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Statement of Bill de Blasio, Public Advocate for the City of New York

New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare and

Committee on Community Development

Oversight: Fighting Hunger in New York City

Int. 696

Monday, November 21, 2011

Good afternoon, Chair Palma, Chair Vann and members of the General Welfare Committee and the Committee on Community Development. Thank you for holding this important hearing regarding New York City's hunger relief efforts and Int. 696. While New York City has made progress enrolling eligible New Yorkers in food stamps over the past several years, there are still over half a million eligible New Yorkers who are not receiving food stamps. Especially in these times of rising unemployment and skyrocketing poverty, we must continue to do everything in our power to ensure that all eligible New Yorkers enroll in the food stamps program.

I strongly support Int. 696 and the broader goal of eliminating the finger imaging requirement for food stamps applicants. The requirement is stigmatizing and discourages New Yorkers who have fallen upon hard times from applying for federal food stamps assistance. Finger imaging fails to turn up fraud that cannot be detected by other means and discourages program participation among eligible families -- especially working families. With recent legislative action to eliminate the requirement in California and Texas, New York now stands alone with the State of Arizona in continuing to require finger imaging. New York State ended the practice of requiring finger imaging for most food stamps applicants in places outside of New York City in 2007. As many as 30,000 New Yorkers may not receive food stamps because of the finger imaging requirement. Based on an average federal monthly benefit of \$153.59 monthly, or \$1,843 annually, these 29,500 food stamps recipients could receive over \$55 million each year, which would be passed on to local businesses.

Recent data paints a disturbing picture of economic distress in New York: according to the most recent numbers published by the U.S. Census Bureau, over 1.6 million New Yorkers (20% of the population) are currently living in poverty; 30% of the City's children are living in poverty. In October of this year, New York's unemployment rate rose to 8.8%. Especially given today's difficult economy, we should be looking for ways to encourage New Yorkers who have fallen upon hard times from applying for federal food stamps assistance, not to discourage them.

As of September 2011, a total of 1,831,882 New Yorkers were receiving food stamps, which brings over \$3 billion into New York City's economy annually. This number represents a 3% increase over food stamps enrollment from September 2010; it compares with a 12%



enrollment increase from October 2009 to November 2010. In addition, during the past year, food stamps enrollment in NYC has decreased during 5 months: December to January, January to February, March to April, April to May and July to August. The decreases have not been large, but they do raise questions regarding the circumstances under which food stamps recipients are being removed from the rolls. My Office has asked the Human Resources Administration to explain the reasons behind the downward fluctuations -- New York City simply cannot afford to allow vulnerable residents eligible for food stamps to lose them. Likewise, we must continue to conduct aggressive outreach to enroll as many eligible New Yorkers as possible.

I look forward to working with both the Council and the Administration to ensure vigorous outreach to potentially eligible individuals and families and uninterrupted receipt of benefits by food stamps recipients who remain eligible.



Human Resources
Administration

Department of
Social Services

TESTIMONY

Robert Doar, Commissioner
Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services

Oversight:
New York City's Food Stamp & Emergency Food Assistance Programs
and
Intro No. 696

*New York City Council
General Welfare and Community Development Committees*

November 21, 2011

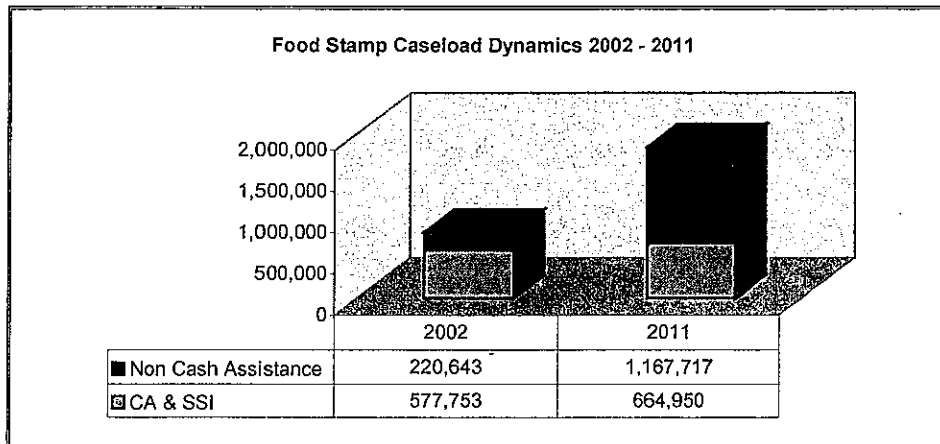
Good afternoon Chairwoman Palma, Chairman Vann and members of the General Welfare and Community Development Committees. I am Robert Doar, Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA). Joining me today are two key members of my leadership team; Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Domestic Violence and Emergency Intervention Services, which administers our Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and Gary Jenkins, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of our Food Stamp program.

Together Commissioners Noel and Jenkins represent the enormous effort New York City makes to help people in need of food assistance. Whether it is the disabled or the elderly, or low-income working single mothers and their children, the EFAP and the Food Stamp Program administered by HRA are there to provide vital assistance. I am extremely impressed by the results Cecile and Gary have achieved with these programs during the past twelve months.

As we come before you today, we are all aware of two facts: First, New York City has weathered the recent recession better than the rest of the country, and better than the City experience during previous recessions. And second, we are still not back to the employment levels that the City experienced in 2007. While we at HRA are not responsible for making the City's economy strong, we do ensure that the EFAP and Food Stamp Programs are as accessible and efficiently administered as possible. The \$3.5 billion in food stamp benefits issued in 2010 and the 11 million pounds of food distributed by EFAP to over 500 food pantries and soup kitchens were perhaps the most important ingredients in our City's support to struggling families during the recent recession. Although the council may take issue with one or two of our approaches, overall I believe you will agree that the New York City food assistance program serve as a model for the rest of the country. Not only for the volume of recipients it serves and for the broad access to the program, but also for the use of technology that has greatly simplified administration and eased the process for recipients. All while maintaining the public's confidence that their tax dollars are being spent appropriately.

Caseload Dynamics

Due to a fundamental change in approach that moved the program from being only about serving the indigent, to one that also supports low-income workers, the Food Stamp Program has had an unprecedented caseload growth since Mayor Bloomberg took office and we are now providing benefits to more than 1.8 million recipients. The program has dramatically shifted since the beginning of the administration and has grown from primarily serving those recipients on other government supports (welfare and SSI) to supporting low-income families, many who are working but need additional support. In fact, the portion of the caseload of individuals who are not in receipt of Cash Assistance or federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits has grown an astounding 429 percent.



Note: To conform to State and Federal practice, in January 2008 this report began including Food Stamp issuances for the Residential Treatment Services Center and Food Stamp Single Issuances.

A Shift in Program Design

This shift in philosophy and demand required us to re-examine the way we do business. While the Food Stamp eligibility process for the Cash Assistance and SSI populations involve minimal visits to the Food Stamp Office, those that are part of the new caseload growth required much more direct worker to client interactions. This means more traffic into the office. We needed to find a way to improve the functioning and layout of our centers, simplify the application and recertification process, and move as many functions from in-person to automation as possible. We have already made a series of significant changes over the past several years (see appendix: Chart A) while others are in various stages of implementation.

Administrative Simplifications

As you know Food Stamp applicants in New York, unlike in many other parts of the country, can not only file an application by mail and fax but also on-line and they can have their interviews done by phone so that they can dramatically reduce their time in the office. Some recipients can also recertify using an automated telephone system at anytime of the day or night. Even with these tremendous advances, we are working to address the immediate and long-term demand on the centers. The reality is that the demand for services has outpaced our automation schedule. I am confident that some of the challenges we currently face related to overcrowding that have been experienced at several of our centers will diminish once the additional administrative and technological changes underway are fully implemented. However, I want to assure you that we are taking the crowding issues at our centers, especially in The Bronx, very seriously.

To assist with this immediate demand, we have now received the 102 new Food Stamp eligibility workers identified in last year's budget and these staff have been trained and deployed to the offices with the most demand. We are also re-evaluating our space plan at several of the centers and with minimal adjustments have been able to identify additional waiting room space inside the facilities. In addition, upon examination of the major demands on the center we realized that 1,000 recipients were coming into the centers each day simply to obtain a referral for a replacement Common Benefit Identification Card. We have raised this issue with the State and are working together to identify a creative solution. Presently though, we have implemented a centralized replacement card referral process for Brooklyn and Queens that is in closer proximity to the State's Card center in Brooklyn. This means that recipients will be able

to bypass their assigned center for a referral; this is easier for the client and will lead to less traffic in the centers. We anticipate very shortly piloting a similar process for some of our Bronx centers.

Just underway for a month, recipients now have the ability to call a centralized number to request a budget letter on their case be generated and mailed to their residences rather than having to come into their local center. This measure has the potential to reduce traffic at the centers by an estimated 9,500 clients each month.

Also, the on-line application process through ACCESS NYC that was initiated last year is being fine-tuned so that the underlying telephone interview system can handle increased demand. As part of this effort, we are working closely with the State so that New York City recipients can benefit from both the ACCESS NYC webpage as well as the State's "myBenefits" website. Our goal is that applicants will continue to apply for food stamps through ACCESS NYC, which allows them to also identify other benefits and services in the City for which they may be eligible. They can then turn to the State's "myBenefits" website to create a user account and obtain up-to-date information about their food stamp benefits including finding account activity and balances, and making PIN changes. This will greatly relieve the demand on our centers and I know we have been in conversations with staff of the committee and Speaker Quinn so that we can work together in promoting this change.

Reaching Out to Communities

Another means of reducing the need to come into a center has been through our partnerships with community-based organizations. In 74 locations citywide, applications can be taken and submitted to our office on behalf of applicants. In fact, we recently received a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Hunger Champion Award for our partnership with the Food Bank that significantly improved service. Together we instituted a mediation model between our application processing centers and the community groups who take applications. The work of these organizations has not only reduced the traffic into our offices, but also has allowed New Yorkers to apply in food stamps in settings that may be more convenient as well as more familiar to them. Our Food Stamp and Nutrition Outreach Program staff also has a presence at least once a week in five community-based organizations to help families submit applications and participates in numerous community events every month. We also have four community coordinators who meet with an average of 70 community boards, community-based organizations and staffers at elected officials' offices each month and share the different ways to receive food assistance.

Increased Focus on Nutrition

In many ways, New York City's food assistance programs have stepped ahead of the federal government in recognizing the importance of nutrition. For example, through City Council and HRA funds, our EFAP program initiated and has continued a Frozen Food Pilot to further improve the nutritional content of EFAP commodities. EFAP has also made nutritional changes to its \$8.2 million in annual food purchases and now their entire inventory meets all the New York City Food Standards. The program has also incorporated nutrition outreach into many soup kitchens and pantries in their network to better able them to improve the nutritional quality of the meals they provide.

We have also worked with the City's Department of Health to offer Health Bucks. Through Health Bucks, Food Stamp recipients at 65 participating farmers' markets receive coupons worth \$2 to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, for every \$5 they spent at the market with their EBT card. Those markets that participate in the program have significantly increased EBT sales

and the program has contributed to a significant increase in the number of farmers markets in low income communities over the past several years

Also, during the last reauthorization of the Food Stamp Program, Congress made a strong statement by changing the name of the program to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to emphasize nutrition. We were hopeful that significant changes would be made to the program to not only incentivize but also to require, like the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program, that some nutritional standards be built into the program. However, with nearly 40 percent of New York City public school children being overweight or obese and the billions of dollars that obesity costs the state and localities every year we could no longer wait for the federal administration. As you know, we submitted a request to the USDA to prohibit sugary beverages from purchase in the Food Stamp program for a three year trial. Unfortunately, the USDA showing a remarkable lack of imagination, denied the request. Hopefully, the national debate our proposal generated and the support we received from national nutrition experts from across the country will result in meaningful changes to the program during the next federal reauthorization.

Program Integrity

All of the initiatives I have described have been accompanied by our continued emphasis on payment accuracy, efficient administration, and protecting government funding from fraud and abuse. When I appeared at this hearing last year, I explained that I was concerned about our error rate rising due to the demand placed on our workers. In fact, the White House Office for Management and Budget is also concerned and has identified the Food Stamp Program (known nationally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) as a "high-error" program based on improper payment information. Here in the City, we took a series of actions over the course of the year including additional staff training and oversight and greater focus on case reviews on eligibility decisions in order to reduce our error rate. Following this effort, I am pleased to inform you that the most recent food stamp payment accuracy rate (through June 2011) shows that clients receive correct benefits 95.63 percent of the time making the payment error rate 4.37 percent.

Although food stamp benefits are paid for with federal tax dollars, for which New Yorkers contribute a disproportionately higher share, over 62 percent of food stamp administrative costs are paid for with City tax levy dollars. The State may supervise the program but they withdrew all support for local administration in 2009. The City contribution is now \$217 million with the federal government reimbursing us for the remaining amount. This is a significant investment on behalf of the City.

Finally, I want to reiterate that a program of the magnitude of New York City's must be managed with integrity to preserve the confidence and credibility of the taxpaying public. The practice of requiring applicants for assistance to provide a finger image in order to prevent the issuance of duplicative benefits is a simple and effective way to ensure that government dollars are spent on eligible individuals and families. In fact, this technology is emerging in hospitals across the country as a more effective tool in patient registration. Other identifying information may pull up a dozen patients or Food Stamp applicants with the same name, but simply put, their fingerprints will never be identical.

This past year, using finger imaging technology, the State identified 1,919 duplicate non-cash assistance Food Stamp cases (8/09-7/10) in the City. Some of these duplications may be

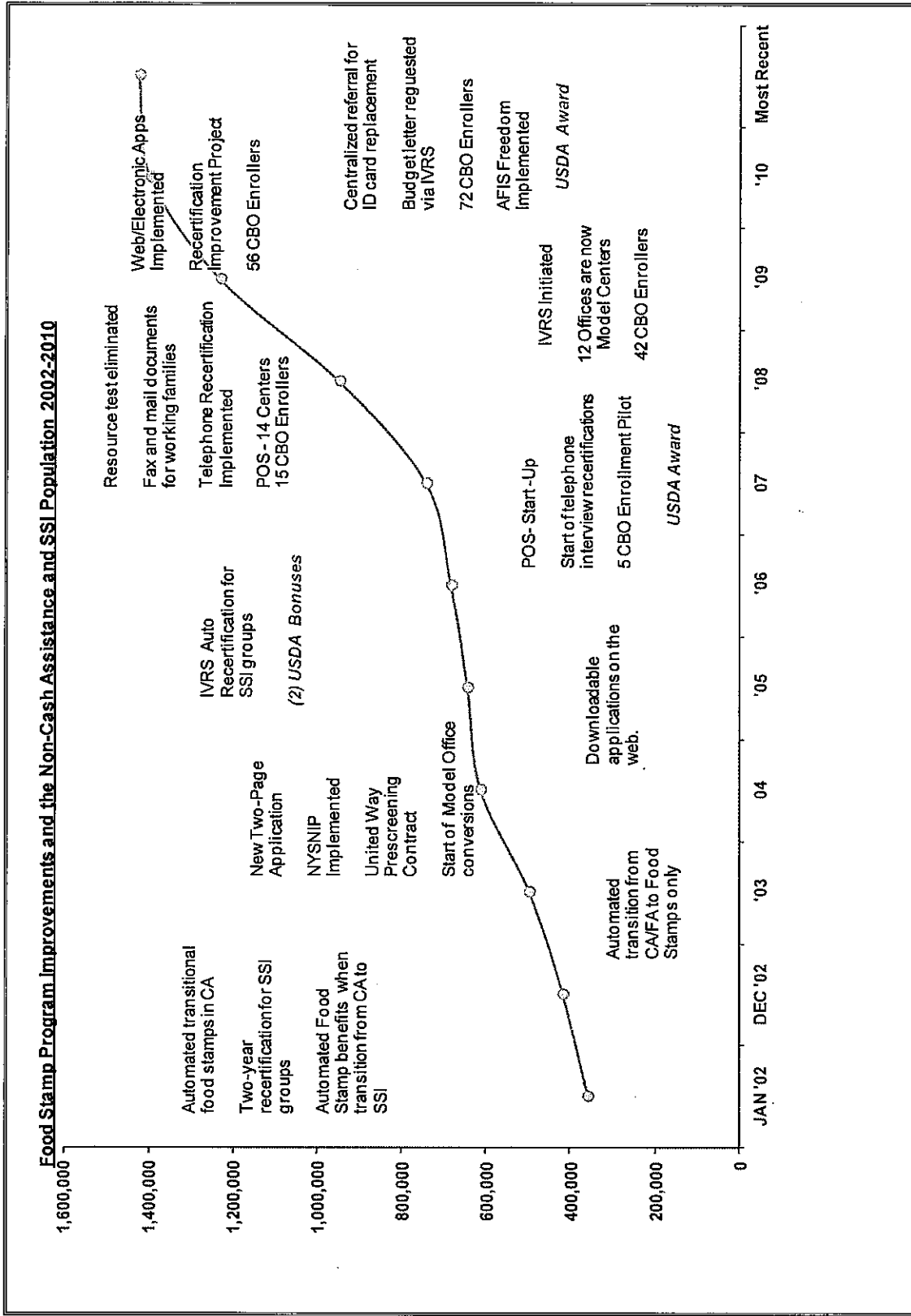
inadvertent or due to human error and some may be an attempt to take advantage of the system. The simple process of finger imaging generated a savings of more than \$5.3 million in actual and/or potential misappropriated benefits through a City investment of approx. \$182,596 annually. Finger imaging in New York City has kept an average of \$3 million a year in federal dollars from being wasted. I would like to be clear, it is not about prosecuting individuals for fraud; it is about preventing and deterring fraud in the first place.

This is why I have serious concerns regarding Intro. No. 696 that suggests the only focus on finger imaging should be to identify and prosecute fraud. Although we could further investigate when a match occurs, generally we are satisfied to stop the process at that point. We think this is a better approach than making automatic referrals to law enforcement agencies. Also, when judging the value of finger imaging, it is necessary to go beyond a narrow focus on the cases of fraud and to also look at the ability to deter multiple applications by the same person, prevent the issuance of duplicate benefits while also not disregarding the State-generated figures on cost savings. Its role as a deterrent will be even more necessary as the system moves toward applying and interviewing remotely. Without it, our ability to verify that an applicant is not stealing someone else's identity and using their social security number and name to obtain benefits for themselves will be greatly diminished. Finally, as we administer the Food Stamp Program on behalf of the State and as such, are required to uphold the integrity of the program.

Focusing on program integrity while continually streamlining and simplifying the eligibility process has been a winning combination. In addition to the series of USDA awards and grants, there has been a steady increase in access and participation in the program as measured by the federal government. Using the USDA's Program Access Index, in 2010 New York State had the highest rate since reporting began of 78.1 percent, almost 30 percentage points higher than the low of 48 percent in 2004. New York City contributed a great deal to this increase as the growth in our Food Stamp caseload outpaced the rest of the State during the same time period. Applying the same methodology, the New York City Program Access Index is 84.9 percent. Even when using the more refined USDA participation rate that factors in program eligibility requirements, New York City's participation rate for 2009 (the most recent available data) was 70.1 percent, also the highest ever calculated.

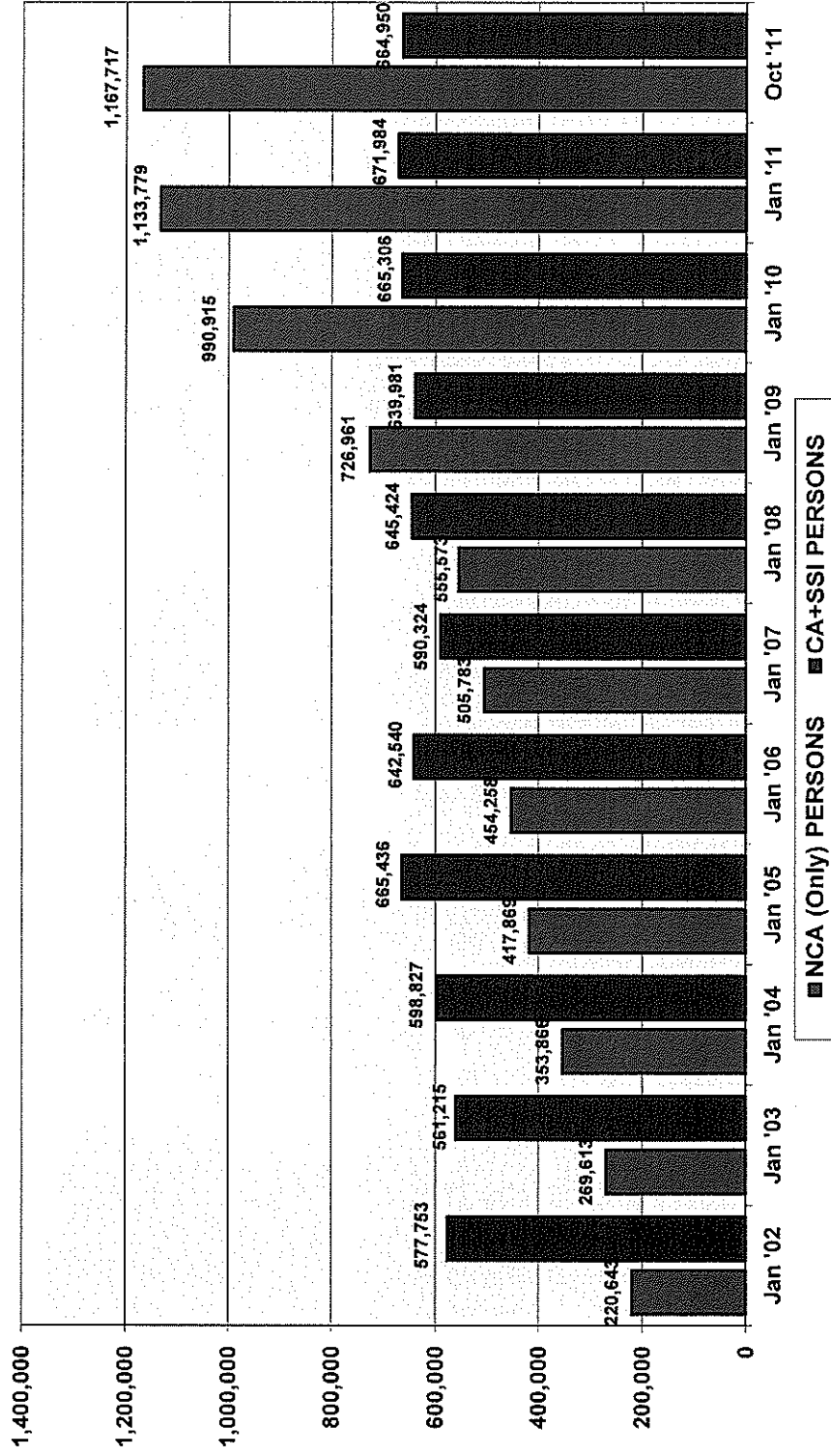
At this time I look forward to the Council's questions.

