

**Testimony of Jill Berry, First Deputy Commissioner  
New York City Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
Oversight, Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City Hearing  
April 3, 2025**

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

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

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

Alongside DSS, our sister agencies and countless community partners serve as part of the safety net to assist food insecure households. Working with colleagues at the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy, as well as a panoply of community stakeholders including neighborhood older adult centers, our houses of worship, and community-based organizations – we work to tackle the challenges food insecurity presents.

The Department of Social Services is responsible for administering programs crucial to uplifting food security. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps approximately 1.8 million New Yorkers access nutritious food, including approximately 550,000 children and 545,000 older adults. The Community Food Connection (CFC) funds more than 700 food pantries and community kitchens across the five boroughs. CFC served more than 21.5 million people (duplicated) in FY25 from July 2024 – December 2024. The CFC model has created added flexibility for providers to distribute the mix of foods that best meet the needs of the communities they serve including fresh produce, Halal certified proteins and Kosher certified foods, among many other options. Formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), CFC received \$57.2M in funding for FY25. From July 2024 through January 2025, CFC has distributed more than 22 million pounds of food.

### **The Federal Landscape**

The federal government is a crucial pillar in advancing the food security of our communities and communities across the country. That is why we continue to monitor developments in Washington DC closely and continue to underscore the importance of the Farm Bill and SNAP. Proposals for federal cuts would have profoundly negative impacts on vulnerable households. The House Plan contemplates eliminating \$230 billion from Agriculture funding, which would severely impact SNAP benefits for New Yorkers. Any reduction to SNAP would have a significant impact on New Yorkers who access our and other essential food security programs. To be clear, neither New York City, nor New York state have the budget capacity to replace crucial federal funding.

We encourage the City Council and all stakeholders to speak out on the importance of these crucial tools for fighting food insecurity. These programs need to be retained and augmented. Instead of a conversation centered on cutting these vital programs, we would like the federal conversation to lift up the lived experiences of these vulnerable households. Moreover, understand the multiplier effect SNAP has in our communities. The US Department of Agriculture has estimated the benefit of every dollar used to assist households with SNAP, finding between an additional positive 80 cents impact to \$1.79 impact on our communities. That multiplier effect supports employment, helps local businesses, including local supermarkets and bodegas, and contributes to a stronger, more resilient economy.

We would also like to draw the Council's attention to a proposal within the Farm Bill that deeply impacts food insecurity in New York communities. The Thrifty Food Plan, is the model used to determine maximum SNAP benefits, from a holistic approach that accounts for fundamentally important factors in determining benefit levels such as food prices, dietary guideline changes, and purchasing habits. The House Plan proposed doing away with the Thrifty Food Plan. Without a Thrifty Food Plan that includes those components, we lose a crucial pathway for regularly updating SNAP benefits; in addition to the annual cost of living adjustment (COLA), the Thrifty Food Plan provides a key avenue for regularly accommodating the real needs of households. Elimination of the Thrifty Food Plan, would result in \$30 billion less in SNAP benefits over 10 years.

We appreciate the Council's partnership in advocating for New York communities and we would like to draw your attention to the timeline of expected federal budgetary action. Foremost on that timeline are the April presidential FY26 budget release, the July House and Senate FY26 appropriations bills release, and the September 30 deadline for Congress to pass FY26 appropriations or a continuing resolution. Your ongoing advocacy is needed to ensure we secure an all-important pillar of protecting New Yorkers' food security.

## **Outreach**

Outreach remains an essential component of our work, upholding our obligation to both make assistance available and make New Yorkers aware that the City serves as a partner in food security. To that end, the DSS Office of Community Outreach (OCO) conducts targeted outreach campaigns to organizations serving specific populations, including older adults, the LGBTQI community, persons with disabilities, and immigrant communities. OCO conducts presentations and attends resource fairs, farmers markets, and other events to increase SNAP awareness and engagement. In addition, DSS works through various channels to educate the public about SNAP benefits to maximize the City's use of available federal programs to increase the purchasing power of low-income New Yorkers.

OCO also provides SNAP trainings and presentations, prescreens potentially eligible applicants, and assists with the SNAP application process. As I mentioned at the start of my testimony: New Yorkers in need of assistance should call 311, visit [foodhelp.nyc.gov](https://foodhelp.nyc.gov) to find nearby food pantries and community kitchens, or reach us through Access HRA or our Benefits Access Centers. New Yorkers can also be connected to a community-based organization (CBO) to get help with SNAP enrollment, as well as other benefits, by calling 311 or visiting the HRA website ("Find a Partner Organization" <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/partners/find-a-partner-organization.page>). In addition, DSS participates in monthly SNAP Task Force meetings, chaired by Food Bank for New York City, to provide updates and answer questions from participating CBOs.

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

## **Legislation**

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

- Introduction 245 (Hudson) proposes a report on the feasibility of creating a universal benefits application for local public benefit programs and directive to develop a universal benefits application as determined feasible by the Commissioner of the Department of

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

- Introduction 1028 (Hudson) proposes that the Commissioner of Social Services create a system to automatically enroll individuals in City-created benefit programs, like Fair Fares NYC.
- Introduction 1148 (Cabán) would require DSS to provide an application receipt to any applicant for benefits or services.

We appreciate the goals of easing the benefits application process, reducing the administrative burden placed on applicants, and offering clarity to applicants as to documentation required in a timely fashion. However, DSS is obligated to adhere to the rubrics set out by State and federal authorities governing applications, enrollment, documentation, and timelines. For instance, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) has been specific about what our website looks like, and what is permissible and impermissible with respect to application submission (e.g. names, addresses, and signatures).

