSS-TALK)

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: (INAUDIBLE) I'm assuming it
11 varies, but...

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, honestly,
13 that's not... It doesn't typically work that way. We
14 don't typically get a lot of requests from food
15 pantries for additional allocations. They are
16 familiar with our cycle and reallocation process.
17 They know that at the end of an allocation cycle is
18 typically when we do reallocations. So we may hear
19 from a few pantries that reach out to us at that time
20 and say, "Hey, we know it's getting close to the time
21 you do reallocations. Please keep us in mind as you
22 do that." It's not the... I understand what you're
23 asking but it has not traditionally followed that
24 formal process.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Can you tell us what the
3 CFC is doing to connect with and support smaller and
4 newer providers?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Sorry? I...
6 the...

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the CFC doing to
8 connect with and support smaller...

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Ah, yes...

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: with smaller newer providers?

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah. So we do
12 feel that it is really important to be able to
13 support all types of providers with the CFC Program.
14 We support large providers, medium-sized providers,
15 as well as small pantries.

16 And the way we support that is we have an open
17 application process. The application process for CFC
18 is always open on a rolling basis. We do keep a small
19 set of funds aside so that we can fund new pantries
20 in the program at any given time. And every pantry
21 application we receive we work with that pantry to
22 try to fund them. One of the... You have to have safe
23 places to store foods. Somebody doesn't have that,
24 we'll do a site visit to talk to them about, you
25 know, "Well, maybe you could put a refrigerator

1 here," or "There's this other location nearby that
2 maybe could help out."

3
4 We also require that CFC not be the only funding
5 source for the pantry. So pantries... CFC is meant to
6 be a supplemental program, it's not funding the full
7 needs of every pantry in the city of New York, but we
8 may work with them to let them know what the New York
9 State application process is so they can apply for
10 both sets of funding at the same time. We can
11 coordinate and ensure that that pantry gets opened.

12 Really the only reason that we would reject a
13 pantry application is if they're not working with us
14 for one, but that's not typically the case. But if
15 there's already a couple of pantries like on the same
16 block, that might be a reason that we might not fund
17 a particular pantry.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is there a minimum to the
19 amount that you expect an organization or program to
20 have in foundation funds before they can be approved
21 for a grant?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: No, there's no
23 set minimum amount, but obviously we try to use our
24 best judgment there. A dollar of funding would not be
25 enough, but there is no set amount, because we know

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2 pantry sizes vary, the number of hours that they
3 operate vary, the number of people they serve vary,
4 so we don't want to be too prescriptive in setting a
5 minimum.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I just worry for this,
7 because the smaller ones may not have the
8 administrative capacity to, you know, dedicate that
9 time or staff to filling out applications. So they
10 may be relying on the food bank, for instance, you
11 know, to bring food. So if they are receiving some
12 supplemental ,you know, program or service through
13 ,like, the food bank for instance would they still
14 qualify?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: That counts. If
16 they're getting food through the food bank or through
17 city harvest, that absolutely counts.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Does the CFC offer any
19 operational grants or assistance to health providers?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes, we do. We
21 issue, every year, we have funding for what we call
22 Administrative Grants as well as Capacity Building
23 Grants. So the Administrative Grant process is...
24 that has been our typical process in the past is the
25 Administrative Grants process, where we'll have

1 unallocated funding from a prior year that we sort of
2 hold aside for this purpose. Pantries submit to us
3 receipts for funding, whether they bought
4 refrigerators or hired some a few staff members to
5 staff a pantry needs for food trucks – they provide
6 us with their receipts, and if they meet the
7 criteria' we will reimburse them.

9 We've also recently, over the last few years
10 under this administration, in partnership with the
11 Mayor's Office of Food Policy, have established these
12 capacity building grants – which I'm very excited
13 about because I think our Administrative Grants have
14 benefited larger food pantries that can outlay money
15 and then and then we reimburse them.

16 But this Capacity Building Grant process that
17 we've implemented allows, I think it makes it easier
18 for smaller pantries to get some support for us.

19 So this process, a pantry applies for what they
20 want to spend the funding on; we evaluate those
21 proposals that we receive, and then we provide
22 pantries with the grant funding, then they can use
23 that money to go out and purchase – let's say a small
24 pantry needs a larger capacity refrigerator, they
25 submit that through our grant process. If they're

1
2 awarded, they then have the funds to go out and buy
3 the larger refrigerator, but they don't have to
4 outlay that money themselves upfront.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. In FY25 Preliminary
6 Budget Response, the Council called on the
7 Administration to increase and baseline the CFC
8 budget to \$60 million to help combat the high levels
9 of food insecurity in the city, which persists today.
10 As of the Preliminary Plan, the FY25 budget for CFC
11 totaled \$60 million; however, the funding dropped
12 substantially to \$20.9 million in FY26 and in the out
13 years.

14 This is a critical program for families in need.
15 Will funding be added for this program, and if so,
16 when and how much?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So we're really
18 proud that this Administration has more than doubled
19 over the last few years the funding for the CFC
20 program. It's an important program, and that level of
21 investment that the Administration has made over the
22 last several years is unprecedented for the CFC
23 Program. And we continue to work with OMB on FY26
24 funding for CFC.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What is the actual
3 spending thus far in FY25, and how much was spent in
4 fiscal FY24?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Thank you for
6 that question, in FY 24 we spent \$55.6 million on the
7 program. And so far in FY25, through March, we've
8 spent \$29.9 million.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The fiscal year runs through
10 June.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes, these are
12 the... this is based on the receipts that we get from
13 Schrier (phonetic). So there is a bit of a lag in
14 their billing us for the food that they have
15 distributed, and then we reimburse them.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What do...

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We traditionally
18 allocated and spent all of the funds, and we fully
19 expect to do that this fiscal year as well.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. We're looking forward to
21 the Administration baselining those funds so that
22 we're not having this conversation year after year.

23 We've been joined by Council Member Stevens.

24 There are currently over 500 listed CFC
25 locations, however many of these are concentrated in

1
2 certain boroughs and zip codes. How does DSS ensure
3 that CFC locations are funded in the in the areas
4 with the most need? And how does DSS incentivize or
5 otherwise support CFC providers locations where there
6 may be a mismatch between food access and need?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So we... the
8 applications are, as I mentioned earlier, the CFC
9 application is open all the time on a rolling basis
10 for any pantry to apply. So any pantry in any
11 location is can apply. If any council members know of
12 a pantry not currently receiving funds, we do
13 encourage you to have them apply for CFC funding.

14 But, the way we manage the food going into the
15 neighborhoods, is through the allocation process,
16 looking at the supply gap. So we're really looking at
17 the data of the need in a community and the capacity
18 and ability to meet that need.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. So we know that in some
20 neighborhoods they lack available brick and mortar
21 locations, and that prevents providers from operating
22 food pantries and soup kitchens. Does DSS have any
23 idea on how this could be overcome? And how is DSS
24 collaborating with other City agencies, such as Aging
25 or DOE to ensure access to food services?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So one of the
3 ways that we are able to meet the need of the lack of
4 the brick and mortar locations for CFC is we do fund
5 some of the mobile pantries in the city. So there's a
6 number of organizations in the city that have mobile
7 pantries, and those pantries can deliver food into
8 neighborhoods that may not have brick and mortar food
9 pantries. And that's an important part of the CFC
10 Program that we will continue to fund.

11 We also collaborate regularly with DOHMH and the
12 Department for Aging to make sure that... with DOHMH,
13 we work closely on a number of programs - they have a
14 number of programs like Health Bucks, Groceries to
15 Go, Get the Good Stuff that are available that we
16 work in partnership, they make available to people in
17 receipt of SNAP benefits. And for the Department of
18 Aging, we work very closely with them, especially and
19 in particular on SNAP outreach to ensure that older
20 adults who are eligible for, and in need of, SNAP
21 benefits apply for and receive them.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think I'm primarily
23 concerned here about, you know, boroughs like the
24 Bronx where, you know, there aren't very many brick
25

1
2 and mortar locations and that, you know, the mobile
3 pantry sites may not be enough.

4 So I know that I asked this at the Preliminary
5 Budget Hearing, but I'm really interested in hearing
6 from DSS, what conversations have been had with the
7 Department for the Aging to maybe increase pantry
8 sites in some of their senior centers - or working
9 with the DOE to identify locations within some of the
10 schools to help identify more locations that...

11 Because, I get it, I have a hard time, too, when I'm
12 distributing my food pantry funds in the Bronx.
13 There aren't that many people to give the funding to.
14 So we rely heavily on, you know, certain groups,
15 which is unfair, right? Because, I mean,
16 some of them are already at, you know, a tipping
17 point. But I just haven't heard or seen, you know,
18 what the plan is to address this.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So...

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I like the mobiles. I just
21 don't rely... I don't think that the mobiles are the
22 you know, like, it's complicated. Right?

23 People need to know, okay, I can go to, you know,
24 to Saint Ann's Church on Thursdays and, you know,
25 Tuesdays and Thursdays, and I'm gonna, you know, be

1
2 able to get what I'm gonna you know, whatever they're
3 giving out that day. But with the mobiles, I don't...
4 I'm not too sure how that how that works.

5 I mean, my experience is that, you know, they
6 move around a lot. So what has DSS done in the in the
7 Bronx specifically to ensure that we are increasing
8 the number of sites? Because the number of funds that
9 are going into the Bronx are significantly lower than
10 that of Manhattan.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So, yeah, I
12 understand your question. What we have done since the
13 Preliminary Budget Hearing is with the \$2.5 million
14 that we allocated, over a billion dollars went to the
15 Bronx. The Bronx got the largest share of that
16 funding because they did have the largest supply gap.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And the highest number of
18 poverty and food insecurity.

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes. All of
20 those things. And they did get the bulk of that \$2.5
21 million.

22 Just in terms of the mobile pantries, I know that
23 there are certain mobile pantries that specifically
24 go to older adult centers and park outside of older
25

1
2 adult centers on a regular day of the month and do
3 have that partnership.

4 But you're right, there is more we can do,
5 and I will commit to reaching out to Department for
6 the Aging in New York City Public Schools following
7 this hearing to see what else we can do to increase
8 numbers... to work with them to increase the number
9 of pantries or access to food through mobile
10 pantries.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, yeah, I think it just,
12 you know, we need to be a little bit more creative
13 about how we get food to folks. Because even if we're
14 getting a \$1 million, we got a \$1 million extra, but
15 the \$1 million is going to the same, you know, three
16 groups. I mean the outreach, you're not expanding,
17 right? Because you're... I mean you're still meeting
18 a need, because it's significant, but there may be
19 parts of the borough that are not benefiting from
20 that.

21 Okay. What is what is HRA doing to streamline the
22 process? Moving over to SNAP - can you tell us what
23 HRA is doing to streamline the process and improve
24 timeliness for public benefits applications,
25

1 including SNAP? And what percentage of clients is HRA
2 seeing reapply or reopening their cases after denial?

3 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure, thank you.

4 So currently, we do not have data on people who
5 are new applicants who then reapply, given there's a
6 variety of different reasons why someone might not
7 have had the application go through the entire
8 process. What we do track is, for individuals who do
9 not recertify, who are currently on benefits, do not
10 recertify, and then rejoin the... reapply within 90
11 days.
12

13 I can say for cash assistance on average, it's
14 about 40 percent of those who do not recertify do
15 reapply. And for SNAP, it's about 25 percent of those
16 who do not recertify will apply within the next 90
17 days and be found eligible.

18 The reasons why people might not recertify can be
19 a variety of reasons - they may not return the
20 recertification form, they may not call for their on-
21 demand interview. But the reason, you know, they are
22 off the caseload is because we didn't receive
23 information from them on recertification, not because
24 we found them to be ineligible, and then they were
25 eligible again a little bit later.

1
2 So we track that very closely to see if there's
3 any trends that we're seeing as well to try to
4 identify if there's places where we can help
5 streamline the recertification process.

6 I will say, as it relates to streamline and
7 improving access to benefits, we spend a lot of time
8 on technology, both utilization of Access HRA and
9 ensuring, as much as possible, especially around cash
10 and SNAP, that individuals can really manage their
11 benefits through that portal, as well as offering the
12 on demand interviews. Right? So in essence,
13 individuals don't ever need to come into a Benefit
14 Access Center if they don't want to. They also can
15 and have get assistance both, either using our PC
16 banks, if they don't have a computer at home, we have
17 staff that man those to help people, as well as
18 provide telephones, if someone wanted to call for
19 their on demand interview in the center.

20 And I can say wait times on average, uh, in
21 January for cash assistance on demand, the average
22 was about 53 minutes and for SNAP it was under 30
23 minutes.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So let me ask you a question,
25 because I hear there's a lot regarding the... hold on

1
2 a second. I just want to make sure that I recognize
3 that we've been joined by Council Member Riley.

4 If a person has started the application process,
5 they have 90 days to complete it?

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: No, the application process
7 for timeliness, sorry...

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Uh-huh?

9 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: for timeliness for if
10 you're an application, in general, there's a 30-day
11 timeline from when someone applies. Right? And in
12 that 30 days, the individual would need to submit all
13 necessary supporting documents and complete an on
14 demand interview. And then we would be required to
15 make a determination within the 30 days on average.

16 There are instances where we will grant someone
17 more than 30 days for the process. Say someone calls
18 towards the end of the 30 day period for their on
19 demand interview, or they call and they need
20 additional time to actually submit documents. We'll
21 defer that application to give them more time to
22 provide the information we need, so that they don't
23 have to restart the application process all over
24 again.

1
2 I can say that for timeliness rates, they have
3 increased quite a bit over the last year, especially
4 as we were able to eradicate the backlogs. So, for
5 SNAP timeliness, for the month of January, that was
6 over 91 percent, uh, cash assistance was at 71
7 percent. And we obviously continue to stay focused on
8 ways in which we can improve, continue to improve
9 those percentages.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The percentages for cash
11 assistance was 70...

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Seventy-one percent.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Seventy-one percent?

14 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'm trying to figure
16 out... because one of the complaints, and one of
17 things that I see a lot, you know, through our
18 Constituent Services Division, is that people are
19 submitting documents and then being told that the
20 documents were not submitted.

21 And sometimes my own staff is submitting the
22 documents, so we know that the documents had in fact
23 been submitted, and somewhere in the ,you know, abyss
24 they get lost, right?

1
2 So then ,you know, it happens pretty often, and
3 my concern is that then they would have to start the
4 process again at the 30 mark, because there's no way
5 of determining that the documents were in fact... So
6 if my staff doesn't call and say, "Listen, I have
7 ,you know, I upload them, I sent them myself,"
8 there's no way that a person on their own can kind of
9 prove that they did that. And they're doing it
10 sometimes upwards of five times. And, you know, so
11 there's something, there's a disconnect somewhere.

12 Is there an acknowledgment at least on the DSS
13 part, and some sort of plan to try to figure out what
14 that disconnect is?

15 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah, absolutely. You know,
16 there is a very high volume of, you know,
17 applications and recertifications that come through
18 on a monthly basis. We're averaging about 48,000 cash
19 applications a month, about 36,000 SNAP applications
20 plus recertifications.

21 So I'm not going to sit here and say that our
22 indexing processes are perfect in any way. We
23 continue to look at ways in which we can improve the
24 indexing to ensure that documents that are, you know,
25 submitted are actually connected to the right case.

1
2 We are rolling out technologies, starting first
3 on the SNAP side, where we are doing auto indexing so
4 that when someone submits some documents, it can be
5 connected to that case.

6 Right now, some of the indexing is, you know, a
7 person process and a people process, where there can
8 be, you know, incidents of, you know, documents maybe
9 not being connected to the right case.

10 Obviously, in instances, you know, where the
11 council members bring those to our attention, we do
12 research to try to understand first what may have
13 happened, and then how we can address that moving
14 forward. Although we acknowledge it is a process that
15 we're continuously looking at given sort of the very
16 large volume of documents that we are sort of
17 managing on a monthly basis.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I mean, we want to
19 prevent people from losing their benefits and we want
20 to...

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Absolutely.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: speed up the time frame in
23 which they're able to access them if they need them.

24 Is there a is there a process within the system
25 that alerts the staff when there's an individual that

1
2 has maybe like a legal guardian whenever ,like,
3 recertification?

4 So I recently had a constituent case that I
5 handled myself, and the person has serious mental
6 health issues and has a guardian that handles all of
7 their finances. And she was frantic because she
8 didn't have any money to eat, and ,you know, she had
9 her food stamp card, and she didn't have any money on
10 it. And when we called, what happened was that she
11 lost them because she didn't recertify.

12 So when I asked who the recertification ,you
13 know, package goes to, it had gone to her. But she
14 has a guardian for that very reason. So I'm not sure,
15 you know, why... does that information get
16 communicated to you guys? Is there a system where
17 you're working within the, you know, the networks for
18 the guardianship program, so that you are aware of
19 who's... who to pay closer attention to - because
20 they may have a specific circumstance that prevents
21 them from filling out the application or recertifying
22 on their own?

23 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: There is the opportunity
24 for individuals to have sort of an authorized
25 representative that works on their behalf. We'd need

1
2 to look in that specific case to see what may have
3 happened in that instance.

4 In most cases, right, the information and such is
5 provided to the individual. You know, we are looking
6 at ways in which we can try to improve that sort of
7 communication or track things.

8 Those who do utilize Access HRA and have accounts
9 with Access HRA, they are able to see both
10 information on their recertification – when that's
11 due, where that went, as well as documents that they
12 submitted... (CROSS-TALK)

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, but we're talking about
14 individuals that have... I'm telling you she has
15 serious mental health issues. And...

16 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Right.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And luckily within, you know,
18 her limitations, she's savvy enough to know that she
19 needs help and come to our office. But I had a
20 similar issue with her – two months prior she was
21 delinquent and rent for like over \$34,000. She has
22 CityFHEPS, the CityFHEPS was about to expire, and she
23 has a guardian that is responsible for all of this.
24 But the information is not getting to the guardian,
25 or the guardian is not communicating with you guys.

1
2 So I'm trying to figure out where... is there a
3 process? And maybe we can help you, I don't know,
4 legislatively. I don't know if this is an internal
5 thing that...

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm?

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: we can put in some sort of
8 practice that ensures that that doesn't happen.
9 Because, in her case, she didn't... she doesn't get
10 a lot of money. Right? So after her bills are paid,
11 she has to still wait until the rest of the of the
12 money sent to her. And if she doesn't have access to
13 food stamp benefits - and she's not eating - and
14 she's may not be, you know, in this case, she's able
15 to self advocate enough, right, like you have to be
16 patient and sit there and kind of like try to
17 decipher what she needs, but not everybody's that
18 patient. I'll tell you that right now. And most
19 people would just be like, oh, you know, this person
20 has problems and we're not, like, we don't know what
21 they want and just, you know, dismiss them.

22 We need to create a better system when there's a
23 person that is completely relying on you to receive
24 their food stamp benefits every month, and they have
25 a proper... they have a guardian, there has to be a

1 network. Like she's not going sign a paper that says,
2 "Oh, I'm gonna assign x y and z to be my
3 representative."
4

5 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Right. Yeah, in instances
6 where there is actually a legal guardian for someone,
7 and happy to talk more about specifics as well on
8 that, because the legal guardian is responsible for
9 managing the finances for that individual and making
10 sure that they have everything, you know, set up and
11 have access to the information they need.

12 So would want to definitely look a little bit
13 further into that, and happy to discuss further ways
14 in which we can... (CROSS-TALK)

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I would love to be able
16 to...