APPENDIX: CHART A



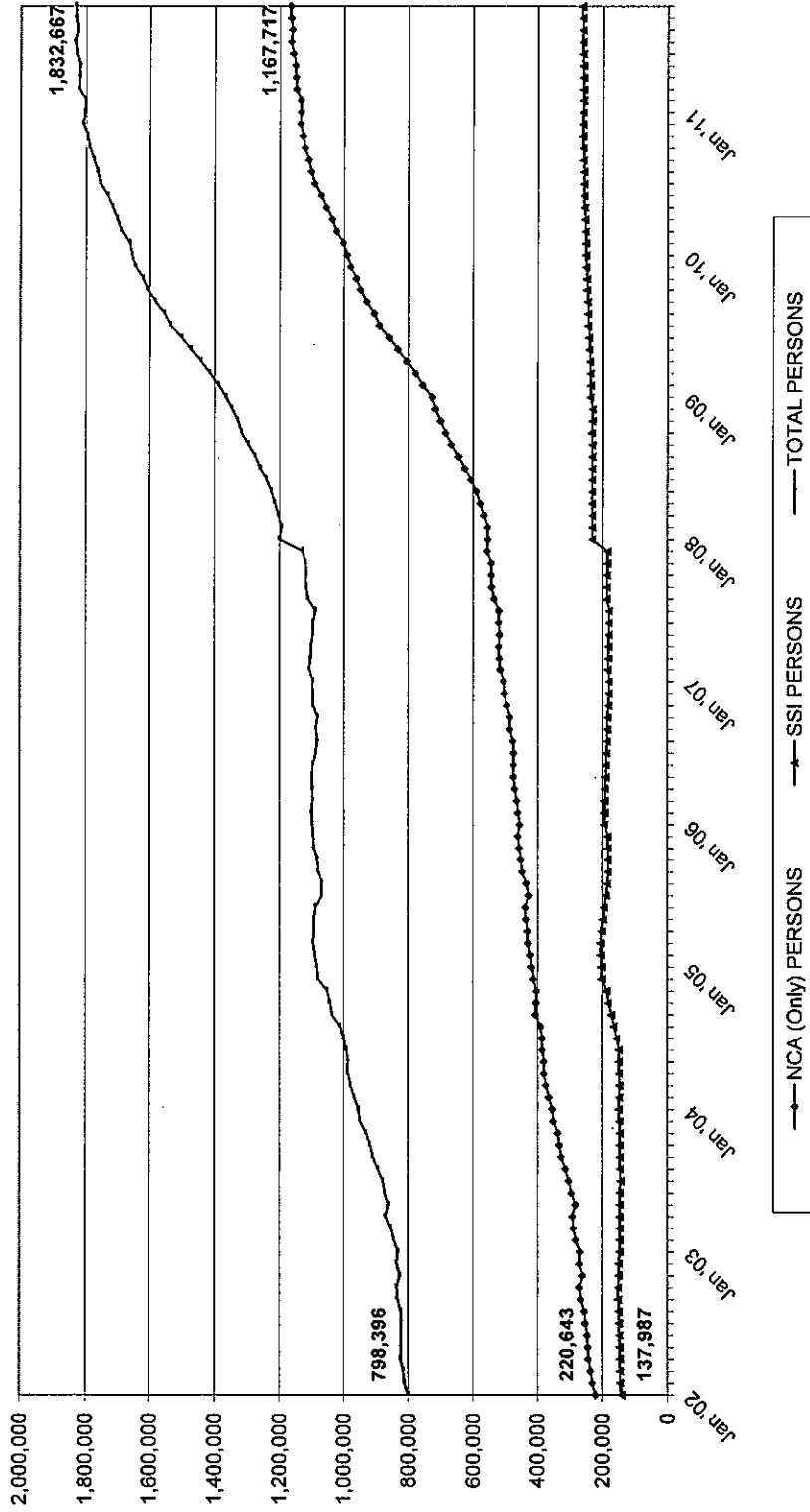
APPENDIX: CHART B

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM RECIPIENTS IN NYC
2002 - 2011



APPENDIX: CHART C

Food Stamp Program Recipients
2002 - 2011





For the Record

THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

SCOTT M. STRINGER
BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer

**Before the New York City Council Committees on
General Welfare and Committee on Community Development**
Regarding City Council Introduction 696 to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in
relation to reporting on finger imaging of food stamp applicants.

November 21, 2011

Good afternoon. I'd like to start by thanking Chairwoman Palma and the General Welfare Committee for holding this important hearing. I am here to testify in support of Intro. 696.

Hard working New Yorkers are facing unprecedented levels of poverty and hunger. The latest census revealed that over 20% of city residents live below the federal poverty line. The New York City Coalition Against Hunger estimates that 1.4 million New York City residents are food insecure and one in five children live in a home without adequate food. Further, last year over 55 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens were unable to meet the current demand for food. A 2010 survey of low-income New Yorkers by the Community Service Society reflects these statistics: 57 percent of low-income working mothers surveyed reported worrying frequently that their incomes would not be sufficient to meet basic expenses.

Luckily, the federal government offers struggling New Yorkers one way to reduce hunger, poverty and the stress over making ends meet – namely, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. These benefits offer help not only for struggling families, but also for the struggling New York economy. Last year SNAP infused more than \$3.2 billion in federal dollars into the local food economy. These are dollars our citizens need, our stores need, and our communities need. New York City government should be encouraging residents to access this important federal benefit. Instead, we deter enrollment by requiring applicants to be fingerprinted – a requirement that adds stigma to those already struggling with hunger and poverty.

I first recommended eliminating fingerprint imaging for SNAP benefits in my 2009 report *Food in the Public Interest: How New York City's Food Policy Holds the Key to Hunger, Health, Jobs and the Environment*. Across the country, New York City is joined only by the state of Arizona in requiring this unnecessary, costly, and misguided hurdle for the hungry. All other cities in the State of New York stopped this practice in 2007. Even Texas, one of the last hold-outs, ended the practice this year. Over 95 percent of states lack this requirement because it has proved ineffective at rooting out fraud.

The New York City Human Resource Administration claims that finger printing is necessary to maintain a low error rate and prevent fraud: Yet, New York City's error rate is higher than the national average, comprised almost entirely of data from 48 states that have found ways other than finger imaging to guard against fraud. Instead of fingerprinting, most states now match names with Social Security numbers, a technique the federal government endorses for preventing fraud.

The City has clung to this practice despite any clear evidence that fingerprinting is worth the fiscal and social cost, and despite a lack of national support. I believe Intro. 696 will provide data that definitively shows what most of us know, finger printing is a waste of tax dollars and an unfair burden on the poor. It is hard for me to comprehend any justifiable reason to oppose a bill that brings more sunlight and more data to this conversation.



Testimony of Kate MacKenzie, MS, RD, Director of Policy and Government Relations
City Harvest

New York City Council, Joint Hearing of the
General Welfare and Community Development Committees

**Int. No. 696 - In relation to reporting on finger imaging of food stamp applicants &
Oversight: Fighting Hunger in NYC.**

November 21, 2011

Good afternoon Chairwoman Palma, Chairman Vann and members of the committees. My name is Kate MacKenzie, and I am the Director of Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest. City Harvest is the world's first and New York City's only food rescue organization, dedicated to feeding the city's hungry men, women, and children by collecting excess food that would otherwise go to waste. Each week, our deliveries help feed more than 300,000 New Yorkers in need. Our *Healthy Neighborhoods* initiative works in the Melrose, Bed-Stuy, Stapleton, and Washington Heights/Inwood communities to work in partnership with community organizations and residents to ensure that healthy, affordable food is accessible, and in high demand.

The collapse of the economy in the fall of 2008 altered the emergency food landscape as demand skyrocketed across the city. The recent return to profitability in some sectors of the economy masks a very different reality that millions of New Yorkers continue to face. A sustained, high need for food has become the new normal for many of our neighbors who struggle to make ends meet. At the same time, the low-income communities most vulnerable to negative economic forces have been the same ones in which rates of diet-related diseases have risen most dramatically. Though preventable, diabetes and obesity have now become commonly accepted as an inevitable part of life in too many of these low-income households.

My remarks today will first speak to the city's overall response to hunger and food insecurity and I will make some recommendations, and then I will focus on City Harvest's on-the-ground experiences of the current state of hunger and food insecurity, and our planned response through our newly adopted strategic plan.

With the Council's leadership, New York City has been at the forefront of innovation and ability to address hunger and food insecurity. Whether it was the funding of EBT at Farmers Markets, the focus on FoodWorks, or the funding of emergency food through the Food Pantry Initiative, to name just a few, NYC residents are better for it. However, much more needs to be done. While the administration may consider its increase in SNAP participation to be a strength, the unfortunate reality is that the increase is based on need. If the increase in participation came at a time when the number of eligible individuals was constant, that would be a success, yet that isn't the case. The SNAP program is an entitlement to those who qualify, and enrolling individuals in the program is the city's responsibility. It is past time to eliminate the finger-imaging requirement for SNAP. The cost-savings rationale for continued use does not pass muster when considering the infringement on human dignity the outdated practice poses. Yes, we are

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faced with a troubling economic climate, yet New Yorkers must be treated with dignity and respect. City Harvest supports Intro 0696-2011, and hopes that it will lead to the complete elimination of the finger-imaging requirement.

Additionally, the City must increase its support of Breakfast in the Classroom. As a member of the Hunger Free Communities Consortium, City Harvest is working to increase school involvement in the program, but it is not easy. Incentives for principals need to be considered, and acknowledgement from the Chancellor of the programs benefits, both academic and economic.

It is clear that the supports provided by the City have kept many vulnerable New Yorkers from falling through the cracks. However, the possible outcomes of deficit reduction plans coming out of the Super Committee threaten hungry and food insecure New Yorkers. Minimal government action has been taken to reduce unemployment and the economy remains sluggish. According to a new report from IHS Global Insight, New York State won't return to pre-recession job levels until the middle of 2013, at the earliest. Current proposals being considered include cuts of \$4.2 B to nutrition programs. By some accounts, these cuts involve changing the eligibility requirements for SNAP.

More than 1.8 million New Yorkers rely on this essential safety net program, and the existing program integrity must be preserved. It is also quite possible that the proposals put forward for these cuts would evolve into the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill has a tremendous impact on food, nutrition, and farming programs that come into NYC. I encourage the Council to be very involved in these discussions with the NY delegation. There is the concerning possibility that opportunities for input by those outside of the Agriculture Committee leadership will be very limited.

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City Harvest stays in close touch with our food programs on the ground. The most recent agency data has shown a spike since the recession began in 2008. Programs where City Harvest delivers food across New York City have reported, on average, a 25% increase in demand for food since the recession began.

- Out of the 221 agencies that reported for all 48 months, 77% saw an increase in visits from 2008 to 2011.
- Agencies have seen a 35% increase in visits made by children.
- Agencies report a 26% rise in visits made by seniors.
- All boroughs report a surge in visits, but the Bronx had the biggest hike, at 53%. Queens and Brooklyn follow with a 29% increase, Staten Island at 25%, and Manhattan at 12%.

Anecdotally, our agencies are telling us that people are traveling further for food and accessing food more regularly. Households have to choose between paying their other bills and food. Something like a sudden illness can destroy a family.

All indicators show that we can expect the demand for emergency food to remain high this fall and winter. It's critical that City Harvest and other organizations remain a reliable source of fresh, nutritious food for the foreseeable future.

Strategic Plan

To determine how to best serve New Yorkers in this challenging environment, City Harvest set out to develop a strategic vision that would chart its course for the next five years. We first identified the hunger gap: the difference between the food New Yorkers need and the food they can access.

What is the hunger gap?

Based on existing food insecurity data, estimates of the amount of food currently moving through the city's emergency feeding programs, and assumptions about food prices, City Harvest identified a substantial hunger gap. **We estimate that New York City needs an additional 249-360 million pounds of food each year to close the gap** and ensure that all New Yorkers have the food they need to live a healthy life.

Why is the hunger gap so large?

The convergence of a wide range of factors including high poverty rates, the increasing cost of living and self-sufficiency, the challenges of living on a fixed income, and government cutbacks has compounded the difficulty that many New York City residents now experience in putting food on the table.

- More than 20 percent of New Yorkers live in poverty; that number climbs to as high as nearly 29 percent outside of Manhattan.
- Seniors living on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to hunger. Nearly 30 percent of seniors in the Bronx and 24 percent in Brooklyn live in poverty and must choose between putting food on the table and paying for necessities like medicine or heat.
- A family of three needs \$60,000 each year to achieve self-sufficiency, yet of the ten most common jobs in New York City, only one typically pays a self-sufficient wage.

Thousands of city and state employees have lost their jobs, and funding for vital safety programs has been drastically reduced or eliminated.

What is hunger's impact on nutrition and health?

The issue of hunger in New York City and its solution are complex—emergency food is only part of the answer. In recent years there has been growing recognition of hunger's corresponding relationship to diet-related diseases. Research increasingly shows that the foods we eat and the neighborhoods we live in have a dramatic impact on personal and family health.

Fresh food is hard to find in many areas of New York City classified as food deserts. It is estimated that three million residents in New York City lack adequate access to fresh food in their neighborhood. The individuals and families in these communities are forced to turn to less healthy options and the result has been a staggering growth in diet-related diseases, with diabetes rates in the city growing by 250 percent since 1997.

The connection between hunger and diet-related diseases is readily apparent, for example, in the South Bronx. Nearly 70 percent of residents are overweight or obese and 17 percent suffer from diabetes. In 2010, the 16th Congressional District in the South Bronx was also identified as the most food insecure in the entire country, with a startling 37 percent of residents reporting that they couldn't afford enough food.

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Demand for emergency food remains at record levels, while New Yorkers experiencing hunger often find themselves or their families battling diabetes, obesity, or other diet-related diseases. We have reached a watershed moment in our response to the twin epidemics of hunger and diet-related disease. Our actions now will impact the nutritional health of this generation and the generations to come.

HOW WILL WE GET THERE AND WHAT WILL WE NEED?

City Harvest's Board of Directors has endorsed two key strategic goals that will help us achieve our vision. In five years:

- 1. City Harvest will distribute 50 to 60 million pounds of food per year.*
- 2. City Harvest will play a leading role in addressing the health and nutrition needs of low-income New Yorkers through our Healthy Neighborhoods program.*

Food Distribution

Over the next five years, City Harvest will rescue and deliver 205 million pounds of food, including nearly 125 million pounds of fresh produce, to soup kitchens and food pantries across the city. To achieve our vision we must build the infrastructure needed, both for City Harvest and within New York City's emergency food network, to distribute more food.

Investing in a Food Rescue Facility

It will not be possible to grow our poundage so dramatically using our trucks alone. We have recently launched a food rescue facility into our operations to address this growth constraint. The 39,000 square foot facility, located in Long Island City, will help City Harvest handle the kind of quick-turnaround donations we are known for on a larger scale while keeping our cost to rescue and deliver a pound of food stable. The end result will be that our fleet of trucks can get more food out to people in need even faster.

Strengthening the Agency Network

We're creating a more sophisticated, multi-tiered distribution model to ensure that the programs we work with can absorb the additional food we will deliver. The new model considers our service levels to areas of high need, poverty rates, and the current and potential capacity of agencies, while identifying tangible, concrete ways that we can improve their ability to operate. Our plan to strengthen and revitalize New York City's emergency food network will ensure that we get the most food, most efficiently, to the strongest agencies in the highest need communities.

Building Healthy Neighborhoods

The strategic planning process identified the niche that this program occupies: **our focus on communities, combined with nutrition education and food access work, is unique and well-designed to address the complex challenges of community nutrition.** As a result, we're deepening our investment in *Healthy Neighborhoods*.

Deepening our Investment

We will continue to invest heavily in our Healthy Neighborhoods communities in the South Bronx, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and the North Shore of Staten Island. In each neighborhood, we plan to increase emergency food deliveries and add a second Mobile Market to improve access to healthy food. To strengthen demand, we will focus all of our nutrition education programs in our Healthy Neighborhoods and continue build

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partnerships that will make improvements to the food environment. Whether providing incubation funding for a new farmers market, negotiating a low-cost buying club, or working in schools, our objective remains the same—to increase the number of healthy options in a community.

Expanding our Efforts

This fiscal year, City Harvest introduced *Healthy Neighborhoods* in the Washington Heights/Inwood community. Following this expansion, we will extend *Healthy Neighborhoods* to Queens.

A TIME FOR ACTION

As rates of preventable diet-related diseases overwhelm low-income communities, the need for healthy food has never been more apparent. President Obama and the First Lady have become strong advocates for healthy food, reducing childhood obesity, and ending hunger. Corporate leaders are making meaningful investments in hunger and nutrition programs. Chefs across the country are joining together with nonprofits to advocate for healthier school meals and teach children the value of eating well. People are realizing that the time has come to change the way we eat.

For nearly three decades, City Harvest has been the primary vehicle for New Yorkers to feed their hungry neighbors. In that time, delivered more than 315 million pounds of free food, while building and refining our *Healthy Neighborhoods* program. We have a significant distance to go until all New Yorkers have access to the food and knowledge they need to live hunger-free and healthy lives. We look forward to working shoulder to shoulder with the City Council to make food security a reality for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and for the work that you do.

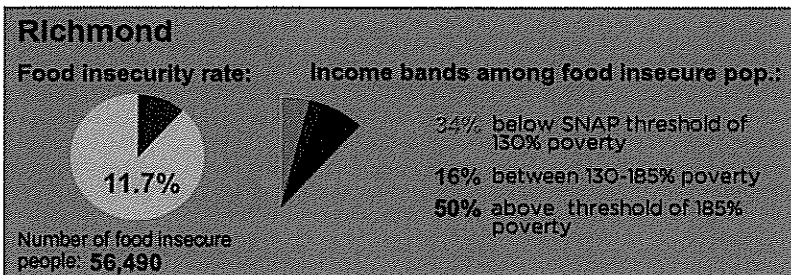
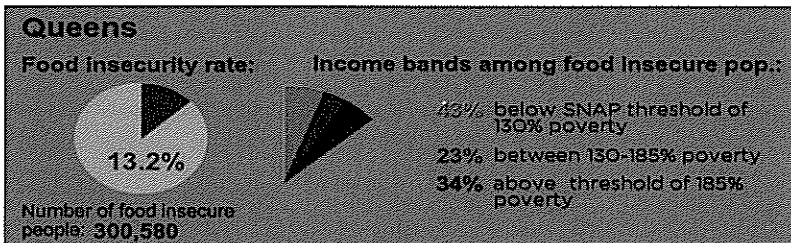
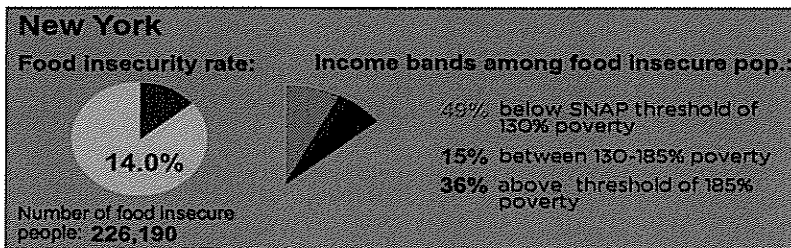
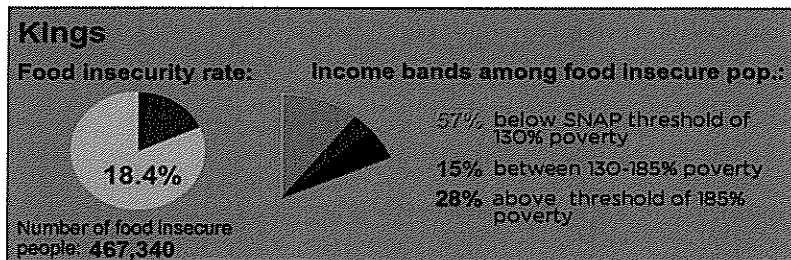
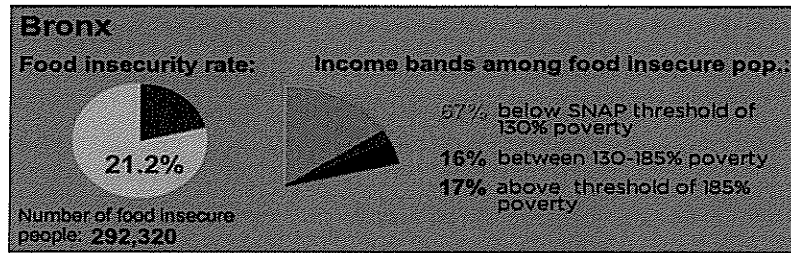
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BOROUGH BASED FOOD INSECURITY



Source

Gunderson, C., Brown, J., Engelhard, E., Waxman, E. *Map the Meal Gap: Technical Brief*. Feeding America, 2011.



City Harvest provides the following services and programs:

Emergency Food: City Harvest's fleet of 18 trucks and three bicycles rescues good, fresh food and deliveries it free of charge to a network of soup kitchens and pantries, including more than 80 in our target communities. This year, we will deliver more than eight million pounds of healthy emergency food, including nearly five million pounds of fresh produce, to partners in our network as we get as much food as possible to the communities that need it most.

Mobile Markets: City Harvest's farmers' market-style, free produce distributions occur twice per month in each neighborhood. Operated at New York City Housing Authority buildings, these markets will increase access to healthy food for over 2,000 low-income households this year as we distribute some 800,000 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to participants. In addition, we complement these distributions with cooking demonstrations and work with local organizations to provide health and benefits screenings and other complementary services.

Nutrition Education: City Harvest provides a range of nutrition interventions including multi-week courses targeted to vulnerable populations (e.g. children, families, or seniors) and healthy cooking demonstrations at locations throughout the community. Participants learn practical steps they can take to improve their diet and lead a healthier life, including how to shop for and prepare healthy meals and how to incorporate these changes into their everyday lives. This year, some 12,000 low-income New Yorkers will have increased knowledge of healthy behaviors and can make positive changes to their diet as a result of our work.

Community Food Assessment: guided by the principle that community participation and resident-driven action is essential to the success of our efforts, we work with local residents and organizations to perform a Community Food Assessment (CFA) for each neighborhood. The CFA examines factors that affect people's eating and purchasing habits and takes stock of the unique strengths and weaknesses of each community. This process serves two purposes: mobilizing around a shared goal and creating a plan of action to address the most critical needs. This year, we'll complete a CFA for Washington Heights and finalize an update to our CFA in the South Bronx.

Building a Healthy Retail Environment: all communities need consistent and reliable access to affordable, nutritious food. Following the completion of the CFA, we work with local businesses and organizations to identify ways to improve their food retail options. By coupling this market-based work with nutrition education, we are changing the relationship that residents have with food. This year, we will work with at least six bodegas, six NYC Green Carts, and three farmers' markets to strengthen demand for healthy food.