Next, given the multitude of benefits HRA administers, not to mention other city benefits administered by other agencies, it is difficult to see the nexus between those diverse programs, that would create a common application that is streamlined to support efficient application and assessment. Certain programs, such as Medicaid, may require protected health information to be submitted that is protected by state and federal confidentiality protections. Additionally, the federal government closely monitors and protects the use of information submitted in support of a SNAP application. State and federal privacy laws currently bar us from sharing data across agency databases without authorization; those privacy considerations preclude certain protected information from crossing certain boundaries within DSS, let alone aggregating sensitive information about individuals' residence history, income tax payments, or earnings history on the scale required for automatic enrollment.

Lastly, these bills would substantially impact the processes and workflow DSS uses to assess eligibility, process applications, and make a determination on an application. Providing a receipt and copies of documents submitted may seem like a simple request at first glance – to the extent we can, we are providing receipts. For applicants using Access HRA a receipt which shows the date the application was submitted is made available upon submission of the application. For a client who comes in-person and applies for benefits, a receipt is made available upon request. Our goal is to keep clients informed throughout the application process, this includes when possible, making them aware of what documentation is outstanding in Cash Assistance and SNAP applications for instance. In other applications we handle, this receipt and copies mandate is much more complicated, such as for Medicaid applications where a caseworker is conducting a home visit for a client with a medical or mental health condition or disability. The caseworker will not have the ability to print a receipt, nor will they be able to scan and provide copies of submitted



documents while visiting the client in their home. In many cases the documentation would need to be mailed to a client once submitted. There are significant privacy concerns especially as it relates to sending personal health information in the mail; such information could be as varied as Social Security Numbers, lab test results, diagnostic information, notes from health care providers, referral and discharge summaries, prescription details, or information about health conditions. If such documents get in the hands of the wrong person, they could be used for nefarious purposes.

## **Conclusion**

Our work to combat food insecurity, and more broadly as the largest social services agency in the country, would not be possible without the ongoing generosity, partnership, and commitment of countless fellow New Yorkers. Thanks is also due to the tremendously hard-working staff at DSS/HRA/DHS and all across government and our community partners who dedicate their lives to uplifting the most vulnerable. We appreciate the General Welfare Committee and the Council's ongoing contributions and look forward to working in partnership to continue that work.

We also appreciate the opportunity to testify and welcome your questions.

Thank you.

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## OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**ANTONIO REYNOSO**

Brooklyn Borough President

### **City Council Committee on General Welfare Oversight – Hunger and Food Insecurity in NYC April 3, 2025**

Thank you to Chair Ayala and members of the Committee, and to Councilmembers Caban and Hudson for introducing these pieces of legislation. My name is Hannah May-Powers, and I am here to represent ~~Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso~~ in my role as the Health and Safety Policy Analyst.

Our city is in an affordability crisis that affects all aspects of life including housing, food, education, and healthcare. A recent study from Columbia University and Robin Hood found that an astonishing one-in-four New Yorkers cannot afford essential items and services<sup>1</sup>. Addressing the poverty and extreme economic inequities that exist in New York City requires a multifaceted approach; however, there are common sense solutions being proposed today that would alleviate the burden of applying for valuable City benefits:

- **Intro. 0245** seeks to create a universal benefits application that would allow individuals to apply for City benefits in one, centralized application and to codify AccessNYC, an online portal that allows residents to apply directly for benefits such as SNAP and Medicaid renewal. This would save valuable time and resources for individuals in need of assistance.
- **Intro. 1028**, which would create automatic enrollment in City-created benefit programs, is another way to ensure that individuals and families are receiving the support they need while granting the ability to opt out if desired.
- **Intro. 1148** will require the Department of Social Services to provide a receipt for applications submitted or benefits and services. This straightforward action will allow New Yorkers in need of services to keep records of the applications they submitted, making it easier to track and follow up.

Regarding the subject of this oversight hearing, one of Borough President Reynoso's top priorities is to address food insecurity in Brooklyn. There are federal, state, and local programs that provide assistance, such as SNAP, WIC, and Health Bucks, yet approximately 1.2 million, or 14.6%, of New Yorkers were food insecure in 2022.<sup>2</sup> A 2023 report from City Harvest showed that there has been

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Hood | [2025 Annual Report: The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City](#)

a nearly 100% increase in visits to food pantries by NYC families with children compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

The City can and should make efforts to improve SNAP enrollment. As of 2022, around 1.71 million NYC residents received SNAP benefits; however, one-in-four eligible New Yorkers are not enrolled in the program.<sup>3</sup> City agencies should engage in outreach to communities where there is a high rate of SNAP eligibility but lower-than-expected enrollment. Reasons why individuals may not be enrolled in SNAP despite being eligible include confusion regarding the application process, stigma, or a lack of trust in government programs. Codifying AccessNYC will allow for sustained access to the site and allow for New Yorkers to continue assessing their potential eligibility for a wide range of public assistance programs including SNAP.

Poverty is the largest driver of food insecurity; however, we must also do more to improve our food infrastructure. For example, there is an astonishing lack of cold storage at our ports and marine terminals. As a result, perishable food items are often diverted out of the city and then moved back in.<sup>4</sup> For example, produce may be trucked out to Maryland or New Jersey, stored in the cold storage facility, and brought back into the city to sell. This leads to more traffic on our streets and is an ineffective way of transporting food. Instead, the City must invest in cold storage at ports, terminals, and at strategic points within the boroughs to ensure that perishable food is transported safely and efficiently.