17 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah...

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: to maybe brainstorm a little
19 bit on how we can figure that out...

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah...

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: so that we're not, you know,
22 necessarily losing people.

23 All right, I going to just hand it over to my
24 colleagues for a little bit, and then I'll be back.

25 Council Member Cabán?

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, I am going to
3 pick up where the chair left off essentially.

4 So I mean, my first question is, are constituents
5 able to retroactively view submitted documents on the
6 Access HRA mobile app?

7 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: They are able to see
8 documents that they have submitted through their
9 Access HRA account, yes. There is a PDF that is
10 created, connected to an application that would show
11 the documents that they did submit as it relates to
12 that application.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And so it shows what the
14 document it is?

15 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And the... okay.

17 So are there any special cases or circumstances
18 in which an applicant might be able to view all of
19 the documents online or on the mobile app outside of
20 that?

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: You mean not having an
22 application but still being able to? To utilize
23 Access HRA, individuals do need to have an account.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. I mean, obviously,
25 that poses digital divide sort of challenges. And

1
2 it's true that ,like, on the app, the documents are
3 categorized, and the apps basically only states what
4 category a document was submitted under, correct?

5 Right. So it doesn't actually tell them what the
6 specific document they submitted, uh, that qualifies
7 under a category. Correct?

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Correct. We... documents
9 get reviewed and verified...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Right.

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: through the processing
12 process - as well as through the interview process to
13 identify, is there anything missing from the...

14 (CROSS-TALK)

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, point is that if what
16 they are able to view on this is just the category
17 and not the specific document they submitted to
18 satisfy the category, which is a number of eligible
19 documents, then they're all left wondering, well
20 which document was it? Was it this? What is this?
21 What was it this other thing?

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And I think that that's a
24 problem. It's not particularized enough information
25 for it to be really useful.

1
2 At what point does the application or the
3 participant receive a receipt or other notice about
4 the status of their application, specifically about
5 documents or next steps?

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure. So individuals will
7 receive notification after their interview if there
8 are still documents required for the application to
9 be completed, right? We'll identify what is still
10 needed from them, which is often when we're also
11 deferring application to give someone more time to
12 actually submit all of the full documents – just
13 because, at initial application, individuals often
14 may not have all of the documents that they need to
15 submit at that time. So...

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah, and also to the
17 Chair's point, there are plenty of instances, which
18 we have many times in our office also – we also
19 submit documents on behalf of our constituents where,
20 you know, the scenario is that we have submitted
21 those documents, and then you all say you don't have
22 them. So that also encompasses what's happening some
23 of the time.

24

25

1
2 I want to also follow-up on some of the questions
3 around the in-person applicants that the chair was
4 asking...

5 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So why is it that a receipt
7 is only provided upon request? Like, doesn't that put
8 it on the applicant to make sure that they're getting
9 the verification they need? Doesn't SNAP... also
10 doesn't SNAP as a federal program require a receipt
11 by statute?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: So we will... to start a
13 SNAP application, actually an individual only needs
14 to provide their name, their address, and they only
15 have to provide three bits of information, which
16 actually none of which would allow us to actually
17 assess someone's application that is ,you know,
18 under, you know, the SNAP guidelines of what we are
19 required to do. And then we would need to continue
20 that by communicating with the individual on what is
21 needed and through the interview.

22 So you know, currently we do have it on request.
23 Right? We can look at that...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Why? I guess ,like, that
25 doesn't answer my question. Like, why are we sort of

1
2 shifting the burden here that ,like, if you're
3 meeting the person in person, the only way they get a
4 receipt is if they ask for it? Why are they being
5 treated differently than other folks? Presumably
6 because if they're being seen in person, they have
7 other, you know, barriers that make that the case,
8 which already makes the process... a hard process
9 even harder. And ,like, I'm gonna say, as a person
10 living with a disability, these are the kinds of
11 differences in treatment that are like absolutely
12 infuriating.

13 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I hear you on that, and I
14 will bring that back in regards to requiring
15 individuals to ask for a receipt.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: But you don't... you don't,
17 today, have a reason or a rationale why that burden
18 is shifted to individuals who are getting services at
19 home?

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I do not.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. That's...

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I will... I understand you
23 as well... (CROSS-TALK)

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: a problem... (CROSS-TALK)

25

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I will also say, you know,
3 an overwhelming majority of individuals are applying
4 through Access HRA, where they do get receipts either
5 on their own, or we encourage people to actually come
6 into the centers to utilize our equipment as well.

7 But I hear you on that instance. So, I will look
8 into that... (CROSS-TALK)

9 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah, some people can't do
10 those things! It's just... and, then, so you're
11 taking people who are on the margins of eligibility
12 in terms of need, and making it even harder. And I
13 think that's a real problem.

14 I want to ask also, this is a little bit about...
15 Oh, and following up on that, at what time in the
16 application is the PDF you talked about made
17 available to applicants? Like, you talking about the
18 ability to review the application at the very, uh, at
19 the very end before, like, before it's being
20 submitted?

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: The PDF, and the sort of
22 receipt of it all, will be after someone has
23 submitted those documents. That's where...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Not when...

25 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: it would be created.

1 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, not before, after?

2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Currently, yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay, I am also thinking
4 about some of the testimony that you gave, and I have
5 a couple of questions based on that.

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: How does DSS currently
8 receive documents? And this is just... I just want to
9 get a lot of detail on the record about this.

10 So how are you receiving the documents from
11 clients who are homebound or providing that
12 verification when they do request the receipt?

13 And then my follow ups to that, because I know
14 I'm running out of time, are, like, couldn't DSS scan
15 the documents there and provide a paper receipt?

16 I can't stress enough that these are our most
17 vulnerable clients who don't have the capacity to do
18 some of this online (TIMER CHIMES) submission or
19 submit the documents in person or by mail.

20 And I think that there are absolutely ways to
21 work around the privacy concerns that you have. I
22 worked as an attorney for a very long time. I had to
23 deal with HIPAA for a lot of my clients, and things
24 that actually... and we would get would get excuses
25

1
2 of, like, well, we can't do this, we can't give you
3 this because of HIPAA. And a lot of times it's, like,
4 no, I'm not asking for the information that falls
5 under HIPAA. I'm asking for general information that
6 would be useful without betraying that that privacy.

7 So yeah, I mean, that's my question. How are you
8 doing this? Why can't you do... scan it another way?

9 I'm curious to hear what you think, and I'd to
10 sign up for a second round, too.

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Certainly. So first also, I
12 meant to say we, as an agency, are committed to
13 working with you on the bill and working through some
14 of the concerns we have to improve the ways in which
15 we can absolutely make people aware of what they've
16 submitted and where they are in the process. Right?
17 That is a goal of ours. It is a large system, and
18 it's an iterative process, but that is definitely a
19 goal of ours, even with the concerns we have about
20 the bill.

21 And, you know, as it as it relates to homebound
22 requests, it sort of depends on each individual
23 request. Right? You know, I can get back to you on
24 specifics for, you know, each of the different
25

1
2 benefits that we have – just because we do some
3 different things with different folks.

4 But we hear you on, you know, the improving
5 voices... (CROSS-TALK)

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: But why can't you scan on
7 scene is, again, my question?

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We could. I mean, the
9 mobile app could be utilized on scene by individuals,
10 right, to upload documents in that way. So that is
11 something that we can do to upload the documents.
12 Depending on if, you know, people can upload the
13 documents, uh, not necessarily utilizing an Access
14 HRA account, right? So those would need to be
15 connected to an individual's account. So it's not
16 always going to be connected, but there are ways, in
17 home, to upload documents.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And so just based on your
19 testimony that you gave just now, it actually... it
20 isn't the case then, as you said in your written
21 testimony, that it would be impracticable,
22 impossible, to provide receipts during for... these
23 home visits?

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: It... I think the thing
25 wasn't always just about receipts. I think it was

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also about copies of the documents. Right? I believe that might have been part of it, but we can follow-up. Each... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, yeah, (INAUDIBLE) again (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Each one would be different, right? A cash application... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I mean, you should (INAUDIBLE) right now... (CROSS-TALK)

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: is different than a Medicaid document... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Is that they could potentially be scanned in a person's home, through some means...

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm, potentially... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: (INAUDIBLE) it's not (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: that we would... we... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: said in the written testimony... But, I just want to... I just want to... (CROSS-TALK)

1 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We would need to work...

2 (CROSS-TALK)

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

4 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We would need to work
5 through it, so there are nuances and complications,
6 but, again...

7 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Yeah...

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We're committed to working
9 with you to...

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Would love, love, love to
11 do that... (CROSS-TALK)

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: work through those
13 things... (CROSS-TALK)

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, uh, yeah.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Stevens?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hello, good morning. I
17 just has a couple of follow-up questions from when
18 the Chair was asking... she was asking about the
19 mobile pantries. Because, I just wanted some clarify
20 around... And we can say specifically in the Bronx
21 because that's my borough - and even more
22 specifically, my district.

23 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yes.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Where are these mobile
3 locations that you guys deploy the food pantries
4 from?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: The mobile
6 pantries themselves, it's the organization that gets
7 funded... (CROSS-TALK)

8 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: (INAUDIBLE)...

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: (INAUDIBLE) the
10 mobile pantries go to... (CROSS-TALK)

11 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah... Yeah, which ones
12 are you funding? Because, I am asking because the
13 only mobile pantries that I've seen in my district
14 are the ones that I fund.

15 So I am trying to find which ones you're funding
16 and where they're located. Because I literally
17 only... the ones that I've been funding, that's the
18 only time I've seen the mobile pantry in my district.
19 So I'm trying to get an understanding of, in the
20 Bronx, where those organizations funded? And where
21 are you deploying them or requesting them to be
22 deployed?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So I know we
24 fund a Council mobile food pantry. I don't know off

1
2 the top of my head all the organizations that have
3 mobile food pantries that we do fund.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Well, I'm just telling
5 you in my district, 16 in the West Bronx, the only
6 mobile food pantry that we have is mine – the ones
7 that I fund specifically through the Council funding.
8 And that's a problem for me, especially because my
9 district has little to no access to healthy and fresh
10 foods. So how are we going to the places where people
11 need it?

12 I know the Chair talked about how it's really
13 hard to find people to fund, even in my district, for
14 this, because there's just... we don't have a lot,
15 and even in the areas that need to be funded. Right?

16 So when I'm thinking about like Highbridge,
17 there's a vacuum. There's nothing there.

18 So I would love to see a mobile food pantry
19 there, which I fund, because it is one, because I was
20 like, this is crazy.

21 Would love to see that, and how are you
22 evaluating the information to make sure that you're
23 hitting areas that have issues with access to food
24 and also have high poverty numbers? What is the
25 evaluation process for that?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So we do
3 recognize and understand that there are communities
4 in the city that do not have enough brick and mortar
5 pantries. We do fund some mobile pantries as a result
6 of that, but we... (CROSS-TALK)

7 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So my question is - so
8 when you're thinking about the shelter placements,
9 because my district is also overrun with that, how
10 are you then countering that to make sure that they
11 have the support that they need?

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Currently what
13 we're doing is we're giving additional dollar
14 allocations to the pantries that are in those
15 locations that are participating in the CFC Program.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: So that's a problem. You
17 guys are over saturating, specifically the Bronx,
18 with these things, and then not looking at how to
19 evaluate to make sure you're off setting the needs.

20 And this is one of the things I talk about a lot,
21 is that we're... it's not that we don't want them
22 there, you guys don't give us the support to be able
23 to handle the amount of things you're putting there.

24 So I think that this is something you need to
25 really take back, and really be evaluating of, like,

1
2 okay, we already have communities that have such high
3 needs – and then we're oversaturated with more people
4 who have high needs – and then we're not giving them
5 the services, and we're kind of left to figure it
6 out.

7 And I guess my question, even around the Health
8 Bucks, too, know you guys were talking about Health
9 Bucks and partnering with DOH, and you are giving...
10 and you are giving Health Bucks to organizations...
11 Because the only Health Bucks I've also seen in my
12 districts, are the ones that I fund.

13 So I'm trying to get an understanding of where
14 the ones you're funding are, and how do my residents
15 get access for that? Because they're only the ones
16 that I fund that I've seen in my district.

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We'll have to
18 get back to you. Because DOHMH is the agency that
19 gives out the Health Bucks. We partner with them to
20 make sure that the SNAP recipients have access to
21 them, but we can talk to DOHMH about how they...

22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Because I would love to
24 know what that looks like. Because, again, in
25 District 16, the only Health Bucks that are given

1 out, are the ones that I allocate from my funding.
2 And if they're supposed to be able to get access to
3 the Health Bucks, I want to make sure that my
4 residents also are able to have access to these
5 Health Bucks. Because they love them. And I get
6 yelled at all the time because I can't give out
7 enough... last year. You know, if you go to the
8 farmers market, everything is super expensive. And
9 ,you know, typically we can only give out anywhere
10 between \$15 and \$20. And they are, like, I can only
11 get a bunch of carrots.
12

13 So I would love to know if there is a place that
14 I can recommend for them to go to support what I'm
15 doing. But, at this time, in the era of food
16 insecurity, my district is super overburdened with
17 it. And I feel like I'm drowning over here, because I
18 am the one trying to pick up the burden. And if there
19 are things that they should be able to get access to,
20 I would love for my district to be able to get access
21 to it.

22 And I guess my last question is, one of the
23 things... one of the issues we have a lot with the
24 Constituent Services is folks coming in and them
25

1
2 being, you know, maybe \$5 over the limit for SNAP
3 benefits and not being able to get any benefits.

4 What are some of the solutions that you guys give
5 to them? Because I know a lot of times they come to
6 our office, (TIMER CHIMES) obviously we give them,
7 you know, a list for like food pantries or whatever,
8 but is there any other support? Because that's been a
9 huge thing where we have, you know, families who do
10 have jobs and working, and they have a number of
11 children, and they're maybe like \$5 over. So they're
12 not qualifying, and now they're struggling.

13 So are there any other options that they might
14 have?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, I mean,
16 you raise a really good point that there is
17 definitely a benefits cliff for most of our benefits.
18 Unfortunately, we don't set the eligibility rules for
19 most of our programs, including the SNAP program.
20 They are set by the federal government, and we have
21 very limited tools when somebody is just \$5 over, for
22 example, the eligibility limit for SNAP, other than
23 providing them with information about food pantries
24 and community kitchens.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON STEVENS: I definitely... yeah, I know
3 we don't set the eligibility for it, but my question
4 was are there other options? Right? So obviously I
5 think that this is something we do need to address,
6 especially with the price of inflation and things
7 going up. It's making it that much harder, because
8 people have less money for food, especially when rent
9 is additionally so high.

10 I mean, and just so fitting, my staff as I'm
11 sitting here, we're in the midst of Participatory
12 Budgeting, and on one of our ballots one of our young
13 people just wrote, "Please give us money for food."
14 So this is a real issue, specifically in my district,
15 and this is at one of my high schools right now as
16 they're collecting petitions.

17 So this is serious for me and it means a lot.
18 And, like I said, if there are things that my
19 district is supposed to be getting, I have not seen
20 them, and I would love to get more information on
21 what that looks like to make sure that we can have
22 access to it, too. Because I have not been seeing it
23 or feeling it in District 16 at all.

24

25

1
2 I feel like I've really been carrying the food
3 pantry burden on my own. So I definitely would love
4 some support and resources. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. And she's entirely
6 right, I mean, when we're when we're trying to fund
7 these organizations, these groups, like you have to
8 search. And ,you know, oftentimes when I represented
9 parts of Council Member Stevens' district, like, I
10 would have to fund pantries that were outside of the
11 borders of my own district, because I didn't have any
12 in that ,you know, particular area. And I don't know
13 that the people in my district knew ,you know, to go
14 that far off to be able to access it.

15 So it's just... it's... yeah, it's just ,you
16 know, we can work together to try to identify ways to
17 make it better, but that conversation definitely
18 needs to be had.

19 I want to recognize we've been joined by Council
20 Member Banks, and I believe he has a couple of
21 questions as well.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Thank you, Madam Chair, and
23 to the Administration, thank you.

24 Quickly, just want some clarification on the SNAP
25 program and the fraud issues that have come up. I

1
2 know particularly there was a notification that went
3 out that SNAP benefits wouldn't be, uh, if there was
4 fraud or somebody's card was breached, that they
5 would have to wait a whole month to get back their
6 benefits on their card. And I wanna know what's being
7 done. I had two seniors whose cards were compromised
8 and they had no food. Their card was compromised the
9 first day of the month when their benefits were
10 supposed to go on their card, and we had to basically
11 run around to other food... to food pantries to get
12 them food.

13 So what is being done by the Administration to
14 fill that gap, especially when we're talking about
15 food insecurity? This just adds more trauma,
16 especially on a person...or anyone, they shouldn't
17 have to go through this.

18 So what's being done to address this issue?
19 Understanding that the benefits won't be on the card
20 until a month later. Who fills that gap?

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, so thank
22 you for that question. And it is really unfortunate
23 that there are a number of bad actors that are
24 preying on low-income New Yorkers in receipt of cash
25

1 assistance and SNAP benefits and skimming those
2 benefits from individuals' cards.

3
4 Unfortunately, December on 20, 2024, we lost the
5 ability to replace SNAP benefits altogether. The
6 federal government did not extend our ability to
7 replace skimmed SNAP benefits after December 20th.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: I'm aware of that. My
9 question is filling that gap, what are you doing to
10 help fill that gap? Are you allowing them to go
11 hungry? Is there any effort by the Administration to
12 assist these folks?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So the efforts
14 that the Administration are making are to, number
15 one, advocate with the State to get... to change the
16 EBT cards to have chips in them. Because that is the
17 main way to protect needy New Yorkers from having
18 their benefits skimmed in the first place...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: What's the timeline for
20 that to be accomplished?

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We encourage
22 you... we support the State legislation that would
23 require the state to enable chip cards. That's Senate
24 Bill 1465 and Assembly Bill 699. We support those
25 bills. We encourage everyone to support those bills

1
2 as well so that the State will implement EBT cards...
3 chips on EBT cards.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: Are there any agency
5 workers who reach out, so if the individual says, "My
6 card has been compromised, I have no food," does
7 the... Is there an agency rep that reaches out to
8 provide them with resources or give them information
9 as to where a pantry may be? I mean, in reality, a
10 lot of... there are folks that call their elected
11 officials' office, and there are folks that don't.
12 And we don't want folks suffering in silence.

13 So what proactive steps are you taking to help
14 full that gap while you are also dealing with ,you
15 know, waiting for the legislation to take place?
16 We're talking about ,you know, we don't want to add
17 to folks' food insecurity and continue to traumatize
18 folks. I want to know what steps are being taken to
19 fill that gap?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: And I understand
21 your question, and there is, unfortunately, very
22 little we can do other than to let people know
23 about... to first of all, protect their cards and try
24 to prevent their benefits from being skimmed in the
25 first place - providing outreach materials and other

1 materials to prevent it in the first place. When SNAP
2 benefits are skimmed, if it happens after December
3 20th, we are unable to replace those benefits. And
4 for some individuals, food pantries and community
5 kitchens are what is going to be able to back them...

6 (CROSS-TALK)

7
8 COUNCIL MEMBER BANKS: But I am not happy with the
9 response of the Administration on this. There needs
10 to be... You need to be much more proactive when
11 we're talking about food and putting food in folks'
12 mouths, especially, when their card has been
13 compromised. This is through no fault of their own.
14 And they are going without food. The Administration
15 needs to step up. And in that mean time, while their
16 card is compromised, there needs to be information
17 about where they can go to the nearest food pantries
18 - even if it's a door-to-door outreach that's being
19 done where they're door-knocking and they're doing
20 another assessment to see what that particular
21 individual's needs are.