Healthy Schools: we know that schools can often be the best opportunity for low-income children to receive regular access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch. Based on the belief that kids can't learn on an empty stomach, this year, interns at each of our four schools

CUNY SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT HUNTER COLLEGE

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Testimony of Nicholas Freudenberg, City University of New York School of Public Health at Hunter College, on Intro 696

Good afternoon. I am Nicholas Freudenberg Distinguished Professor of Public Health at City University of New York School of Public Health at Hunter College. I am testifying today about the role of Food Stamps in the lives of CUNY students and the importance of reducing deterrents to Food Stamp –or SNAP – enrollment among this population. City University of New York enrolls about 270,000 degree students and another 240,000 non-degree student. Many of our students come from low-income families and communities and many face the economic and social hardships that all low-income New Yorkers face. Since a college education is one of the surest tickets out of poverty and also offers lifetime health protection, New York City policy should maximize the chances for qualified students to earn a college degree. Obviously, food insecurity can be a significant deterrent to successful academic achievement. Today I present findings from a study on food insecurity among CUNY students that my colleagues and I completed last year, in 2010. The study is based on a telephone and Web-based survey of a random representative sample of 1,086 CUNY undergraduate students. The study was commissioned by the Chancellor of the City University of New York Matthew Goldstein based on his concern that the economic crisis was causing hardships for our students and wanting data to inform the development of appropriate responses to unmet needs.

- We found that overall, 39.2% of CUNY students in our sample, about two in five, reported that they experienced some degree of food insecurity in the past 12 months. We used standard measures to assess food insecurity. Applying this rate to the estimated enrollment of undergraduate students in the Spring 2010 semester, this suggests that almost 100,000 CUNY students experienced some level of food insecurity in the last year.
- About twice as many students reported that they often or sometimes worried that they would not have enough money for food (45.1%) as reported that they often or sometimes went hungry because of a lack of money (22.7%), suggesting that the highest level of food insecurity (hunger) is less common than lower levels.
- Some populations of CUNY students had significantly higher rates of food insecurity than others. For example, Black and Latino students were about 1.5 times more likely to report food insecurity than White and Asian students. Students reporting household incomes of less than \$20,000 a year (about 26% of all CUNY undergraduates) were more than twice as likely to report food insecurity as those with household incomes of more than \$50,000 a year. Students who support themselves financially were 1.6 times as likely to report food insecurity as those not supporting themselves. Students working more than 20 hours per week had a higher rate of food insecurity than those who did not work (44.0% vs. 35.5%). Finally, rates of food insecurity were higher among those reporting health problems. Students who reported that

their health was fair or poor were more than 1.5 times more likely to report food insecurity than those who rated their health as excellent or good.

We also asked questions about the use of Food Stamps and other food assistance programs.

- Despite high levels of food insecurity, only 7.2% of students reported using the services of a food pantry or other food assistance program in the last 12 months.
- Only 6.4% of students reported currently receiving Food Stamps (i.e., SNAP benefits) even though 18% thought they were eligible and 16.6% had previously applied for this benefit.
- Among students currently receiving Food Stamps, 63% reported food insecurity, suggesting that for almost two-thirds of the recipients, Food Stamps were not sufficient to provide food security.
- Among those that have ever applied for Food Stamps (16.6%), 40% are currently receiving SNAP benefits. This suggests that about 16 to 17,000 CUNY students were receiving Food Stamps in Spring 2010. In addition, 24% of our sample has been rejected for Food Stamps. Thus, an estimated almost 10,000 CUNY students have been turned down for Food Stamps. Of those who were denied, 40% reported not being sure why they were turned down.
- Among those denied Food Stamps, 36% believed the program had made an error in turning them down.
- Of those who had received Food Stamps in the past but no longer receiving them, 29% reported that they failed to re-certify and 14% reported they that were cut off because they failed to meet re-certification requirements.

Our students listed many reasons for not applying for Food Stamps. Of those who did NOT apply:

- 55% reported they did not need Food Stamps,
- 42% reported they did not know how to apply for Food Stamps,
- 29% felt it was a handout,
- 28% were too embarrassed,
- 23% perceived too many obstacles, and
- 12% reported the application process was overwhelming.

Sadly, we did not ask directly about their experiences or perceptions on finger imaging.

However, these data show that a substantial portion of CUNY students who appear to be eligible for Food Stamps based on their income did not apply because of a variety of deterrents they experienced or perceived. More than 60% of those who have never applied for Food Stamps reported personal incomes of less than \$15,000 as did 54% of those who reported being turned down or denied Food Stamps.

Providing low-income and food insecure CUNY students with Food Stamps is one of the wisest investments New York City could make for educational equity, economic well-being, health and common decency. I strongly support the various changes identified in Intro Number 696 as important steps in the right direction of facilitating enrollment of eligible New Yorkers, including the students of City University of New York, into the SNAP program, New York City's and the nation's strongest bulwark against hunger and food insecurity.

Copies of the report on food insecurity among CUNY students are available at <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cunyfoodinsecurity.pdf>. Also available are reports on housing instability (<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cunyhousinginstability.pdf>) and psychological well-being (<http://web.gc.cuny.edu/che/cunypsychwellbeing.pdf>). among CUNY students. For more information, contact Nicholas Freudenberg, at nfreuden@hunter.cuny.edu



**Testimony of Joel Berg, Executive Director
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Hearing on Hunger in New York City and on Int. No. 296**

November 21, 2011

Introduction

I am Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. I am testifying on behalf of the city's more than 1,200 soup kitchens and food pantries – and the more than 1.4 million New Yorkers who live in households that can't afford enough food. I want to first thank the General Welfare Committee and Chairwoman Palma for holding this hearing and for all her amazing leadership on hunger and poverty. I also want to thank Speaker Quinn for all her stellar leadership on food issues.

Poverty Soaring Citywide

The main reason that hunger and food insecurity are increasing in New York City is that poverty is increasing. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, the number of people in New York City living under the meager federal poverty line has increased by more than 200,000 people since the year 2000, with one in five New Yorkers now living in poverty. In fact, the number of people in poverty was increasing *even before* the recession. The number of poor people in NYC – 1.6 million people – is now greater than the entire population of Philadelphia. I hope the City doesn't stand by their previous assertions that we are doing just fine on the poverty front because we have a slightly smaller percentage of the total population that are poor than Detroit or Philadelphia. Next, the City will brag we have a lower poverty rate than Haiti or North Korea.

Hunger and Food Insecurity Are Skyrocketing

The number of New York State residents that live in homes that directly suffer from hunger, a condition labeled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as "very low food security," increased by 56 percent from the 2005-2007 time period to the 2008-2010 time period, according to a new government report. (See: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap/ap057/>)

Fully 702,000 state residents live in households experiencing hunger, the highest level recorded for the state since the federal government began collecting such data in the mid-1990s.

Adding those 702,000 “very low food secure” New Yorkers to the broader number of New Yorkers who suffer from “low food security” (who may not actually go hungry but can’t afford a sufficient supply of food at least some time during the year), the USDA reported that nearly one in seven of the state’s residents faced some degree of “food insecurity” between 2008 and 2010. That number represents a 30 percent jump from 2005-2007, also showing the highest level of broader food insecurity since USDA started collecting the data. Thus, nearly 2.5 million state residents live in homes that can’t afford enough food.

As we will announce tomorrow when we release our annual hunger survey, New York City is facing similar trends.

The survey that my organization conducted last year found that, as demand at New York City food pantries and soup kitchens grew by 6.8 percent in 2010 (on top of a 20.8 percent increase in 2009), most hungry New Yorkers were able to get by thanks in large part to federal stimulus funding for emergency food and boosts to the federal Food Stamps Program (currently known as SNAP). Our report found that, in 2010, SNAP provided more than \$3.2 billion of federal funding for food purchases in New York City alone, a \$458 million jump over 2009 and a \$1.35 billion increase over 2008. While increased federal funding helped curb the tide, the survey found that 51.4 percent of the city’s pantries and kitchens reported not being able to meet growing demand. This number was down slightly, from 55.3 percent in 2009 and 68.6 percent in 2008. Because food and funding to these agencies have since been cut, our new report will show that more emergency feeding programs are running out of food and many are even being forced to close.

More than one in six of the city’s residents, and more than one in five of the city’s children, live in homes that cannot afford enough food consistently throughout the year.

SNAP/Food Stamps Overall

It is true that SNAP participation has increased significantly over the past few years in New York City, but the increase has not kept pace with the massive increases in unemployment and poverty. According to the most definitive USDA data, the overall statewide rate for food stamps participation rate in 2008, the most recent year published, is 68 percent, which is below other populous states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, Illinois, and Michigan. For working families, New York had an even lower food stamps participation rate, an abysmal 48 percent, placing New York State in 40th place in the nation. Given that New York City generates at least half of the state’s caseload, the city’s rates are likely similar. I hope the City is not satisfied that more than half of eligible working families do not get them. These are the very families that the Bloomberg Administration claims are most deserving of food stamps benefits.

Hunger and poverty are soaring in New York City. SNAP participation is skyrocketing in the rest of the nation and the state. New York City has the most extensive nonprofit sector food stamps outreach system in the nation. Why then has SNAP participation declined here in five of the last ten months? The most likely primary cause is the churning of people who were removed from the rolls at time of re-certification only to be put back on SNAP later, which both disrupts the food flow to hungry families and costs the State and City more administrative funds to place households back on the program.

Finger Imaging

There is no question that finger imaging is one of the key reasons for the City's lagging food stamps participation.

Until recently, the practice existed in only four locations in the entire country: Arizona, Texas, California, and New York City. California and Texas have eliminated the practice because it not only fails to detect fraud that is undetectable by other means, but finger imaging also discourages program participation among eligible families (especially working families, legal immigrants, and seniors), as well as wastes millions of dollars in taxpayer funds.

In both 2007 and 2009, I compared the 46 states that did not finger image food stamps applicants with the four that still did. In both years, I found that the program participation rate was higher and the "error rate" was lower in the 46 non-finger imaging states than in the four that still did. While "error rate" (which measures the degree to which people do or do not get benefits correctly and whether the actual benefit amount received is correct) is not exactly a match to "fraud rate," it is a pretty good proxy. USDA does not report fraud rates by state and does not penalize states based on fraud alone. But USDA does report error rate by state each year and penalizes or rewards states based on those error rates.

Actual fraud in the SNAP program nationwide was never as significant as right-wing critics charged. That being said, food stamps fraud was higher in the 1990s than it is today because then food stamps were still paper coupons and the crack epidemic was at its peak. Today, according to USDA, food stamp fraud accounts for only one percent of benefits issued, surely far lower than the rate of fraud on Wall Street, by defense contractors, or on the CityTime project. Yet the food stamps fraud that still remains is obviously unacceptable and must be fought in the most effective and cost-efficient ways possible. As evidenced by recent reports by the USDA Office of Inspector General, the most costly type of fraud that still exists is when retail stores traffic in benefits. Finger imaging does not catch this kind of fraud, as finger imaging supporters are forced to admit.

The second most common type of fraud is committed by government employees or former government employees that make up fake cases. For an example, see the following article: <http://www.vosizneias.com/70688/2010/12/08/new-york-new-york-city-employees-charged-with-operating-massive-food-stamps-fraud-ring/> Again, finger imaging can't detect this kind of fraud either. The third most common type of fraud is committed by applicants who hide extra income; finger imaging doesn't detect that type of fraud either.

The only type of fraud that finger imaging could potentially catch is the rarest form: applicants purposely creating duplicate cases in order to receive duplicate benefits. The vast majority of duplicative cases are simply the result of administrative error – not fraud – and are detected in other, better, and more cost effective ways. The act of purposely creating a duplicate case to defraud the government is so rare that HRA admits that it has not once referred such a case for criminal prosecution.

Given HRA's claim that the main reason for finger imaging is its deterrence against fraud, then surely the agency would seek to prosecute these cases if the current system detected them.

After then-Governor Spitzer eliminated food stamps-only finger imaging in most of the rest of the state, I ran into a senior official with Erie County Social Services. I asked this individual whether there was any increase in fraud after finger imaging was eliminated and the person laughed and then responded, "of course not." The plain truth is that, among many social service professionals managing the SNAP program, finger imaging is a joke because they know it is a waste of money that still exists solely due to politics, not due to true fraud protection.

Media accounts of food stamps and other social service fraud cases that have been found statewide recently have all involved fraud by retail stores, government employees, or applicants covering up income. I have seen no reports that involve duplicate cases. Further, no cases of duplicate accounts have even been found with finger imaging. It is no wonder that Texas and California eliminated it.

Fully 48 other states now have in place other (less costly, less discriminatory) methods to prevent food stamp case duplications. The Texas State legislature recently passed – and Texas Governor Rick Perry agreed to – a bill that eliminated finger imaging for both food stamps and cash assistance recipients. Governor Perry's state agency then issued an implementation memo that stated: "The benefit of this policy change is that the agency can prevent duplicate participation and confirm the identity of applicants while saving money and staff time previously spent on finger imaging."

It is bad enough that New York City is perusing policies too punitive for Rick Perry and Texas, but its even worse when we are policy bedfellows with Arizona. Mayor Bloomberg has forcefully and eloquently spoken out against Arizona's discriminatory immigration policies. Similarly, he has wisely decried Arizona's unwillingness to reduce potential murderers' access to handguns. Arizona does not even recognize Daylight Saving Time. Surely the City of New York should be chastened by sharing this policy failure with Arizona. Finger imaging most harms working parents who have to leave work and lose wages just to spend a day at a City government office to prove they are virtuous enough to obtain the federal nutrition assistance benefits for which they have already paid taxes to support. Thus the greatest irony is that the very people that Mayor Bloomberg most believes deserve SNAP benefits – working poor families – are those that are most harmed by the City's finger imaging policy.

The City keeps throwing around loaded political images of "fraud" and the supposed "bad 'ole days'" of high welfare. But food stamps are not welfare. In May 1996, 74 percent of food stamps recipients also received cash assistance; today in New York City, only 19 percent of food stamps recipients obtain cash assistance. Thus, if the past reasoning for finger imaging was to prevent "welfare" fraud, since food stamps aren't welfare, there should be no finger imaging for food stamps-only cases today. Moreover, in the 15 years since the institution of this policy, technology has advanced significantly, so there are far more cost-effective, non-intrusive ways to prevent duplicate cases other than by finger imaging.

Moreover, HRA has never explained why they can't detect duplications in the same way that 48 other states now do. They have not presented an iota of hard evidence that those states have more duplicate cases that are undetected than does New York City. The Bloomberg Administration's claims of whether they actually catch fraud with finger imaging are incredibly inconsistent, and are not particularly credible.

On November 20, 2007, HRA Commissioner Robert Doar included the following statement in his testimony to this Committee: "In calendar year 2006, 31 cases of fraud involving non-cash food stamp clients were detected by HRA through imaging." At the time, he claimed the finger imaging process cost the City \$800,000.

At the time, accepting those fraud numbers from the City as real, I calculated and publicized the following: The Urban Institute found that, in one out of 23 cases, otherwise eligible people don't apply solely due to finger-imaging requirements. New York detected only 31 cases of suspected fraud thanks to finger imaging in 2006. Given that about 1.1 million people in the city received food stamps, that meant that only one in 34,991 Food Stamp Program applicants were caught in the act of potentially committing fraud by finger-imaging. Thus, to seize possible fraud by only one in nearly 35,000 people, the City denied benefits to one in 23 actual hungry people. Even more absurd, New York City spends \$800,000 yearly on finger-imaging. That's right: the City spends \$800,000 of its own money on a system that may prevent 31 people from getting benefits for which they are *not* entitled, even though it prevents 21,500 people from getting \$31 million in federal benefits for which they *are* entitled.

Perhaps not coincidentally, because the ratio of money spent to fraud cases the practice supposedly caught made the City look bad, since then HRA has claimed, almost magically, that the true costs are much lower than previously claimed but the number of duplications found is supposedly greater.

Yet last year, when pressed by Council Member Brad Lander at this same annual hearing, Commissioner Doar had to admit *not one* person was referred for prosecution based on fraud discovered through finger imaging.

More recently, in the *Huffington Post*, Commissioner Doar wrote: "Today, we still identify nearly two thousand duplications through finger imaging. Some of these duplications may be inadvertent or due to human error and some may be an attempt to take advantage of the system. Finger imaging's primary purpose is to identify duplication for whatever reason." His use of the word "may" is telling. If what he wrote most recently is correct, why in the world doesn't HRA seek to determine if each duplication found is simply an administrative error or whether it is true fraud? Since the City routinely prosecutes people for offenses as small as turnstile jumping or marching on a sidewalk, I suspect the reason that the City does not try to prosecute fraud found with finger imaging is that there isn't any true fraud found this way.

We now know that current and former HRA employees have indeed been prosecuted for massive fraud schemes but that HRA has not found so much as one minimal fraud case through finger imaging that they deem worthy of prosecution. It seems at though HRA is placing its anti-fraud efforts in the wrong place, unduly burdening law-abiding applicants but doing little to prevent some of own errant employees from stealing.

The City's claims of how much this process costs also changes dramatically over time. As noted above, Doar testified before the City Council a few years ago that finger imaging cost the City \$800,000, but now he says the number is \$180,000, even though the caseload is larger now than in 2007, meaning the cost theoretically should have increased. The cost of the statewide finger imaging contract held by OTDA last year was \$6.4 million, and New York City contributes at least half of the caseload in the state, and also accounts for the vast majority of SNAP-only finger imaging costs – so the true cost for New York City should likely be millions of dollars.

In addition, HRA recently posted on its web site other claims about finger imaging that are not accurate (see http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/Food_Stamp_Performance_2011.pdf) For example, the agency stated that “the City’s cumulative food stamp payment error rate was only 4.32 percent.” Yet they fail to point out that their error rate is actually greater than the national average of 3.81. (See: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/qc/pdfs/2010-rates.pdf>). HRA then further claimed that: “If finger imaging were eliminated, HRA would not be able to maintain a high accuracy rating without hiring more staff. Higher operating costs, and potential penalties from the Federal government if the Agency’s accuracy rating suffers, mean less money would be available for benefits when they are sorely needed.” But the agency has not provided any evidence that eliminating the practice would decrease payment accuracy. In fact, states that do not use finger imaging have a *higher* payment accuracy rate than those that use it (including New York). Therefore, the HRA statement is demonstrable untrue.

Furthermore, even if the City's error rates did somehow increase and USDA imposed penalties, those funds wouldn't take a penny out of benefits for hungry families. By federal law, the money for those penalties would have to be paid by non-federal, non-benefits funds. To quote the late, great Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "You are entitled to your own set of opinions, but not your own set of facts."

A soon-to-be-released report from the Empire Justice Center demonstrates that an astounding 97 percent of finger imaging case closures were reversed at the fair hearing level. People who appealed their closure of SNAP cases due to problems with finger imaging waited months for their cases to be resolved through the fair hearing process, which not only delayed federally funded food going to needy families, it cost the City and State additional resources to cover the administrative costs of holding the fair hearings.

In addition, given that finger imaging has now been virtually eliminated for SNAP applicants upstate, where the caseload is more likely to be white, but has been maintained in New York City, where the caseload is more often non-white, the manner in which the finger imaging policy is implemented in New York raises serious civil rights concerns. It is, in effect, an electronic "stop and frisk." Quoting part of this statement by me out of context, Heather Mac Donald of the Manhattan Institute published a column in the *NY Post* accusing me of having “played the race card.” Of course, neither Ms. Mac Donald nor the *Post* even tried to dispute my facts about the racial disparities in how finger imaging is carried out – or not carried out – in New York State. So my message for the *Post* and the Manhattan Institute is basic: bringing attention to proven facts about racial disparities is not “playing the race card.” However, denying such disparities exist, but engaging in ad hominem on your opponents, citing race, actually *is* playing the race card.

Speaking of actual facts, Speaker Quinn's FoodWorks report determined that the City's finger imaging requirement alone deters 30,000 eligible New Yorkers from signing up for SNAP benefits per year, costing low-income families – and the city's economy – \$54 million a year in federal benefits yearly.

Beyond the numbers, I do hope policy makers consider the real-life human impacts. Time after time, hard-working, low-income people tell us they will not apply for benefits for their struggling families because they don't want to be treated like criminals. The letter I received, pasted below, about how the City wanted to force a 95-year-old man to go to a government office to provide his finger image, speaks for itself

Speaker Quinn was absolutely correct when she said, "Now – is the time for us – to decriminalize hunger. Requiring fingerprinting for food stamp applicants is a harmful and destructive policy – and I call on the Bloomberg Administration to abandon it immediately. It's simply the right thing to do."

We believe that Mayor Bloomberg or Governor Cuomo should end this practice immediately.

We also strongly support Int. No. 696, which would require HRA to merely report on how much it spends annually on finger imaging, how many cases of fraud are detected, if any, and how many cases are referred for prosecution, if any. Given the Bloomberg Administration's ever-shifting claims about finger imaging's costs and benefits – even in testimony to the City Council, a co-equal branch of government – it is imperative to have the request for facts have the force of City law.

I understand that the Bloomberg Administration has expressed some reservations about this bill; if that's correct, it's astounding. If the Bloomberg Administration is so darn proud of their finger imaging policy, why do they want to keep the facts about it away from the taxpayers that fund it? The Mayor often says, "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Perhaps the corollary of that should be: "If they are afraid to measure it, perhaps they are embarrassed about how they manage it."

October 12, 2011

Dear Christine Quinn and Joel Berg:

I read the article in today's NY Times about fingerprinting food stamp applicants and am writing to encourage you to continue to fight against this un-necessary, insulting and discriminatory practice.

I recently went to a food stamp office in Manhattan to apply for food stamps for my 95-year-old father, and was told he had to come in to be fingerprinted! I was outraged, and pushed the issue until I was told he would be exempt from fingerprinting if I brought in a doctor's note! That is ridiculous, insulting and un-necessary as well, but the alternatives - no food stamps or dragging my beloved, frail, 95-year-old father to the application office, standing in line, and then sitting around for hours - are worse.

I am deeply disturbed by this practice. And while I am pretty adept at navigating and pushing the system, my heart breaks for the thousands of New York citizens who go to bed and wake up hungry because of this awful requirement.

Please keep up the fight, and thank you.

Sincerely,

A Lifelong New Yorker & Taxpayer

Other Steps the City Should Take to Better Fight Hunger

1) Making it Easier for Unemployed People to Receive SNAP.

The City should accept waivers, offered by the State and authorized by federal law, to enable Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) to continue to receive food stamps as they actively look for work. Given the massive irregularities and inefficiencies in the City's make-work programs, it is not credible to believe everyone who needs a job in order to continue receiving benefits is able to get one.

2) Improve the Ability of Post-Secondary Students to Receive SNAP.