Thank you again to the General Welfare Committee for holding this hearing today. Intros. 1148, 0245, and 1028 are simple and logical ways our benefits system can improve and afford more dignity to individuals applying for benefits. We must also look to the broader context of social and economic inequities and improve infrastructure-related deficits to help New Yorkers access fresh and healthy food.

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<sup>2</sup> City Harvest | [The State of Child Hunger in NYC, Spring 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> Office of Evaluation and Research | [A SNAPshot of Enrollment and Participation of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in New York City](#)

<sup>4</sup> La Voce di New York | [New Cold Storage Needed in Red Hook to Improve Quality of Life](#)



April 3, 2025

Dear Chair Ayala and Members of the Committee on General Welfare,

On behalf of the American Heart Association, thank you for the opportunity to provide public testimony about hunger and food insecurity in New York City. My name is Syed Bhuiyan, and I am the Senior Community Impact Director with the American Heart Association.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for adult New Yorkers. A healthy diet and lifestyle are the keys to preventing and managing cardiovascular disease. Unfortunately, too many New Yorkers lack access to healthy foods.

According to the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy, about 1.2 million people in the city didn't have enough food to eat in 2022. The reality is 20% of New Yorkers including many children receive supplemental nutrition assistance program (SNAP) benefits.<sup>i</sup>

The American Heart Association is committed to removing barriers for New Yorkers to access healthier foods. Our Community Impact team has partnered with community organizations... (insert 2-3 sentences on any relevant CI efforts).

The American Heart Association is supportive of increased city funding for Health Bucks, New York City's SNAP incentive program. SNAP incentives, also known as nutrition incentives, have improved access to healthy foods and increased spending on fruits and vegetables.<sup>ii iii iv</sup> Health Bucks are \$2 coupons that can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets. According to the city, there are more than 130 farmers markets across all 5 boroughs during the summer and fall. There are also year around markets in each of the 5 boroughs.<sup>v</sup>

Community and faith-based organizations (CBOs) bridge the gap left by government programs, helping those in need get access to nutritious food. In the New York City budget, the funding for CBOs has remained \$200,000, which isn't enough to meet the growing need. Hundreds of CBOs have applied to provide Health Bucks in their community, but without an increase in funding for the program they are unable to participate and expand access to healthier foods.

It is also important for the City Council to continue to fund access to healthier food initiatives. This includes \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative and \$1.5M for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative in previous budgets.



Once again, on behalf of the American Heart Association thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the importance of addressing hunger and food insecurity in our city.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://council.nyc.gov/data/emergency-food-in-nyc/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20NYC%20Mayor%27s,family%20size%2C%20multiplied%20by%20three.>

<sup>ii</sup> Polacsek M, Moran A, Thorndike AN, et al. A supermarket double-dollar incentive program increases purchases of fresh fruits and vegetables among low-income families with children: The Healthy Double study. *J Nutr Educ Behav.* 2018; 50(3):217-228, doi: 10.1016/j.jneb.2017.09.013

<sup>iii</sup> Mabli J, Ohls J, Dragoset L, Castner L, Santos B. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Measuring the Effect of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Participation on Food Security. August 2013. <https://fns-prod.azureedge.net/sites/default/files/Measuring2013.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Mark Nord, "How much does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program alleviate food insecurity? Evidence from recent programme leavers," *Public Health Nutrition* 15, no. 5 (2012): 811-7.

<sup>v</sup> [www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/health-bucks.page](http://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/health-bucks.page)



# CATHOLIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

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191 Joralemon Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

**Testimony of Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director  
Catholic Community Relations Council  
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Oversight and  
Investigations  
Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, Chair Brewer, and members of the Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Oversight and Investigations. I am Joseph Rosenberg, the Executive Director of Catholic Community Relations Council (“CCRC”) representing the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens on local legislative and political matters.

The focus of this Council Committee hearing on hunger and food insecurity could not be timelier.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York and Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens have been providing shelter, food, and clothing to New Yorkers for more than one century, not just during disasters such as Superstorm Sandy and the COVID 19 pandemic, but on every day of every year. These two charities combined with parishes in both dioceses operate over 80 food pantries throughout the 5 boroughs and serve more than 8 million meals annually.

Both organizations, as well as other nonprofit human service providers, have faced many challenges feeding hungry New Yorkers over the years. Right now, this challenge is at a crisis level due to several factors. These include the increasing poverty rate of New Yorkers, the dramatic increase in rents including the rising percentage of households who are rent burdened and paying over 50% of their income on rent, and even more significantly, the uncertain status of federal programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that provides essential funding to address food insecurity for vulnerable Americans.

Nonprofit human service providers have seen the number of clients at food pantries increase significantly. We are not just assisting more working families, seniors, and children at our pantries. Newer clients include college students, recent college graduates who are either unemployed or underemployed, youth aging out of foster care and new migrants, many of them with infants.

The plight of hungry children is particularly heartbreaking, with more than 1 in 4 children in our City living in poverty. This is why, with more New Yorkers going hungry, we urge that \$20 million in emergency funding for food pantries be included in FY’26 New York City Budget for both Catholic Charities as well as our partners, Met Council, and the Hispanic Federation.

While the skyrocketing increase in food insecurity caused by the pandemic has partially subsided, demand remains extremely elevated from pre-pandemic levels. Spurred on by rapid food inflation pricing, clients, as well as the pantries serving them, have all been negatively impacted financially. (Just one vivid example of the soaring price of food pantry staples is the cost of eggs.) At the same time, the ending of federal monies provided during the pandemic has placed tremendous pressures on funding our food programs.