22 But I am not satisfied with the response of the
23 Administration on that. And I would urge you to
24 (TIMER CHIMES) do much more. Thank you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to just piggyback off
3 of that a second, because... so in terms of like
4 providing, you know, extra additional funds that is,
5 you know, that's complicated. We get that. However,
6 nothing prevents the caseworkers assigned to specific
7 cases where skimming has occurred, to inform and
8 provide those individuals with information to local
9 pantries and places where they can get food. And I
10 think that that is something that is pretty practical
11 and doable, but it doesn't happen.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah. And I do
13 think that that is reasonable, and things that I can
14 take back and make sure that, if we're not already
15 doing it, to make sure that our skimming website and
16 any skimming denial forms include information about
17 how to access food pantries and community kitchens.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I mean, because, it's...

19 (CROSS-TALK)

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Again, we may...
21 That information may already be there, but if it's
22 not...

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah...

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We can make sure
25 that it is.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In most cases, it's not
3 preventable, because people are going to the same
4 supermarket that they've always gone to and having
5 their benefits stolen. When I go... When I use my
6 debit card at ATM, I ,you know, I move it all around
7 ,you know, I'm making sure that there's nothing in
8 there. Because ,you know, I've learned that through
9 my precinct council meetings. But these are
10 individuals that are actually going to their local
11 supermarket, the same supermarket they go to every
12 month to buy the same food. And then they're ,you
13 know, they look and they have absolutely nothing. And
14 ,you know, they're very low on food - if they have
15 any. And it's an emergency. And I get that... I've
16 got a follow-up question on the State part, but I
17 would like to recognize Council Member Ung.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you, chair.

19 I just want to follow-up on this EBT card scam as
20 you see, it affects a lot of our districts.

21 Is there any proactive steps that HR is taking,
22 to tell their clients about ways to prevent that? You
23 know, I know there's a way to freeze/unfreeze the
24 app. And I know this is not the easiest for many
25 people to use, but is... and is there, you know, and

1 teaching also the clients when you go to the
2 supermarkets to look out for these skimmers?

3 So what proactive steps are you taking for the
4 clients to make sure that, you know, this you know,
5 this stops happening month to month?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yep. So we have,
7 in particular this year, since we are unable to
8 replace the skimmed SNAP benefits, we have re-upped
9 our flyers, made flyers available to community based
10 organizations. All of our outreach and work in
11 collaboration with the community based organizations,
12 through our New York City Benefits Program, and
13 through newsletters, communications to others, we're
14 making sure that we are providing flyers on the
15 information. We're also working on some videos on how
16 to use the EBT Edge app and how to look for and
17 identify skimming.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: Thank you. Can you, you know,
19 are the videos done yet or hasn't... it's not... it's
20 still in progress?

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I believe we're
22 still working on those.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER UNG: If you're doing those videos,
24 It'll be great to have them different languages.
25

1 card with a skimming device. Some of it is happening
2 through, unfortunately, spoofing campaigns, phishing
3 campaigns, where people might be inadvertently
4 providing information to bad actors that allows those
5 bad actors to take their benefits.
6

7 And in some cases it might just be a coincidence
8 that people are using the same grocery store over and
9 over again. And that may not be how the bad actors
10 are getting access to the data.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Wow. You mentioned that the
12 DSS has been working with the state on, you know,
13 supporting these pieces of legislation. I mean, how
14 aggressive are those conversations? Because the
15 State can hold a bill for years.

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We have
17 communicated regularly with OTDA (Office of Temporary
18 and Disability Assistance), and we can continue to
19 communicate regularly with OTDA about the importance
20 of the need for chip cards. We're not just working
21 through the New York State legislation.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Are those conversations
23 fruitful? Like, are they... have they been receptive?

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I think that our
25 partners at OTDA definitely agree with us that the

1
2 chip cards are necessary to protect benefits for
3 clients.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, I think we all agree
5 that those are necessary. I'm just trying to figure
6 out where the sense of urgency is in rectifying this.
7 Because it's probably more cost effective to just
8 replace the cards than it is to have to replace the
9 benefits.

10 And it's inhumane to, you know, remove that
11 funding from the state budget while we still have not
12 rectified the problem to begin with. So we're like
13 the dog chasing his own tail you know at this point.

14 I'm trying to figure out where we can be helpful
15 in pushing – and I'm happy to ,you know, to submit
16 and to speak to my colleagues at the State. But I'm
17 trying to decipher whether or not the conversations
18 that DSS has been having, you know, with (INAUDIBLE)
19 you know, separately have been, you know, positive
20 and do you feel confident that we're moving in the
21 right direction to, you know, address this issue as
22 soon as possible?

23 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Yeah. I do feel that the
24 conversations we've had with them have been positive
25 in understanding this is the way in which we need to

1
2 go. Just like at the City level, at the State level,
3 agencies need to work through their processes as to,
4 you know, how those things are approved and move
5 forward. But we are not getting any sort of pushback
6 on the need to be able to moving towards the chip,
7 you know, technology, and that that is actually the
8 answer to really address the skimming issue for
9 everyone across the state.

10 And I can say we're not the only locality
11 advocating for this. You know, all of the social
12 services districts are equally advocating for a
13 transfer to the chip technology to protect
14 individuals and their benefits.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, with all of the
16 technology that we pay for and, you know, this is
17 2025, uh, I would assume that that would be something
18 so simple.

19 I'm going to allow Council Member Cabán a couple
20 of more questions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you, I only have a
22 couple more I promise – maybe three, four.

23 I want to ask again about the accessing the PDF
24 in the application digitally. Where can that PDF be
25 accessed? Is it... when you're doing it digitally, is

1
2 it under the "My Uploads" tab or is it under the
3 "Case Records" tab or is it somewhere else?

4 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I will have to go back to
5 you, because I'm not an expert on the system, so I
6 don't wanna misspeak as to where it is in the system.

7 I'm also happy to set up a time for our teams to
8 sit down with you and walk through the system to show
9 exactly where everything is.

10 But I don't wanna misspeak as to where it is or,
11 you know...

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay.

13 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Okay?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I will say also that, you
15 know, my team has sat down with y'all. It's actually
16 how this piece of legislation was born because of
17 countless number of cases, countless number of
18 meetings between our office and the agency, and there
19 still was a real gap that we were seeing.

20 I also want to ask how long it takes for
21 documents submitted by an applicant or a participant
22 to become part of the case record? And also, to that
23 end, does the length of time depend on how the
24 documents were submitted to HRA?

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: So when we have documents
3 that we are attempting to index, our goal is to index
4 those as quickly as possible, oftentimes trying to do
5 it within, you know, 48 hours.

6 Sometimes it takes longer because of the volume
7 of documents. So I don't want to, you know, say
8 there's a specific... because certain months will be
9 a much higher volume than other months. But our goal
10 is to turn that over and connect it to cases as
11 quickly as we can... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: So, best case scenario, you
13 can do it within 48 hours. But ,like, what are you
14 also seeing as part of the practice in terms of the
15 longer end of those becoming part of the case record?

16 And again, that second question is, does it make
17 a difference how the documents are submitted to HRA
18 in terms of the length of time it takes for that to
19 become part of the case record?

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I mean, someone, you know,
21 who submits through Access HRA, those documents could
22 get to our indexing site, you know, probably quicker
23 than someone who does a paper document.

24 But, you know, I will say we monitor very
25 closely, if there's a number of documents that we're

1
2 seeing where the number is increasing, and we'll
3 redeploy resources to address that as quickly as
4 possible... (CROSS-TALK)

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: And you testified what the
6 earlier end is. What is the longer range of how long
7 documents may be taking to become part of the case
8 file?

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I mean, I
10 don't... I have not looked at all the data, but I do
11 look at the data regularly. And I have not seen it go
12 longer than maybe four or five days at the very
13 longest. I'm not saying that is the longest, but I do
14 look at the report fairly regularly and that is...

15 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay.

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: the outside.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: How if documentation is
18 missing or unusable for some reason, right? Like and
19 example I'll give are - if it's illegible or it's
20 blurry for some reason, how does the agency notify
21 the applicant or the participant?

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Well, in reviewing
23 documents when someone is doing their interview, we
24 will identify at that point if a document is not
25

1
2 usable or they will be notified through, you know, a
3 notice that we require another version of a document.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Okay. And when you aren't
5 with them in person and you're sending out a notice,
6 does... do you explain why... exactly why that
7 submitted documentation is insufficient?

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: The notice would indicate
9 that it as needed, but I don't know that it would...
10 I don't believe it would necessarily provide the
11 specific reason as to why.

12 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)... (CROSS-TALK)

13 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I know, and that's a
14 problem. I mean, I just, again, if they're not coming
15 through our office and we're trying to figure it out
16 together or we're keeping our own records about what
17 they've submitted, you've got a person getting a
18 letter saying your submitted documentation is
19 insufficient, and they have no idea why. They don't
20 know if it's because that document is the wrong
21 document entirely. They don't know that it's simply
22 they sent a blurry copy of the document. They don't
23 know if like... it just... those are just like
24 really, really simple things that would cut down the
25 length of time between getting an application

1
2 approved, which to the stories that we've heard
3 today, is like the difference between eating and not
4 eating, the difference between keeping your home and
5 not keeping your home.

6 And these are just, I mean, to hear these
7 reasons, which seem, you know, like they could be
8 pretty easy fixes, are ,like, (PAUSE) when we have to
9 tell our constituents who walk in the door that this
10 is what's happening, (TIMER CHIMES) it's devastating.
11 And it's hard... it's hard to do. And it shouldn't
12 happen.

13 I want to ask one more question if that's all
14 right.

15 So the there was data reported for Local Laws 168
16 and 170 that showed that a lot of case rejections or
17 closures for both cash assistance and SNAP benefits
18 were due to a failure to provide verification.

19 So for example, in quarter two of FY25, that's
20 the October to December of 2024, the data shows that
21 5,452 cash assistance cases were rejected because of
22 failure to provide verification. And so this accounts
23 for 16.5 percent of all of the rejections in that
24 quarter.

1
2 Have you guys reviewed this category of
3 rejections to evaluate whether there are systemic
4 fixes that can be implemented to decrease the number
5 of those rejections?

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We do peer... we review the
7 data as is to identify trends where we see things may
8 be growing larger than we have seen them in the past
9 to identify systemic trends.

10 So I would have to get back to you on specifics
11 as it relates to that specific data for that specific
12 period of time. But we are consistently looking at
13 where we see rejection rates or specific codes that
14 maybe are all of a sudden becoming larger to try to
15 identify what might be happening there - Especially
16 if it's something that's happening on our end, we
17 definitely want to fix this. Right?

18 We similarly take our jobs and our
19 responsibilities to New Yorkers extremely seriously
20 and certainly don't want to create challenges and
21 difficulties for folks. You know, our system is large
22 and complicated, and there are definitely places
23 where we can improve. And we're committed to
24 improving and continuing to talk with you about where
25 there are places we can improve the way we provide

1
2 documentation to individuals and inform them of
3 what's happening with their application.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: I would certainly love a
5 follow-up on what sort of conclusion y'all are
6 drawing from, again, that as a specific example.

7 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm, sure.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Because when I read that,
9 what I am concluding is that there's a lot of people
10 being rejected because they aren't able to verify the
11 information they're providing in their application.
12 That's a huge number of rejections. So I would hope
13 to get a response on that. And, thank you, Chair.

14 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Sure.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to recognize that we
16 have been joined by Council Member Restler.

17 Yeah, I see, I mean, I see a lot of today's line
18 of questioning as an opportunity to really work
19 together a little bit closer to try to identify.

20 I mean, listen I get it, like, DSS is a big
21 agency, and there are a lot of people that we're
22 servicing, and there's a lot of opportunity to miss
23 the mark. I don't think that it's intentional, but I
24 think that it's really important that when we are
25 hearing the consistency in where the we're dropping

1
2 the ball, that we're looking more closely at those
3 areas.

4 And ,you know, but I also want you to you know to
5 see us as partners, right? We're not just here to,
6 like ,you know, wave the finger. We're trying to
7 better understand the system and where those
8 discrepancies lie, so that we can try to
9 alternatively figure out legislative ways, fiscal
10 ways that we can be helpful. But we need to a better
11 job of maybe working together, you know, outside of
12 the council to try to figure out... because every
13 community is also very different, know, there are
14 language issues. I really want to figure out this
15 whole older adult, you know, issue where you have a
16 guardian, a legal guardian, and, you know, make that
17 process a little bit more seamless - individuals with
18 disabilities, you know, like that should all be
19 flagged.

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Absolutely, and we agree as
21 well. We are always looking to improve. And, as I say
22 to all of my staff, at the same time as well, at the
23 end of the day, everyone in this room has the same
24 goal, and that's to serve New Yorkers.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: So if there's ways we can
3 work more closely, or there's something we're not
4 seeing in the same way you are, we definitely want to
5 sit down and talk about it and see where we might be
6 able to improve.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, we're problem solvers,
8 and we are very passionate about that.

9 But ,you know, we've also been on the receiving
10 end of food insecurity and having lived that and
11 knowing what it's like ,you know, to not have food
12 that day. And when I go home at night, and I have a
13 constituent that is telling me that their benefits
14 were stolen, and now I have to tell them there's
15 nothing I can do. I can't sleep that night. Because I
16 know I'm going home, and I'm eating, and I can't...
17 I'm thinking about it and it's horrible. Right? And
18 I get it, there are a lot of things that prevent us
19 from being able to act a little bit more
20 expeditiously.

21 But it just seems like there's some things that
22 common sense it will tell you that, you know, we need
23 to do something today. Like we can't wait, you know,
24 for anybody to come save us. Like, we have to figure
25 out what the solution is.

1
2 And wherever we can be helpful on that end, you
3 know, you can see we're pretty much... we're the
4 biggest pain in the butt, so we can (LAUGHS) we'll
5 sic Council Member Cabán on them.

6 (LAUGHTER)

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: She likes it, she likes it.

8 All right. So I want to talk a little bit about
9 the food access and affordability issues.

10 So the cost of food has continued to rise across
11 the country and many New Yorkers struggle to afford
12 groceries. How is the DSS supporting New Yorkers
13 facing this affordability crisis? And what kind of
14 outreach does the City do to ensure that New Yorkers
15 are aware of the services and support that they may
16 be eligible for?

17 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Certainly. So we, too, are
18 very concerned about the cost of food prices and how
19 they're increasing. We're equally concerned with
20 parts of the House bill that not only would result in
21 potentially \$230 billion in cuts to SNAP over ten
22 years, but also the proposal to do away with the
23 Thrifty Food Plan, which is, you know, the a plan
24 that really allows for SNAP benefits to be adjusted -
25 not just for cost of living adjustments, but also

1 when food prices change, when dietary restrictions
2 change, as well as preferences.

3
4 And all of those are very much at risk right now,
5 which makes us extremely concerned. I will say when
6 it comes to access to SNAP though, New York City is
7 really far and ahead of many other places around the
8 country. The USDA has an indicator called the Program
9 Access Indicator, which measures what percentage of
10 individuals at or below 125 percent of the federal
11 poverty level are accessing SNAP.

12 For 2023, which is the most recent data, New York
13 City's rate was 94.9 percent, which is the highest
14 we've ever had. And it was well ahead of the State's,
15 which was 85 percent, and the nation overall which
16 was 80 percent.

17 So while there's always more we can do, and we're
18 always looking to identify ways in which there are
19 communities we might not be reaching to the best of
20 our abilities, I think it's also important to really
21 highlight what amazing work New York City is doing.
22 That's not just the work of HRA, it's the work of the
23 Council, our community partners, and all of those.

24 So those are very much ways in which we feel like
25 we are doing well. But we continue to try to amplify

1 those pieces, definitely also utilizing our
2 partnerships with the 36 NYC benefit partners, who
3 really are, within the communities in which they
4 operate is where, you know, they serve. And they are
5 also best attuned to really identify what might be
6 specific outreach activities that would resonate best
7 in that community. So we rely and partner with them
8 quite a bit as well.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Does rent get factored in to a
11 person's monthly expenses as a means of determining
12 how much an individual should be receiving? What
13 other... Because I mean, we have a lot of people that
14 are working, working poor, and they're paying a lot
15 of their income on rent. They may not have enough,
16 you know, to purchase food, but their income makes it
17 so that they're not necessarily eligible. Do you
18 factor in the rent as a...

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We are
20 unfortunately unable to factor in the full amount of
21 the rent. The amount of rent that we are able to
22 calculate as part of the standard of need for cash
23 assistance and SNAP benefits is capped at the shelter
24 allowance amount, which we all know is inadequate.

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is that amount?

1
2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So for an
3 individual it's \$215 a month. That is the most of the
4 rent expense that we're actually able to calculate
5 when we are determining SNAP and cash eligibility.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's horrible, that's
7 horrible.

8 It's almost the same thing with Section 8 and any
9 subsidized housing. Like, we're asking folks to pay
10 30 percent of their income. But instead of asking
11 them to pay 30 percent of their net income, we're
12 asking them to pay 30 percent of their gross income.
13 And for some people, that means an entire check. You
14 know, that's just horrible.

15 When a person enters a shelter without any source
16 of income, what support does HRA provide to help them
17 access food and other benefits? And where in the
18 process of entering the shelter does that occur?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: So the first
20 thing we try to... that we do - and we have been
21 doing a lot of work with the shelter providers
22 recently - is to connect people who are eligible for
23 benefits to benefits. And we've been providing
24 shelters with a lot of information about Access HRA
25 and the provider portal so they can support clients.

1
2 We're also providing shelters with a lot more
3 information about who in their shelter is in receipt
4 of benefits already and who is not in receipt of
5 benefits, so they know which of their shelter
6 residents to target for benefits applications.

7 And we're going to start looking at which
8 shelters are doing better jobs than others. And those
9 shelters that have higher numbers of people who may
10 be eligible for benefits and not in receipt of them,
11 we can provide additional training for those
12 shelters.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: How will you be doing that,
14 and when will you be beginning that process of
15 determining which shelters are doing it and not doing
16 it? Is that like via a survey, or?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: No we are able
18 to connect our information that we have on who is in
19 receipt of cash and SNAP benefits with the shelter
20 information.

21 So we provide that information...

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: directly through
24 the care system, so they know who is in receipt of
25 benefits and who is not in receipt of benefits.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. The question I'm asking,
3 I mean, a lot of the questions that we ask ,you know,
4 are born from conversations that we have with our own
5 constituents. But, in this case, I had a woman that
6 entered shelter, they put her in a temporary site
7 with a kitchen – which is great because she has
8 children – However, she didn't have any money. She
9 had no income, so she couldn't purchase food. And
10 because she has a kitchen, that means that that site
11 is not supplying families with prepared meals. But
12 she also had been there for two or three days
13 already, and nobody had spoken to her about it or
14 asked her if she had access to funding for food. So I
15 had to coach her to go look for whoever the case
16 worker was on-site and make that request.

17 So I'm just trying to figure out, is there
18 supposed to be a process by which when a person comes
19 in, and they're we're asking them a gazillion
20 questions about their personal life and ,you know,
21 where they live, and if they're married and ,you
22 know, who they're married to – is there a question
23 that says like, what type of income do you have right
24 now? And when they say, "Well I have no income," does
25 a bell ring, to say, "Okay, well you can go to HRA

1
2 tomorrow and access emergency food assistance. And
3 they'll help you fill out an application or we can
4 help you fill out application."