The State and City impose a wide variety of restrictions on students who are enrolled at least half time in higher education. One way to avoid the restrictions is for students to be employed 20 hours a week or more, but we are hearing that, given the recession (and that even work-study slots are being eliminated), many students are unable to find work, and thus they are excluded from food stamp benefits at just the time they need them the most. The City and State should work together to remove these barriers.

3) Increase the Ability of SNAP Applicants to Submit Supporting Documents Online.

The increasing use of online applications is certainly beneficial, but it would be far more helpful if more sites accepted the electronic submission of supporting documents. Online SNAP applications systems should also be better integrated with online applications for other government benefits.

4) Oppose any proposed federal cuts in SNAP or other federal nutrition benefits.

Both Mayor Bloomberg and the Council have opposed such cuts in the past, and I hope they can continue to do so forcefully.

5) Increase In-Classroom School Breakfasts.

Unfortunately, school meals programs everywhere in the country are often hampered by stigma. A low-income high school dropout in Denver, describing how he felt when forced to use a different-colored card to obtain a reduced-price lunch, said: "You feel low. It should not be like that. We should not have certain colors to separate us like one rich, one poor." Many children in those situations choose to go hungry rather than admit they are poor. "Lunchtime is the best time to impress your peers," said Lewis Geist, a senior and class president at Balboa High School in San Francisco. Being seen with a subsidized meal, he said, "lowers your status." While school lunch programs have nearly 100 percent participation rates in elementary schools (since kids can't leave the school buildings), as the students grow older, their participation decreases.

When it comes to breakfast, participation is much worse. Research proves that children who eat breakfast at school have higher test scores, fewer school nurse visits, act up less in class, and may even suffer less obesity. Yet school breakfast participation is far lower than school lunch participation. Often it is served too early or too late, making it impractical for students to eat.

Stigma is an even bigger problem for school breakfast than for school lunch, because while most kids eat lunch, everyone knows that only the really poor kids go to the cafeteria to eat breakfast. Nationwide in the 2006 school year, only 45 percent of kids eligible for free and reduced-price meals participated in free and reduced-priced breakfasts. According to a 2007 report by the Food Research and Action Center, out of 23 big cities in the United States, fully 21 had rates of free and reduced-price breakfast participation below 65 percent. In 11 of those cities, the rate was below 50 percent. In New York City, only a third of the children who receive school lunches receive breakfasts, giving New York City one of the lowest breakfast participation rates of any big city.

A few years ago, in response to this problem, the best possible thing happened: all the key players – the Department of Education (DOE), the teachers union, and advocates – worked together to find common ground to address the problem.

We jointly visited Newark, New Jersey – where both universal and in-classroom breakfast are utilized – and found that the school district has a 94 percent breakfast participation rate. During our visit, we were thrilled to find elementary school student breakfast monitors cheerfully delivering breakfasts to all their peers. We also learned of a local high school in which the number of breakfasts served increased literally tenfold after the meals were provided in classrooms.

Having learned first-hand of Newark's success, in 2008, New York City launched a pilot project to try out in-classroom breakfasts in a number of schools. I must point out that, on school meals issues, the Bloomberg Administration has, to date, been helpful. They've improved the nutritional quality of school meals and expanded participation through some innovative initiatives. At one pilot site I visited, PS 68 in the Bronx, every student ate breakfast together during their first-period class. The pilot is working better than anyone could have anticipated. The school's principal told me that, before the pilot, an average of 50 kids came to school late every day, so many that she had to assign extra staff just to write out late slips. When the school started serving breakfast in their classrooms, kids came in early just for the meals, and now only about five kids a day are late – a 900 percent decrease in tardiness. The principal also told me that absenteeism and visits to school nurses also dropped, and in the afternoons, kids fall asleep in the classrooms less frequently. This is obviously not only good nutrition policy but also good education policy. The United Federation of Teachers has also supported in-classroom breakfasts, calling them “a hit.”

Given that most school districts must now have a complex systems in place to collect forms and data on the income of each student's parents to determine the eligibility of each child for either free, reduced-price, or full-cost meals, when a district adopts a universal breakfast or lunch policy, not only does it reduce the stigma faced by children and thereby increases participation, but it also reduces the paperwork and bureaucracy, saving the school district time and money.

When kids eat breakfast in a classroom instead of a lunchroom that is a hallway or two away, they have more time to focus on their studies and are protected from the stigma of having to leave their friends to go to a special breakfast room “for the poor kids.”

Since textbooks are widely understood to be a critical educational tool, public school districts typically lend them out free of charge to all students. The time is ripe for the nation to view school meals in the same way. Free breakfast and lunch should be universal in all classrooms..

The pilot in-classroom project in New York worked so well that Mayor Michael Bloomberg and DOE expanded it to about 300 schools. But even most of those schools do not serve breakfast in all classrooms. Moreover, the rest of the 1,600 DOE schools don't have in-classroom breakfast at all. Less than three percent of New York City DOE students now receive in-classroom breakfasts.

Since all meals are reimbursed by the federal government, DOE could break even or even make money by dramatically expanding in-classroom breakfasts. That is why Chicago and Houston have recently mandated such breakfasts in every class in every school. Given that one in five of the city's children live in homes that cannot afford enough food consistently throughout the year, DOE should immediately make in classroom breakfast available in every class in every school.

**Testimony of Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of
Hunger Action Network of New York State
Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Hearing on Hunger in New York City and on Int. No. 296**

November 21, 2011

I am Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network of New York State.

Started in 1982, Hunger Action Network is a statewide membership organization of emergency food programs, low-income individuals, advocates and faith groups whose goal is to end hunger, and its root causes, including poverty, in New York State.

Hunger and Poverty are Way too High in NYC

An all-time high of 1.84 million NYC residents rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as Food Stamps, and 1.4 million rely on emergency food. One in six, including more than 400,000 of our children live in households facing food insecurity. Demand at area food programs increased more than 50% in recent years; new data will be released this week by the NYC Coalition Against Hunger.

More than 1.6 million NYC residents - one in five - live below the official federal poverty level. The recent 1.4% increase in the number of NYC poor residents was the largest increase in decades. New York State leads the country in income disparity. In NYC, the richest 1% get 45% of the income. The last time the country saw such tremendous income disparity was right before the Great Depression. Manhattan had the biggest income gap of any county in the country, with the top fifth of earners (with an average income of \$371,754) making nearly 38 times as much as the bottom fifth (\$9,845). Citywide, poverty among children is 30 percent.

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, NYC's homeless shelter population rose to an all-time high of 41,000 at the end of October. Homeless children sleeping in shelters also reached an all-time record with 17,000 children needing to stay in shelters each night. The coalition noted the dramatic increase in the city's homeless rate since the Bloomberg administration ended housing assistance programs such as Advantage, which aimed to assist homeless families transfer to more permanent housing.

The number of New York State residents that live in homes that directly suffer from hunger, a condition labeled by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as "very low food security," increased by 56 percent from the 2005-2007 time period to the 2008-2010 time period, according to a new government report. (See: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/ap/ap057/>)

The solution to hunger, at least in America, is to end poverty. To that end, the City Council should do more to create jobs and raise wages, such as the proposed expansion to the Living Wage Law. The City also needs to address the shocking income inequality, such as making the wealthy, Wall Street and the bank bear a fairer share of the tax burden. Hunger Action Network for instance has been calling for the \$14 billion rebated annually to Wall Street speculators from the Stock Transfer Tax to be devoted to a FDR-style WPA jobs programs to create 500,000 public jobs paying between \$14 to \$17 an hour. Remember that the Stock Transfer Tax used to be dedicated to the City, not the State coffers. The alternative revenue the state agreed to when they took over the Stock Transfer Tax is no longer provided to the City. It is time for the City to demand payment.

I. Improve SNAP/Food Stamps

The NYC Coalition Against Hunger is submitting detailed testimony today to the committee and we endorse their findings and recommendations.

I have worked at Hunger Action Network for 26 years. One of the things that has most surprised me over the years is that in survey after survey, only about half of the guests at emergency food programs are actually receiving SANP benefits, even though their income data indicates that virtually all of them are eligible for assistance. This problem needs to be corrected.

One of the reasons why so many EFP guests aren't receiving food stamps at the time they come to HRA is the city's excessive rate of sanctioning. Many others are waiting a long time for the initial applications to be processed - even though in many cases it should be no longer than five days if they are in an "emergency" situation or 30 days otherwise.

Other guests at EFPs refuse to apply for food stamp benefits because they find the process humiliating and intrusive.

All of the above problems cite the need for stronger enforcement of state and federal laws regarding access to food stamp benefits - something unfortunately that the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance have been unwilling to do with local districts such as HRA.

a. NYC should eliminate fingerprinting for food stamps

It is inexcusable that NYC continues to require finger imaging for food stamp (SNAP) applicants at a time when the rest of New York State and every state other than Arizona has long ago ended this practice. It is a waste of taxpayer resources. There are many other safeguards already built into the food stamp system, including excessive documentation of many household facts such as address, social security numbers, rent, utility bills, payment stubs, etc. that safeguard against fraud. There is no evidence of duplicate identities being used to fraudulently obtain food stamps, as HRA officials has admitted. We appreciate the City Council's effort to convince Mayor Bloomberg to end this practice. We would also request that the City Council urge Governor Cuomo to stop allowing Mayor Bloomberg to do it.

Last month I joined Speaker Quinn and other members of the City Council at a City Hall press conference calling for an end to fingerprinting. Speaker Quinn stated "Now – is the time for us – to decriminalize hunger. Requiring fingerprinting for food stamp applicants is a harmful and destructive policy – and I call on the Bloomberg Administration to abandon it immediately. It's simply the right thing to do."

We also strongly support Int. No. 696, which would require HRA to merely report on how much it spends annually on finger imaging, how many cases of fraud are detected, if any, and how many cases are referred for prosecution, if any. Given the Bloomberg Administration's ever-shifting claims about finger imaging's costs and benefits, it is imperative to have the request for facts have the force of City law.

We also support:

b) Making it Easier for Unemployed People to Receive SNAP.

The City should accept waivers, offered by the State and authorized by federal law, to enable Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) to continue to receive food stamps as they actively look for work.

c) Improve the Ability of Post-Secondary Students to Receive SNAP.

The State and City impose a wide variety of restrictions on students who are enrolled at least half time in higher education. The City and State should work together to remove these barriers.

d) Increase the Ability of SNAP Applicants to Submit Supporting Documents Online.

The increasing use of online applications is certainly beneficial, but it would be far more helpful if more sites accepted the electronic submission of supporting documents. Online SNAP applications systems should also be better integrated with online applications for other government benefits.

2. Increasing Access to Healthy Food and Food Deserts - Health Bucks

New York City is to be commended for providing leadership in trying to expand access to healthy foods, especially in low-income areas, such as FRESH, Healthy Bodegas, Green Carts and Health Bucks.

Health Bucks, worth \$2 each, are developed and distributed by NYC Health Department District Public Health Offices and can be used to purchase fresh fruits & vegetables at participating farmers markets (listed on each Health Buck). Community organizations located in the District Public Health Office neighborhoods of the South Bronx, East and Central Harlem and Central Brooklyn may apply to receive Health Bucks to distribute to their clients as an incentive to support nutrition education and other health promotion activities.

We hope that the City will increase funding for this program. It is expected that \$20 million of matching funds annually nationwide for such initiatives will be included in the pending reauthorization of the Food and Farm Bill.

We are also supportive of the Food Desert legislation sponsored by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand and hope the City Council will also support.

3. The City Council should support a Federal Farm Bill to End Hunger, Support Healthy Foods, Aid Farmers and Protect the Environment

More than one hundred New York City organizations, faith leaders, chefs, writers, and educators have signed a call to Congressional representatives to support a Food and Farm Bill that will end hunger, promote health, and support strong, regional farm and food economies. We urge the City Council members to quickly take a similar step.

Drafted by the NYC Food and Farm Bill Working Group, the signed declaration articulates five key principles they hope to see reflected in the current re-authorization of the Food and Farm Bill: 1 A Health-Focused Food System; 2 An End to Hunger and Access to Healthy Food; 3 A Level "Plowing" Field (promoting agricultural decentralization, competition, and fairness); 4 Good Environmental Stewardship; and 5 Vibrant Regional Farm and Food Economies.

The signatories contend that the present Food and Farm Bill does not do enough to help either consumers or farmers and contributes to hunger and health problems such as obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. As our group's statement points out we, in New York City, have an enormous stake in the Food and Farm Bill. Eight

million of us spend \$30 billion annually on food. Yet, hunger persists in our midst and many of us find unhealthy food far more accessible than healthy food.

The FFBWG shares the concern expressed by others across the country that the reauthorization of the Farm Bill could happen as part of the deficit reduction process, rather than in 2012 as initially scheduled. If this happens, the ability for a democratic process of reauthorizing legislation is short-circuited, and public concerns about the health and viability of the country's food and farm programs are essentially silenced.

"We want the Food and Farm Bill to do a better job of ending hunger and providing access to healthy food. This means increasing SNAP benefits, as well as strengthening our regional food system to provide local, healthy food to everyone. We need to support new and existing farmers allowing them to grow multiple crops and practice sustainable agriculture to improve the health of our environment and our economy," said Benjamin Solotaire, Policy Chair of the Brooklyn Food Coalition and member of the NYCFFBWG Community Engagement Committee.

Many organizations have been critical of the so-called "secret negotiations" taking place on the Food and Farm Bill, which are largely focused on how to replace commodity subsidies. The groups are concerned that other key issues will be neglected, such as a number of key innovations adopted in the 2008 Food and Farm Bill to promote local and regional farm and food economies.

"Many Americans feel the Congress should be addressing the nation's greatest problems, namely unemployment and hunger, not the deficit. But in any case the supercommittee process should not result in Congress abandoning the goal of reforming the Food and Farm Bill to better meet the needs of farmers and consumers. We need to create a healthier diet for Americans and to ensure the future viability of farming in the United States," stated Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network and one of the co-conveners of the NYC Food and Farm Bill Working Group

Organizations and individuals signing on to the NYC Food and Farm Bill Working Group's declarations include anti-hunger organizations (Hunger Action Network of NYS, NYC Coalition Against Hunger, West Side Campaign Against Hunger, WhyHunger), food policy/justice groups (Just Food, Slow Food NYC, Brooklyn Food Coalition, Food Systems Network NYC, Food and Water Watch), and health groups (Public Health Solutions, New York Academy of Medicine). Local chefs, writers, and educators include Dan Barber, Bill Telepan, Anna Lappe, Marion Nestle, Nevin Cohen, and Janet Poppendieck.

A copy of the documents and the present list of endorsers can be found at <http://foodbillnyc.wikispaces.com/Principles>

4. Oppose Congressional Efforts to Cut Food Stamps Benefits to NYC Public Housing Residents

The draft of the Farm Bill that was circulated in the last few days indicates that the leadership of the Agriculture Committee wants to end the ability of more than 100,000 New York State residents, primarily NYC residents of subsidized housing, to receive higher food stamp benefit.

In 2008, under prodding by USDA, Governor Paterson agreed to increase federal food assistance — by more than 50 percent in some cases — 114,000 households, most of whom were in New York City public and Section 8 subsidized housing, were enrolled in the LIHEAP energy subsidy program.. About 90,000 households in New York City were to receive, on average, \$131 more per month in food stamps.

The increases were allowable under provisions in federal law that enabled residents enrolled in the federal home-energy subsidy program (LIHEAP) to qualify to utilize the Standard Utility Allowance in determining food stamp benefits. So the state provided them with a LIHEAP benefit of \$1. The draft bill would increase the

threshold amount of LIHEAP to \$15 in order to be eligible to utilize the Standard Utility Allowance in determining food stamp benefits.

In general, the draft Farm Bill falls far short of the reforms needed, especially with respect to SNAP, which accounts for 70% of the funding..

Of critical importance to NYC residents is to end the arbitrary cap on the amount of housing costs an individual can deduct in determining the amount of their SNAP benefits.

Among the SNAP reforms Hunger Action calls for:

- o Combine the application for SNAP with other public benefits and create a universal application or data sharing to minimize paperwork redundancies
- o Eliminate the finger imaging and work requirements for applicants
- o As the basis for SNAP benefits, replace the outdated “Thrifty Food Plan” with the Low-Cost Food Budget (approximately 25 percent higher)
- o Maintain the value of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) benefit boost, not allowing it to erode with food cost inflation
- o Increase the minimum SNAP benefit so that elderly households receive at least an amount that is equivalent in value to the floor set in the 1970s; fully allowing SNAP benefits to be adjusted when high housing costs consume more of a family’s income
- o Extend the SNAP program to needy people now excluded from benefits by arbitrary eligibility rules, including by restoring eligibility to all legal immigrants, dropping the lifetime ban on benefits for drug felons who are making a new start in society, and removing time limits on receipt of SNAP by certain jobless adults seeking work
- o Allow all states to operate the Social Security Income (SSI) CAP model that seamlessly enrolls SSI recipients into SNAP, and encourage other data matching initiatives
- o Promote increased access by low-income people to nutritious food in neighborhoods, including by fostering development of supermarkets and outlets in “food deserts,” and by equipping all farmers’ markets with Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) capability.

5) Mandate In-Classroom School Breakfasts.

A January 2011 national report by FRAC (Food Research Action Center) found that NYC continues to be among the worst large cities in the country in terms of the number of eligible children receiving school breakfast. NY is now ranked the third lowest in the country (a small improvement from past reports where it was the worst). Only 34.1% of the students participating in the school lunch program also participated in the school breakfast program.

Nationally, for every 100 low-income children who ate free or reduced-price lunch, 47.2 low-income children ate free or reduced-price breakfast in school year 2009– 2010. In many of the best performing states the ratio is about 60:100. A realistic goal for urban areas is 70%. Cities’ large student populations allow them to benefit from economies of scale, and the concentration of free and reduced-price eligible students translates into larger federal reimbursements for the meals served.

Chicago, though still among the worst large city in the country in terms of participation in school breakfast, was cited for having increased the participation rate by the most thorough implementation of the breakfast in the classroom program in over half of its elementary schools. Chicago recently announced that it would implement the program in all schools.

New York City has also adopted the breakfast in the classroom program to try to increase participation. However, participation by schools is voluntary and most principals have not yet decided to participate, and even in schools that do have it, not every classroom participates. The pilot in-classroom project in New York worked so well that Mayor Michael Bloomberg and DOE expanded it to about 300 schools. But even most of those schools do not serve breakfast in all classrooms. Moreover, the rest of the 1,600 DOE schools don't have in-classroom breakfast at all. Less than three percent of New York City DOE students now receive in-classroom breakfasts.

Breakfast in the classroom creates a level playing field – for the children who no longer feel stigmatized for eating breakfast at school, for the parents who want and need the help it provides their families and who want to improve the program further, and for the teachers and principals who want their students to reap the educational benefits of breakfast.

Research proves that children who eat breakfast at school have higher test scores, fewer school nurse visits, act up less in class, and may even suffer less obesity. Yet school breakfast participation is far lower than school lunch participation. Often it is served too early or too late, making it impractical for students to eat.

The City Council speaker's recent report, Food Works, called for the in breakfast program to be mandated at least in low-income schools. Others feel more needs to be done to promote children taking advantage that breakfast is available for free in every public school in NYC.

While there are many inspiring stories of improved breakfast participation in individual schools, more leadership is needed from the mayor and school chancellor. Our education leaders need to embrace that good nutrition is a pathway to an improved education system. There are limitations to the classroom breakfast program, including how the city operates it in terms of meal production. It also provides students with less options compared to a program where they can go to the cafeteria to pick up breakfast

Since all meals are reimbursed by the federal government, DOE could break even or even make money by dramatically expanding in-classroom breakfasts. Given that one in five of the city's children live in homes that cannot afford enough food consistently throughout the year, DOE should immediately make in classroom breakfast available in every class in every school.

**Public Hearing—Oversight
Fighting Hunger in New York City
Reporting on Finger Imaging of Food Stamp Recipients**

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Jointly with the Committee on Community Development

November 21, 2011



Testimony Prepared by:

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Good afternoon, my name is Lori McNeil, Director of Research and Policy at the Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project (HOPP) at Urban Justice Center. I appreciate this opportunity to testify. As we all embark on our own Thanksgiving festivities, it is particularly compelling to explore food stamp policies generally and to explore remedies to food insecurity in New York City. Before I begin discussing policies and hunger solutions, I would like to describe why HOPP is uniquely positioned to testify at today's hearing. Since its inception in 1984, HOPP has been continuously involved in serving vulnerable populations in New York City. We serve low and no income residents through direct legal services, systematic advocacy and outreach and through an application of policy research, thereby not only serving our clients but also impacting all low income New Yorkers.

In addition to our research and direct service work, our office recently settled two lawsuits with HRA that we believe bring about important systemic improvements to the administration of the food stamp program. First, in *Harris v. Eggleston*, we challenged the City's wrongful termination from the food stamp program of individuals who transferred from the cash assistance program to Supplemental Security Income (SSI). A settlement agreement was approved by the federal court in September 2007. The computer problem has been fixed and already \$14 million dollars from New York State in retroactive food stamp benefits have been restored to class members. Second, in April 2008, the federal court approved a settlement in *Williston v. Eggleston*. In this case, we alleged that HRA failed to provide food stamps to eligible applicants at food stamp offices within the time frames established by law. Under the terms of the settlement, HRA will: (1) screen all food stamp applications submitted to food stamp centers for eligibility for expedited processing; and (2) provide food stamps to eligible

households within five days if eligible for expedited food stamp processing, and within thirty days if otherwise eligible. As with the *Harris* lawsuit, this suit has served as a catalyst for HRA to fundamentally change the way it does business to ensure that households receive the food stamps to which they are entitled. HOPP has a long history advocating for food stamps in New York City and it is in this capacity that I wish to address the Supplemental Nutrition Access Program (SNAP).

In May 2011, HOPP released a research report, *Case Closed: An Examination of Exclusion in New York City's Public Assistance Programs*, documenting the many barriers and diversionary techniques used by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) to deny eligible applicants vital public assistance benefits (including food stamps). We identified numerous instances of erroneous case closings and sanctions, clerical errors, caseworkers relaying inaccurate information to applicants and recipients, unanswered phones, onerous appointments and duplicative document requirements. HRA is a highly bureaucratic system of rules, procedures, regulations and processes that, far too many times, serves as an impermeable barrier to those in desperate need of food assistance.

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) fair hearing statistics provide ample evidence of the rampant nature of the many problems embedded in the administration of public benefits in New York City. According to OTDA, while New York City represents 63% of the State's public assistance population, it accounts for 94% of all State fair

hearings (used to contest public assistance case decisions) and 79% of all sanctions in the State.¹ Of the almost 140,000 fair hearings held in New York City, only 13% (18,701) were correct when made or affirmed as correct by an administrative law judge.² As part of our research report referred to earlier, HOPP interviewed 52 pro se appellants and 45% of them described the reason for their fair hearing, as an **error by HRA**. The public assistance program in New York City is rife with faulty practices and ineffective procedures and the outcome of these errors has the potential for horrific consequences, including denying food for our City's most vulnerable such as children, victims of domestic violence and those who are disabled. The provision of a receipt as outlined in Bill 696, will enable applicants to document their activities, (often necessary in fair hearings) a measure important in averting the erroneous termination of food stamp benefits.