As a result, we have difficulty providing as much fresh food to clients as in previous years due to these increased costs. With more New Yorkers relying upon our pantries, we are often forced to distribute dry goods and canned and jarred products rather than fresh produce to ensure that clients do not leave empty handed.

Our mission is to serve needy New Yorkers and help stem their hunger, while providing them with the healthiest food options possible. Our city faces daunting challenges but few of us would disagree that one of our most important priorities must be to ensure that the residents of our City, especially the young and the elderly, do not go hungry. We therefore call for your support in including this essential \$20 million emergency food pantry program in the FY'26 City Budget.

Thank you.



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses  
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
Council Member Diana Ayala, Chair**

**Oversight - Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**Submitted by Anita Kwok, Policy Analyst  
April 3, 2025**

Thank you Chair Ayala and Council Members for convening for today's oversight hearing on hunger and food insecurity. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Food insecurity emerged as a top community need at settlement houses during the pandemic, and today, demand for emergency food remains at higher levels than before the pandemic began, particularly given the recent influx of asylum seekers in New York who are grappling with meeting their basic needs. Settlement houses address hunger through benefits enrollment, pantry services, community outreach, and referrals. Still, resources and government support remain sparse. Food is a basic human right and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance.

Our testimony for today's hearing will focus on budget and legislative requests to alleviate food insecurity in New York City and the impact of federal cuts on settlement house programs and community members.

**Address Older Adult Hunger**

The FY26 Preliminary Budget makes no new investments to address high rates of older adult hunger and rising inflation costs, and rather makes additional cuts. In addition to restoring over \$80 million in cuts to NYC Aging – a potentially disastrous fiscal cliff that could result in closing dozens of Older Adult Centers and ending the nutrition services they offer – in the FY 2026 Adopted Budget, the City needs to invest at least an additional \$77.6 million to combat older



adult hunger, focused specifically on the home delivered meals program and congregate meals at older adult centers.

### **Congregate Meals**

Older adult centers (OACs) are crucial supports for older New Yorkers, offering both in-person and virtual activities, congregate meals, and other essential supports. Settlement houses in UNH's network operate 42 standalone OACs and two network OACs, serving tens of thousands of older adults in these centers.

Rising inflation rates have affected senior meals programs, especially food costs for congregate meals. There has not been an increase to the congregate meals budget in years, since at least the last RFP in 2021 which predated a period of abnormally high inflation. Food costs have reached record highs, placing an immense strain on an already chronically underfunded meal program. And this year, despite eggs being a cost-effective source of protein, the food staple has been experiencing shortages and record high costs that are not expected to go down any time soon. Rising food costs have made it increasingly difficult for providers to offer culturally-competent and nutritious meals. Food insecurity remains high among older adults, and anything the City can do to address these needs should be embraced.

The City must ensure inflation costs are included annually in future budgets for congregate meals at OACs. This year, **the City must invest a total of \$57 million in new funding for congregate meals**, which includes restoring the \$7 million PEG cut to congregate older adult center meals from the FY24 Adopted Budget and including at least \$50 million to cover inflation costs. This \$57 million figure is consistent with an analysis of the on-the-ground needs from UNH and our advocacy partners. We are grateful that the Council's FY26 budget response included a \$55 million investment for OACs, which will help address this need.

### **Home Delivered Meals**

Nonprofit home delivered meals (HDM) providers deliver a daily nutritious meal to homebound older adults who are unable to prepare their own food, while also providing case management and regular in-person wellness checks for those at risk of social isolation. Eight UNH members currently provide home delivered meals in their communities, either as lead contractors or subcontractors. The HDM program recently underwent a new procurement that began last fall. Several private vendors were selected to carry out this work for the first time instead of nonprofits, and we are monitoring the impact of this change and whether meal reimbursement rates are appropriate. We deeply appreciate the Council's support over the last few years in securing funding for a higher reimbursement rate for the HDM program. Since 2021, the per-meal reimbursement rate has increased from \$9.58 to \$13.78 per meal. This is a significant and essential improvement.

Older adult hunger is at a crisis level. For many homebound older adults, the HDM program is the only food they are receiving for all of their nutritional needs, and they will stretch the meal to last all day. We need to look toward expanding this system and providing more meals to those who need them. **This can begin by investing \$20.6 million investment to operationalize Council Member Lee's Intro 0770, which requires the City to pay for meals 7 days a week.** Currently, weekend and holiday home delivered meals are provided through a public-private partnership with Citymeals on Wheels. Intro 0770 shifts the responsibility from Citymeals on Wheels to regular home-delivered meal contracts, allowing Citymeals to provide additional meals per day.

Expanding home delivered meals is critical to addressing food insecurity among older adults and ensuring homebound seniors receive nutritious meals.

### **Grab-And-Go Meals**

Grab and go meals were a tremendous innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic, initially serving as an interim solution before the Get Food program was set up and later serving as an option for older adults who were ready to go outside but not to spend time eating indoors in a crowd. We were disappointed to hear NYC Aging ended the grab and go option in 2022, unless providers included grab and go meals in their most recent OAC contracts. Since then, many centers continue to report that grab and go remains a popular option, with some older adults still hesitant to be unmasked and eating congregate meals indoors. Providers report that older adults are still concerned about COVID and this is affecting their utilization numbers for congregate meals. At the same time, food insecurity remains high among older adults, and anything the City can do to address these needs should be embraced. The City must ensure grab and go meals continue to be a viable option at all older adult centers that offer them – and not only those that had the foresight to include grab and go in their contracts.