5 Is that supposed to happen or is that not a
6 policy?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Absolutely.
8 Shelter providers should...

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They should have...

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: absolutely be
11 doing that. And in addition, they should be
12 maintaining an emergency pantry on-site to provide
13 food for that day that they arrive if somebody is
14 hungry. And they should have information about nearby
15 community kitchens and food pantries that the
16 families can also access. That is what should happen.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So are all sites, temporary
18 sites, outfitted with a with a food pantry, or is it
19 just them?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Not every
21 shelter is going to have the space or adequate
22 facilities to maintain an emergency food pantry. But
23 that is generally expected of family shelters— in
24 particular that have kitchens on-site — that they do
25 maintain some emergency pantry supplies.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. So how do we make it so
3 that it is a mandatory part of that conversation? So
4 that we're not waiting until day two, three, or four
5 to realize that you know the family's struggling?

6 Because ,you know, I get it, on in paper it looks
7 really good. In practice, it's not as... it's not as
8 nice and rosy as ,you know, as we paint it.

9 I've been in shelter a couple of times, and ,you
10 know, it's been it's been a minute, so I'm hoping and
11 assuming that a lot of things have changed. But based
12 on my conversations with a lot of my constituents, it
13 doesn't look like a lot has changed. And it seems
14 like a lot of the staff is very overwhelmed or not
15 necessarily informed – that they don't have the
16 experience, right, in in making these determinations
17 or... I used to do psychosocial. I worked with older
18 adults that were homebound, and that really helped
19 me, because I got to know the entire person. I didn't
20 make any assumptions. I just, you know, I listened
21 and I had specific questions that I had to ask that
22 were not, you know, too intrusive, but allowed me to
23 gauge where the person was.

24 And a lot of the times, know, we're not
25 necessarily...we don't have the resources to employ

1 social workers in, you know, in these facilities.
2 Right? That's a funding problem. I get that. But I
3 think that if we give them a set list of questions
4 that are mandatory, you have to ask this, right, you
5 have to... and if this is a yes, then this is what
6 you do ,you know, this is where you go next. I think
7 that that would be really helpful.

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, and it...
10 many of those are mandatory as part of the completing
11 the Independent Living Plan.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah.

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Especially
14 information about income and benefits and all that.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah. I just... I'm trying to
16 figure out, how do we do this? How are we proactive
17 in a situation where we don't have much control over
18 who is providing the service and who is interfacing
19 with the client at the moment?

20 So sometimes ,you know, we make it a little bit
21 easier by putting these practices in place and
22 ensuring that, you know, that the providers are
23 complying.

24 Okay, Council Member Restler, did you have any
25 questions?

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (UN-MIC'D) Not this
3 second. (INAUDIBLE)

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

5 So could you tell us what the actual spending...
6 wait, I don't I don't wanna move too far, because I
7 think I skipped something.

8 Okay, the American Relief Act of 2025, signed
9 into law on December 21st of 2024, extended the 2018
10 Farm Bill which included funding for SNAP through
11 September 30, 2025. Rhetoric from the current federal
12 administration, especially in relation to cutting
13 government spending, has caused concerns about
14 whether SNAP funding will be maintained after the
15 Farm Bill expiration.

16 If SNAP were to be cut or eliminated, has HRA
17 estimated a potential impact on City residents? And
18 what advocacy is the City undertaking to help protect
19 SNAP benefits for New Yorkers?

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Certainly. So, yes, we're
21 extremely concerned about the Farm Bill and potential
22 cuts.

23 As I've mentioned before, we've estimated that
24 there could be up to \$230 billion in cuts to SNAP
25 over the next ten years. We estimated that that would

1
2 result into potentially \$870 million in annual
3 funding in SNAP that New York City – and more
4 importantly New York City residents – would lose from
5 their benefits. That would, for a family of three,
6 result in about a \$130 less each month, about \$1,560
7 over a year, which are very real dollars.

8 And cuts of that magnitude is not something the
9 City or the State will be able to step in and fill
10 the gap on that. So we're very concerned. We are
11 doing an immense amount of advocacy at the federal
12 level around, you know, these and trying to really
13 highlight the human impact of these types of cuts
14 that they're not numbers, they're people. So we
15 encourage and welcome the Council's partnership, but
16 we are concerned because the estimates we've done are
17 very real and very significant.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I mean...

19 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Along with a variety of
20 other benefits potentially as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, the Administration is
22 really good at poverty shaming and making people feel
23 like it's their fault that they were born into
24 circumstances beyond their control. And also it does
25 not factor in that we have a number of SNAP

1 recipients who actually have jobs and have to rely on
2 government aid, because they still can't make ends
3 meet.
4

5 So, it really upsets me that we're even having
6 discussion, because I think, when we're on the scale
7 of things, like we're paying for wars that are not
8 even ours, and we're having a discussion about
9 cutting public dollars for people that live in this
10 country, that rely on those benefits to be able to
11 live, it's horrible. It's horrible. And I don't know
12 how the churches don't crumble when they walk in. I
13 digress. It gets me so upset.

14 The Mayor's Office for Food Policy published *Food*
15 *Forward NYC: A 10-Year Food Policy Plan* in September
16 of 2022. The most recent progress report was
17 published in July of 2023. One of the plan's long
18 term goals was the establishment of a Food Justice
19 Fund to allocate funding to community driven food
20 projects.

21 This was slated to start in 2025. Has there been
22 any progress on this goal? And what is the City's
23 plan going forward?

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: I'm sorry what
25 was to be implemented in 2025?

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right, the Food Justice
3 Fund, establishment of a Food Justice Fund to
4 allocate funding to community driven food projects.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, I would
6 have to reach out to the Mayor's Office of Food
7 Policy to understand what that is in reference to.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And regarding the
9 budget, what is the actual spending thus far in 2025?
10 I think I asked that... No, that was for the Food
11 Connection program. This is for overall spending on
12 SNAP benefits, I believe.

13 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I can say in the last
14 fiscal year, the overall spending was about \$5
15 billion.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Five billion? Okay.

17 So with the EBT card fraud issue, does the
18 federal government give any funding for
19 reimbursements for victims of card skimming?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: The SNAP
21 benefits were reimbursed through the federal
22 government. Only the federal government has the
23 authority to allow for reimbursement of skimmed SNAP
24 benefits.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And those still haven't
3 been raised... (CROSS-TALK)

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: The cash SNAP
5 skimmed benefits are authorized by the state, and
6 those are... We still have the ability through the
7 state to replace skimmed cash assistance benefits.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay... Oh, you do?

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Absolutely.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Absolutely.

12 Unfortunately, it is the SNAP benefits that tend
13 to be skimmed far more frequently than the cash
14 assistance benefits.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: But it is only
17 the federal government that has stopped the ability
18 for us to replace SNAP benefits. The state still
19 allows us to replace stolen cash assistance benefits.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hmm...

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: And I just wanna clarify
22 the \$5 billion was calendar year 2024.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

24 (PAUSE)

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, I have two questions on
3 Council Member Hudson's bills.

4 Intro 245, the universal benefits application,
5 what does DSS believe the creation of this
6 application will cost and how did it come to that
7 determination?

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: So for 245, the estimate is
9 the primarily technology that would be required to
10 create an application do universal and then all of
11 the things needed in the back end. That would be
12 approximately \$30 million. And the estimate is based
13 on similar projects.

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Right, it's
15 based on similar costs to add programs and develop
16 the Access HRA common application.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Does DSS believe that there
18 are City benefit programs for which applications can
19 be combined?

20 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I think we would want to do
21 a further sort of assessment, but, you know, the
22 primary benefits that people come to us for would not
23 be able to be combined into a universal application
24 such as cash assistance, SNAP, Medicaid.

1
2 So we would need to look at the other benefits
3 that are both HRA and also provided by other agencies
4 to determine that. Where we can, we have tried to
5 simplify the application processes. So for
6 individuals who apply for cash, they also are
7 automatically applying for SNAP and Medicaid, because
8 in most instances, if you're eligible for cash,
9 you're eligible for those two benefits as well and
10 you'll be enrolled. If for some reason you're not
11 eligible for cash, we'll automatically do a separate
12 determination for SNAP and Medicaid separately to
13 determine if individuals are eligible for that.

14 We also utilize SNAP applications to determine if
15 someone may be potentially eligible for Fair Fares.
16 And if someone is, that we've determined they meet
17 the income requirements, we will actually fast track
18 those individuals where we will inform them that they
19 are eligible for this benefit. They would just need
20 to agree to the terms and conditions, and we'll
21 automatically enroll them in that.

22 And we try to do a similar thing with HEAP, which
23 is the state heating benefit for individuals who
24 apply for cash and SNAP. We'll determine if we think
25 they may be eligible for the heating benefit, and if

1
2 they are we would auto enroll them. That's usually
3 for most people a one-time benefit of \$25 to \$50.

4 Those are things we've been able to do within
5 sort of the state and federal requirements we have in
6 working closely with our state and federal oversights
7 to get agreement. We do have concerns about trying to
8 create a much broader universal application, but also
9 happy to sit down and discuss further through that
10 and...

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Isn't that what Access NYC
12 does though? I mean, I haven't gone on the site...

13 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Right.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: in a while, but isn't the
15 objective of Access NYC that a person puts all of
16 their information and then it determines the what a
17 person qualifies for or not?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: It determines
19 what you may or may not be eligible for, yes, but
20 then an individual has to reenter all of that same
21 information into the actual application for those
22 individual programs. It doesn't automatically
23 transmit or result in an application. It's just a
24 screening tool.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I mean, I would think
3 that that would be a little bit easier and faster,
4 because you're killing a whole bunch of birds with
5 one stone. How long... the animal rights people, do
6 not come at me for that. Sometimes I just say things.

7 The bill also calls for a report on... Well,
8 first question, if assuming that something like this
9 were able to be done, how long do you estimate it
10 would take to create a universal application?

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I think I can talk about
12 the assessment piece first and then the technology
13 behind it.

14 But to do an assessment piece of that could be a
15 significant piece of time. Because estimating it will
16 require us to really look at the specific additional
17 regulations or statutes that govern it - and to
18 determine instances where the City could maybe do
19 something on their own, which is going to be few and
20 far between, versus where we're going to need to
21 partner with the state and federal government. So
22 it's it could be an extensive period of time
23 depending on the benefits themselves.

24 I will say, especially at the federal level,
25 anything that relates to SNAP, the USDA is very, uh,

1
2 they have a lot of parameters around what data can
3 and cannot be used that's submitted for SNAP that
4 could also be utilized for other things.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. The bill also calls
6 for a feasibility study that would help us understand
7 if it's even possible to create a universal benefits
8 application. Are you supportive of that?

9 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We are open to doing, you
10 know, a feasibility study and discussing with the
11 Council - we'd be happy to sit down with the Council
12 and the sponsor to talk a little bit more in depth
13 about specific benefit programs and what our initial
14 estimates would be on those to see what potentially
15 came from that in regards to identifying other steps.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. The bill also codifies
17 Access NYC, does DSS support that?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, It's a
19 screening tool, but it is a good screening tool that
20 does provide people with a lot of good valuable
21 information about the benefits they may be eligible
22 for.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, now, 1028 the auto
24 enrollment for city programs bill, I understand that
25 the agency is concerned about automatic enrollment as

1
2 it believes that we should respect the choice
3 individuals who may not want to enroll in certain
4 programs. Yet many New Yorkers are unaware that they
5 qualify for certain benefits and should access those
6 benefits immediately, and this bill includes an opt
7 out mechanism as drafted.

8 How could this bill better meet your concerns
9 about choice?

10 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I think first, you know, as
11 we sort of said about Access NYC, that is a screening
12 tool that does identify for individuals what they may
13 be eligible for. You know, actual applications for
14 specific benefits are very sort of controlled
15 depending on the benefits. So we don't have a lot of
16 freedom there, as well as we don't really have a lot
17 of flexibility around sort of auto enrolling people
18 in specific benefits. You know, we're happy to
19 discuss it more, but there are also instances where
20 someone may be potentially eligible for a benefit,
21 but for a variety of reasons we are not aware of,
22 they're not interested in accessing that benefit or
23 applying for that benefit, but we'd be happy to
24 discuss further with the sponsor and the Council. But
25 there are very real limitations beyond what I had

1
2 sort of highlighted before in regards to just us
3 being able to automatically enroll people into
4 benefits.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: My final question is what data
6 does DSS not have access to that it would need to
7 determine automatic enrollment? And what agencies do
8 you believe have this information? How could we
9 ensure that you receive it to administer an automatic
10 enrollment program?

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: That would really depend
12 the specific benefits that we're looking at. But,
13 again, many of our bedrock benefits are very much
14 guided by state and federal regulations in regards to
15 how we receive the information – applying for those
16 benefits – and what we are or are not able to do with
17 that information outside of the specific benefit
18 someone is being considered for.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Any questions from my
20 colleagues? Yes?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: How are you?

22 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Good, how are you?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Good to see Administrator
24 French.

25 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: You, too.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: First slightly,
3 relatedly, I just was wondering if you had any
4 further updates on the timeline for the work
5 requirements to take effect for a public assistance
6 recipients? Do we have any additional updates?

7 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Certainly. Yes, so ,you
8 know, the rollout will happen in waves, not everybody
9 is going to start at the same time.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right.

11 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: The first wave will begin
12 in mid April where a group of people will be...

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Any sense of the scale of
14 that first wave?

15 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I can get back to you on
16 that. They were sort of looking at the numbers of
17 those things. But we are trying to do it
18 intentionally. Right? And not overwhelm the system or
19 overwhelm people. This is something we're restarting
20 it after several years of not doing it. So, we want
21 to be very thoughtful. And it is also a combination
22 of individuals currently on the caseload, as well as
23 new individuals coming into the system. So people
24 coming into the system will be automatically put into

1
2 the process, as well as we are now going to be able
3 to be reengaging with...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: How frequently, uh, what
5 is the cadence of these waves?

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: They will be monthly
7 through, right now, the end of the year.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So over the course of
9 about seven-eight months, we'll go from zero to 60?

10 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: In a nut... yeah, most
11 of... (CROSS-TALK)

12 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: (INAUDIBLE) a population
13 of public (INAUDIBLE) this... this is...

14 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Most... Most... The goal is
15 to have engaged almost all of the populations we need
16 to.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And could you just, if
18 you would, if you happen to have this at your
19 fingertips, my understanding is that failure to
20 comply with this federal requirement would lead to
21 the city and state losing out on significant federal
22 funds. Can you speak to the scale of the funding that
23 we would lose if we did not comply with the work
24 requirements?

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I can't speak specifically
3 to the scale just because we haven't experienced this
4 before. And this is not something the federal
5 government has really been implementing that much. So
6 there isn't a lot for us to specifically look at. But
7 what I can say, it is a requirement; the requirement
8 is actually connected to the Work Participation Rate
9 the State is meant to get for individuals on TANF
10 (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families). That's
11 almost exclusively families with children. And those
12 rates are set at the federal level. And missing those
13 rates will incur fiscal penalties. My understanding
14 is that the penalties could be on a sliding scale
15 depending on how close or far you are from the rate
16 you were supposed to meet. But, the details of that,
17 we don't fully have, but we expect it to be
18 potentially in the tens of millions of dollars or
19 more.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right.

21 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: But we don't have specifics
22 on it...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: In your...

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: But it's significant.
25

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And your current modeling
3 is that you are anticipating 40,000 additional public
4 assistance recipients will take advantage – will
5 need, I should say – child care vouchers...

6 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Mm-hmm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: to be able to manage the
8 work requirements. That's right?

9 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: That would, uh, will need
10 and will be eligible. Right? There's a couple of
11 things going on – I will say, pre-COVID we averaged
12 about 41,000 in cash assistance clients accessing
13 child care. So that was sort of the pre-COVID
14 baseline. Currently we are at about 23,000, and we do
15 expect for that to increase to about 63,000 between
16 now and January of 2027, where we think it would
17 stabilize. So ,you know, the increase we expect is
18 due to a couple of things – A, the caseload of cash
19 assistance is much larger than it was 2019. And there
20 was also a change in child care certification
21 periods. So individuals are certified for 12 months,
22 and they can remain... have that child care for 12
23 months...

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Right.
25

1
2 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: even if at some point an
3 individual dropped off the caseload, say for
4 noncompliance. So there are a couple of things going
5 on in our model that result in the increase in need
6 we see.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And just for our benefit,
8 as these state budget negotiations are unfolding in
9 real-time, are you able to share with us updates on a
10 monthly basis on people that are taking advantage of
11 child care vouchers, mandates vouchers? Is there an
12 interval of updates that can be shared with the
13 Council so that if your modeling was more or less,
14 was higher or lower than anticipated that we can
15 adjust accordingly and think creatively as... I
16 imagine that this is going to be... depending on how
17 they navigate this in Albany, this will be an
18 important conversation for the city budget as well.

19 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Absolutely, we can look at
20 what would be the right interval to update on
21 utilization as it relates to child care... (CROSS-
22 TALK)

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Do you think...

24 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: We will be tracking it very
25 closely to see...

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Perfect...

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: if your trends analysis and sort of model is on the mark, under the mark, above the mark, so that can be... (CROSS-TALK)

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Do you think we could anticipate (TIMER CHIMES) like April and May and June updates to inform budgetary decisions? Is that a... I mean, I don't mean to put you exactly on the spot, but...

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: on an interval of the updates or whatever. But do you think we will be getting data updates from you this spring that can inform budget decisions?

ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I think that we anticipate seeing significant start of shifts in this probably in June as we sort of start... The way in which the system works out mostly is because have time to determine if they need or access or child care through the application process. So someone who applies say in April, and has a mandatory requirement, has that 30 days and potentially we could give them more time if they say they need child

1
2 care but have not been able to find it yet. So we
3 need a couple of months to actually... (CROSS-TALK)

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So you have the...

5 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: (INAUDIBLE)...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So just to just to
7 reality say...

8 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I don't...

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You don't think we are
10 going to have much data that's going to tell us much
11 by June?

12 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: I don't think that would be
13 able to inform budgetary negotiations, I don't.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: That's helpful to
15 understand. Thank you for the chance to raise a
16 slightly germane, but not exactly on-topic question.
17 Thank you for the answers.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: He just had a baby so he's
19 very dedicated.

20 I don't have any further questions. I just want
21 to add that I am really serious in terms of
22 partnering with DSS to try to... We need to... This
23 is a very difficult year, and with all of the threats
24 that are coming from the federal government that will
25 trickle down to our state budget, that will then

1
2 trickle down to the city budget, we need to be as
3 aggressive as we can. So please utilize us - letter
4 writing campaigns, calls, go and sleep ,you know, in
5 front of the White House, whatever you want to do, we
6 are there. But I think this is a time to really show
7 a united front that this is the time. We cannot
8 afford to lose a single cent here in New York City.
9 Too many people rely on those services, and they rely
10 on us to make sure that they have them readily
11 available.

12 Thank you so much for being here today. And I
13 look forward to hearing more during the Executive
14 Budget cycle. And, definitely, please ask for
15 whatever it is that you need, realistically.

16 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: Thank you.