Currently, only two states, Texas and Arizona, and several municipalities across the United States require finger imaging to receive food stamps. In a recent letter to HOPP, HRA Executive Deputy Commissioner Brune explained that finger imaging was necessary to ensure that duplicate food stamps benefits are not issued. But, in virtually every case across the United States, states, counties and municipalities have identified and utilized other means to address duplicate benefits without creating this barrier for recipients. Requiring food stamp recipients to engage in finger imaging, a practice that is imbued with stigma akin to criminality, is

¹ New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2009). *2009 Statistical Report on the Operations of New York State Temporary Assistance Programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.otda.ny.gov/main/resources/legislative-report/2009> LEGISLATIVE REPORT.pdf.

² New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2010). *2010 Statistical Report on the Operations of New York State Temporary Assistance Programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.otda.ny.gov/main/resources/legislative-report/2010> LEGISLATIVE REPORT.pdf.

unconscionable and in contradiction to HRA's commitment to expand access to food in New York City. The finger-imaging requirement creates a barrier to food stamps, and this can result in decreased food stamp participation. The food stamp program is completely funded by the federal government (excluding administrative costs), thus supporting the practice of finger-imaging essentially reduces the amount of federal dollars being funneled into the City when our City most needs these funds. Moreover, for every food stamp dollar spent, nearly two dollars in economic security is generated through job creation and increased tax revenues.³ Reporting bill 696 begins the important process of data collection necessary to eventually eliminate the finger imaging requirement in New York City.

We laud the success of HRA's recent efforts at streamlining the food stamp process, including online application, the establishment of the paperless office system and telephone recertification. In fact, the number of food stamp recipients has increased by over 70% over the last five years. The provision of face-to-face interview waivers (in hardship cases), submission of application by facsimile and accurate electronic, hotline and printed materials enhances streamlining efforts already underway.

Now is the time to approve the food stamp measures outlined in Bill 696, especially in light of the newly enforced work requirements for food stamp only cases, the practice of which will add more complexity to the receipt of food stamps. HOPP fully supports all elements of the finger-imaging reporting bill. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

³ Widom, Ewart & Martinez. (2006). *A Better Recipe for New York City: Less Red Tape, More Food on the Table*. New York: Urban Justice Center.



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Testimony prepared by

Triada Stampas

for the

Committees on General Welfare and Community Development

on

Fighting Hunger in New York City

and

Intro. 696 of 2011 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to reporting on finger imaging of food stamp applicants.

November 21, 2011

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon and thank you, Chairpersons Palma and Vann, and members of the Committees on General Welfare and Community Development. My name is Triada Stampas, and I am the Director of Government Relations and Public Education at the Food Bank For New York City. The Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council regarding fighting hunger in New York City and Intro. 696 of 2011.

First, the Food Bank thanks the City Council for your ongoing efforts to address the issue of hunger and ensure all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food. The City Council's consistent support for increasing enrollment of eligible households in the Food Stamp Program and expanding the in-classroom School Breakfast Program, as well as funding to expand the supply of food available at emergency food programs are especially appreciated and needed as the recession has left increasing food poverty in its wake.

We also thank you for recognizing the threats to federal nutrition assistance programs in the current deficit reduction negotiations in Congress, and for sending a message to the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction (known as the "Super-committee") that these programs, particularly the Food Stamp Program (known federally as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), not fall victim to cuts or restructuring.

Food Bank For New York City works to end hunger and food poverty by increasing access to nutrition, education and financial empowerment. Approximately 1.5 million New York City residents rely on our programs and services. We distribute food and provide support services to approximately 1,000 emergency and community food programs citywide; manage nutrition education programs for schools and community-based organizations (CBOs); operate income support programs including food stamp outreach & enrollment assistance and one of the largest Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) programs in the country; and conduct research to inform community and government efforts to end hunger in New York City.

Our recently released special report, "From the Front Lines to the Bread Lines," for example, revealed that one in four households with a military veteran in New York City is experiencing difficulty affording food, and one in ten is relying on a food pantry or soup kitchen to make ends meet. We are proud and grateful that Speaker Quinn has committed to addressing the issue of food poverty among veterans in New York City.

I also would like to take a moment to acknowledge the Human Resources Administration's (HRA's) recent Hunger Champions award from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for working with the Food Bank and the Food Stamp Task Force we convene to develop a mediation model for individuals and families who encounter problems during the food stamp application process. This public-private partnership is a national model that shows how government can work with the non-profit sector to cut red tape and deliver benefits by resolving cases before they escalate to the fair hearing level. Because the mediation model reduces the need for fair hearings, an often lengthy and resource-intensive process, it is saving time and resources both for food stamp applicants and for HRA: a real win-win.¹ More than 70 community-based organizations have been trained in the mediation model to date.

With indicators of need in New York – including poverty, food insecurity and unemployment – remaining entrenched at high levels since the start of the recession, a discussion of hunger in New York City, the topic of today's hearing, could span a broad scope: from the City's progress in connecting low-income New Yorkers to nutrition assistance programs, to the struggles of front-line providers to meet need with diminishing resources. My testimony today will focus on the impact that cuts to federal nutrition assistance programs, particularly food stamps, under consideration by the Super-committee right now could have on low-income New Yorkers already struggling to put food on the table.

¹ All food stamp applicants, including those who avail of mediation, remain entitled to a fair hearing if they choose.

2011: RECOVERY ELUDES LOW-INCOME NEW YORKERS

More than two years have elapsed since the official end of the recession in June 2009, yet more Americans are poor than at any time in the last half century, exposing just how limited and illusory the economic recovery has been. The number of people living in poverty throughout the U.S. increased by 3.3 million people from 42.9 million people (14 percent) in 2009 to 46.2 million (15 percent) in 2010, the largest number in the 52 years for which poverty estimates have been calculated.² This constitutes a nearly 24 percent increase from the 37.3 million people (12.5 percent) living below the poverty level in 2007, before the recession began.

Unsurprisingly, the employment picture is reflective of these conditions. The unemployment rate in the United States, now 9 percent (13.9 million people), almost double (an increase of 81 percent) from 5 percent unemployment (7.7 million people) at the start of the recession in December 2007, has been at or near that rate for more than two years.³ Those out of a job spend approximately ten months, on average, without work – a duration more than doubled (from 16.5 weeks, or approximately four months) since then. An additional 8.8 million U.S. workers are underemployed, nearly twice (an increase of 93 percent) the number (4.5 million) at the start of the recession in December 2007.⁴

Food insecurity, the federal measure that indicates limited or uncertain access to adequate food, remains high. The number of food insecure households in the US, while statistically unchanged between 2009 and 2010, increased from 13 million (11.1 percent) at the start of the recession in 2007 to approximately 17.2 million households (14.5 percent) in 2010 – a 32 percent increase.⁵ State-level data released by the USDA this year show that the recession has caused a sharp increase in food insecurity in New York State.⁶ Throughout New York, the three-year average (2008 to 2010) of the number of households living in food insecurity was 12.9 percent (approximately 980,000 households), up from 12.4 percent (approximately 941,000 households) in the 2007 to 2009 three-year period – a four percent increase.⁷

New York City's circumstances are no better. The city's poverty rate is 20 percent, with 1.6 million New Yorkers living below the federal poverty level (approximately \$18,500 annually for a family of three) – *meaning that one in five New Yorkers earns less than half the income needed to meet basic needs in New York City.*⁸ After eight consecutive months of double-digit unemployment that lasted into early 2010, local unemployment still rests at an uncomfortably high 8.7 percent, or 347,000 people – almost double (an increase of 85 percent) that of the 4.7

² Community Population Survey. (2010). U.S. Census Bureau.

³ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Oct. 2011). U.S. Department of Labor.

⁴ Underemployment is characterized by the number of people who are employed part-time involuntarily due to economic reasons, such as the inability to find a full-time position.

⁵ Nord, M., *et al.* Household Food Security in the United States, 2010. (September 2011). U.S. Department of Agriculture.

⁶ At the state level, sample sizes are smaller than the national data. Therefore, the USDA provides three-year averages on state-level food security data to provide reliable statistics. Sample sizes are too small to produce reliable city-level data.

⁷ Nord, M., *et al.*

⁸ There is broad consensus that the federal poverty level is an outdated calculation that does not adequately reflect need. The poverty measure, developed in 1960, does not take into account the cost of basic necessities such as housing, utilities, clothing or health care. Geographical differences in the cost of living are also not reflected within the measure. Research on basic living expenses conducted by Columbia University's National Center for Children in Poverty shows that families throughout the U.S. need an income of approximately twice (200 percent) the federal poverty level (approximately \$36,600 annually for a family of three), and in New York City 250 percent of the federal poverty level to meet basic needs [*Measuring Income and Poverty in the United States*. National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University. (2007)].

percent unemployment rate (approximately 184,000 people) at the start of the recession in December 2007.⁹

The table below summarizes these indicators:

	Poverty (individuals, in millions)			Unemployment			Food Insecurity (households, in millions)		
	Pre-recession (2007)	2010	Change	Pre-recession (Dec. 2007)	Sept. 2011	Change	Pre-recession*	Most recent**	Change
US	38.1	46.2	24%	7,696,000	13,900,000	81%	13	17.2	32%
NYS	2.6	2.8	8%	448,055	759,000	70%	.76	0.98	29%
NYC	1.5	1.6	1%	183,681	347,000	85%	N/A	N/A	N/A

* US food insecurity pre-recession data reflects 2007 figures. NYS food insecurity pre-recession data reflects 2006-2008 three-year estimate.

** Current US food insecurity data reflects 2010 figures. Current NYS food insecurity data reflects 2008-2010 three-year estimate.

It is therefore no surprise that research conducted by the Food Bank and Marist College Institute for Public Opinion last year showed that 37 percent of New York City residents, 3 million, were experiencing difficulty affording food in 2011, an increase of 48 percent from 2 million (25 percent) in 2003.¹⁰

New York City food stamp (SNAP) enrollment rates increased to incorporate higher numbers of eligible families and individuals falling on hard times; as of September 2011, more than 1.83 million city residents are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program, marking a one-year increase of more than three percent, and a 62 percent increase in enrollment since the start of the recession, when approximately 700,000 fewer New Yorkers were receiving food stamps.¹¹ Today, approximately one in five New York City residents relies on SNAP for food purchases.

Food pantries and soup kitchens across the city are on the front lines of the crisis. In 2009, almost all (93 percent) emergency food sites in the city (food pantries and soup kitchens) witnessed an increase in the number of first-time visitors — and more than one-half saw an increase of more than 25 percent.¹² Despite substantial additional public and private resources to address the impacts of the recession — including an increase in private donations and increases to both emergency food and SNAP benefits in the federal stimulus package, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA)¹³ — many emergency food sites experienced food shortages and were forced to compensate by scaling back services. During 2009, 59 percent of soup kitchens and food pantries ran out of food at some point.¹⁴

⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (September 2011). U.S. Department of Labor.

¹⁰ *NYC Hunger Experience 2010*. Food Bank For New York City.

¹¹ Analysis of SNAP data as reported by HRA.

¹² *NYC Hunger Experience 2009*. Food Bank For New York City.

¹³ ARRA also instituted the Making Work Pay Credit and increased other tax credits important to low-income tax filers, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit).

¹⁴ *NYC Hunger Experience 2009*. Food Bank For New York City.

2012: THREATS TO THE SAFETY NET

Many of the measures that provided a percentage of low- and middle-income households with some relief at the start of the recession were not only intended to be temporary, they have not been sufficient to keep up with need that continues to remain at extraordinary levels. Instead, the upward pressure of high demand has been met by a downward squeeze of diminishing supply. The recession response and recent innovations in service delivery provide real lessons in fighting hunger, but the current legislative and fiscal environment presents real threats to further gains, particularly at the federal level.

Early negotiations on the federal budget this spring broadcast the possibility that the safety net for low-income Americans could be slashed to ribbons: in late April, the House of Representatives passed a federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2012 Budget Resolution that drastically cut funding for programs like Medicaid, food stamps, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and low-income housing. At the same time, reductions in commodities from the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) meant that food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters – the resource of last resort for those struggling to afford food – would be unable to maintain existing levels of service, let alone meet the additional need that reductions in SNAP, WIC and other benefits would clearly create.

While those threats were not realized in the FY 2012 federal budget, deeper threats remain in the current deficit reduction process and the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization.¹⁵ The 12-member Congressional Super-committee has until this Wednesday to create a plan to reduce the federal deficit by at least \$1.2 trillion over the next ten years. Recently, proposals that would seriously harm anti-hunger funding have been sent to the Super-committee for consideration: the leadership of both the House and Senate Agriculture Committees have proposed \$23 billion in cuts to agriculture funding, and \$4.2 billion of those cuts would come from SNAP; the American Farm Bureau Federation sent its own proposal recommending that nutrition programs bear 30 percent of any cuts to agriculture spending. Cuts of this size are not possible without cutting benefits and/or access to programs. Coming from influential sources, either of these proposals could make its way into the Super-committee's plan, and SNAP is especially vulnerable in this process.

Federal Issues

TEFAP: Increasing the supply of emergency food was one of the key measures put in place to address the spike in food poverty at the start of the recession. The Farm Bill's \$100 million increase to TEFAP mandatory funding began to flow through to emergency food organizations around the country late in 2008, but the full impact of the increase was not realized until 2009.¹⁶ In addition, ARRA provided a one-time increase of \$150 million for TEFAP, and for the first time in four years, the amount of discretionary commodities streaming into TEFAP outweighed the entitlement portion of the program. Consequently, the total 2009 TEFAP package for New York City amounted to \$28.5 million, a 118 percent increase from the 2008 TEFAP funding level of \$13 million. Of the overall amount, however, a little less than 40 percent was TEFAP entitlement (a baseline, recurring amount), and the entitlement increase since 2008 was only 24 percent

¹⁵ The Farm Bill, reauthorized by Congress every five years, sets federal policy and funding for SNAP, TEFAP and other federal nutrition programs. The Farm Bill is scheduled for reauthorization in 2012.

¹⁶ TEFAP is comprised of two components: mandatory funding authorized by the Farm Bill every five years; and discretionary funding for commodities purchases triggered by low food prices on commodities markets. This discretionary funding is primarily a market intervention to stabilize commodities prices and therefore fluctuates with little predictability from year to year.

(\$2.2 million). The remainder of the food resulted from a combination of ARRA and discretionary commodities, of which the former was exhausted in 2010 and the latter is unpredictable.

Discretionary funding for commodities purchases dropped in 2011 as a result of strong agricultural markets; there was little need for the federal government to exercise this market intervention and as a result, discretionary federal food purchases have dropped by approximately 30 percent – resulting in an overall reduction to TEFAP of approximately 15 percent.

TEFAP is the single largest source of food within New York City's emergency food network, yet sustained supply at current levels cannot be guaranteed: while Congress voted to increase mandatory TEFAP funding in 2012 to account for food inflation, further reductions in discretionary TEFAP purchases, forecast by strong commodities markets, could more than offset this increase.

- *Recommended Action: Advocate for additional funding for TEFAP to better meet immediate need and oppose any proposal to cut TEFAP funding.*

Conceptually, emergency food is an important component of the work to end food poverty, as it ensures that families have access to immediate assistance while longer-term solutions are put in place. However, emergency food is designed to be a temporary measure, and absent resources being dedicated to long-term, sustainable solutions, emergency food is but a band-aid.

Food Stamps (SNAP): Last week, the Chairs and Ranking Members of the Agriculture Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate jointly proposed to the Super-committee \$23 billion in cuts to agriculture programs, of which \$4.2 billion is slated to come from immediate reductions in SNAP benefits. The technical mechanism for the cut is a restriction on states' ability to coordinate Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and SNAP benefits – forcing low-income families to make the choice of “Heat or Eat.” In New York City alone, approximately 90,000 households in public housing receive this benefit and would lose, on average, more than \$100 per month in food stamp benefits if this cut is approved. This loss will also deprive this City of the economic stimulus that redemption of SNAP benefits provides.¹⁷ Even if the Super-committee does not adopt this proposal, it is likely to resurface in Farm Bill negotiations scheduled to begin after the new year, given that it already has the agreement of the leadership of the committees with jurisdiction in both houses of Congress.

- *Recommended Action: Oppose this and any federal cuts to SNAP benefits.*

State and Local Issues

HPNAP: Budget cuts and deficit reduction measures over recent years have wiped out gains in funding for the New York State Department of Health's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), the State's funding for emergency food. State funding for the program reached a high-water mark in Fiscal Year (FY) 2008, when it was allocated \$33.3 million. The current State budget leaves HPNAP down \$3.6 million from that amount, at a baseline funding level of \$29.7 million, and recent reallocations in HPNAP have left many

¹⁷ Estimates of the multiplier effect for every SNAP dollar redeemed range from \$1.73 to \$1.84 in economic activity.

emergency food providers in New York City with less. Any efforts to balance the State's budget in the coming year must not come at the cost of food for New Yorkers struggling to provide for themselves and their families

- Recommended Action: Advocate for additional funding for HPNAP and fight any proposed cuts to HPNAP and other nutrition assistance supports.

EFAP: New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program, administered by the Human Resources Administration (HRA), is an \$11.7-million program that provides food to approximately 500 New York City food pantries and soup kitchens, and is the second largest single source of food in the emergency food network. Flat-funded for many years, baseline EFAP food funding saw a small increase in the FY 2012 budget, to nearly \$8.4 million from \$8.24 million in FY 2011. While this is an increase of almost two percent, it has not maintained EFAP's buying power, as wholesale food costs have risen nine percent over the past year.¹⁸

The City Council has historically supplemented EFAP funding as part of the food pantries – HRA budget initiative. This was originally an initiative of the General Welfare Committee, and we thank this Committee for its continued support. This funding has allowed the Food Bank to make food purchases, including Kosher foods, lean meats, fruits and vegetables, that supplement foods in otherwise short supply in the emergency food network and that ensure food pantries and soup kitchens can provide nutritionally balanced food packages and meals to their clients. Recognizing that the emergency food supply is failing to adequately meet demand, funding designated for capacity expansion efforts at food pantries and soup kitchens has been used – by agreement with the City Council and HRA – in recent years for food as well.

Because EFAP funding is not designed to keep up with changes in food costs and demand, every year of flat-funding has effectively cut the effectiveness of the program as food poverty has deepened in New York City. We ask for this Committee's support to address this issue this year.

- Recommended Action: Increase funding for EFAP food by \$3 million in FY 2013.

Finger Imaging: Finger imaging for SNAP applicants is a policy that discourages participation and stigmatizes both the program and recipients. It creates a barrier to access for applicants who are able to apply from community-based organizations either electronically via the Paperless Office System (POS), by mail or online through ACCESS NYC. Its merits, if any, are unproven. With annual tracking of finger-imaging activities, as Introduction 696 of 2011 calls for, the costs and effectiveness of the practice will become better known.

- Recommended Action: End finger imaging of SNAP applicants, and pass Introduction 696 of 2011.

Targeted SNAP Outreach Initiatives: This City Council has appreciated the potential for increasing SNAP enrollment by targeting outreach to populations with a high likelihood of eligibility. The Food Bank For New York City has worked with HRA and the City's Department for the Aging (DFTA) to conduct targeted outreach to income-eligible seniors who receive the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE). Similarly, the Food Bank is targeting SNAP enrollment to low-income tax filers who access our free Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) tax

¹⁸ Producer Price Index. Bureau of Labor Statistics, US Department of Labor.

assistance program during tax season. In 2010, we identified one in six tax filers as income-eligible and interested in screening for SNAP benefits.

Without the City Council's support of Food Stamp outreach, prescreening and facilitated enrollment, programs like the Paperless Office System that allows New Yorkers to submit their food stamp applications from community-based organizations throughout the city rather than a food stamp office would not have achieved as great a degree of success. Programs like these streamline the application process both for applicants and HRA staff; as the City continues to face resource shortfalls, initiatives like these are cost-effective ways to extend the reach of the food stamp program and continue to reap the benefits it provides to our local economy.

- Recommended Action: *Expand City Council funding for Food Stamp outreach and education efforts.*

School Meals

In the 2010-2011 school year, more than 800,000 children, or 75 percent of the city's total student population, were enrolled in free or reduced-price school meals, meaning their maximum annual household income was 185 percent of the federal poverty level (approximately \$34,000 for a family of three).¹⁹

School Breakfast: Despite the fact that school breakfast has been free and universal since 2004, breakfast participation has not seen substantial increases; the combination of stigma and inconvenience prevent many children from eating school breakfast as it's traditionally served, in the cafeteria 30 minutes before the start of the school day. Breakfast in the classroom has been proven to substantially increase breakfast participation, but only 333 schools currently participate, and only 32 of those offer it schoolwide.

- Recommended Action: *Support efforts to expand breakfast in the classroom.*

Universal School Meals (Provision 2): As part of the FY 2010 budget, SchoolFood's budget reductions led to the loss of more than 130 schools from a universal school meals program known as Provision 2. FY 2011 saw further cuts to Provision 2 schools. In this economy, budget cuts to free school meals are insensitive to the needs of low-income families.

- Recommended Action: *Stop further cuts to Universal School Meals.*

SUMMARY

Because we are involved in all aspects of ending food poverty – from emergency food and income support, to nutrition education to allow low-income families to achieve a healthy diet long-term and sustainably – we understand that for low-income New Yorkers, measures to combat hunger are really a coherent set of services upon which they need to rely *in combination* in order to put food on the table. For them, it's not a choice between emergency food, SNAP or school meals – it's all of the above. A successful approach to ending food poverty must understand this, and policy and budget choices must reflect this as well.

¹⁹ New York City Department of Education Consolidated Claims Report. June 2011.

Good afternoon. My name is Rev. Ann Kansfield, and I serve as the co-pastor of the Greenpoint Reformed Church in North Brooklyn. When I first came to the church, we often had people come to us in need of assistance, sometimes asking for food. In the summer of 2007, our congregation studied our surrounding community. We learned that Greenpoint had over a 30% poverty rate, and when we called 311 to find out about local food pantries in our zip code, we learned there were none. This discovery led us to start a food pantry, which now provides 500-600 bags of free groceries every Thursday.

Having graduated with honors from Columbia University and having a seminary degree, I didn't think much about what managing a food pantry would involve. But let me assure you, figuring out how to provide food in the face of ever-increasing levels of need takes every bit of my abilities. It also takes an incredible amount of administration and time, not to mention creativity and patience. While various levels of government provide grants that enable us to purchase food, there is next to no funding available to pay for the operational expenses of running a food pantry. In our case, the church provides the pantry with a significant amount of space, most of the utilities, the phone and internet. \$9,000 of my \$22,000 salary is from a discretionary grant from Councilman Levin, the remainder of this is paid through private individual contributions. I am paid as if I was a part-time contractor, but in reality I spend well over 40 hours a week managing the pantry.