UNH supports Intro 237 by Council Member Crystal Hudson which would require NYC Aging to establish a grab and go meal program at older adult centers, allowing all OACs the option to provide grab and go meals and have them be counted toward their mandated units. This bill would also require NYC Aging to make available to every participating older adult center a notice that provides information on the grab-and-go meal program and centers to post the notice in a visible location.

### **Food Assistance and Benefits Access**

It is crucial to address issues of hunger, food insecurity, and poverty in New York City. Moreover, the difficulties arising from high levels of inflation and significant increases in housing costs, as well as the influx of asylum seekers, pose an unprecedented challenge to our food system and are further exacerbating the growing poverty and food insecurity crisis for families.

A 2023 survey<sup>1</sup> of more than a 1,000 settlement house families within the UNH network found that food insecurity remains widespread. A third of surveyed parents said that they visited a food bank in the past seven days. Nearly one in four (23 percent) respondents reported that they were “sometimes unable to afford food for their children,” with an additional 10 percent reporting they were “often” or “always” unable to do so.

More recent data from the Census Bureau’s Household Pulse Survey also confirms that insufficient access to food remains an issue for many low-income New York families: nearly a quarter (24 percent) of families in the New York City metro area earning less than \$25,000 a year reported that they did not have enough food in their household within the past week.

Given the deep needs around food insecurity in New York City, we ask the Council to support the following initiative in the FY26 City budget:

### **Increase and baseline funding to \$100 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC)**

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<sup>1</sup> [Settlement House American Rescue Plan \(SHARP\) Wave 2 Report](#)

The Community Food Connection (CFC) program, formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), plays a vital role in CBOs' efforts to combat food insecurity. Through strategic partnerships with local businesses, farmers, and dedicated volunteers, providers have expanded the program's reach and improved the quality and variety of food available to those in need. With an 83% rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, NYC's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain.

Several settlement houses in UNH's network receive this funding. For example, WHEDco's weekly Community Food Pantry serves approximately 65 households per week and approximately 3,400 individuals per year. Overall, providers have emphasized the critical importance of continued or increased CFC food funding to the CBO's ability to address the growing need for emergency food resources in their respective neighborhoods.

The FY25 Adopted Budget restored \$31.9 million for the CFC program, bringing the program level with FY24 funding at \$55.7 million total. However, this was only one-year funding, and the FY26 Preliminary Budget brings total CFC funding down to \$23.8 million.

**The City must restore the previous funding to the CFC and expand it to \$100 million** to sustain and grow the program, allowing providers to effectively allocate resources and keep supporting the growing needs of asylum seekers. This involves securing funding for procuring fresh produce, addressing staffing requirements, and enhancing community outreach efforts. This increase will also address the inefficiencies found in using third-party vendors, particularly in the procurement of kosher and halal items, by allowing for spending flexibility and direct purchasing. This approach not only aims to optimize program funding but also ensures the diverse dietary needs of the community are met more cost-effectively and efficiently. Additionally, we advocate for the provision of technical assistance to facilitate the effective use of funds and the exploration of alternative methods to supplement dietary options.

### **Federal Threats**

UNH members are deeply concerned about the devastating impact of federal funding cuts on settlement house programs and services, including funding streams that have already ceased and others that are at risk.

FEMA Emergency Shelter and Food Program funding has stopped, which has affected community-based organizations' ability to provide food assistance and eviction prevention services. One UNH member, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, has been forced to reduce food pantry days, affecting hundreds of food insecure community members. NMIC's food pantry typically serves 520 community members per month, but rising demand has led to 90 new registrations in March alone. Beyond food assistance, federal threats also significantly increase the risk of families facing eviction. FEMA funds previously used for tenant rental assistance, sometimes required by the city in order to receive a larger rental assistance grant to prevent their eviction, have been paused, forcing NMIC to immediately stop offering this critical service.

Another UNH member, University Settlement, is also contracted with FEMA to get emergency rent, food, and utilities payments to families in need. University Settlement has been offering this service to hundreds of families each year as part of their eviction prevention program, Project Home, a highly regulated program with strict oversight to prevent fraud, waste, and abuse. University Settlement is currently owed \$100,000 for emergency grants distributed to families in

need. Unfortunately, they will now be forced to stop the program until they know they will be paid, leaving families at risk of eviction, homelessness, and hunger.

Participants in UNH members' settlement house programs are just a small portion of the 1.8 million New Yorkers who rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to put food on the table. Of these 1.8 million recipients, one-third are children and another third are seniors. SNAP has been deeply threatened by the federal government, with significant cuts included in the budget framework agreement that passed last month. NYC Department of Social Services Commissioner Molly Wasow Park estimated that SNAP cuts would cost the City \$900 million. Hunger Free America, a food justice advocacy organization, asserts that if anything close to this magnitude of cuts is actually implemented, it would lead to the greatest hunger and food insecurity crisis since the Great Depression.

Federal threats are also discouraging community members from accessing food assistance services by settlement house programs. Reports of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents stationed outside of food pantries from settlement houses have created fear and paranoia, leading to many individuals and families, especially undocumented and mixed-status individuals and families, to avoid seeking food assistance, forcing vulnerable neighbors to choose between their safety and ability to access nutritious meals.