17 ADMINISTRATOR FRENCH: Thank you very much.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BERRY: We appreciate
19 it.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

21 We are going to take a five minute break, and
22 then we are going to start with the panel
23 discussions.

24 (PAUSE)

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I now open the hearing for
3 public testimony. I remind members of the public that
4 this is a formal government proceeding and that
5 decorum shall be observed at all times. As such,
6 members of the public shall remain silent at all
7 times.

8 The witness table is reserved for people who wish
9 to testify. No video recording or photography is
10 allowed from the witness table. Further, members of
11 the public may not present audio or video recordings
12 as testimony, but may submit transcripts of such
13 recordings to the Sergeant at Arms for inclusion in
14 the hearing record.

15 If you wish to speak at today's hearing, please
16 fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant at Arms
17 and wait to be recognized. When recognized, you will
18 have two minutes to speak on today's hearing topic:
19 *Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City* – or any
20 of the three bills that we are hearing today.

21 If you have a written statement or additional
22 testimony you wish to submit for the record, please
23 provide a copy of that testimony to the Sergeant at
24 Arms.

1
2 You may also email written testimony to
3 testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72 hours after the
4 close of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
5 will not be accepted.

6 We will now call the first panel: Lynette Brown,
7 Lakesha Morris, Molly Eckerle, and Joseph Rosenberg.

8 Hello, either one of you on either end, you want
9 to begin? Okay, just make sure that the mic is on.

10 MOLLY ECKERLE: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, and
11 fellow committee members, thank you for holding this
12 hearing today. My name is Molly Eckerle, and I'm the
13 Food Policy Associate at the Metropolitan Council on
14 Jewish Poverty.

15 I'm here today on behalf of Met Council's food
16 programs. We operate the largest Kosher food pantry
17 network in the country providing Kosher and Halal
18 observant food assistance to 200,000 New Yorkers
19 annually regardless of religious observance.

20 It's on behalf of those we serve and all New
21 Yorkers that we and our partners, Catholic Charities
22 and Hispanic Federation, urgently request that City
23 Council allocate \$20 million in discretionary funding
24 for emergency funding for food pantries.

1
2 Both organizations, as well as other nonprofit
3 human service providers, have faced many challenges
4 feeding hungry New Yorkers over the years. Right now,
5 this challenge is at a crisis level due to several
6 factors – these include the increasing poverty rate
7 of New Yorkers; the dramatic increase in rents,
8 including the rising percentage of households who are
9 rent burdened and paying over 50 percent of their
10 income on rent; and even more significantly, the
11 uncertain status of federal programs such as SNAP and
12 the Emergency Food and Shelter Program that provide
13 essential funding to address food insecurity for
14 vulnerable Americans.

15 Non profit providers have seen the number of
16 clients at pantries increase significantly. We are
17 not just assisting more working families, seniors and
18 children at our pantries, newer clients include
19 college students; recent college graduates who are
20 either unemployed or underemployed; youth aging out
21 of foster care; and new migrants, many of them with
22 infants.

23 The plight of hungry children is particularly
24 heartbreaking with more than one in four now city
25 living in poverty. That is why with more New Yorkers

1
2 going hungry, we urge that \$20 million in emergency
3 food for pantries be included in the FY26 New York
4 City Budget for both Catholic Charities as well as
5 our partners, Met Council and the Hispanic
6 Federation.

7 Spurred on by rapid food inflation, clients as
8 well as the pantry serving them, have been negatively
9 impacted financially. As a result, we have difficulty
10 providing as much fresh food to clients as in
11 previous years due to these costs. With more New
12 Yorkers relying on pantries, we are forced to
13 distribute dry goods and canned and jarred products
14 rather than fresh produce to ensure that our clients
15 do not leave hungry. Our mission is to serve needy
16 New Yorkers and help stem their hunger while
17 providing them (TIMER CHIMES) with the healthiest
18 food options possible.

19 Our city faces daunting challenges, but few would
20 disagree that our most important priority would be to
21 ensure that New Yorkers do not go hungry. We
22 therefore call for your support including this
23 essential \$20 million in the City Budget. Thank you.

24 LAKESHA MORRIS: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, my
25 name is Lakesha Morris, and I am the Division

1
2 Director for Food and Housing Stability at Catholic
3 Charities Communities Services.

4 Catholic Charities is committed to serving
5 vulnerable populations, providing assistance to those
6 in need across the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten
7 Island. Just last year we served over 5.8 million
8 meals to over 58,000 unique households of a total of
9 650,000 individuals. Rising demand and challenge that
10 we are seeing today is about 25 percent increase in
11 the number of people that are food insecure coming to
12 our pantries and that's due to the lack of SNAP
13 benefits, food inflation costs, and lack of income.

14 As donations decrease and food costs rise, it's
15 especially essential needs like eggs, meat, fresh
16 produce that many of our community members need. The
17 demand has grown but the resources are dwindling at
18 this point. Funding shortages with the federal and
19 city level is really crippling our ability to make
20 sure that every household that is in need of food is
21 able to access it.

22 What we're asking for is to consider funding \$20
23 million in the City funding to allow us to be able to
24 do the vital work that needs to be done to serve our
25 community members so no one goes hungry. In addition

1
2 to that, we are asking that we restore and increase
3 CFC funding, make it stable, so we don't have to sit
4 here every year wondering how we're going to feed our
5 New Yorkers in need.

6 And in addition to that, we would really
7 appreciate your support in our state ask as it
8 relates to SNAP and food assistance funding – like
9 FSAP for instance – that is on hold today, (TIMER
10 CHIMES) that has crippled many of our pantries, and I
11 thank you for your time.

12 LYNETTE BROWN: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, and
13 fellow committee chair members. I am Lynette Brown,
14 Food Resource Coordinator for Catholic Charities
15 Brooklyn and Queens. I have worked within our network
16 of 61 food pantries throughout Brooklyn And Queens
17 since 2023. Before that, I was a volunteer at an at
18 our network pantry, Benedict the Moor in Jamaica and
19 Our Lady of Mercy in Brownsville. I'm happy to be
20 here today as the subject of food and hunger
21 insecurity in New York City is close to my heart.

22 Since the pandemic, many of our pantries have
23 seen an increase in attendance of 1,000 percent or
24 more. Small parish pantries that fed 25 to 30 people
25 each week started seeing 400 to 500 clients. Things

1 started to level off in 2021, and while we never went
2 back to pre-pandemic numbers, things became more
3 manageable. By 2023, our network of 61 pantries was
4 feeding an average of 25,000 people a month. But we
5 have seen a steady increase in the number of people
6 needing food, and it is a diverse population that
7 spans from young adults to elderly, working families,
8 college students, and the underemployed.
9

10 Our pantries in Southern Brooklyn, especially Our
11 Lady of Miracles in Canarsie, have seen an influx of
12 newly arrived Haitians and Ukrainians.

13 We are seeing more and more young people come to
14 us for help. Last year, we opened a pantry at Our
15 Lady of Sorrows in Corona. Many of the clients, have
16 families with young children or they're helping
17 support their parents.

18 Our pantries in Long Island City and Woodside
19 Queens are seeing larger number of people than ever
20 before. Since the fall of 2024, we are feeding a
21 total average of 37,000 people a month throughout all
22 of our food pantries in Brooklyn and Queens.

23 The price of food is rising and funding is
24 becoming more difficult. As hard as last year was,
25 this year is proving even more difficult. The

1
2 uncertainty of what lies ahead for federal government
3 has everyone nervous. (TIMER CHIMES) The price of
4 staples such as eggs, butter, milk, fresh fruit, and
5 vegetables has surged. These increases have forced us
6 to change our food distribution.

7 Please support our continuing efforts to feed
8 hungry New Yorkers by providing \$20 million in
9 emergency food pantry monies in the fiscal year 2026
10 New York City Budget. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I was going to ask
12 a question, Lynette, about the increase but you spoke
13 very eloquently about that.

14 LYNETTE BROWN: Yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But my question, Joe, think is
16 the around the \$20 million ask. Is that consistent
17 with the funds that we were able to get allocated
18 throughout the pandemic when we saw, you know, the
19 need for more resources at our local pantries grow?

20 JOE ROSENBERG: I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The \$20 million, is that
22 comparable with funding... with the funding that was
23 provided during the pandemic, the onset of the
24 pandemic, the additional funding that was given to
25

1
2 food pantries to make up the difference for the
3 increase in population?

4 JOE ROSENBERG: It's helpful. I mean, I think the
5 \$20 million was basically chosen because we're all
6 suffering such need. It wasn't particularly
7 quantified, but you were obviously indispensable in
8 helping to provide the \$1 million which each of us
9 has \$250,000 with from last fiscal year.

10 But things have deteriorated, prices have
11 increased, references were made to the emergency food
12 and shelter program, and both Catholic Charities have
13 sustained loss of \$800,000 each in this program. And
14 that doesn't even include the \$230 billion that
15 Congress appears to be poised to reduce and SNAP.

16 So, the \$20 will be absolutely indispensable.
17 Will it offset what is coming in our direction from
18 the feds? Unlikely. But it will prevent people from
19 going hungry.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate it. And I
21 appreciate all of you and the work that you do each
22 and every day. And we will continue to support those
23 efforts as well. Thank you so much for your testimony
24 today.

25 PANEL: Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Our next panel is Eric Lee,
3 Rachel Sabella, Lo Anderson, and Shirley de Peña.
4 Whoever wants to begin first on either end? You want
5 to begin first? Just make sure that the light is red.

6 SHIRLEY DE PEÑA: I submitted written testimony,
7 so I'm just going to give highlights, briefer
8 highlights.

9 Good afternoon, Chairperson Ayala, and members of
10 the General Welfare Committee. My name is Shirley de
11 Peña, and I serve as a Director in the Central Office
12 of Student Affairs and the Liaison to the Campus
13 Resource Centers and Food Pantries at CUNY.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I begin
15 by expressing my sincere gratitude for your support
16 of CUNY's food security initiatives. Food insecurity
17 is one of the most urgent challenges facing CUNY
18 students today. When students struggle to afford
19 food, they often face increased stress, difficulty
20 concentrating in class, and a greater likelihood of
21 dropping out. Many of our students are already
22 balancing coursework with jobs, family
23 responsibilities, and financial hardships.

24 CUNY has food pantries operating at 18
25 undergraduate colleges and two professional schools.

1 Our students can visit any food pantry, regardless of
2 their campus of attendance. These food pantries do
3 more than just provide groceries. Many pantries are
4 located within Campus Resource Centers where staff
5 assist students in applying for SNAP, emergency
6 financial aid, and connecting with other critical
7 services such as housing assistance and mental health
8 counseling.
9

10 The need for these services has grown at an
11 alarming rate. In 2024 alone, CUNY food pantries
12 recorded more than 206,000 visits, an extraordinary
13 increase from 58,941 visits in 2022, and 146,544
14 visits in 2023.

15 Beyond food pantries, City Council funding has
16 allowed CUNY to implement the Fresh Food Bag Program,
17 providing students with fresh produce, bread, eggs,
18 and culturally appropriate food options, helping to
19 alleviate hunger, while also creating opportunities
20 for students to connect with vital support services
21 on campus.

22 (TIMER CHIMES) Despite the success of these
23 initiatives, demand continues to outpace available
24 resource. CUNY students are hard working, resilient,
25 and deeply committed to their education, but no

1 student should have to choose between paying for
2 textbooks and putting food on the table. If we want
3 our students to succeed, we must ensure they have
4 access to fundamental resources they need to thrive.
5

6 I urge the Council to continue and expand its
7 investment in food security programs at the cost of
8 \$1.125 million at CUNY. With additional resources, we
9 can sustain and grow our food pantry operations,
10 expand the Fresh Food Bag Program, and enhance the
11 critical support services that help students. Thank
12 you for your time.

13 ERIC LEE: Hi, good afternoon. Thank you, Deputy
14 Speaker Ayala, and members of the Committee and
15 central staff for being here today and allowing me
16 the opportunity to testify.

17 I am Eric Lee, Director Of Public Policy for
18 Volunteers of America Greater New York, a 129-year-
19 old anti-poverty organization which seeks to end
20 homelessness in the Greater New York area through
21 housing, health, and wealth building services.

22 I submitted written testimony which I will
23 summarize given the time.

24 Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of
25 the Committee for your steadfast commitment to

1
2 protecting the human services safety net. Hunger and
3 food insecurity for low-income households is already
4 far too common and, unfortunately, it's only going to
5 get worse.

6 With regards to federal cuts, we urge the Council
7 to use your voice to call on Congress to maintain and
8 increase funding for SNAP as commissioner Park
9 estimates that 1.8 million New Yorkers rely on this
10 critical lifeline and could cost the City up to \$900
11 million per year if Congress does not back away from
12 proposed cuts.

13 We also urge the Council to call on Congress to
14 restore funding to the Emergency Food and Shelter
15 Program or FSAP, which was testified by others today.

16 VOA-GNY utilizes this funding to feed survivors
17 of domestic violence within our seven DV programs.
18 And FEMA halted \$3.9 million in congressionally
19 approved funding to us and 96 other FSAP recipients
20 in New York City beginning on January 27th.

21 Given these federal cuts, we urge the Council and
22 Administration to double down on local resources to
23 keep New Yorkers fed. VOA-GNY greatly appreciates the
24 Brooklyn Delegation's current support for our food
25 pantries program, which is utilized to create food

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2 pantries within our SRO supportive housing sites, as
3 well as offer culturally appropriate meals and fresh
4 food options within our shelters in Brooklyn.

5 We ask the Council to please consider our FY26
6 request of \$20,000 per borough to the Bronx
7 Delegation, (TIMER CHIMES) Brooklyn Delegation, and
8 Manhattan Delegation to further expand this
9 critically needed program.

10 Do you mind if I offer comments about the
11 legislation? Okay, thank you.

12 With regards to the legislation being considered
13 today, for Intro 245, we're supportive of DSS
14 exploring the feasibility of creating a universal
15 benefits application. But one flag we have is it's
16 not clear to us how City benefits are defined based
17 on § 21-151 of the code.

18 For Intro 1028, we're supportive of streamlining
19 public benefits, but we recommend that enrollment
20 must have an opt-in requirement – rather than an opt
21 out – for each adult in the household to make sure
22 that they wish to receive benefits and avoid
23 inadvertently harming their personal situation.
24 Examples where this could be problematic include
25 survivors of domestic violence who are fleeing their

1
2 abuser, young people who are seeking emancipation
3 from the parent or legal guardians as both of those
4 cases, if they're already added to a household and
5 are trying to apply for their own benefits, would be
6 denied. And we also are concerned about immigrant
7 households who would be seeking permanent residency
8 status given the public charge concerns around that.

9 Finally, for Intro 148, we strongly endorse this
10 legislation to require DSS to provide receipts and
11 for applications for benefits and services. We
12 recommend the receipt also be automatically uploaded
13 to the applicant's Access HRA account, so that they
14 can download it on demand should they lose their
15 paper copy. And the receipt should also include the
16 name and email address of the DSS caseworker to allow
17 for timely follow-up by the client or provider, as
18 well as foster additional transparency and
19 accountability within the process.

20 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

21 (PAUSE)

22 RACHEL SABELLA: Good afternoon; my name is
23 Rachel Sabella, and I have the honor and privilege
24 of serving as the Director of No Kid Hungry New
25 York. Chair, I want to thank you for your steadfast

1
2 work on this. What we heard today was how important
3 this is, how you're holding the Administration
4 accountable. We are lucky to have you leading in
5 this battle, and I am proud to call you one of my
6 hunger heroes. So thank you.

7 I also want to thank the full Council body and
8 the staff. This council has always come together to
9 fight for what is right and to put food on the
10 table. Last year when the Administration cut school
11 meal programs in the middle of the year, it was
12 this body that got it restored in a month. It was
13 this body that worked with us to get information
14 out to families on summer EBT this year, and I so
15 admire the work that Council is doing for immigrant
16 families right now. This is more needed than ever
17 before.

18 I have worked on anti-hunger programs for more
19 than ten years. I have never seen anything quite
20 like what we're facing right now. We just did a
21 survey of New Yorkers, and what we found is half of
22 New Yorkers are going into debt to pay for
23 groceries; 86 percent have said their incomes are
24 not rising as fast as grocery prices. New Yorkers
25 also told us that not only is this stretching their

1
2 checkbooks, but it's affecting their mental and
3 physical health. They're cutting meals, they're
4 skipping meals, they're hiding food to make sure
5 there are resources for children at the end of the
6 month. And we know what our survey tells us, what
7 our experience tells us is these numbers are much
8 higher in communities of color.

9 But what does give me a little bit of hope is
10 that New Yorkers don't support these cuts. They
11 also believe that solving child hunger should be a
12 bipartisan solution. This is not a time to play
13 games.

14 So you have my written testimony with all the
15 data and policy recommendations and things. But I
16 just wanna sum up my ask in two ways. One is we
17 want this entire body to work together, again in a
18 bipartisan way as we advocate in Washington. (TIMER
19 CHIMES) It's not about politics. It's about what's
20 right. It's really scary what these SNAP cuts could
21 be, the proposals, whether limiting choice, cutting
22 benefits, pushing costs onto states. It could have
23 a devastating effect. There are also potential
24 rollbacks to school meal programs. That's something
25 we wanna keep in mind when New York City is giving

1
2 free meals to every child and when the State has a
3 major proposal there too.

4 My second ask, and I will be very quick, and I
5 think the word proactive was said by every Council
6 member today. How are we making sure the
7 Administration is being proactive? I think about
8 school meal programs. There is so much growth for
9 participation in school breakfast that doesn't have
10 a financial implication. What is the Administration
11 doing? Is SNAP outreach happening in school
12 buildings and after school programs, that TA to
13 help people get their summer EBT benefits? Are
14 people getting information about where pantries
15 are? We know they can't fix the SNAP skimming, but
16 there are other things that we can do.

17 We also know New Yorkers are afraid, and they
18 have trusted sources that they can go to for
19 support, and we want to make sure the
20 Administration continues to support them.

21 So I thank you for everything you and the entire
22 team are doing. Please count us in in this work,
23 and we are here together to make sure No Kid Hungry
24 is a reality.

1
2 LO ANDERSON: Good afternoon, thank you so much
3 for the opportunity to testify this afternoon.

4 My name is Lo Anderson; and I'm the Student
5 Engagement Coordinator for a program called CUNY
6 Cares. It's a pilot program right now that is a
7 combination of the CUNY Office of Transformation
8 and the Graduate School of Public Health. So we
9 hope by FY26 to prove to the CUNY chancellor that
10 this is a program that is worthy to spread to the
11 other CUNY campuses.

12 So what do we do as CUNY Care Student
13 Navigators? We meet the student with peer to peer
14 support by helping them – and I call public
15 assistance litigation, everyday litigation, right?
16 So, do you respect and qualify college students as
17 the everyday litigators that they – so 18,000 folks
18 across the three Bronx campuses that we serve, so
19 Hostos Community College, which I am a graduate,
20 Bronx Community College, and Lehman College
21 together. They have already been leading the way in
22 terms of food security through their Access
23 Resource Center, which you heard my colleague
24 highlight. So, we have our local superheroes of
25 Madeline Cruz, Dawn Daniels, Rain Diaz, Baraka

1
2 Corley who lead the conversation on food insecurity
3 every single day on campus and help students who
4 are coming to campus hungry. Because there's no way
5 that we can continue to advocate for higher
6 education – folks actually learning in the
7 classroom while they're hungry, and worrying about
8 losing their housing, and, furthermore benefits in
9 the midst of that.