In the course of my lifetime, our society has decided that social and poverty-fighting programs worked best by making life more difficult for those in need. This hasn't solved the problem of poverty. In fact, poverty has only gotten worse. One of the main responses to this urgent need has been the growth of a network of soup kitchens and food pantries, most of them affiliated in some way with a faith-based organization. For countless people who live on less and less, we represent the last stop toward economic abyss.

These graphs show how the economic downturn has affected our pantry. The number of people we serve continues to grow, and, thanks to increased funding that was part of the 2008 stimulus package, for much of this growth we received increasing allotments of government funding. But now that the stimulus money has run out and the USDA has cut discretionary funding for TEFAP, we've seen a profound decrease in food over the past six months. The City's EFAP funding has not been able to make up for such a drastic decrease in food. This summer was particularly difficult. We had to turn away literally hundreds of our clients because we had no food to give them. Our pantry's experience is not unique. I have heard from other pantry directors around the city that they had empty shelves, less food and increasing need this summer as well. It is heartbreaking to turn families, seniors, children, homeless individuals, immigrants and the unemployed away, people who have come to rely on us week after week in order to avoid hunger.

On behalf of food pantries and soup kitchens in our City, I would like to ask you to consider the following changes to how our emergency food system operates:

1. Food stamp benefits are a far more efficient way to ensure that no one is hungry in our city. Please find ways to encourage more New Yorkers receive Food Stamps. As a low-income New Yorker myself, I can attest to the miserable service at the HRA office. The long wait times are just the beginning, but often the workers there are rude and come with an unnecessarily supercilious attitude.

2. Please do away with finger imaging. We do not require finger images for corporate executives to receive tax breaks for locating their businesses in our city. Why do we ask poor people who clean their offices to be fingerprinted in order to receive SNAP benefits.

3. Please find a way to fund more of the operational costs, especially the salaries of food pantry managers. And if possible, please find a way to streamline the funding process so that pantry managers can focus on keeping up with meeting demand and not on paperwork. While we are grateful for the discretionary grant, we have spent over 180 hours attempting to fulfill the paperwork needed to receive the check.

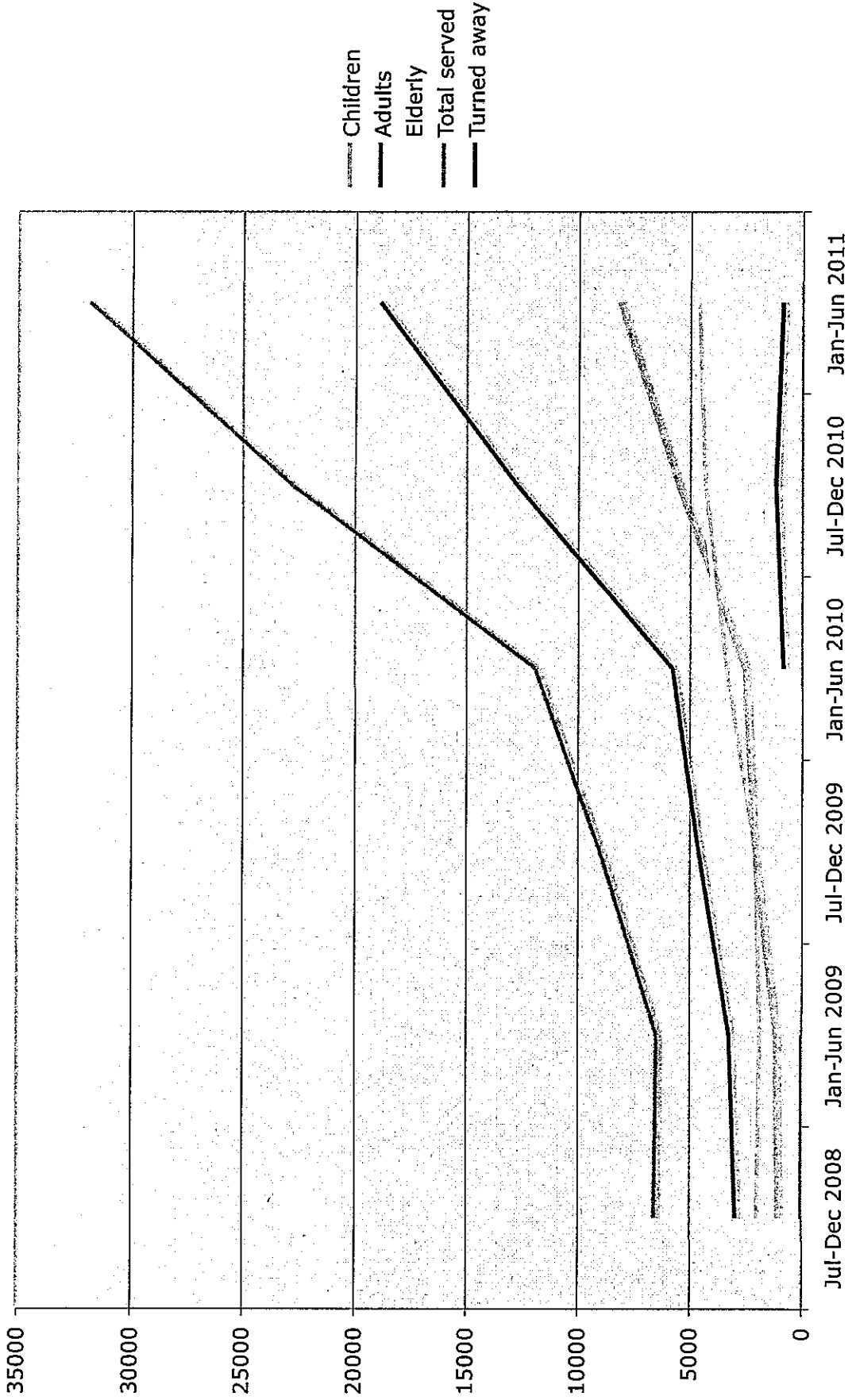
4. Please lobby Congress for an increase in TEFAP funding and to maintain current Food Stamp benefit levels, and in the meantime please increase EFAP funding to make up for the difference.

5. When we receive EFAP funding through the Food Bank, pantries have no choice about the food we receive or the date on which it comes. When we receive City Council funding through the Food Bank, we have a choice of foods and delivery dates. Please consider stipulating that pantries have a choice about what foods we can receive with our EFAP funding and when the deliveries are scheduled.

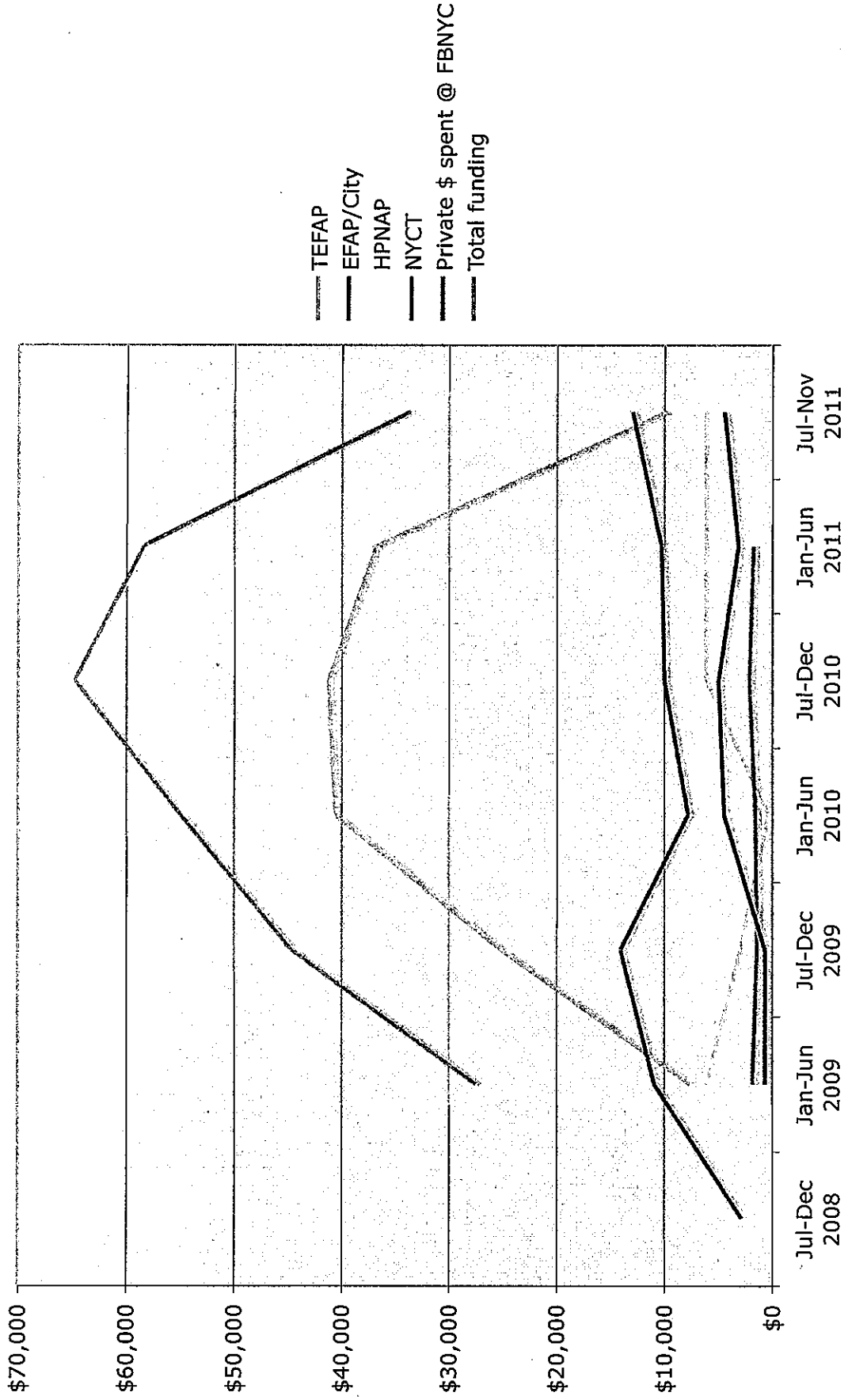
It is in everyone's best interest that all New Yorkers have enough to eat. Hunger leads people to make choices that they otherwise might regret. No one should have to steal in order to get money for food. As a city, we have made significant strides to reduce crime, but the current unemployment and under-employment crisis that has only intensified in the past four years is creating a situation where more and more New Yorkers are being pushed into desperate situations and, I fear, may begin to make more desperate choices.

Rev. Ann M. Kansfield
Greenpoint Reformed Church Food Pantry
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Brooklyn, NY 11222
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Greenpoint Reformed Church Pantry People Served



Greenpoint Reformed Church Food Pantry - Food Funding



	Jul-Dec 2008	Jan-Jun 2009	Jul-Dec 2009	Jan-Jun 2010	Jul-Dec 2010	Jan-Jun 2011	Jul-Nov 2011
TEFAP		\$7,632	\$25,179	\$40,520	\$41,207	\$36,741	\$9,742
EFAP/City	\$2,767	\$10,912	\$14,050	\$7,728	\$9,974	\$10,234	\$12,921
HPNAP		\$6,500	\$3,336	\$764	\$6,500	\$6,500	\$6,500
NYCT		\$1,778	\$1,375	\$1,518	\$2,051	\$1,713	
Private \$ spent @ FBNYC		\$637	\$675	\$4,403	\$4,945	\$3,108	\$4,379
Total funding		\$27,459	\$44,615	\$54,934	\$64,677	\$58,295	\$33,543

	Jul-Dec 2008	Jan-Jun 2009	Jul-Dec 2009	Jan-Jun 2010	Jul-Dec 2010	Jan-Jun 2011	Jul-Oct 2011
Children	1081	1176	2152	2572	5554	8210	4323
Adults	2942	3247	4594	5787	12723	18851	10131
Elderly	2199	2060	2262	3548	4508	4806	2621
Total served	6576	6483	9008	11907	22785	31868	17079
Turned away	0	0		845	1175	865	2300



TESTIMONY

Presented by Doreen Wohl,
Executive Director
West Side Campaign Against Hunger
263 West 86 Street, New York, NY, 10024

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
November 21, 2011

Thank you for holding a hearing on the increasing incidence of hunger in New York City.

West Side Campaign Against Hunger is an emergency food program on the Westside of Manhattan that is set up like a supermarket, where customers select their own food, and functions as a customer cooperative where customers assist in the daily operations of the store.

Over the years since 1970 WSCAH has expanded services. In addition to providing 3 days worth of healthy food a month, WSCAH provides social service counseling, linking families in need with entitlements such as food stamps, health insurance, child care, and legal, financial and employment training resources. WSCAH has eliminated barriers and serves people from all boroughs in New York City

Hunger is increasing.

Since 2008, the number of people coming to WSCAH in need of emergency food has increased by 48%, and it is still increasing. In the last year there is an overall increase of 17%, 19% amongst seniors,, 15% parents with children, and 23% adults without children. In 2008 we saw 6,000 customer a month, we are now seeing 10,000 customers a month.

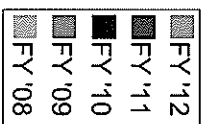
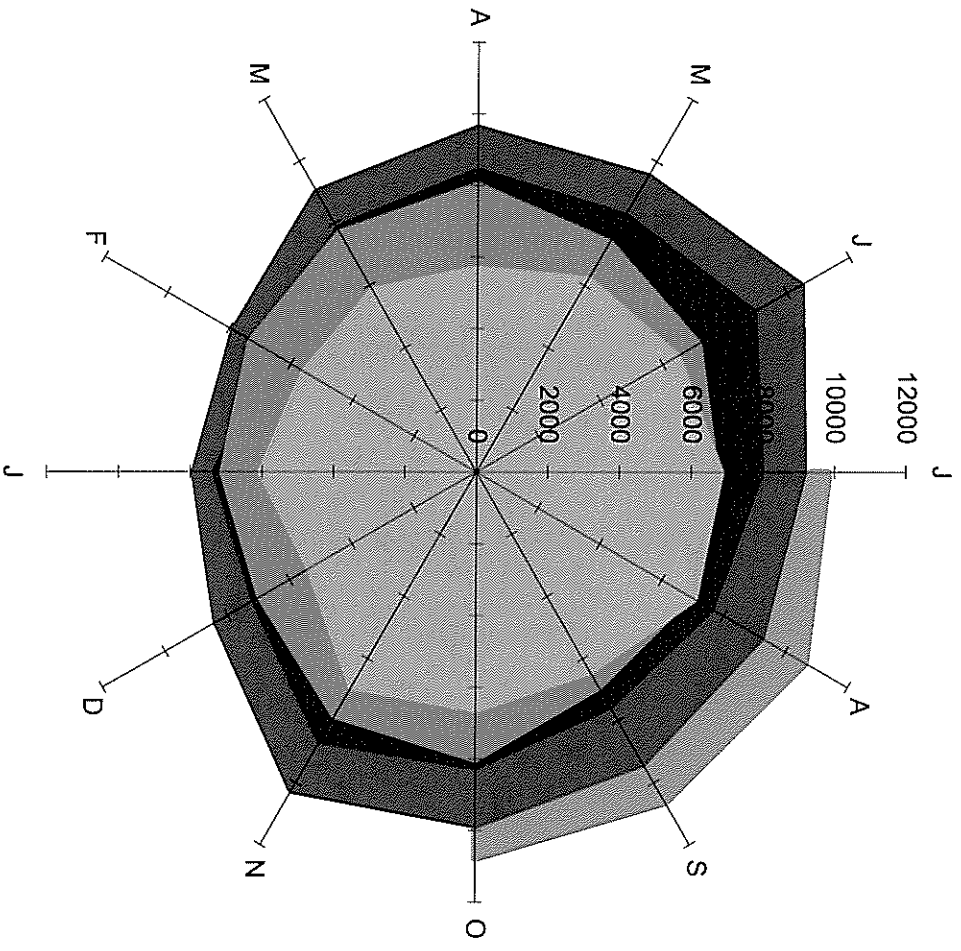
At the same time that hunger is increasing, government funding is diminishing.

The City has the opportunity of reducing government expenditure by eliminating finger imaging of food stamp applicants. New York City and Arizona are the only two locations in the country that persist in finger imaging food stamp applicants. All other areas have found the expense and prejudice toward the poor is not justified.

Finger imaging is an unnecessary expensive and cumbersome process which deters eligible people from applying and gaining the benefits of food stamps.

- **FEAR** - Parents of eligible children are fearful of applying
- **RE-CERTIFICATION** - for food stamps is every 6 months, except for people on fixed income
- **YEARLY** - repeat finger imaging
- **DELAY** - Because finger imaging is done by an outside agency, there is a 2 week delay in integrating results into HRA records. It is regularly 45 days before an applicant receives food stamps, rather than the 30 day requirement, resulting in the loss of benefits.

Persons Per Month at WSCAH by Fiscal Year



West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Fiscal Year, July 2010 to June 2011

Date	House Holds	Person	Meals	New	Total Adults	Single Adults	Parents	Children	Seniors
Jul-10	3,280	9,116	82,044	379	4,734	2,900	1,834	2,963	1,419
Aug-10	3,295	9,205	82,845	377	4,751	2,908	1,843	3,032	1,422
Sep-10	3,323	9,339	84,051	282	4,828	2,900	1,928	3,115	1,396
Oct-10	3,467	9,818	88,362	434	5,089	3,107	1,982	3,259	1,470
Nov-10	3,619	10,225	92,025	411	5,317	3,232	2,085	3,416	1,492
Dec-10	2,886	8,363	75,267	263	4,370	2,614	1,756	2,838	1,155
Jan-11	2,731	7,868	70,812	233	4,334	2,831	1,503	2,328	1,206
Feb-11	2,706	7,863	70,767	235	4,278	2,777	1,501	2,336	1,249
Mar-11	3,147	9,014	81,126	299	4,851	3,133	1,718	2,672	1,491
Apr-11	3,291	9,615	86,535	321	5,128	3,275	1,853	2,896	1,591
May-11	3,278	9,541	85,869	291	5,085	3,243	1,842	2,894	1,562
Jun-11	3,587	10,436	93,924	337	5,494	3,477	2,017	3,225	1,717
Totals FY'11	38,610	110,403	993,627	3,862	58,259	36,397	21,862	34,974	17,170
percent of population	100%	100%				33%	20%	32%	15%

Increase over FY10

10%	17%	17%	-4%	20%	23%	15%	13%	19%
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Totals FY '10

35,147	94,128	847,152	4,014	48,678	29,582	19,096	30,966	14,484
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percent of population

100%	100%				32%	20%	33%	15%
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Jul-09	2,978	7,953	71,577	368	4,010	2,361	1,649	2,744	1,199
% increase	10%	15%	15%	3%	18%	23%	11%	8%	18%
Aug-09	2,895	7,591	68,319	317	3,859	2,306	1,553	2,525	1,207
% increase	14%	21%	21%	19%	23%	26%	19%	20%	18%
Sep-09	2,873	7,523	67,707	310	3,797	2,245	1,552	2,555	1,171
% increase	16%	24%	24%	-9%	27%	29%	24%	22%	19%
Oct-10	3,136	8,207	73,863	425	4,094	2,382	1,712	2,850	1,263
% increase	11%	20%	20%	2%	24%	30%	16%	14%	16%
Nov-09	3,251	8,640	77,760	393	4,330	2,495	1,835	3,079	1,231
% increase	11%	18%	18%	5%	23%	30%	14%	11%	21%
Dec-09	2,641	7,122	64,098	277	3,586	2,045	1,541	2,569	967



MANHATTAN YOUNG DEMOCRATS

MANHATTAN YOUNG DEMOCRATS

Testimony prepared by the **Community and Social Equity committee of the Manhattan Young Democrats**

For the **New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Community Development**

Date: November 21, 2011

Re: Support for Intro. 696

To the members of the committee on General Welfare and the committee on Community Development. We are the Community and Social Equity committee of the Manhattan Young Democrats (MYD). MYD is an all-volunteer organization and the official youth arm of the Democratic Party in New York county. Our mission is to educate and activate young progressives and empower them to create the change they want to see in their neighborhood, borough, state, and country.

The Community and Social Equity committee unequivocally supports intro. 696, requiring that the Human Resources Administration report on the costs and effectiveness of its requirement that food stamp applicants be finger imaged. The practice of taking the finger images of applicants for food stamps is problematic for two reasons.

The first, and perhaps most obvious, is its complete irrelevance in achieving the goal—that of fraud prevention—for which its proponents claim it is necessary. As many other groups have and will point out, even USDA undersecretary Kevin Concannon has called the practice “not cost effective,” and pointed out that simply “matching names with social security numbers...is far less costly... and equally effective.” In fact, in 2007, the year finger imaging requirements were implemented in New York, the city only discovered 37 cases of fraud, out of over 1 million people receiving food stamps in the city. The requirement’s usefulness seems even more dubious when one considers that, with Arizona, New York City is now the only place in the nation to employ the practice, California and Texas having ended their finger imaging programs earlier this year, citing its ineffectiveness.

The second, and perhaps more pressing issue, is finger imaging’s proven record of preventing New York’s most vulnerable families from receiving the assistance they need

to survive. The correlation between finger imaging requirements and low rates of enrollment among eligible families has been well documented. In 2007, the four states that required finger imaging served 20% fewer people than those that did not. For the working poor, this jumps to 30%. In fact, considering how effective finger imaging is at excluding eligible participants with how unnecessary it is for preventing fraud calls the motives of finger imaging's proponents, including Mayor Bloomberg, into question.

With all of this in mind, we firmly support the passage of Intro. 696. Our only complaint is that the bill merely requires the investigation of a practice that has already been so thoroughly discredited. While this bill is perhaps a necessary precursor to definitive action, we will not be satisfied until New York City ends the practice of finger imaging completely. As current and aspiring members of government and the larger civic community, it just seems like good policy. As a youth-based organization operating at the height of a recession that has disproportionately affected employment opportunities for the young, we also feel that it is in the best interest of both our members and our peers.

Sincerely,

Community and Social Equity Committee, Manhattan Young Democrats

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Testimony of

Louise Feld
Policy Associate for Food and Economic Security
Citizens' Committee for Children

Before the
New York City Council
General Welfare Committee

Oversight – Fighting Hunger in New York City

November 21, 2011

Good afternoon. My name is Louise Feld and I am the Policy Associate for Food and Economic Security at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 68-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chair Palma and the members of the General Welfare Committee for holding this hearing today, and for their continued interest in fighting hunger in New York City.