Settlement houses and other community-based organizations were already struggling to meet the growing need for food and housing assistance. These federal cuts and threats don't just affect programs—they harm the children, seniors, and families who rely on them. The City must take action to protect residents by ensuring our local food and rental assistance programs remain fully funded, accessible, and able to meet growing needs.

### **Create a statewide “SNAP4All” program**

At the State level, UNH is advocating to create a “SNAP4All” program, which would utilize state funds to provide food benefits to low-income New Yorkers who are currently ineligible for SNAP due solely to their immigration status. Federal law limits SNAP participation to U.S. citizens and certain lawfully present non-citizens, while roughly 800,000 New Yorkers are excluded from SNAP for no other reason than their immigration status. Every New Yorker deserves the basic human right to food, regardless of their citizenship status. Investing in SNAP4All ensures every New Yorker has the food they urgently need.

The NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council recently [recommended](#) the creation of a state food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status, and several states have recently enacted similar programs, including California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington. SNAP4All is detailed in recently introduced legislation, A.6632 (Assemblymember González-Rojas).

We are grateful that the Council has expressed support for this concept through the passage of Council Member Ayala's Resolution 57 last month, which calls on the state to advance this policy for older adults. We urge the Council to support our ongoing efforts to create a SNAP4All program at the state level.

Thank you for your time. To follow up, you can contact me at [akwok@unhny.org](mailto:akwok@unhny.org).



**Testimony submitted to the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare**

**Oversight Hearing: Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2025**

**Introduction and Thanks:** My name is Eric Lee, and I am the Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America- Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are a local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc (VOA). I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

**About Us:** VOA-GNY is a 129-year-old anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health, and wealth building services. We are one of the largest human services providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through our 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester, and thousands more students living in shelter through our Operation Backpack® initiative. We provide shelter and transitional housing for families and individuals including survivors of domestic violence and are an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, including for senior citizens and veterans.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala and Members of the Committee, for your steadfast commitment to protecting the human services safety net for New Yorkers. Hunger and food insecurity for low-income households is already all too common and only going to get worse.

**Food Insecurity Concerns:**

VOA-GNY is gravely concerned about anticipated federal cuts to the Safety Net Assistance Program (SNAP). **We urge the City Council to use your voice to call on Congress to maintain or increase funding for SNAP, a critical lifeline for low-income households across the city and nation.** Per DSS Commissioner Park, approximately 1.8 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP, with one third of them being children, and another third being older adults, and estimated SNAP cuts could cost the city \$900 million a year<sup>i</sup> if Congress does not change course. At a time when New York City has a 25% poverty rate<sup>ii</sup>, reductions in this critical program, in addition to directly increasing food insecurity for one in four New Yorkers, will have devastating secondary effects, including lower school attendance and academic achievement, worse health outcomes from challenges managing chronic health conditions and lowered nutrition, and reductions in spending/reinvestment in local businesses.



Given the threats to the SNAP program, pantries and other hunger relief programs are going to be more important than ever but even these programs are under threat. **We urge the City Council to use your voice to call on Congress to restore funding for the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), which provides essential food and housing assistance services throughout New York City.** Beginning on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025, FEMA halted Congressionally approved funding for EFSP, an unauthorized withholding of \$3.9 million, which administered through the United Way of NYC, funds ninety-seven community-based organizations in NYC, including VOA-GNY, to provide emergency meals, food pantry items, and eviction prevention services, and other critical resources to keep households stable.

Given these dire cuts to federal resources for feeding programs, we urge the Council and administration to bolster support for local resources to keep New Yorkers fed. **VOA-GNY greatly appreciates the Brooklyn Delegation for its current support of our Food Pantries program, and we kindly request the Council to consider our Bronx Delegation (Ref 187658), Brooklyn Delegation (Ref 181379), and Manhattan Delegation (Ref 187632) FY26 Requests of \$20,000 per borough to further expand this critically needed program.** VOA-GNY utilizes Food Pantries expense funding to stock food pantries within our supportive and affordable housing buildings and shelters in Brooklyn where residents prepare their own food. This supplemental funding plays a vital role in alleviating the financial pressures and stresses of low-income tenants, as well as enhancing our limited DHS shelter food budgets to offer culturally appropriate and nutritious foods for people who cook within our facilities. Our FY26 requests would enable VOA-GNY to further expand our food pantries to more of our sites within Brooklyn, as well as establishing pantries at our sites in the Bronx and Manhattan.

#### Legislative Efforts to Improve Access to Public Benefits:

VOA-GNY is supportive of improving access to public benefits for everyone who qualifies for them and streamlining the overly bureaucratic application and recertification processes to minimize delays and interruptions in benefits. Connecting households to public benefits is core to stabilizing families and individuals to exit shelter as well as remain in their housing. Delays accessing benefits mean people who cannot afford food go hungry, and people who cannot afford rent are stuck in shelter longer or fall further into arrears. Every effort must be made to ensure that people are prioritized above paperwork.

**Int 245:** VOA-GNY is supportive of DSS exploring the feasibility of creating a universal benefits application, as the Department is well-situated to understand the capabilities and limitations of



existing city databases and public benefits technology infrastructure. One flag we have, is that it is not clear to us how “city benefits” is defined based on the cited administrative code of the city of New York, section 21-151 (Training and supervision of housing specialists).

**Int 1028:** VOA-GNY supports streamlining access to public benefits, but we recommend that any enrollment in public benefits must include an opt-in requirement for each adult in the household to affirm that they wish to receive them to avoid inadvertent harm to their personal situation. The step to verify household composition under the current process, in addition to seeking to determine appropriate benefit levels, seeks to understand the individual dynamics of each household to detangle sometimes complicated interpersonal dynamics and larger looming concerns for the household and individual members.