10 So it was interesting to be in this hearing and
11 participate. I do want to thank you for the
12 accountability of all three of these legislations
13 that are providing some sense of accountability
14 towards DSS. Because I can tell you from the direct
15 service level there hasn't been a lot of it for us.

16 Fair Fares, specifically I can say, while
17 expanded eligibility has been introduced, I can
18 tell you that a student who works 40 hours at
19 McDonald's does not qualify for the Fair Fares
20 program currently.

21 I can tell you that students that I advocate for
22 on the ground every day in, order to access or
23 process a One-Shot Deal for housing arrears or
24 anything that they deal with, is upwards of six
25 applications in order to process it correctly.

1
2 (TIMER CHIMES) Thirty to 45 days is the full day
3 that is set by DSS in terms of determination, and
4 we find that it is egregiously more than that. So
5 imagine a student dealing with a one semester, 30
6 to 45 days is simply insufficient.

7 So we appreciate your support, and we're asking
8 for \$300,000 to expand upon the work of these
9 resource centers and move CUNY CARES to all City
10 University of New York campuses. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much. So you
12 know, you're asking for \$300,000 more or
13 \$300,000...

14 LO ANDERSON: I believe that's in addition. I
15 know that we have asked from the Bronx Delegation
16 as well. And we are advocating at the state level
17 for \$4 million to expand the program.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, all right, perfect.

19 Mr. Lee, I had a question for you. The food
20 pantry programs within the shelter system, are
21 those funded through the City or are those funded
22 through the nonprofit organizations that are
23 running the shelter?

24

25

1
2 ERIC LEE: So, we receive funding through our DHS
3 contracts for food, for our shelters where people
4 do not cook for themselves.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Uh-huh?

6 ERIC LEE: But, at the same time, we also layer
7 on the funding from the Brooklyn Borough Delegation
8 to enhance it, unfortunately, the DHS contracts to
9 do not pay...

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Enough...

11 ERIC LEE: a very high amount for the food. And
12 we want to be able to offer culturally appropriate,
13 nutritious, fresh foods to our people within our
14 facilities.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So in in the case of an
16 individual, like the one that I referenced that was
17 in shelter for several days, didn't have any
18 income, did not have a SNAP case open; she's in a
19 shelter where she can cook if she had the food. In
20 situations like that, in in shelters that are run
21 by your organization, are those folks automatically
22 screened for food insecurity to ensure that...

23 ERIC LEE: Our caseworkers work with our clients
24 to get them on public benefits. If they cook
25 themselves, or if they have facilities that can

1
2 cook in there, for at least in Brooklyn, we have
3 the ability to then have those food pantries to
4 offer food if their food stamps run out. If they're
5 a little short, we have that extra cushion there
6 based upon the Council support.

7 We would love to be able to offer it within also
8 Manhattan and the Bronx, which is why we expanded
9 our ask this year to those two borough delegations
10 as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So the City only provides
12 funding for shelters where there is no cooking
13 facility... no cooking available? Right?

14 ERIC LEE: Yeah, for shelter facilities where
15 clients do not have kitchens within their units...

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Uh-huh?

17 ERIC LEE: They would offer food, uh, prepared
18 meals for the clients.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. And in the cases where
20 the person can cook, those pantries, if there is
21 one, are funded through the Council funding?

22 ERIC LEE: For our sites. Not at...

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But you're not receiving any
24 other funding to run those?

1
2 ERIC LEE: So for DHS facilities where people
3 cook for themselves...

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Uh-huh?

5 ERIC LEE: Not every building would have
6 pantries. That is based on a building by building,
7 contract by contract thing. And that is how we try
8 to creatively use funding with VOA. But that's not
9 something that I'm... I can't speak to every
10 provider.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Mm-hmm.

12 ERIC LEE: But that's how we do the food services
13 within our buildings.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And how soon does the
15 caseworker, they're interfacing with the client do
16 the assessment, makes the assessment on whether or
17 not that individual may or may not need emergency
18 food?

19 ERIC LEE: I can get back to you on that
20 information. The other thing is to speak more
21 broadly to how VOH works, is the FSAP program we
22 use that to enhance food options within our DV
23 programs. So trying to creatively look at how we
24 can enhance the services and options to ensure
25 that, holistically, people within our buildings

1
2 have the food that the need, connections to care,
3 services and other things. And that is one way in
4 which, as I mentioned in my testimony, we are
5 concerned that with the freezing of those funds
6 from Congress, that we would welcome the Council's
7 support in calling on Congress to push FEMA to
8 release that. Because that is not within FEMA's
9 authority currently.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Perfect thank you.

11 Did you want to add something?

12 SHIRLEY DE PEÑA: I just wanted to add with
13 respect to the DHS process, there are places and
14 units – we have a lot of students living in shelter,
15 period. So that's the reality.

16 And we do have programs that are coming out to
17 combat that, but in the interim, I do hear constantly
18 from my students who are living in shelter that their
19 access to food as they live in shelter is decreasing.
20 One example I can give you is a young mother of twin
21 daughters who were staying in a hotel in Queens and
22 had staff from the shelter come and remove the only
23 microwave that she had. So for someone with twins,
24 under the age of three, to me – egregious – with no
25 previous memo, with no notice, and no reasoning why.

1
2 So I would certainly pay attention through the
3 ombudsman to see what folks are complaining about,
4 food security specially. Because I know in the Bronx
5 for certain, I hear those complaints a lot as well
6 from students and their families.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, that's very helpful,
8 that's very helpful. All right, thank you, guys, so
9 much for the work that you do and for coming here and
10 spending the day with us to really lend truth to this
11 crisis that we are facing. And hopefully, if you have
12 any creative ways that you think that we can be
13 helpful as well, you know where to find me.

14 PANEL: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

16 Our next panel is Nick Buess, Deborah Berkman,
17 Naima Dahir, and Kim Moscaritolo.

18 (PAUSE)

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right, you can begin.

20 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Good afternoon, Deputy Speaker
21 Ayala, staff, thank you so much for the opportunity
22 to speak today. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I'm
23 the Director of the Shelter and Economic Stability
24 Project at New York Legal Assistance Group or NYLAG.

1
2 My specific project at NYLAG helps people access
3 and maintain public benefits, and I'm intimately
4 familiar with the subjects of today's hearing.

5 First I would like to speak out in support of
6 Intro Number 1148. We very much support DSS, uh,
7 requiring DSS to provide a receipt for all
8 applications for benefits or services and
9 particularly a detailed receipt for the documents
10 submitted. So many times NYLAG clients visit DSS
11 offices and attempt to apply or recertify or
12 otherwise change their public benefits and they come
13 away empty handed. Clients are later told that
14 documents are needed when they were already submitted
15 or that clients applications are denied for "failure
16 to submit documents" when in fact they did include
17 those documents with their application or submitted
18 them within the time frame required. Given the
19 current disorganization of DSS, and how many
20 applications or recertifications are simply not acted
21 upon, it's imperative that receipts are given so that
22 clients may follow-up on their applications.

23 Second, NYLAG has some concerns about Intro
24 Number 1028. While we applaud the intent of automatic
25 enrollment of eligible people and City-created

1 benefit programs, we are concerned about the
2 collateral consequences of involuntary enrollment.
3 While the bill does contemplate an opt out provision,
4 it's very likely that many people will never know
5 that they've been enrolled in public benefits or how
6 to opt out. And in the current political climate,
7 people have very valid reasons why they may not want
8 to access certain public benefits eligible for.
9 Moreover, the bill is silent on people who don't meet
10 their requirements for the benefits that they're
11 accidentally enrolled in and what type of repayment
12 for benefits wrongly issued would be mandated. That's
13 why NYLAG thinks that all benefits should require an
14 opt in, not an opt out. But in keeping with the
15 spirit of the bill, NYLAG does support an automatic
16 screening with a simplified opt in mechanism so
17 people are able to more easily access those benefit
18 programs.
19

20 (TIMER CHIMES) Just very quickly, far too many of
21 our neighbors are going hungry. And I think that a
22 huge part of it is that people are not able to access
23 their food related public benefits, specifically
24 SNAP. My team assists numerous clients every day who
25 are hungry and reliant on SNAP, but because of DSS's

1 failure to process their applications properly or
2 their recertifications, they have their SNAP benefits
3 denied or discontinued. And while, of course, we're
4 able to get their benefits restored retroactively, as
5 we all know people need to eat on a consistent basis
6 and they can't eat retroactively. Most of these
7 clients that we have are elderly or they live with
8 disability, and when their SNAP is discontinued they
9 just don't know where to turn.
10

11 I wanted to answer a question that the Deputy
12 Speaker had earlier today also about how to maximize
13 how to help someone who's about \$5 below the SNAP
14 eligibility requirement access SNAP.

15 So there are a lot of... while the federal rules
16 can change and the City doesn't have any access to
17 change those rules, what they can do is help people
18 engage in SNAP budgeting that would make them
19 eligible for more benefits. So for elderly and
20 disabled people that's computing their medical costs
21 and that would change how much SNAP that they would
22 be eligible for. And for everyone there's something
23 called SUA and if people pay for heat and electricity
24 and or electricity, they get a bigger sort of income
25 deduction which raises the amount of the benefit that

1
2 navigation, legal services, and food distribution,
3 ensuring that community members would receive
4 holistic support.

5 Our community health and well-being team assists
6 thousands of clients annually in enrolling in public
7 benefits such as the SNAP, cash assistance, one-time
8 emergency grants, heating and energy benefits, and
9 health insurance, and New York City Cares for
10 individuals who do who do not qualify through New
11 York State programs. We conduct proactive outreach
12 including pre-screening events and application
13 assistance to ensure clients access the resources and
14 supports they need to apply.

15 Our clients face numerous bureaucratic barriers
16 when applying for public benefits. Clients struggle
17 to track their application status, often receive
18 unclear instructions about documents, they are not
19 provided receipts confirming their submission, making
20 it difficult to track progress. Many face obstacles
21 such as long wait times – ranging from hours on the
22 phones to entire days in person – or language
23 barriers and the need to reapply multiple times due
24 to incomplete or lost paperwork.

1
2 really urge the City Council to help alleviate these
3 challenges.

4 We support the introduction of these bills, and
5 thank you so much for allowing me to testify today.

6 KIM MOSCARITOLO: Hello, I'm Kim Moscaritolo, I am
7 the Director of Communications and Advocacy for
8 Hunger Free America.

9 Our overall message is very simple. New Yorkers
10 still face massive food insecurity and hunger crises
11 citywide, and we need a massive response from the
12 City, especially one that focuses on increasing
13 participation in federally funded SNAP, WIC, School
14 Breakfast, and the new summer EBT program.

15 And given the massive funding cuts that are
16 proposed, and in some cases already implemented by
17 the federal government, it's more important than ever
18 for New York City to step up and ensure that all New
19 Yorkers have access to nutritious food.

20 We are here today specifically to support Intro
21 245, which would mandate the report on the
22 feasibility of creating a universal benefits
23 application, and mandate the creation of such a
24 universal benefits application, as determined
25 feasible by the commissioner of DSS.

1
2 So while it is true that it is easier to apply
3 for multiple benefits in New York City than in much
4 of the rest of the state, it is still an onerous
5 process to obtain those benefits. Rather than being
6 able to apply for multiple benefits at one time, low-
7 income New Yorkers are forced to spend countless
8 hours traveling to and waiting at social services
9 offices, spending long times on phone calls which
10 means taking time away from work or raising their
11 children.

12 Economists often talk about the term "opportunity
13 cost" as it relates to higher and middle income
14 people, meaning time they spend on one task is not
15 available to perform another important task, but they
16 rarely apply this concept to low-income people acting
17 as though their time is essentially worthless.

18 The reality is applying for benefits in New York
19 City is a time consuming, humiliating, and costly
20 process. So we have long championed the idea of a
21 single portal, including the MyCity portal, which we
22 have been very supportive of. We were particularly
23 disturbed by reports that the City has already spent
24 \$100 million on MyCity and none of the most important
25 features are operational.

1
2 So we are not technology experts, but every day
3 our dedicated benefits access team works with
4 struggling families to help them apply for and
5 receive benefits they desperately need and we see the
6 difficulties they face.

7 (TIMER CHIMES) So once again, we fully support
8 Intro 245, and we hope that you will work
9 expeditiously to get this work started. Thank you for
10 the opportunity to submit this testimony.

11 NICHOLAS BUESS: Hi, good afternoon, I'm Nick
12 Buess from the Food Bank for New York City. Thank
13 you, Chair, for your continued commitment to
14 addressing food insecurity in New York. Thank you to
15 the Council for continuing to stand up for
16 specifically food pantries and soup kitchens across
17 our city. We want to recognize, acknowledge, and
18 thank the Council for including \$100 million of
19 baselined food funding for the Community Food
20 Connection Program.

21 You saw it this morning on the steps, food
22 pantries and soup kitchens are worried. We're worried
23 because we stand in the gap. That's what council
24 Member Banks was asking, "Who stands in the gap when
25 SNAP's not available?" Food pantries stand in the

1
2 gap. It's the last best option for our for our
3 community members. You know this.

4 But we need to make sure that our community based
5 food programs have the support, have the capacity
6 support and have the food support available,
7 particularly in the face of what's happening in the
8 federal government.

9 We can't retroactively eat. So even if things are
10 moving around, even if we are successful in receiving
11 more food from the USDA, today we have 2 million
12 meals that are suspended from the USDA. We have to
13 fortify our network so that we can make sure that
14 food pantries have the supply they need.

15 So I have a little bit more details in the
16 written testimony, but I just want to close by saying
17 that the City Council's Food Pantry Initiative and
18 emergency funding for food programs is an essential
19 part of our need in the next year as well, given
20 these uncertainties. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you all for your
22 testimony. Thank you for that information, I had no
23 idea.

24 DEBORAH BERKMAN: Definitely follow up with you...
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, please, yeah. Thank you
3 so much.

4 Our next panel is Stephen Grimaldi, Molly
5 Eckerle, Jeanette Estima, Anita Kwok, and Jenny
6 Veloz.

7 Hello, you may begin.

8 STEPHEN GRIMALDI: Okay. Good afternoon, thank
9 you, Committee Chair Ayala, and members of the
10 Committee on General Welfare for this opportunity.

11 I'm gifting you, Diana, 300 plates, from our
12 participants in multiple languages, French,
13 Spanish, Mandarin, and English and notes from our
14 participants who are concerned about the cuts to
15 the Community Food Connections program.

16 As you know, hunger in New York's reached epic
17 proportions, epidemic proportions. I could go
18 through the data - 1.3 million households, nearly 3
19 million people are struggling to make ends meet
20 according to the True Cost of Living Report. One in
21 three New Yorkers used a food pantry in the past
22 three years according to Robinhood.

23 The data goes on and on and on. I think you've
24 heard already today more information about that,
25 and I know you're aware of that.

1
2 Last year, we served 11 million meals at the New
3 York Common Pantry, and we're on pace to serve 12
4 million this year assisting 730,000 visitors.

5 When we started, we were serving 1.5 million
6 meals to roughly a 100,000 guests. We continue to
7 do more.

8 Last month, we experienced a 13 percent increase
9 in March compared to last March. So just comparing
10 that particular month, and, of course, that's an
11 increase. That's on top of the increase of 17
12 percent in individuals we served last year.

13 A lot of people have talked about the cuts.
14 Recent Department of Agriculture termination of the
15 Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative
16 Agreement, this funds NYFNYF or New York Food for
17 New York Families. Last year, that was \$1.9 million
18 for the New York Common Pantry - that's a gap of
19 over 2.3 million meals - Never mind the SNAP cuts
20 that were that are coming, WIC, possibly CSFP,
21 EFSP, which we already know about, TFAP, which Nick
22 just talked about. A lot of these cuts are going to
23 layer and (TIMER CHIMES) really hurt those we serve.

1
2 We applaud the City, the City Council for the
3 baseline funding for a \$100 million per year, and
4 we hope that the budget will include that.

5 My last thing, I did want to say a little bit
6 off script, listening to First Deputy Commissioner
7 talk about mobile pantries. We have 60 mobile sites
8 in addition to nourish sites. We have about a 175
9 sites, mobile, across our city. We have been
10 waiting for two years to get an EFRO number from
11 the City so we can open more mobile pantries, and
12 we can get CFC money for that.

13 So, yes, we need CFC money to be able to do
14 that, but we also need to have clearance just a
15 site visit, which we have been promised for two
16 years. There was initial visit. So those are the
17 sort of things that can easily be done. Once we get
18 an EFRO number, we can start distributing CFC food.
19 Right now, we can only serve CFC food to our brick
20 and mortar locations.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I can try to make a
22 connection there, so that we can...

23 STEPHEN GRIMALDI: Okay, thank you.

24 ANITA KWOK: Thank you, Chair Ayala, for convening
25 today's over oversight hearing. My name is Anita

1
2 Kwok, a Policy Analyst for United Neighborhood
3 Houses, which is a policy and social change
4 organization representing neighborhood settlement
5 houses that that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from
6 all walks of life.

7 Food insecurity emerged as a top community need
8 at settlement houses in the beginning of the
9 pandemic, and today demand for food assistance
10 remains higher than ever. Settlement houses address
11 hunger through benefit enrollment, pantry services,
12 community outreach, resources and government support
13 are sparse.

14 Older adult hunger is at crisis levels.
15 Congregate meals at older adult centers have been
16 severely impacted by rising food costs. The City must
17 invest at least \$57 million in new funding for
18 congregate meals, including restoring prior cuts and
19 addressing inflation.

20 Additionally, home delivered meals, which are
21 often the sole food source for homebound seniors,
22 must be expanded with the Council Member Linda Lee's
23 Intro 770, which ensures meals are provided seven
24 days a week.

1
2 We also urge the Council to support Council
3 Member Hudson's Intro 237, restoring grab-and-go
4 options at older adult centers.

5 Beyond older adults, several UNH members rely on
6 funding for the Community Food Connections Program,
7 which plays a vital role in combating food
8 insecurity. For example, WHEDco's weekly Community
9 Food Pantry serves approximately 65 households per
10 week and 3,400 individuals per year.

11 Providers have emphasized that sustained or
12 increased CFC funding is critical to meeting the
13 growing demand for emergency food assistance in their
14 communities. UNH thanks the Council for putting the
15 expansion of CFC to \$100 million to sustain and grow
16 the program in your budget response.

17 Additionally, UNH urges the Council to support
18 our ongoing efforts to create a SNAP for All Program
19 at the state level, which would utilize state funds
20 to provide food benefits to low-income New Yorkers
21 who are currently ineligible for SNAP due solely to
22 their immigration status. Food is a basic human
23 right, yet the federal government has failed to
24 uphold it slashing critical food assistance programs
25 at a time of unprecedented need.

1
2 Our most vulnerable neighbors shouldn't be forced
3 to choose between rent or food. (TIMER CHIMES) The
4 City must take action to protect residents by
5 ensuring our local food and rental assistance
6 programs remain fully funded, accessible, and able to
7 meet growing needs.

8 Please see my written testimony for more. Thank
9 you for this opportunity.

10 JEANETTE ESTIMA: Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala,
11 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is
12 Jeanette Estima, and I am the Director of Policy and
13 Advocacy at City Meals on Wheels. City Meals works to
14 ensure that homebound older New Yorkers have the food
15 they need to safely age in place, something we all
16 want to be able to do.

17 Last year, our research showed that for 60
18 percent of older adults participating in the City's
19 Home Delivered Meals Program, the one meal a day they
20 receive is simply not enough. Our meal recipients are
21 not able to regularly get to a grocery store or
22 prepare their own meals, which means that SNAP food
23 pantries and other food programs are not always
24 accessible to them. It's critical we look at ways to
25 expand and modernize existing food programs and

1
2 create new programs that bring more food directly to
3 older adults in new ways.