In recent years, a staggering number of New York City's families have faced increased poverty, and a sobering inability to consistently access healthy and affordable foods. According to newly-released U.S. Census data, since 2009 there has been a 7.4 percent increase in the number of New Yorkers who live in poverty, and the City's overall poverty rate is 20.1 percent.¹ Even starker is the City's 30 percent child poverty rate, which has grown an overwhelming 10.8 percent since 2009, and reflects the inclusion of even higher poverty rates in certain neighborhoods and boroughs, such as the Bronx (43 percent) and Brooklyn (34 percent).²

In addition, over 1.8 million New York City residents currently receive food stamp benefits from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program ("SNAP") – a growth of almost 600,000 people since the summer of 2008 – and the number of New York City families, with children, who receive food stamps has doubled since 2007, now standing at about 30 percent.³ With so many New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet and put food on the table, and one out of every three New York City children living in poverty, it is no surprise that soup kitchens and food pantries in all five boroughs have reported a "great" increase in the number of families with children who "used their services."⁴

Low-income New Yorkers face serious barriers in their efforts to access fresh and affordable foods. Besides lacking adequate funds to consistently purchase healthy food, New Yorkers in high-poverty neighborhoods also have a noticeable absence of food retail options at which to shop. This resulting inability to purchase and consume nutritious foods takes both a short- and long-term toll on the overall well-being of New York City's children from low-income families. In the immediate, the inability to reliably access nutritious foods has contributed, in part, to New York City's alarming childhood obesity rates. In New York City public schools' kindergarten through eighth grades, 18 percent of students are overweight and 21 percent are obese,⁵ while almost 11 percent of New York City high school students are obese and over 16 percent are overweight.⁶ Also impacted in the short term are children's academic achievements, because poor nutrition affects cognitive and psychosocial development, and causes illnesses that may result in

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, 2010.

² Id.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, 2010.

⁴ "Hungry New Yorkers Barely Hang On: 2010 Annual Hunger Survey Report." The New York City Coalition Against Hunger, November 2010.

⁵ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (June 2009). Childhood Obesity is a Serious Concern in New York City. *NYC Vital Signs*.

⁶ New York City High School Survey Trend Analysis Report. 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey Results. Available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/epi/srv/epi/srv-yrbdata.shtml>.

increased school absences and decreased ability to focus in class.⁷ With regard to long-term outcomes, it is widely acknowledged that a poor diet can have lifelong health consequences, such as increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

CCC appreciates that Mayor Bloomberg, Speaker Quinn, Chair Palma and the City Council have demonstrated a strong commitment to increasing New Yorkers' access to healthy foods, and improving health outcomes for New York City's children and families. Notably, we are thankful for the successful efforts in recent years to increase SNAP enrollment in New York City and the expansion of SNAP benefit use to New York City's farmers' markets. Further, CCC is appreciative of this year's passage of Council bills to increase procurement of fresh, local foods for schools and other City agencies and to issue an annual report measuring a variety of New York City's food metrics. We are also pleased with the progress made in the fight against food insecurity that has resulted from programs such as Green Carts and FRESH. Finally, we continue to support the many exciting initiatives detailed in Speaker Quinn's FoodWorks plan.

Despite these many laudable advancements, much work remains to be done in order to increase the food security of New York City's poor and working poor families and their children. Childhood obesity and hunger remain significant obstacles to child well-being in NYC. CCC respectfully submits the following proposals to make healthy food more affordable and accessible to all New Yorkers:

1. Protect and Expand School Meals

CCC strongly recommends that the City increase the availability of the Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) program to more New York City public schools. BIC currently exists in at least one classroom in about 330 New York City schools, but is only implemented school-wide in just over 30 schools. Through its in-classroom provision of a free breakfast to all children at the start of the school day, BIC both helps to eliminate the stigma a child may otherwise feel when having to go to the cafeteria to get a free meal before the school day begins, and relieves the hardship caused to parents who would alternatively have had to rush their children to school early in the morning in order to ensure that they received breakfast. BIC therefore results in more children actually eating breakfast, which is critical to children's healthy development and ability to focus in school. Further, studies have shown that students who regularly eat breakfast in their classrooms have better attendance and behavior, as well as improved cognitive function and academic achievement on standardized tests.⁸ In short, BIC increases low-income children's consistent access to needed food, and ultimately has a positive impact on their overall physical well-being and school performance.

⁷ Sell, K., Zlotnik, S., Noonan, K., and Rubin, D. *The Recession and Food Security. The Effect of Recession on Child Well-Being.* November 2010.

⁸ Ortiz, B. (Jan. 2011). "Why Breakfast in the Classroom Should be in Every Classroom." Presented at the conference "What Must New York Do Now to Prevent Obesity? A Symposium of Good Ideas from the Field," New York Academy of Medicine, New York; see also Turque, B. (2009, Nov. 16). Meal program aims to keep kids hungry for learning *Washington Post*; Callaci, D. Breakfast in the Classroom a Hit. Retrievable at <http://www.uff.org/news-stories/breakfast-classroom-hit/>.

CCC also supports the protection and expansion of the Universal School Meals (“USM”) program. In many of our public schools, an eligible child may receive a free meal only after his or her parent fills out an application, which then needs to be properly collected and verified. Some parents have difficulty understanding the necessary application forms. Other parents may not even submit an application for fear that either their immigration status will be revealed, or that their children will be stigmatized for being “poor.” Alternatively, children who attend schools that offer the USM program are automatically provided free lunch, and therefore can more easily access food. Unfortunately, in 2010 the Department of Education announced that the USM program was going to be eliminated from 136 schools. CCC strongly urges a reinstatement of USM in the schools from which it was removed, as well as an increase in the number of schools participating in USM, as it serves as a vital and consistent source of food to school children.

2. Eliminate the Finger-Imaging Requirement for Food Stamp Applicants

We also overwhelmingly support the elimination of the finger-imaging requirement for SNAP applicants. This application requirement, which does not exist in any other New York State local district besides New York City, nor anywhere else in the country besides the State of Arizona, deters at least 30,000 potential eligible from applying for SNAP benefits.⁹ To date, finger imaging has led to the identification of negligible levels of fraud, yet its administration costs the City large amounts of money while resulting in savings only to federal funds – not City dollars. Simultaneously, this practice prevents the influx of federal dollars into New York City that would otherwise result from the increased use of food stamps in local stores and farmers’ markets. As noted in the FoodWorks report, the estimated loss to New York City markets and businesses is \$54.4 million.¹⁰ Given these facts, it is no surprise that the USDA publicly recognized, in March of last year, both the chilling effect that finger imaging has on SNAP applications, and the inefficacy and unnecessary cost of the procedure.¹¹

CCC therefore strongly supports Int. No. 696, introduced in October of this year, which seeks to establish an annual finger imaging report. We look forward to the provision of the data about finger imaging that this bill requires. We anticipate this data will serve to further underscore the above points about the damaging and ineffective nature of this practice.

⁹ This number was the City Council’s own estimate. See Council of the City of New York. “Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Council General Welfare Committee Chair Annabel Palma, Public Advocate Bill De Blasio, New York City Coalition Against Hunger, and Elected Officials Call on Mayor Bloomberg to End Finger Imaging Requirement for Food Stamp Applicants.” (Press release, Oct. 12, 2011). <http://council.nyc.gov/html/releases/101211imaging.shtml>.

¹⁰ “Food Works: A Vision to Improve NYC’s Food System.” New York City Council, Christine C. Quinn, Speaker. November 2010.

¹¹ Hagstrom, J. “USDA Criticizing Food Stamp Application Methods.” *AgWeek*, 8 March 2010.

3. Continue to Explore Ways to Connect Residents of Food Deserts with Food

Many low-income neighborhoods in New York City are considered “food deserts,” meaning residents lack access to nutritious and affordable foods. Traveling on public transportation with small children exacerbates the difficulties these New Yorkers face when attempting to access markets that carry fresh and reasonably priced foods, and that accept SNAP and WIC. CCC therefore supports innovative ideas for connecting New Yorkers in food deserts with healthy and affordable foods.

For example, the New York City Economic Development Corporation, through incentives, could encourage the expansion of supermarket delivery catchment areas to include underserved neighborhoods. Notably, studies show that supermarkets offering free shuttle service to residents of low-income neighborhoods experienced increased sales and an expanded customer base, thereby demonstrating that this proposal would benefit both low-income families and our City’s food retailers.¹² In addition, the City has some experience in shuttle service, as there was a pilot program in which school buses transported the elderly to and from supermarkets during the school day when buses would otherwise sit idle. CCC encourages the establishment of this program for parents who may otherwise have difficulty transporting their infants and toddlers, as well as grocery bags, home from a shopping trip.

Further, the City should continue to support and further develop already existing programs that increase New Yorkers’ access to, and consumption of, healthy and fresh foods. We urge the maximization of Green Cart vendors’ abilities to serve low-income neighborhoods through the continued increase in the number of wireless electronic benefit transfer (EBT) terminals available at Green Carts and the establishment of year-round Green Cart locations in sheltered spaces on public property or at community-based organizations. We also support the further expansion and incentivizing of the use of food programs, such as SNAP and WIC, at New York City farmers’ markets, as well as the continued development of the Healthy Bodegas program.

4. Listen to the Voices of Youth Regarding Food Issues Impacting their Lives and Communities

CCC’s youth program, YouthAction NYC, brings together socio-economically diverse high school students from all five boroughs to inform them about New York City government and policies, and then provides them with skills for advocacy and civic engagement. Youth enter the YouthAction NYC program after completing the YouthAction Community Leadership Course (YCLC), which is a ten-week training designed to give students the tools they need to become youth advocates. YouthAction NYC Members meet weekly after school to research an issue area, and collaboratively design and execute a strategic advocacy campaign around that particular issue. This academic semester, the YouthAction NYC Members have focused their efforts on

¹² Mohan V. & Cassady D. *Supermarket Shuttle Programs; A Feasibility Study for Supermarkets Located in Low-Income, Transit Dependent, Urban Neighborhoods in California*. Center for Advanced Studies in Nutrition and Social Marketing, University of California, Davis, CA, 2002).

hunger, and therefore felt compelled to share their concerns about food insecurity in New York City and their support of Int. No. 696 in a letter to the Council. Given that the youth are in school right now, a letter from the YouthAction students to the City Council is attached.

In conclusion, New York City's low-income and working families are facing ever-growing challenges in their attempts to feed their children the nutritious and affordable meals necessary for healthy growth and development. New York City must ensure that all families are provided with, and can access, nutritious foods so that their children can thrive.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



November 9, 2011

New York City Council General Welfare Committee
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear City Council General Welfare Committee:

We are writing to you on behalf of the Citizens' Committee for Children's (CCC) YouthAction Program, which is comprised of high school students from New York City's public and private schools. CCC is a sixty-eight-year old child advocacy organization that seeks to ensure that every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. Since 1999, YouthAction NYC has introduced aspiring young leaders to civic engagement and advocacy opportunities. YouthAction Members (YAMs) meet once a week after school to analyze social policies, current events, and specific community issues, and to develop policy and budgetary recommendations to improve life in New York City. YAMs conduct advocacy campaigns and meet with elected and appointed officials in Albany and at City Hall.

The recession has caused many people to lose their jobs and face financial hardship. A major concern of ours is the rising number of people in New York City that are hungry. According to the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, 1.4 million New Yorkers live in a home where there isn't always enough food. One in five children live in these types of homes. According to the latest census, there has been a 50 percent increase in the number of families with children that are receiving food stamps since 2007. In addition, there are many soup kitchens and food pantries that do not have enough food to satisfy growing demand. New York City needs to find new ways to address this issue and help New Yorkers in need access food.

YouthAction Members have been working on an anti-hunger campaign by compiling information from different sources and using what we learn to advocate about this issue. For our first project we partnered up with the Yorkville Common Pantry (YCP) to put on a Thanksgiving Food Drive. We will also be volunteering at YCP by serving meals and packing pantry boxes. The most crucial part of our hunger project is to educate the public on how to access food stamps and other food assistance programs through the creation of a public service announcement. Our aim is to distribute the video to organizations that reach large numbers of New Yorkers, especially those who may need food assistance.

Citizens Committee for Children's YouthAction members support Int. No. 696, which requires data collection and reporting on finger imaging of food stamp applicants. We think it is important to gather this information, so that the Mayor and City Council can analyze the efficiency of finger imaging. The city must determine whether this practice is effective in preventing fraud and whether it keeps qualified applicants from receiving benefits. Thank you

for recognizing the need to conduct research on the consequences of finger imaging for food stamps. We look forward to seeing this bill passed into law.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our position on such an important issue, and we urge the City Council to actively seek out the voices of young people by creating opportunities for them to participate in the development of programs related to hunger.

Sincerely,

YouthAction Members
Citizens' Committee for Children
YouthAction NYC

Testimony to NY City Council Regarding Finger Imaging and Food Stamp accessibility

November 21, 2011

Submitted by Anthony Butler, Executive Director, St John's Bread and Life

Good Afternoon, Madam Speaker, and members of the New York City Council. My Name is Anthony Butler and I am the Executive Director of St John's Bread and Life. St John's Bread and Life is an emergency food provider and social service agency that is located in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. Last year we provided over 500,000 meals to the hungry in the community and assisted over 25,000 with services including medical, legal, and immigration, and housing, pre-vocational and on-site food stamp application. This on site food application allowed us last year to assist over 1500 food stamp applicants and assisted in returning \$3,000,000 in Food stamp benefits to the community. We are able to assist our guests in a safe secure dignified environment and complete the entire process, with the exception of fingering imaging. I want to take a moment to commend the New York City Human Resource Administration of their partnering with us over this initiative. HRA has been responsive and helpful over the last several years regarding the implementation and delivery of this program. This brings me to the issue of the use of finger imaging as part of the food stamp application process. I would see three reasons why finger imaging should no longer be mandatory for food stamp application project. One it is not an effective anti-fraud device: statistical evidence along with very low national usage of this anti-fraud strategy points that this is not an effective stratagem to ensure the proper stewardship of these funds. Second it is a barrier that reduces participation in the food stamp program. This denies hungry New Yorkers much needed access to food. It also reduces the amount of already procured federal resource moving into New York City. It behooves New York City to not have hungry New Yorkers. Hunger in 2010 caused, statewide 9.2 billion dollars in increased education and health related costs (Progress America). It also reduced the amount of rightfully allocated tax funded dollars returning to New York City. In 2010 some \$750,000,000 of Food stamp monies that should have come to New Yours City, stayed in Washington. This finger imaging barrier surely added to this. Third, there is the question of dignity, to illustrate this I would like to relate a story:

Approximately four years ago my wife had to stop working because of a debilitating back condition that required two surgeries and insertion of rods. This condition subsequently made it impossible for her to work and as such she applied for disability. To begin the process she filled out an on-line application. Social Security subsequently sent her an email that gave the choice of 7 different times for a phone interview. She completed the phone interview and was informed that a decision would be made on her claim within 45 days. During this entire process the Social Security agency was respectful, thoughtful and competent. Approximately one month later, an unexpected payment appeared in our bank account. The next day, a result of the slowness of the US Postal Service, we discovered she had been approved for Disability.

This made me wonder how, a government agency, one no less committed to rooting out fraud, and one that distributed significantly far greater sums of monies, could deliver its services in such a dignified way. Yet New York City Food Stamps uses a device that is used to detect, prosecute and track criminals,

namely finger imaging. It is wrong, that solely because of the type of entitlement and who is the traditional recipient of an entitlement that different assumptions are made regarding the risk of fraud and the means by which it is detected. Simply because one is poor and hungry and cannot afford to feed one's family does not mean that they can be trusted less than a middle class woman. Simply because one is poor it is no excuse to use a means that reeks of implied criminality to determine eligibility. A civic society is founded on the rights and responsibilities of its citizens. Its citizenry deserves and demands that it be treated equally and without prejudice as it applies for appropriate services of government. In these times of great hunger, with 1 in 5 New Yorkers using emergency food resources, 1 in 4 veterans using emergency food, I urge the Council to remove this undignified, inefficient, and insulting use of finger imaging for those who apply for food stamps. As citizens of this great city we are all entitled to the same respect. Thank you

**Testimony of Carmine Rivetti, Associate Vice President, Income
United Way of New York City**

**Before New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Hearing on Hunger in New York City
and on Int. No. 696**

November 21, 2011

Introduction and Overview

Good afternoon, I'm Carmine Rivetti, Associate Vice President of Income at United Way of New York City. I want to thank the City Council for holding this hearing and applaud your continued efforts to address hunger in New York City.

Today, 1 in 4 New Yorkers do not have enough income and earnings to pay for basic necessities. United Way is working everyday to change this reality. We're fighting poverty by working to make sure low-income people get the support services they need right now, while simultaneously driving real, system-wide change in our community.

We focus on education, income stability and health—the building blocks of a good life. Because the nonprofit sector plays such a critical role in the delivery of health and human services across New York City, we also work to build the capacity of local nonprofits to enable them to deliver the highest-quality services possible.

2011 Hunger State: The State of Hunger in New York City

Through the years, United Way has played a key role in fighting hunger in New York City. By working with government, local health and human service agencies, we are able to connect families to hot meals, fresh and locally-sourced produce, shelter, and, public income supports. In the past year alone, United Way of New York City has:

- **Empowered over 500 local community partners** (soup kitchens, pantries and shelters) through funding and program support to provide meals and facilitate distribution of bags of fresh food and produce.
- HPNAP funded pantries and kitchens use **over 20 percent** of their support exclusively on the purchase and provision of fresh and healthy produce—**twice as high** as the relevant state mandate.
- **Connected households in need to \$1.3 million** in rent, mortgage and utility subsidies to stave off homelessness and household volatility.

- **Prescreened over 34,000 and enrolled nearly 11,000 households** in food stamp benefits accounting for approximately **\$39.6 million in benefits** and roughly **\$62.1 million in local economic activity**.

Sensing a growing urgency in the state of hunger in New York, this past October United Way completed a survey of 700 New York City adults -- using a Random Digital Dialing method -- to evaluate New Yorkers' attitudes about and direct experiences with hunger in a year where the effects of the recession have hit lower-income households even harder. The results were staggering: nearly two in every three (67%) New Yorkers said they were concerned that someone they know will need help paying for and getting food in the next twelve months. Though the issue spans across ethnic lines, the survey illustrates that the problem of hunger is of more concern amongst non-white households. Specific concerns raised by our 2011 Hunger Survey include the following:

1. **Hunger has Gotten Worse:** A substantial number of New Yorkers (84%) view hunger and poverty as an issue right next to jobs and unemployment. Despite significant efforts made by the City and local authorities to address hunger, 62 percent feel that too little progress has been made regarding hunger over the past several years.
2. **Access to Healthy Options:** Nearly two-thirds of adults in neighborhoods with higher rates of obesity and diabetes, reported limited access to stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. Two in five report "near to none" access to affordable, nutritious healthy food.
3. **Families are Hardest Hit:** New Yorkers rightfully assume that the folks visiting pantries are not those of "yesteryear"; hard-working families with children, seniors and working adults who can't afford food are meeting their hunger with pantry support.
4. **The Bottom Third are Most Vulnerable:** Those earning household incomes below \$25,000 are most vulnerable, citing that the issue of hunger (59%) is one of their major concerns.
5. **The Economics of it all:** Thirty-six percent of New Yorkers report that they've had difficulty affording food or groceries in the past 12 months. That often means they've had to make difficult decisions between necessities as a whole: paying rent, clothing their children, medical expenses and keeping up with their utilities.

United Way's Efforts to Combating Hunger and Insecurity

During these difficult economic times, United Way has pushed hard to develop and implement programs designed to help the working poor learn about available help, access available community resources to help stave off hunger, and connect to public benefits that change the household equation on poverty.

On the awareness front, in February 2011, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded United Way of New York City \$2 million to promote Hunger-Free Communities. With the grant, United Way is leading the Hunger-Free Communities Consortium, a partnership of leading nonprofit

and governmental anti-hunger, nutrition, and aging organizations working to significantly reduce hunger and improve nutrition throughout the city. Honing in on support for working families, senior citizens and children, the Consortium is unifying hunger and nutrition work under a common marketing platform. We will be ramping up outreach efforts in the short-term to build greater awareness around benefits available to combat hunger (WIC, food stamps, etc.) and also efforts to address childhood hunger through a “Breakfast in the Classroom” policy push.

In addition to its Hunger-Free Communities Consortium, United Way through its Food Card Access Project (FCAP) addresses outreach, access and enrollment all at the same time. In partnership with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the Human Resource Administration, Food Bank for New York City, New York City Coalition Against Hunger and five community-based partners, FCAP places benefits specialists in key outreach centers of communities across the five boroughs, connecting to families in local shopping markets, WIC centers, hospitals, schools and community hubs to educate how food stamps can help families meet their hunger needs, improve their access to nutritious meals and change the financial dynamics of their household. Through FCAP, United Way, over the past eight years has helped more than 100,000 families all across the city gain access to the food stamp benefits and stave off hunger.

Our efforts to connect more and more New Yorkers to food stamps coincides with an unprecedented rise in the number of New Yorkers enrolled in the program. Since Mayor Bloomberg took office in 2002, food stamps enrollment has more than doubled. In November 2010, it was projected that 1.8 million individuals living in New York City receive benefits, 182,000 more recipients or an 11.4 percent increase since October 2009. Collaboration between NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (ODTA) has resulted in new processes to administer the Food Stamp program more efficiently. These improvements include:

- The creation of MyBenefits, ACCESSNYC and the Paperless Office System (POS) that allow for electronic application submission, fax and mail-in procedures for initial and recertification of food stamps.
- Reassignment of staff duties and operations to centralize processing departments (change centers) to address growing volume for interviews and recertification.
- Shifting in-person interview practices to also include phone interviews to better accommodate working families.

These improvements have undoubtedly increased the numbers of applications initiated. Since the beginning of the recession in December 2007, food stamps participation in New York City has increased by 61 percent, from 1.1 million to 1.8 million residents (approximately one million households) in April 2011. In addition, 44 greenmarkets throughout New York City now accept Food Stamps, connecting low-income households to fresh and local produce. UWNYP applauds the City’s and State’s past and ongoing efforts to improving the way families access food stamp benefits—and other public supports.

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), also administered locally by United Way, provides support to low-income New Yorkers on an emergency basis to prevent hunger, preserve housing, provide shelter, and support their basic energy needs. This past year, EFSP supported 234 soup kitchens, food pantries, and shelters that, in turn, served one million meals and distributed 1.5 million bags of food. Recently EFSP suffered a 40 percent cut creating greater limitations on the extent to which United Way and EFSP can support families in states of hunger and poverty. Regardless, program staff and community partners continue to stretch every dollar to serve hot meals, provide families with nutritious pantry bags and provide rent, mortgage and utility subsidies.