Automatically enrolling all members of a household without manually gaining their consent could hinder or delay individuals from obtaining their own benefits independent of other family members. For example, survivors of domestic violence who are trying to leave their abuser would be unable to open their own benefits case if they or their children are automatically added to the household benefits case of their abuser. Young people seeking to emancipate themselves from their parent/legal guardians, including runaway and homeless youth, would also have a more difficult time obtaining public benefits if they are automatically added to their parents’/legal guardians’ benefits case.

Certain immigrant households may also be eligible to receive benefits but prefer to decline enrollment for concerns related to public charge. Given recent federal enforcement actions against immigrant communities, households may be even less inclined to accept public benefits which they qualify for and are entitled to receive, if there is a possible risk of imperiling their ability to obtain permanent residency status.

**Int 1148:** VOA-GNY strongly endorses this legislation to require DSS to provide receipts for applications for benefits or services. While clients can currently request receipts when going to HRA Centers, it is not a standardized requirement to provide one unless you are using the automated kiosk to upload documents or know they can ask for one when meeting with HRA staff. We have had clients who were denied benefits because HRA maintains they missed an appointment which the client did attend, or for missing documents which the client submitted to HRA multiple times. Having a receipt would help to prove that applicants have done everything necessary to qualify for assistance, when their case falls through the cracks.



The receipt, in addition to a paper print out, should also be automatically uploaded to the applicant's Access HRA account, and capable of being viewable to HRA workers as well as downloadable for the applicant and their case manager. Currently, if applicants lose their paper receipt, they have no way of accessing a copy, which is crucial evidence for a fair hearing.

We recommend that the receipt also includes the name and email address of the HRA caseworker who met with the applicant, to enable more timely follow up on next steps outlined in the receipt and foster additional transparency and accountability.

Thank you, Deputy Speaker Ayala and Members of the General Welfare Committee, for your unwavering leadership protecting the cornerstones of the human services safety net for New Yorkers. In this moment of uncertainty, we must ensure the continued support of all New Yorkers who need assistance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Eric Lee.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [elee@voa-gny.org](mailto:elee@voa-gny.org).

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<sup>i</sup> Ngo, Emily, Coltin, Jeff, and Reisman, Nick. (Feb. 27, 2025) *Standing up in the Adams admin*, Politico Playbook, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/new-york-playbook/2025/02/27/standing-up-in-the-adams-admin-00206390>

<sup>ii</sup> Lily Bushman-Copp, Chloé Cargill, Eunho Cha, Anghelo Chavira-Barrera, Sophie Collyer, Lolita Colon, Qin Gao, Irwin Garfinkel, Janira Gayle, Sofia Giorgianni, Sonia Huq, Yajun Jia, Stephen, Karlya, Anastasia Koutavas, Michael Langburd, Isabel Laus, Helen Leon, Xiaofang Liu, Sally Ma, Fatoumata Magassa, Angie Moran, Max Moran, Kathryn Neckerman, Conner Radke, Olga Rios, Gerardo de la Rosa, Schuyler Ross, Daniel Salgado, Nadia Schwingle, Jingjing Tang, Julien Teitler, Ryan Vinh, Lauren Voss, Jane Waldfogel, Kahlen Washington, Jacob Westjohn, Christopher Wimer, Christopher Year, (Feb. 2025) *Annual Report: The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City Vol. 7*, Robin Hood Foundation, <https://robinhood.org/reports/poverty-tracker-annual-report-vol-7/>





### **Testimony Submitted by**

**Martina Santos, Board Member of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger**

### **For the General Welfare Hearing on the FY26 NYC Budget**

Thank you to General Welfare Committee Chair Diana Ayala for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Martina Santos and I live in the Bronx, New York.

Currently, I attend the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH) food pantry as a customer, volunteer, and board member. I have been visiting WSCAH for over 15 years, where I initially came as a customer because my income was very low, and I couldn't afford to buy food that would take me the whole month. When I first came to WSCAH, I immediately noticed the quality of the food WSCAH distributes to its customers. That day, I went home with a smile, as I brought with me fresh fruits and vegetables, protein, grains, milk, which I was able to choose myself during my visit. The experience of being able to choose food made me feel worthy, as I was able to put aside the stigma of visiting a food pantry.

WSCAH has become a home for me, as almost immediately from my first visit, I became a pantry volunteer.

WSCAH's mission is to alleviate hunger by ensuring that all New Yorkers have dignified access to healthy food selection and support services.

Last year, WSCAH distributed over 6 million pounds of healthy food for its 110,000.

I've had the opportunity to help this work grow.

For example, seven years ago WSCAH had one distribution point and now WSCAH has more than 30 distribution points and is also delivering directly to over 2000 homes. My greatest satisfaction is being able to refer family, neighbors, friends and even strangers to WSCAH because I know they will find not only a wide variety of fresh and healthy foods, but also empathetic treatment from the WSCAH team.

As a WSCAH volunteer, I have been able to feel the sad reality of hunger and need that exists in our city. I am pleased to be able to help, together with WSCAH, so that the tens of thousands of New Yorkers who annually visit WSCAH, do not go to bed hungry. I have witnessed for more than 15 years how WSCAH's work has become indispensable to many in our community, but unfortunately it is a job that requires a lot of effort and financial support.