4 City Meals piloted new programs this year, a
5 breakfast box to provide a second meal and a mobile
6 grocery program that allows an older adult to order a
7 bag of food with a few options to choose from through
8 a phone ordering system.

9 This innovative pilot is being done in
10 partnership with WSCAH (West Side Campaign Against
11 Hunger), and funding like CFC is critical in
12 supporting organizations like ours working together
13 to expand access to nutritious food to the City's
14 most vulnerable residents. So, thank you for
15 including a \$100 million in CFC in your budget
16 response and we hope to see that included in the
17 budget.

18 We also urge the Council to pass Intro 770 with
19 \$20.6 million in funding to ensure that the Home
20 Delivered Meals Program provides meals seven days a
21 week – instead of just five days a week – and to
22 increase reimbursement rates for congregate and home
23 delivered meals to combat years of inflationary cost
24 increases. Thanks again for your partnership.

1
2 JENNY VELOZ: Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and
3 the members of the Committee on General Welfare for
4 holding today's oversight hearing on food insecurity,
5 and hunger.

6 My name is Jenny Veloz; I'm a Policy Associate at
7 Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. And
8 since 1944, CCC has served as an independent, multi-
9 issue children advocacy organization dedicated to
10 ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed,
11 safe, and educated.

12 Low-income households continue to struggle with
13 the high cost of not only food, but housing, child
14 care, transportation, and utilities. According to the
15 State Comptroller's May 2024 report on food
16 insecurity, households with children experienced the
17 highest rates of food insufficiency when compared to
18 households without children. In 2022, 16 percent of
19 households with children experienced food
20 insufficiency. And, although that number decreased to
21 15.1 percent in 2023, it was still higher than the 10
22 percent of households without children.

23 With New York City potentially losing \$870
24 million a year if proposed federal SNAP cuts go into
25 effect, it's even more important to invest in the

1
2 resources necessary to alleviate food insecurity
3 among children and families. Programs like Community
4 Food Connection are a vital resource for families
5 needing that extra help in accessing healthy food
6 options.

7 CFC and other food initiatives play a crucial
8 role in ensuring families have the nutrition and
9 supports that they need. So we applaud the Council's
10 budget response of including increased funding for
11 community food connections to a \$100 million and
12 baselining that funding.

13 We also recommend the following investments:
14 Increasing funding for free Health Bucks and creating
15 a \$5 million Food Justice Fund.

16 And I just want to say that I think we can all
17 agree that making sure that children and families are
18 fed should not be controversial issue; we should not
19 have to advocate every year for funding to make sure
20 that New York City's children and families are fed.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I agree, thank you all so much
23 for coming and testifying today. It is a pleasure
24 working with all of you. And, yes, we have a big
25 fight ahead of us, thank you.

1
2 The next panel will consist of Martina Santos,
3 Isaac Anderson, Adlerstein? He left, Isaac? Okay.
4 Debipriya Chatterjee, and Leah Eden.

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin, whichever one
7 of you wants to go first on either end. You want to
8 start? (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE) Okay.

9 LEAH EDEN: Thank you, Chair Ayala, for your
10 leadership today.

11 My name is Leah Eden; I am Executive Director of
12 Equity Advocates where we build the capacity of food
13 justice leaders from across New York to advocate
14 collectively for a strong, sustainable food system.
15 We also lead the New York City Food Policy Alliance,
16 a network of 60+ local food systems groups that we
17 have had the honor of convening for the past five
18 years since those early pandemic days.

19 You've heard the stark figures – food insecurity
20 affects every borough, every demographic, but it does
21 not impact all New Yorkers equally. Right?

22 Communities of color and low-income households bear
23 the brunt of this crisis, and failing to fund
24 emergency food programs only deepens the racial and
25 economic disparities. This is why we're calling for

1
2 \$100 million in baselined funding for Community Food
3 Connections, and we really applaud and thank the City
4 Council for your leadership and recognition – that
5 now is not the time to scale back our City's
6 investment in this program – as was outlined in the
7 Mayor's Preliminary Budget Proposal.

8 We also urge the Council to continue to champion
9 and invest in local food economies that build wealth
10 in communities, specifically investing in creating
11 and expanding market pathways for small and
12 historically marginalized farmers, while increasing
13 access to locally sourced food in public
14 institutions. There's been some really great progress
15 in this area, particularly in schools and hospitals,
16 but dedicated funding, technical assistance, and
17 connection is required to support our local farmers
18 and growers and producers in meeting procurement
19 contracts.

20 We also call for increased funding for Health
21 Bucks, as well as Get The Good Stuff, to make healthy
22 food more affordable for more New Yorkers while
23 continuing to leverage federal GusNIP funds (Gus
24 Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program) to maximize
25 those resources.

1
2 And finally, and thank you, Chair Ayala, for
3 asking this question earlier today – we also urge the
4 creation of a \$5 million Food Justice Fund for
5 community-led projects that are designed to grow food
6 justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income
7 communities as outlined in the Food Forward New York
8 Plan. We are happy to discuss that more offline.

9 (TIMER CHIMES) Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

11 DEBIPRIYA CHATTERJEE: Thank you, Chairperson
12 Ayala, and to everyone in the committee. My name is
13 Debipriya Chatterjee, and I am the Senior Economist
14 at the Community Service Society of New York (CSS),
15 long-time nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives
16 of low-income New Yorkers.

17 Today I am here to discuss the severity of the
18 food insecurity landscape and suggest policy
19 recommendations.

20 Per our annual survey of housing and economic
21 security, what we find that almost a quarter, 24
22 percent, of New York City residents experience food
23 insecurity, defined as skipping meals or enduring
24 hunger due to lack of food or reaching out for free
25 food at food pantries, meal programs, or soup

1
2 We would strongly urge the Council to pass (TIMER
3 CHIMES) and make the benefit system more accessible
4 by passing Intros 0245, 1028, and 1148. Our survey
5 shows that 15 percent of all potential recipients
6 lost benefits in the past year due to incomplete or
7 incorrect paperwork and missed application deadlines.

8 In addition to reiterating all the asks from our
9 collaborators, from whom you have been hearing
10 throughout the day today, I would also like to
11 mention that as proposed tariffs go into effect,
12 typical New York households will lose up to \$1,200 to
13 \$2,000 in purchasing power, and here we need the City
14 and the City Council to amp up its efforts to make
15 sure the losses to our city is not as devastating.

16 You heard that we will lose around a \$1 billion
17 every year in SNAP benefits, so this is where we
18 would urge the Council to recognize the moment for
19 what it is and invest heavily to improve nutritional
20 security. Thank you so much.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

22 MARTINA SANTOS: Good afternoon, everyone, Chair
23 Ayala. Thank you for having me here for the second
24 time today. I am going to ready my testimony to you,
25

1
2 and when I finish, I want to add a little bit more –
3 if you let me.

4 My name is Martina Santos, and I am a volunteer
5 at West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). Thank
6 you for giving me the opportunity to present my
7 testimony.

8 Currently, I attend the West Side Campaign
9 Against Hunger as a customer, volunteer, and board
10 member – for over 15 years – where I originally came
11 as a customer because I have a low income, and I
12 couldn't afford to buy some food – fresh fruits and
13 vegetables. Immediately when I went to WSCAH, I saw
14 the quality of the food that WSCAH distributes to its
15 customers. That day I went home with a smile, as I
16 brought home fresh fruits and vegetables, protein,
17 grains, milk, which I was able to choose myself
18 during my visit. The experience of being able to
19 choose my fresh fruit and vegetables, is it like I
20 was going to the supermarket.

21 WSCAH has become a home for me, as almost
22 immediately from my first visit, I became a pantry
23 volunteer. Last year, WSCAH distributed over 6
24 million pounds of healthy food for its 110,000
25 families. For example, seven years ago WSCAH had one

1
2 distribution point and now WSCAH has more than 30
3 distribution points and is also delivering (TIMER
4 CHIMES) directly to over 2000 homes. My greatest
5 satisfaction is being able to refer family,
6 neighbors, friends and even strangers to WSCAH,
7 because I know they will find not only a wide variety
8 of fresh and healthy foods, but also empathetic
9 treatment from the WSCAH team.

10 As a WSCAH volunteer, I have been able to feel
11 the sad reality of hunger and need that exists in our
12 city. I am pleased to be able to do this job, because
13 no New Yorker wants to go to bed hungry.

14 In Fiscal Year 2024 the budget for Community Food
15 Connection program, which was \$60.1 million, was
16 slated to drop to \$25 million in FY 2025. WSCAH's
17 work has become indispensable to many in our
18 community, but unfortunately it is a job that
19 requires a lot of effort and financial support.

20 I'm here too, letting you know, Ms. Ayala, to
21 help in to fighting for the CCFC to bring the budget
22 back to (INAUDIBLE) pantries, because the sad part
23 for me is sometimes I'm going home with a broken
24 heart, because I see people in the street and heard
25 the conversation how they struggle to pay rent, buy

1
2 medicine, pay their electricity bill. All these
3 thing, I'm struggling too, because I'm low-income and
4 I be the work in the food stamp line.

5 So I appreciate if you and your team keep
6 continue with the hard work. And God bless you for
7 helping us to get the budget back to service to our
8 customer with dignity like they deserve. Because
9 sometimes I don't have enough money, and I need to
10 eat - like I don't (INAUDIBLE) to eat rice and beans
11 in the evening because I don't have enough meat and
12 this rice and bean they increase my sugar. I suffer
13 from high blood pressure, too. And that's why I'm
14 here, so can hear my voice - and to begging for help
15 to do something for us, the food pantry, because
16 that's not only me, that's my community, living
17 pantry to pantry. Food insecurity roars not a
18 monster, not only in New York City, around the world.
19 And now New Yorkers are supposed to skip meals,
20 because if they eat breakfast, they don't eat lunch.
21 They save it so they can go to bed with something in
22 their stomach. And that's really sad, Ms. Ayala. We
23 are living in the capitol of the world, and this is
24 heartbreaking for me.

1
2 Thank you very much for listening to me, and have
3 a wonderful afternoon, every single person, and
4 (INAUDIBLE) Ms. Ayala.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You did so good!

6 (APPLAUSE)

7 MARTINA SANTOS: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you! Thank you, thank
9 you, ladies.

10 Our next panel will me Marcus Jackson, Liz Ward,
11 Alex Hughes, and Angie Vega.

12 Okay, perfect, any one of you, whatever corner
13 wants to start first. Do want to start? Okay.

14 LIZ WARD: Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, and staff.
15 My name is Liz Ward, and I am a Program Assistant at
16 the New York Health Foundation.

17 The New York Health Foundation is a private,
18 independent foundation that seeks to improve the
19 health of all New Yorkers, especially people of color
20 and others who have been historically marginalized.
21 Since 2014, we've invested millions of dollars in
22 supporting programs and policies that connect New
23 Yorkers with the food they need to thrive.

24 Despite considerable investment, food
25 insufficiency remains a serious concern for millions

1 of New Yorkers. Nearly one in five Black New Yorkers
2 and one in seven Hispanic New Yorkers experienced
3 food insufficiency last year compared with one in
4 eleven white New Yorkers. Recent federal cuts make
5 City investment and stronger safety net programs all
6 the more critical. Just last month, the USDA cut more
7 than \$1.6 billion from food banks and schools. The
8 Agency also paused \$500 million for the Emergency
9 Food Assistance Program, meaning shipments of
10 essential foods that were destined for food banks
11 will no longer arrive. In New York City alone, 2.5
12 million meals are at risk. We are in full support of
13 others' calls to continue investing in the Community
14 Food Connection Program.
15

16 We also believe the City must pay service
17 providers on time. More than \$4 billion in federal
18 aid supports the work of nonprofits that are
19 essential to New York City's safety net, yet many
20 providers are still waiting on overdue payments.
21 Federal cuts threaten their financial stability, so
22 the City must honor its commitments and quickly pay
23 them what they owe.

24 Finally, we encourage the Council to use its
25 collective voice to oppose harmful federal cuts.

1
2 To conclude, we are grateful for the City's
3 shared commitment to ensuring all New Yorkers have
4 reliable access to the nutritious food they need to
5 live healthy, dignified lives. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Angie Vega?

7 ANGIE VEGA: Yes. Thank you. Good afternoon,
8 members of the committee, and thank you for the
9 opportunity to speak with you.

10 My name is Angie Vega, and I am the Assistant
11 Director of the Children's Health Fund, the Healthy
12 and Ready to Learn Initiative. Today I will speak
13 about the importance of the continued and increased
14 funding for programming that critically supports
15 schools and parents, ensuring that students are well-
16 positioned to thrive in schools like our New York
17 City Council funded program, Healthy and Ready to
18 Learn.

19 According to the New York City Office of the
20 Mayor's Food by the Numbers Annual Report, over 1.2
21 million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity.
22 Moreover, 40.2 percent of adults lived in a household
23 at risk of food insecurity in 2023 continuing a
24 rising trend.

1
2 Across the five New York City boroughs, the
3 percent of children experiencing food insecurity
4 ranges from as low as 14.2 percent in Staten Island
5 to as high as 33.2 percent in The Bronx. In all
6 counties, Black and Hispanic Latino individuals make
7 up the majority of those who have limited access to
8 quality food.

9 Child food insecurity is linked to a number of
10 adverse outcomes, development interruptions, school
11 behaviors, and academic problems, physical alignment
12 including reduced immune system function, worse body
13 weight outcomes, asthma, and mental health condition
14 particularly anxiety and depression.

15 Children facing hunger may struggle in school and
16 beyond. They are more likely to repeat a grade in
17 elementary school, experience developmental impairs
18 in areas like language and motor skills, and have
19 more social and behavioral problems. This is why the
20 New York City Council continued support of the
21 Children's Health Fund, Healthy and Ready to Learn
22 program is extremely important.

23 Healthy and Ready to Learn was developed by the
24 Children Health Fund in 2014 as part of our mission
25 of supporting kids so that they can thrive. (TIMER

1
2 CHIMES) It was developed recognizing the importance
3 of education in helping kids to reach their potential
4 and that they be healthy themselves to take advantage
5 of educational opportunities.

6 The program is designed to help schools identify
7 and address health barriers to learning rooted in
8 social, racial, and economical inequities that impact
9 student learning.

10 When we have their health needs met, they're able
11 to be better learners and succeed in school,
12 ultimately translating into a likelihood of a
13 productive and happy life.

14 Healthy and Ready to Learn started with a strong
15 focus on screening and responding to what we call
16 health barriers to learning, such as addressing
17 medical issues like asthma, dental, vision problems,
18 and mental health well-being. While we continue to
19 address these health barriers to learning, we are
20 focused more on the worrisome needs of food
21 insecurity and childhood trauma.

22 HRL therefore has evolved to include connecting
23 families to local food banks and other community
24 resources to ensure that families' food security
25

1 needs are addressed so that their children could
2 thrive and reach their full potential.

3
4 Through our current model, we leverage finding
5 our flagship school, PS 49 in the Bronx, and in
6 Councilwoman Diana Ayala's district, to inform
7 materials and training that are conducted with
8 educators, administrators, and parents citywide – and
9 through our Resource and Training Center, which was
10 launched in 2017 as an online platform that enables
11 Children's Health Fund to scale our impact to reach
12 students throughout New York City.

13 Our aligned (INAUDIBLE) is equity and diverse
14 focus, and houses a Board of Library that includes
15 infographics fact sheets, interactive learning
16 images, slide decks, and internal resources, external
17 resources links.

18 Here is a snapshot of our resource and training
19 center and HRL's impact...

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you have a lot left? Your
21 time expired. If you could... you could also submit
22 the full testimony for the record.

23 ANGIE VEGA: Okay, we just wanted to give you a
24 snapshot of the impact, but we want to thank you for
25 allowing us to testify today and to continue to have

1
2 your support, so that we can continue to support
3 schools citywide. And hopefully we can expand into
4 more schools and provide services to them.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you make sure that you
6 submit that to us.

7 ANGIE VEGA: Pardon?

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Make sure to submit that to
9 us.

10 ANGIE VEGA: Okay, okay, thank you so much.

11 ALEX HUGHES: Thank you, Chair, and the General
12 Welfare Committee for holding this meeting and
13 hearing our testimony and frankly our cries for help.
14 My name is Alex Hughes; I'm the Senior Director of
15 Hunger Prevention and Advocacy with Project
16 Hospitality, one of the largest social service
17 providers on Staten Island. I've been with this
18 agency since 2016 doing lifesaving work. I know what
19 it is to be hungry and how it feels to have nowhere
20 to turn. It's not something that I would wish on
21 anybody.

22 We're here as the collective canary in the coal
23 mine. Emergency food programs, whether food banks or
24 food pantries, soup kitchens, funders, all of us,
25 we're all feeling the heat. And to put it as simple

1
2 as I can, we're all seeing services go up,
3 utilizations go up, the lines get longer with the
4 resources tackle it dwindling in front of our eyes.
5 And critical program in this is the Community Food
6 Connection Program. Without this program, the 30,000+
7 folks that we serve annually on Staten Island would
8 suffer.

9 The reality is that the work, and thereby the
10 people that we serve, are under attack with reckless
11 and inhumane public policy decisions at the federal
12 level of our government. SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, TEFAP,
13 school meals, and the list goes on. We all know that
14 these programs work and that these programs are still
15 under siege.

16 When the USDA cut the LFPA program that was
17 mentioned earlier, they said in a statement that
18 these programs "no longer effectuate agency
19 priorities." In the face of that, I want to say that
20 our drive and our commitment to this work will always
21 remain an unwavering priority. We always want to do
22 more. It's not a matter of want, it's a matter of
23 having the proper amount of resources to make the
24 work happen.

1
2 I implore the Committee, the Council, please
3 continue thinking of the hungry. Think of the
4 children who are missing school meals. Think of the
5 single mother or the single father who skip meals so
6 their children can eat. Think about the person
7 struggling to choose between healthcare, between
8 housing, and between food costs.

9 One way that we can do this, (TIMER CHIMES) and
10 as other orgs here are saying, is to increase that
11 CFC baseline to a \$100 million.

12 No, this won't bridge the gap, but it really
13 could soften our landing as we work not just to serve
14 meals, but to end hunger. In a time of discussion
15 about priorities and what should and what shouldn't
16 be cut, please don't forget us, our work, or our
17 people.

18 As we all know in the hardest of times, New
19 Yorkers band together and we lean into each other for
20 support. Now is the time that we have to do this. We
21 have to do this as organizations, as individuals, and
22 as professionals. The time is now. Thank you.

23 **MARCUS JACKSON:** Good afternoon, members of the
24 General Welfare Committee. My name is Marcus Jackson,
25 and I serve as the Aging Friendly Community Organizer

1
2 for Encore Community Services. Thank you for the
3 opportunity to speak today on food insecurity among
4 older adults.

5 Encore operates one of the largest home delivered
6 meal programs, more than 750,000 meals annually, to
7 older adults who are homebound, medically fragile,
8 and often entirely alone. For many, the meals we
9 deliver are their only source of daily nutrition. But
10 the City currently only funds one meal a day for five
11 days a week. This leaves thousands of older adults
12 hungry over the weekends and undernourished every
13 day.

14 We're urging the Council to expand meal funding
15 to provide three meals per day, seven days per week,
16 to every older adult who needs them.