Finally, our efforts around hunger come full circle with United Way's Hunger Prevention Nutrition and Assistance Program (HPNAP) and its Local Produce Link. Since 1984, United Way of New York City has served as the local administrator of HPNAP for the New York State Department of Health. Designed to improve the health status of vulnerable New Yorkers, HPNAP provides support to over 400 pantries and soup kitchens stemming from aid to purchase healthy food, equipment to upgrade soup kitchen facilities and technical assistance to improve service delivery. In ensuring our partners provide heart-healthy options that are rich in key nutrients, United Way and our HPNAP team have also developed Local Produce Link, with Just Food, to connect pantries in low-income communities to area farmers producing locally-grown produce throughout the season. In 2010 alone, Local Produce Link enabled nearly 40 pantries to receive over 208,000 pounds of fresh produce.

How to Turn the Tide on Hunger

Despite our best efforts, many families in our city continue to struggle. From our Hunger Survey we also learned that half of those surveyed want hunger and poverty to be a top priority of government. In fact, one in three New Yorkers said that they hold government accountable for taking action and addressing the state of hunger and poverty in New York. We share this view that government needs to be more engaged and are dismayed by the continued cuts from federal government to programs that would directly address the problem of hunger in our city. United Way of New York City will not only continue to implement programs and allocate needed resources to our partners, but we will move forward with a thoughtful and robust legislative agenda focused on increasing resources from government to help the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Intro 696

Recognizing the multiple barriers faced by the families we serve, United Way of New York City applauds the City Council's efforts to further explore the finger imaging practices related to food stamp enrollment and looks forward to its findings surrounding the program's viability, costs and its impacts upon the enrollment of the working poor. We feel that a thorough review

that considers diverse points of view will help to meet all stakeholder interests and lead to an informed decision regarding the finger imaging practice and its continuation. We implore the Council to make a decision that is in the best interest of the families in New York City who struggle with hunger and poverty daily; every resource brings families closer to addressing their basic needs and achieving household stability.



United Way
of New York City

United Way of New York City 2011 Hunger Survey Executive Summary

United Way of New York City commissioned Global Strategy Group to conduct a telephone survey of 700 New York City adults with oversamples of 100 African-American and 100 Latino adults. The survey was conducted between August 2 and 8, 2011 in both English and Spanish.

The base sample was fielded using an RDD methodology. The oversamples were conducted using targeted RDD sample for high density African-American and Latino census tracts. All interviews were conducted on landline telephones. The margin of error on the overall sample is +/-3.7%. The margin of error is larger at the subgroup level.

Overview

Fully half (50%) of New Yorkers believe hunger and poverty is a major issue facing the city that the Mayor and City should make a top priority to address. But while most New Yorkers perceive hunger to be a real problem facing the city, there are substantial differences in perceptions along racial and socioeconomic lines. Throughout the survey, non-white and lower-income households not only express greater concern about the problem of hunger than their white and higher-income counterparts but are more personally willing to take action to address the issue of hunger than other adults.

For instance, sizeable numbers of New Yorkers have had personal or familial experiences with the issue and a majority worries someone they know will need help getting and paying for food in the next twelve months. But non-college-educated adults, households earning less than \$25,000 annually, and African-Americans and Latinos are significantly more likely to worry that someone they know will have problems affording food than New Yorkers as a whole.

Though New Yorkers acknowledge hunger to be a serious problem for the City, adults believe relatively little progress has been made in recent years to address the issue and that the number of people who go hungry has actually increased. Adults also believe the populations served by food pantries have shifted over the past few years. Whereas they might have seen mostly homeless individuals in line at food pantries a few years ago, New Yorkers rightfully assume these same organizations serve more families with children and working families today.

New Yorkers tend to think that funding for food pantries and soup kitchens comes from private donations, though they believe government – city, state, or federal – should bear the majority of responsibility for funding hunger-prevention efforts. Most adults believe the federal government has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year and support restoring federal funding for New York’s food pantries and soup kitchens.

Detailed Findings

Concern

- **Many New Yorkers believe the issue of hunger and poverty to be a major problem facing New York.** Not surprisingly, the economy – specifically jobs and unemployment (95% net problem, 78% major problem) – tops New Yorkers’ lists of concerns. But a substantial number of New Yorkers – 84% – also view hunger and poverty as a problem facing the City, including half (50%) who consider hunger and poverty to be a major issue facing the City today.
- Bronx residents perceive hunger and poverty to be an even greater problem than residents of other boroughs, though majorities of residents across boroughs still perceive the issue to be a problem. Three in five (60%) of Bronx residents describe hunger and poverty as a major problem facing New York City compared to 44% of Brooklynites, 51% of Manhattanites, and 51% Queens residents.
- African-American and Latino New Yorkers are also more likely to describe hunger and poverty as a major issue facing New York City than their white counterparts. African-American (60% major problem) and Latino adults (64%) are significantly more likely than white adults (40%) to believe hunger and poverty is a major issue in New York City today.
- Lower income households perceive the issue of hunger as being an even greater problem for the City than their higher-income counterparts. Perceptions of hunger as a major problem decline as incomes increase – 59% major problem among New Yorkers with household incomes of \$25,000 or less, 50% among households earning \$25,000 to \$75,000, and 38% among households earning more than \$75,000 annually.
- **Adults are concerned about not just how much food people have to eat, but the quality of that food as well.** Two-thirds (62%) are very concerned to learn that in many low-income neighborhoods where there are higher rates of obesity and diabetes, there are few stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables. Interestingly, concern is highest in Manhattan: 67% of Manhattan residents are very concerned compared to 60% of Bronx, 60% of Brooklyn, and 63% of Queens’s residents.
- **Half of New Yorkers think addressing the issue of hunger and poverty should be a top priority for the Mayor and the City.** Again, adults place even greater emphasis on the need for the City to improve prospects with regards to jobs and unemployment (96% top or high priority, 71% high

priority) and New York City's schools (91%, 65%), but half of New Yorkers want the Mayor to make addressing hunger a top priority as well (85%, 51%).

Progress

- **Relatively few New Yorkers believe significant progress has been made in addressing the issue of hunger here in the City over the past several years.** Only 13% believe major progress has been made, while the bulk of residents believe only some (42%) or a little (20%) progress has been made in addressing hunger. Just as many New Yorkers believe no progress (12%) as believe significant strides have been made. More than one in ten (14%) of New Yorkers just don't know what if any progress has taken place.
- **Adults believe the problem of hunger has grown worse in the past year or two.** Most New Yorkers – more than three in five – would assume that both the number of New Yorkers who go hungry (69%) increased a lot or a little and demand for food assistance at food pantries (63%) has increased in the past year or two. And fully half assume those numbers have increased a lot (49% and 46%, respectively), not just a little.
 - Relatively few New Yorkers believe the number of people who go hungry (5%) or demand at food pantries has decreased (13%) in the last year or two. Another 17% and 15% respectively think the number of those afflicted and demand have stayed the same in the past year or two.
- **New Yorkers rightfully assume the populations served by New York's food pantries has shifted in recent years and that food pantries are serving more families with children, including working families, than ever before.** If they were to walk into a food pantry today, relatively equal numbers of New Yorkers assume they would most likely see families with children (19%), homeless people (16%), non-working adults (14%), seniors (11%), working adults who cannot afford food (6%), or all of the aforementioned groups (24%).
- Conversely, if they were to walk into a food pantry a few years ago, many more New Yorkers would expect to see mostly homeless people (45%) as compared to families with children (13%), seniors (12%), non-working adults (8%), or working adults who cannot afford food (2%). Another 11% would have expected to see all aforementioned groups.

Personal Experiences

- **The problem of hunger hits close to home for a number of New Yorkers who worry that someone they know will have difficulty affording food in the coming year.** Two-thirds of New Yorkers (67%) are concerned that someone they know will need help getting and paying for food in the next twelve months, including 44% who are very concerned about the likelihood of someone they know needing food assistance.
- **Just fewer than two in five New Yorkers have personally struggled to afford food or groceries over the course of the past twelve months.** The most common problem being that individuals have been

forced to buy less healthy foods because they are cheaper than buying fresh foods (38% personal or family experience) or have had difficulty paying for groceries (36% personal or family experience).

- **A sizeable portion of New Yorkers have limited access to healthy foods in their neighborhood.** Two in five (38%) New Yorkers surveyed have limited or no options for affordable, nutritious and healthy food, including low-fat dairy, lean meat, fresh fruits and vegetables in their neighborhood. Three in five (59%) say they have a lot (38%) or some (22%) options for places to get healthy, nutritious food nearby.
- Access to affordable, healthy food differs significantly depending on socioeconomic status and ethnicity. Non-college educated, lower-income, and non-white households report less access to affordable, healthy food than their more upscale and white counterparts:
 - Forty-two percent (42%) of non-college educated adults say they have only a few or no options for affordable, nutritious food in their neighborhood compared to 32% of college-educated adults.
 - Forty-five percent (45%) of African-American and 46% of Latino respondents have little or no options for healthy food locally compared to 26% of white respondents.
 - Half (51%) of households with annual incomes of \$25,000 or less have little to no access to affordable, healthy food locally compared to 42% of households earning \$25,000 to \$75,000 and 24% of households earning \$75,000 plus annually.
- Access to affordable and nutritious food differs markedly by borough as well. Half (50%) of Bronx residents have limited access to healthy food compared to 42% of Brooklyn, 33% of Manhattan, and 34% of Queens' residents. (The sample size is too small in Staten Island to report out results there separately.)

Funding

- **Most New Yorkers assume private donations comprise the majority of funding for New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens but believe government – city, state, or federal – should bear responsibility for supporting emergency food suppliers.** Half of New Yorkers (47%) assume the majority of funding for food pantries and soup kitchens in the City comes from private donations. Roughly one-third think it comes from the federal (9%) or state (11%) or city (11%) government.
- That said, only 18% believe private donors should be responsible for funding emergency food suppliers while the vast majority – 76% – place responsibility with government (37% city government, 35% state government, and 31% federal government).
- **Adults believe the federal government has an obligation to help provide food for those in need.** Four in five (78%) of New Yorkers agree "the federal has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year," including 55% who strongly agree. Another one in five (20%) disagree that the government is obliged to provide for those in need.

- **New Yorkers strongly support restoring federal funding to food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City in light of this year’s funding cuts.** In response to information that the federal government cut funding to New York’s food pantries and soup kitchens by 40% this past year, 80% of New Yorkers support restoring federal funding, including 60% who strongly support restoring federal funding. Only 16% of adults oppose restoring funding and 4% are unsure.

Willingness to Act

- New Yorkers would be personally willing to take a range of actions to address the issue of hunger in New York City, the most likely being signing a petition in favor of restoring federal funding to food pantries (85% net likely, 61% very likely). Two in five would also be very likely to donate money to a charitable organization working to address the issue (77% net likely, 44% very likely), contact their Congressperson asking them to restore federal funding (75%, 42%), or volunteer their time with a charitable organization working to address the issue of hunger (70%, 40%).
- With the exception of donating money to a charitable organization, lower-income and non-white households are more likely to personally take action to address the issue of hunger in New York City than their counterparts:

	Black	Latino	White	<\$25K	\$25-75K	\$75K+
Sign petition to restore federal funding	72%	64%	53%	66%	68%	62%
Donate money to charitable organization	47%	39%	47%	36%	44%	59%
Write letter to elected official	47%	55%	31%	47%	48%	39%
Volunteer time w/ charitable organization	54%	50%	21%	47%	43%	31%
Meet w/ member of Congress	43%	49%	17%	45%	38%	18%
Attend public meeting or rally	38%	51%	10%	37%	36%	19%
Contact the media	33%	42%	13%	35%	31%	17%



1. In general would you say that things in New York City are headed in the right direction or would you say things in New York City are off on the wrong track?

Right direction.....	29%
Wrong track.....	48
VOL: (Neither/mixed).....	14
VOL: (Don't know/Refused).....	8

Now I am going to read you a list of possible problems facing New York City today. For each one I read, I want you to tell me if it is a major problem, somewhat of a problem, a minor problem, or if it is not a problem at all for New Yorkers and their families.

	PROBLEM		NOT PROBLEM		(DK/Ref.)	NET	
	Major	Some	Minor	Not at all		PROBLEM	NOT PROBLEM
• Jobs and unemployment.....	78%	17	3	1	1	95	4
• Access to affordable housing.....	64%	23	7	4	3	87	10
• Education.....	58%	26	7	7	3	83	14
• Hunger and poverty.....	50%	34	11	3	2	84	14
• Taxes.....	47%	32	14	5	2	79	19
• Access to healthcare.....	47%	31	11	8	2	78	20
• Crime.....	42%	38	16	2	2	80	18

For each of the items I just read, please indicate if it should be a top priority, a high but not top priority, not that high a priority, or not a priority at all for the Mayor and the City to address over the next year.

	PRIORITY		NOT PRIORITY		(DK/Ref.)	NET	
	Top	High	Not that	Not at all		PRIORITY	NOT PRIORITY
• Jobs and unemployment.....	71%	24	3	*	1	96	3
• Improving New York City's schools.....	65%	26	4	3	2	91	7
• Increasing access to healthcare.....	54%	33	9	3	1	87	12
• Hunger and poverty.....	51%	34	11	3	1	85	14
• Increasing access to affordable housing.....	50%	34	11	3	2	84	14
• Reducing crime.....	48%	34	16	2	*	82	17
• Holding the line on taxes.....	40%	35	15	8	3	75	22

16. Thinking specifically about the issue of hunger, how much progress has been made over the past several years in addressing the issue of hunger here in New York City?

Major progress.....	13%
Some progress.....	42
Only a little progress.....	20
No real progress at all.....	12
VOL: (Don't know/Refused).....	14
PROGRESS (NET).....	55%
NOT PROGRESS (NET).....	31

17. As far as you know, where does the majority of funding for food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City come from?

Private donations.....	47%
City government.....	11
State government.....	11
Federal government.....	9
Other (SPECIFY).....	2
VOL: (All of the above).....	3
VOL: (None of the above).....	*
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused).....	17
GOVERNMENT (NET).....	31%

18. Who should be responsible for providing funding for New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens?

City government	37%
State government	35
Federal government	31
Private donors	18
Other (SPECIFY).....	2
VOL: (All of the above).....	11
VOL: (None of the above).....	1
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	5
GOVERNMENT (NET)	76%

19. Historically, the federal government has provided funding for food pantries and soup kitchens. This past year, the federal government cut funding to New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens by forty percent. Do you favor or oppose restoring federal funding to New York City's food pantries and soup kitchens? [IF FAVOR/OPPOSE] Is that strongly or somewhat favor/oppose?

Strongly favor	60%
Somewhat favor.....	20
Somewhat oppose.....	7
Strongly oppose.....	9
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	4
FAVOR (NET).....	80%
OPPOSE (NET).....	18

20. Some people have said the federal government has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year. Do you agree or disagree that the federal government has an obligation to help provide for New Yorkers who go hungry every year? [IF AGREE/DISAGREE] Is that strongly or somewhat agree/disagree?

Strongly agree	55%
Somewhat agree	22
Somewhat disagree.....	12
Strongly disagree.....	8
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	2
AGREE (NET)	78%
DISAGREE (NET)	20

21. If you had to guess, how many people go hungry in New York City every day, meaning they eat less or skip meals because they cannot afford 3 meals a day?

Less than 1% of New Yorkers	4%
Less than 5%.....	9
5-10%	22
11-15%	13
16-20%	14
More than 20% of New Yorkers	28
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	11

22. Do you think the number of New Yorkers that go hungry has increased or decreased in the past year or two or has it stayed the same? [IF INCREASED/DECREASED] Has the number of New Yorkers that go hungry increased/decreased a lot or a little?

Increased a lot.....	49%
Increased a little	20
Decreased a little.....	4
Decreased a lot	2
Stayed the same.....	17
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	8
INCREASED (NET).....	69%
DECREASED (NET).....	5

23. Do you think demand for food assistance at food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City has increased or decreased in the past year or two or has it stayed the same? [IF INCREASED/DECREASED] Has demand increased/decreased a lot or a little?

Increased a lot.....	46%
Increased a little	17
Decreased a little.....	7
Decreased a lot	7
Stayed the same.....	15
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	8
INCREASED (NET).....	63%
DECREASED (NET).....	13

24. If you were to go to a food pantry or soup kitchen in New York City today, who would you be most likely to see waiting on line for food?

Families with children	19%
Homeless people.....	16
Non-working or unemployed adults.....	14
Seniors	11
Working adults who cannot afford food.....	6
Teens.....	1
VOL: (All of the above)	24
Other (SPECIFY).....	4
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	4

25. Thinking back a few years ago...If you were to go to a food pantry or soup kitchen in New York City a few years ago, who would you be most likely to see waiting on line for food?

Homeless people	45%
Families with children	13
Seniors	12
Non-working or unemployed adults.....	8
Working adults who cannot afford food.....	2
Teens.....	*
VOL: (All of the above)	11
Other (SPECIFY).....	4
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	6

26. Thinking about the neighborhood in which you live, how many food stores near you sell affordable nutritious and healthy food, including low-fat dairy items, lean meat, fresh fruits and vegetables - a lot, some, only a few, or none at all?

A lot	38%
Some	22
Only a few.....	31
None	8
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	2
SOME OR MORE (NET)	59%
ONLY A FEW OR LESS (NET)	38

27. Some people say that there is no point in increasing access to food for people who need it unless that food is healthy and nutritious. They say we should only provide nutritious meals that include fresh fruits and vegetables at New York City food pantries and soup kitchens.

Only provide nutritious meals	44%
It's more important that we increase access	48
(Neither).....	*
VOL: (Both).....	5
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused)	3

Other people say that while the nutritional content of the food served at New York City food pantries and soup kitchens is important, it's more important that we increase access to food generally, even if some of that food is canned or processed.

Which side do you agree with more?

Now I am going to read you a list of facts about New York City. Please indicate how personally concerned you are about each of the following.

	CONCERNED		NOT CONCERNED		(DK/Ref.)	NET	
	Very	Some	Not too	Not at all		CONCERNED	NOT CONCERNED
• The unemployment rate in New York City was 9 percent in June, 2011.....	74%	22	3	1	*	95	4
• Right now in New York City, 3 million people regularly have difficulty affording food.....	71%	23	3	1	1	95	4
• 1.6 million New Yorkers or almost 20% of New York City residents live below the poverty line.....	69%	25	3	2	1	94	5
• 1.4 million New Yorkers or almost 20% of New York City residents rely on food pantries or soup kitchens to feed themselves and their families.....	67%	26	4	2	1	92	7
• One in six senior citizens relies on a food pantry or soup kitchen to meet their nutritional needs.....	62%	31	3	2	1	93	6
• New Yorkers who live below the poverty line have higher rates of obesity and diabetes, but in many low-income neighborhoods, there are very few stores that sell fresh fruits and vegetables.....	62%	27	6	3	2	89	9

Please tell me whether you would be very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not likely at all to do each of the following to address the issue of hunger in New York City.

	LIKELY		NOT LIKELY		(DK/Ref.)	NET	
	Very	Some	Not too	Not at all		LIKELY	NOT LIKELY
• Sign a petition in favor of restoring federal funding to food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City.....	61%	24	6	8	1	85	14
• Donate money to a charitable organization working to address the issue of hunger.....	44%	33	10	12	1	77	22
• Write a letter, call, or send an email to your Congress person asking them to restore federal funding to emergency food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City.....	42%	33	10	15	1	75	25
• Volunteer your time to a charitable organization working to address the issue of hunger.....	40%	30	13	15	1	70	29

Please tell me whether you would be very likely, somewhat likely, not too likely, or not likely at all to do each of the following to address the issue of hunger in New York City.

	LIKELY		NOT LIKELY		(DK/Ref.)	NET	
	Very	Some	Not too	Not at all		LIKELY	NOT LIKELY
• Meet with your Congress person to ask them to restore federal funding to food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City.....	33%	27	19	19	1	60	38
• Attend a public meeting or rally in support of anti-hunger groups in New York City.....	30%	31	19	19	1	61	38
• Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper or write a blog posting about the issue of hunger in New York City.....	27%	29	19	24	1	56	43

41. How concerned are you that you or someone you know will need help getting and paying for food in the next twelve months?

Very concerned.....	44%
Somewhat concerned.....	24
Not too concerned.....	17
Not concerned at all.....	14
VOL: (Don't Know/Refused).....	2
CONCERNED (NET).....	67%
NOT CONCERNED (NET).....	31

In the past month, have you or a family member...[IF YES] Was that you or a family member or both?

	YES			No	(DK/Ref.)	NET
	You	Family	Both			YES
• Bought less healthy foods because they were cheaper than buying fresh food.....	16%	8	13	60	2	38
• Had difficulty paying for food or groceries.....	15%	9	12	63	1	36
• Chose between paying for food and rent or some other household expense.....	14%	10	9	65	2	33
• Turned to family members or friends for help paying for food or groceries.....	10%	10	4	74	1	24
• Skipped meals or ate less because you could not afford food for three meals a day.....	9%	6	8	76	1	23
• Visited or received food from a food pantry or soup kitchen.....	6%	5	2	86	2	13

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11.21.11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DORREN WELLS

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maggie Dickinson

Address: 163 Russell St. #1, Brooklyn, NY 11222

I represent: Greenpoint Reformed Church Food Pantry

Address: 136 Milton Street, Brooklyn, NY 11222

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicholas Freudenberg

Address: 2180 Third Ave

I represent: City University of NY School of Public Health

Address: 2180 Third Ave NY 10035

▶ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◀

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Cmssr

Address: 180 Waker Street

I represent: HRA / DSS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: TRIADA STAMPAS

Address: _____

I represent: FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

Address: 39 BROADWAY, 10th Floor, NYC 10006

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mark Dubea

Address: 64 Rulter Ave

I represent: Hunger Action Network

Address: 64 Rulter Ave

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 286 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joel Berg

Address: 1 Plaza St West, Brooklyn

I represent: NYC Coalition Against Hunger

Address: 50 Broadway St, NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: REV. ANN KANSFIELD

Address: 136 MILTON ST.

I represent: HUNGRY PEOPLE OF N.Y. AS FED AT

Address: THE GREENPOINT REFORMED CHURCH
FOOD PANTRY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert Doar, Commissioner

Address: 180 Water Street

I represent: HRA / DSS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gary Jenkins, Assistant Deputy Comptroller

Address: 180 Water Street

I represent: HRA IDSS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ahmed Nigam

Address: ~~202~~

I represent: Manhattan Young Democrats

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carmine Rivetti

Address: 2 Park Ave NY NY 10016

I represent: United Way of NYC

Address: 2 Park Avenue, NY NY 10016

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Butler

Address: 479 17 ST Brooklyn

I represent: ST Johns Bread + Life

Address: 795 Lexington Ave Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Louise Feld

Address: _____

I represent: Citizens' Committee for Children

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LORI McNeil

Address: 123 William - Manhattan

I represent: Homelessness Outreach & Prevention Proj.

Address: UJC - Urban Justice Center

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate Mackinnon

Address: 575 8th Ave

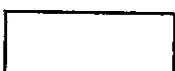
I represent: CITY HARVEST

Address: _____

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card



I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 696 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Butler

Address: 799 Lexington Ave Brooklyn

I represent: ST

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