17 We also need reimbursement rates that actually
18 cover providers' real costs. Food prices, labor, and
19 delivery expenses have all increased but funding
20 hasn't and has remained the same throughout. Without
21 action, providers like Encore will be forced to make
22 impossible decisions about what we can and can't
23 afford to deliver.

24 Finally, nutrition is only one part. Our
25 Financial Case Managers help older adults apply for

1
2 SNAP, manage health care bills, and access rent
3 relief. They're essential to preventing hunger before
4 it starts. Expanding funding for financial case
5 management must be a part of the City's hunger
6 response. Encore has been serving older adults for
7 nearly 50 years. We know what it takes to prevent
8 hunger and it starts with fully funding the programs
9 at work. Thank you for your time and for your
10 commitment to this issue.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Thank you all for
12 coming by and lending testimony to today's hearing,
13 thank you.

14 Our next and final in person panel consists of
15 Genevieve Brown-Ross, Christopher Leon Johnson, and
16 Sharon Brown.

17 (PAUSE)

18 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Ready?

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can begin.

20 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello, Chair
21 Diana Ayala; My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm
22 here to support people that are hungry in the city of
23 New York. The issue is that it's a lot of
24 grandstanding that's going on with the City Council
25 and these nonprofits that they love to serve nasty

1 food to the people. They don't serve healthy food. I
2 don't know what's going on with that. The City
3 Council need to start supporting more healthy food
4 giveaways to the people that are poor. Instead just
5 giving away nasty GMO processed foods, they need to
6 start pushing more for healthy foods. If you give
7 people healthy foods, it will solve the issue with
8 the hunger crisis because healthy foods last longer
9 than unprocessed foods.
10

11 But the thing is that these nonprofits only care
12 about getting a money lined up, and the way they get
13 their money lined up is through these organizations
14 and these donors that are backed and work hand in
15 hand with these GMO food organizations.

16 So it's it all come in hand... and this is all
17 about medical research on the people that they know
18 they can exploit and what I'm talking about is the
19 working poor. If you give them... if you give them
20 nasty food they get sick. And who we think that
21 benefits? It's the corrupt insurance companies and
22 the corrupt hospitals. And everybody knows that the
23 hospitals and the insurance companies fund majority
24 of these nonprofits and fund our Speaker of the city
25 Council and our Zoning Chair, Kevin Riley. So this is

1
2 all about research. This is all about exploitation of
3 the poor and that's all it's about. We... there is a
4 hunger crisis. There is a food shortage, but there's
5 a way... you need to solve this by allocating more
6 money into the foods and give it directly to the
7 people instead of relying on these nonprofits that
8 just see these people as photo ops and photo
9 opportunities and exploit... and allow them to just
10 see them as like, oh, we got well, if we get these
11 people sick with the help of the hospitals and the
12 nonprofits and the big donors, they make money off
13 the sick people.

14 So this is under of pipeline. I call... I call
15 the sick... the what is it? The hungry to (TIMER
16 CHIMES) hungry to hospitals pipeline. This is what it
17 is. It's all about getting these people sick. That
18 GMO foods, it gets you sick.

19 So I say this right now, support we need to
20 support, but this... this need... we need a lot of
21 change the city. It needs a lot of change. And I feel
22 bad for the people that, you know, that are hungry,
23 that needs food, that don't have the opportunities
24 that I do to try and make some money, but they rely
25 on these food banks and these food pantries to

1 sustain themselves. But if you go to a food pantry or
2 any food bank or any food giveaway, like, it just...
3 they give this disgusting, nasty foods that don't
4 last that long. Some of the food expired. They have
5 black marks on the on the bananas. But that's all
6 done on purpose, because these big time food
7 distributors don't want the food and they know where
8 to give it to. And these nonprofits don't care
9 because they see, oh, we give out 20,000 boxes of
10 food in one day to the people that... especially in
11 like Corona or Elmhurst or Jackson Heights, you know,
12 they stay, you know, these it looks good for the
13 photo op. And some these people that run for city
14 council, they love that stuff.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, Christopher...

17 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Know I immediately... I
18 know

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Christopher, I'm sorry, you...
20 I let you go over, I let you go over. Do you think
21 that you can submit the rest of it (INAUDIBLE)...
22 (CROSS-TALK)

23 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, yeah, I can.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right, thank you, honey,
25 thank you for coming...

1 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Thank you, thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Sharon?

3 SHARON BROWN: Hello, my name is Sharon Brown from
4 Rose of Sharon Enterprises. Before I begin, remember
5 the hostages, release the hostages, let Yahweh's
6 people go, defend Israel.
7

8 Okay, for General Welfare, as far as the food is
9 concerned, I am still concerned about the shelters.
10 They were giving out spoiled food at specific
11 shelters. I want to know if that there's going to be
12 some kind of follow-up on that. It was like maybe six
13 months ago, six months before that they were saying
14 it was a problem. We came back, it was still a
15 problem. They were giving out spoiled food at the
16 shelter. So I hope that's being taken care of.

17 I want to make not for profit sit in restaurant
18 chains and grocery stores not for profit. I hope
19 other people do that. Just regular restaurants - all
20 different variety, Mexican, Chinese, anything, but
21 just up to standard and regular grocery stores,
22 bodegas, and things that give out food free.

23 And we need to try to coordinate with the grocery
24 stores they have now, the grocery stores, the
25 restaurants and stuff, the people that don't sell out

1
2 the groceries and they always wind up with a backlog
3 of food getting spoiled just sitting there. Maybe
4 they can coordinate and have people come in and shop
5 before all that food goes spoiled. Or they can do
6 charitable giving, so when people are in need you can
7 get people to coordinate with certain grocery stores.
8 They can go there and they can shop. And then they
9 can do some kind of tax write off, they can get some
10 kind of benefit, maybe somebody can organize that
11 myself or something.

12 We need prayer in school, we need to... we need
13 prayer, we need the bible, we need the 10
14 commandments in school. We need to make sure (TIMER
15 CHIMES) that all the students are fed. And they can
16 coordinate with the schools and the grocery stores
17 and stuff like that.

18 The school... just a few more minutes. The
19 parents that don't have food at home, but they do
20 have food at school, maybe we can coordinate with the
21 restaurants and the grocery stores, that when they're
22 doing bad and they're not selling, they can
23 coordinate... and coordinate with the schools and the
24 families to give food to these families - let them
25 shop. And they can do it as a tax write off,

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charitable giving, or something and just Rikers Island needs to be closed. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much for coming, Sharon.

We have now heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in person, please visit the sergeant's table and complete and appearance card now.

(PAUSE)

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We will now move onto our Zoom portion of the hearing. William Flynn?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

WILLIAM FLYNN: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We can't hear you, William. Hold on. Are you muted?

WILLIAM FLYNN: (INAUDIBLE)

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, we can't hear you.

Okay, so we are going to move onto the next person, and we will come back to you while you figure out...

Adriana Beltran?

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

ADRIANA BELTRAN: (INAUDIBLE)

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, we are taking a quick
3 pause to check on our end to see if the issue is with
4 us.

5 (PAUSE)

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, all right, we are going
7 to go back to William Flynn. Try now.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

9 WILLIAM FLYNN: Can you hear me?

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

11 WILLIAM FLYNN: Oh, great, okay. Thank you, I know
12 it's been a long day.

13 Chairperson, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and members of
14 the General Welfare Committee, thanks for the
15 opportunity. I will be really brief.

16 My name is Bill Flynn; I am the Director of our
17 Government Benefits Unit; our Disability Advocacy
18 Unit; our LGBTQ+/HIV Advocacy Project; and our
19 Veterans Justice Unit at Legal Services NYC in our
20 Queens Office.

21 I am here today to speak Intro 1148, introduced
22 to this body in December by Council Member Cabán, and
23 how it will benefit and help our most vulnerable
24 clients and your constituents.

1 delay was putting his housing in jeopardy. The agency
2 sent me an evidence packet prior to the hearing,
3 which contained all the documents, not surprisingly.
4

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

6 (PAUSE)

7 WILLIAM FLYNN: (INAUDIBLE) as it will help our
8 clients navigating these systems. And I encourage you
9 to refer your clients to our agency for assistance in
10 navigating these clients as well. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, thank you so much.

12 Adriana?

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Adriana Beltran?

15 ADRIANA BELTRAN: Good afternoon, Chairperson
16 Ayala and members of the committee.

17 My name is Adriana Beltran; I serve as a Deputy
18 Director, Woodside on the Move. I have worked with
19 Woodside on the Move for over a decade, and I have
20 been serving (INAUDIBLE) residents during my tenure
21 with Woodside on the Move.

22 In my role, I oversee and manage all the programs
23 – including grants and contract management, insurance
24 (INAUDIBLE) the services are made for the community.
25

1
2 Through my years with on the Move, I've had the
3 privilege of assisting countless community members,
4 particularly seniors, in applying for a critical
5 benefit such as housing, Medicaid, and SNAP, programs
6 that are essential to their daily well-being.

7 However, I have repeatedly witnessed systematic
8 inefficiencies that create unnecessary barriers to
9 accessing their services.

10 One of the most persistent challenges our clients
11 face is the lack of a clear and consistent
12 application process. Many applications are delayed
13 due to the prolonged processing times or disorganized
14 case management. Applicants frequently find
15 themselves having to submit their documentation
16 multiple times due to either lost or untracked
17 paperwork, causing them undue stress and delaying the
18 assistance that they deserve. For example, one of our
19 longtime clients, a senior woman who has been serving
20 receiving assistance for 14 years, relies on
21 (INAUDIBLE) to renew their SCRIE and SNAP services.
22 While she has benefited greatly from these services,
23 she has expressed delays in receiving renewal
24 applications from DSS leading to disruptions in her
25 benefits. Fortunately, our case managers at Woodside

1
2 on the Move have been able to advocate on her behalf,
3 ensuring she does not lose access to those critical
4 resources.

5 However, not all individuals have access to the
6 advocacy and support that she does, leaving many
7 struggling through the system.

8 Intro 1148-A (TIMER CHIMES) (INAUDIBLE)...
9 (CROSS-TALK)

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you, your time has
11 expired.

12 ADRIANA BELTRAN: Okay.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can wrap it up.

14 ADRIANA BELTRAN: (INAUDIBLE) to step towards
15 addressing the systematic issues by requiring DSS to
16 provide a receipt for applications. This bill ensures
17 transparency and accountability in the application
18 process. A receipt will offer applicants clear
19 documentation of their submission date and records of
20 the materials received and guidance on completion of
21 applications. This simple yet crucial measure will
22 prevent unnecessary delays, reduce stress for
23 applicants, and provide access to essential services
24 for the City's most vulnerable residents. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Next will hear from
3 Stephen Grimaldi?

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

5 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Hello, Stephen Grimaldi?

7 UNKNOWN: (INAUDIBLE)

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, we're moving on to Syed
9 Bhuiyan?

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 (NO RESPONSE)

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What is that?

13 ANDREW STA. ANA: Hello, I don't think there's a
14 Syed Bhuiyan. But, I am here to testify. Should I
15 begin? I think I was just unmuted.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, uh, are you Andrew?

17 ANDREW STA. ANA: Yes, hi.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Andrew Ana? Okay.

19 ANDREW STA. ANA: Yes, Andrew Sta. Ana.

20 Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala, for holding this
21 important, very timely hearing on food insecurity.

22 My name is Andrew Sta. Ana, I am the Interim Co-
23 Executive Director at Asian American Federation
24 representing the collective voice of more than 70
25

1
2 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New
3 Yorkers.

4 Food insecurity for New York's Asian community is
5 at a breaking point from a combination of federal
6 cuts, escalating anti-immigrant policies, fears of
7 folks jeopardizing their status because of public
8 charge, and, of course, the wild shifts in the prices
9 of food and the economy from tariffs have created an
10 untenable situation.

11 Despite the model minority stereotypes
12 surrounding Asian Americans as wealthy and
13 successful, our communities face significant
14 hardship. So while there has been population growth
15 for our community, one in three Asian residents lives
16 in low-income households, and they're twice as likely
17 to experience poverty relative to white New Yorkers.
18 Currently, 42 percent of Asian older adults are low-
19 income, making them amongst the poorest seniors.

20 So what we hear from our communities about food
21 insecurity is alarming. Our member organizations rely
22 on federal, state, and city sources to feed their
23 communities, and the potential cuts are terrifying.
24 Food pantries that are funded under TEFAP, EFSP, and
25 folks that seek assistance through SNAP, these cuts

1 are going to be devastating to the Asian communities.
2 And so while we recognize that the City Council is
3 doing its best to show up for our communities and
4 protect the line, I wanted to share how this is
5 impacting our communities. Because what we're hearing
6 is that folks are fearing accessing food pantries
7 because of ICE raids. People are disenrolling from
8 benefits. And, of course, they're still subject to
9 some of the perennial scams such as like their
10 benefits cards being skimmed and compromised.
11

12 So when all of these things come together, we
13 want to make sure that our communities that are doing
14 that work in community to make sure that people are
15 fed is resourced.

16 So, again, we believe that it's important – more
17 important than ever that we continue to reinforce
18 these supplemental supports for our communities, and
19 that looks like a couple different things. Of course,
20 continuing to fund the groups that do linguistically
21 (TIMER CHIMES) and culturally competent food services
22 that provide alternative food benefits for the
23 immigrant community, the Asian community, and
24 particularly older adults. And that, of course,
25 includes continuing to fund that culturally

1
2 competent, in language, nontraditional service models
3 that are often that space that provides that access
4 point for older adults and food insecure people when
5 they're often afraid to access other programs.

6 Listen, I know that there are not easy answers to
7 these questions, and the challenges are complex. And
8 your leadership and ongoing leadership in this space
9 has been very vital. And I'm going to submit more
10 details online. Thank you so much for your time.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, thank you so much.

12 Pernell S. Brice?

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

14 PERNELL S. BRICE: Thank you, Deputy Speaker
15 Ayala. My name is Pernell S. Brice, III, and I am the
16 Vice President of Policy and Advocacy for Children's
17 Health Fund.

18 Today to speak on behalf of the children and
19 families of New York City who are struggling with
20 hunger and food insecurity. As a city of great
21 wealth, it is deeply troubling that so many of our
22 neighbors, particularly our children, go to bed
23 hungry or lack consistent access to nutritious food.

24 The statistics surrounding hunger in New York
25 City are staggering and unacceptable. According to

1 recent data, one in five New York City children,
2 approximately 400,000 kids, are food insecure,
3 meaning they do not have consistent access to enough
4 food for an active healthy lifestyle. Nearly one in
5 four families with children in New York City
6 experience food insecurity, with the rates
7 disproportionately higher among families of color.

8 The poverty rate in New York City is
9 approximately 18.9 percent, but for Black and Latino
10 children, that number is even higher, at nearly 30
11 percent.
12

13 These figures are not just numbers – they
14 represent real children, families, and communities
15 who are facing daily struggles to access basic
16 sustenance. Hunger affects a child's ability to
17 learn, grow, and thrive. Food insecurity is linked to
18 developmental delays, poor academic performance, and
19 long term health problems. No child should have to
20 worry about where their next meal will come from,
21 especially in a city as prosperous as New York City.

22 We ask the City Council to continue to fund
23 necessary food assistance programs, like SNAP, to
24 ensure that all New Yorkers, particularly children,
25

1 have the sustenance that they need to be successful.

2 Thank you so much.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We will now move
5 onto Barbara Hughes.

6 BARBARA HUGHES: My name is Barbara Hughes, and I
7 am the Executive Director of City Beet Kitchens at
8 Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services
9 nonprofit agency. Thank you for convening this
10 hearing.

11 For over 55 years, Project Renewal has provided
12 shelter, housing, health care, and employment
13 services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We
14 are grateful to the City Council for its ongoing
15 support of our programs. We are proud to have
16 partnered with the City to address some of New York's
17 biggest challenges, including food insecurity and
18 hunger.

19 More than 1.2 million New Yorkers are food
20 insecure, with over 1.8 million receiving SNAP
21 benefits, and countless others relying on
22 approximately 400 food pantries and 80 soup kitchens
23 throughout the city. We are encouraged to see that
24 the General Welfare Committee is prioritizing
25 legislation to make it easier for New Yorkers to

1
2 apply for and receive benefits from food assistance
3 programs.

4 City Beet Kitchens, which I oversee, is a social
5 enterprise that plays an integral role in combatting
6 food insecurity throughout New York. As one of the
7 largest food providers to New Yorkers in need, we
8 serve 2.6 million meals each year at shelters,
9 supportive housing, and senior centers across the
10 city. Beyond our catering services for events and
11 meetings, we prepare meals for people living in
12 shelters and for other nonprofit organizations. We
13 also organize food drives and special holiday dinners
14 to ensure families don't go hungry during the
15 holidays.

16 Our Culinary Arts Training Program provides New
17 Yorkers facing barriers to employment—including
18 veterans— with world class culinary education and
19 pathways to fulfilling careers. Many graduates secure
20 positions in corporate kitchens, local restaurants,
21 and within City Beet Kitchens itself. We've witnessed
22 the powerful transformation of New Yorkers who once
23 faced employment barriers now working full time to
24 support others facing similar challenges.

1
2 To sustain (TIMER CHIMES) and expand City Beet
3 Kitchens and our Culinary Arts Training Program, we
4 rely on City investment. We thank the Council for its
5 continued support of our programs and applaud the
6 priority this committee is placing on alleviating
7 food insecurity in our city. By investing in
8 nonprofit food providers and facilitating access to
9 SNAP and other food benefits, the Council plays a
10 vital role in addressing the hunger crisis in our
11 city.

12 I recently came across a quote that reminds me of
13 everything I've heard today, which is "Democracy is a
14 sham in the presence of hunger".

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

17 Our last person on Zoom is Jacob Zychick.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

19 JACOB ZYCHICK: Thank you so much to Deputy
20 Speaker Ayala. On behalf of the American Heart
21 Association, thank you for the opportunity to provide
22 public testimony about hunger and food insecurity in
23 New York City.

24 Heart disease is the leading cause of death for
25 adult New Yorkers. A healthy diet and lifestyle are

1
2 the keys to preventing and managing cardiovascular
3 disease. Unfortunately, too many New Yorkers lack
4 access to healthy foods.

5 First, I would like to thank all of the fantastic
6 organizations and advocates today who are doing
7 incredible, meaningful work to address hunger by
8 providing meals and food to those in need, thank you
9 so much.

10 The American Heart Association is supportive of
11 increased funding for two specific programs that will
12 address nutrition, hunger, and food insecurity in the
13 city. The American Heart Association is supportive of
14 increased funding for Health Bucks, New York City's
15 nutrition incentive program, and also for Get the
16 Good Stuff, a program where every dollar you spend
17 using SNAP EBT on eligible fruits, vegetables, beans,
18 and other products is matched up to \$10 per day.

19 Once again, I want to thank everyone today for
20 all their great work to address hunger in the city,
21 and thank you so much for this opportunity to provide
22 public testimony. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

24 All right, we are making one final call for Zoom
25 registrants who have not yet spoken. Okay, seeing

1
2 none, if we have inadvertently missed anyone who
3 would like to testify virtually, please use the Zoom
4 Raise Hand Function, and I will call on you in the
5 order of hands raised.

6 Okay, seeing no one, I would like to note that
7 written testimony, which will be reviewed in full by
8 committee staff, may be submitted to the record up to
9 72 hours after the close of today's hearing by
10 emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

11 With that, this hearing is concluded. [Gavel]

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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 May 6, 2025