In Fiscal Year 2024 the budget for [Community Food Connection program](#), which was \$60.1 million, was slated to [drop to \\$25 million](#) in FY 2025. Food Pantries work as part

of a web of services and support, and when one area is cut, all the community feels the pain. Across the city a massive advocacy push in May/June of 2024 pulled the total CFC funding back up to 2024 levels. We spent an inordinate amount of time and energy across the sector to fight shocking proposed cuts and I came before this very committee to testify. Now the Fy26 baseline is only slated to be 20.9 million this coming year. Let's not do this again, we simply have too many hungry friends and neighbors to help feed. The baseline levels are not consistent with the need in our city.

**Lets Ensure All New York City Families Have Access to Healthy, Affordable Food. Increase baseline funding to a total of \$100 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC) Program, formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).**

Please help us to help our community.

Martina Santos  
Board Member  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger

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**TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE  
THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE: OVERSIGHT  
HEARING ON HUNGER AND FOOD INSECURITY  
April 3, 2025**

Good afternoon, Council Member Ayala, Council Member Hudson, Council Member Cabán, and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Naima Dahir, and I am here on behalf of the Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC). AAFSC provides culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed, multi-generational social services to the growing Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Muslim, and South Asian (AMENAMSA) communities across NYC. With locations in all five boroughs and services available in over 30 languages, AAFSC provided comprehensive support to more than 20,000 individuals last year.

The Arab American Family Support Center submits this testimony to the oversight hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City to address the barriers our clients and community members face when applying for public benefits.

At AAFSC, we ensure that immigrant communities and communities of color receive support and services in a culturally competent setting, where our teams understand their backgrounds and speak their languages—removing one of the biggest barriers to care. We provide wraparound services—including domestic violence case management, housing navigation, legal services, and food distribution—ensuring that community members receive holistic support. Our community health and well-being team assists thousands of clients annually in enrolling in public benefits such as SNAP, cash assistance, one-time emergency grants, heating and energy benefits, health insurance, and NYC Cares for individuals who do not qualify through New York State health programs. We conduct proactive outreach, including pre-screening events and application assistance, to ensure clients access the resources and support they need to apply for public benefits.

Our clients face numerous bureaucratic barriers when applying for public benefits. Clients struggle to track their application status and often receive unclear instructions about required documents. They are not provided with receipts confirming document submission, making it difficult to track progress. Many face obstacles such as long wait times—ranging from hours on the phone to entire days for in-person visits to HRA offices—language barriers, and the need to reapply multiple times due to incomplete or lost paperwork.

At HRA offices, our clients endure long lines and language barriers due to limited language access. Clients attempting to schedule interviews or follow up on their applications face further

roadblocks. At times, they are unable to get proper assistance to schedule interviews, run out of time to complete the application process, and must start over. The online application portal does not make things easier. Submitted documents do not always appear in the system, resulting in application denials and the need to restart the process. These inefficiencies create frustration and discourage people from continuing their applications, despite their urgent need for assistance. Our team continuously advocates on their behalf, but the system remains deeply flawed.

Against this already challenging backdrop, recent federal policies have placed immigrant communities in immediate jeopardy by increasing enforcement actions, eliminating protections, and restricting access to critical services. These policies disproportionately impact the Muslim, Arab, Black, and South Asian communities we serve. As a result, many clients and families forgo essential social services, such as food assistance, due to fear of sharing personal information with federal agencies. Trusted organizations like AAFSC have become even more vital in bridging these service gaps. Our clients are relying on us now more than ever during these critical times. At this moment, we are enhancing our outreach efforts to ensure that our clients apply for public services despite fear and barriers.

The inefficiencies of the benefits system take valuable time away from community-based organizations (CBOs) like ours that are already stretched thin. Federal funding freezes and delays have created unprecedented uncertainty for our services and programs. AAFSC alone faces a potential \$1.1 million shortfall amid growing need. Like many CBOs, we lack endowments or reserve funds to bridge these gaps while awaiting federal decisions.

We urge the City Council to take action to alleviate these challenges. Today, we affirm our support for Int. 0245-2024, which establishes a universal benefits application for city programs and codifies Access NY; Int. 1028-2024, which mandates automatic enrollment of eligible individuals in city-created benefit programs; and Int. 1148-2024, which requires the Department of Social Services to provide receipts for benefits applications. These legislative measures are key steps toward addressing the barriers to public benefits access. However, our overall systems remain ineffective, and more must be done to create streamlined, equitable, and individualized processes that support our community members rather than hinder them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



## **Asian American Federation**

### **Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare**

*April 3, 2025*

#### Written Testimony

I want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala for holding this hearing and giving the Asian American Federation (AAF) the opportunity to testify on the issue of hunger and food insecurity in New York City. My name is Andrew Sta. Ana, I am the Interim Co-Executive Director at AAF, representing the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

In 2025, food insecurity for New York's Asian community is at a breaking point. A confluence of catastrophic events has come together—draconian cuts on the federal level, a sharp rise in anti-immigrant policies, community fears of jeopardizing their status because of “public charge” concerns, and, of course, wild shifts in the economy and the prices of food from tariffs, and lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic - have created a perfect storm. In a city where millions of Asian New Yorkers and immigrants call home, these events have created conditions that undermine our community's trust in the systems meant to meet our baseline needs.

In the time I have before you today, I want to provide a picture of poverty for Asian New Yorkers. Despite the model minority stereotype that Asian Americans are wealthy and successful, such incomplete narratives obscure the realities of our community. Indeed, our community holds and lives multiple truths at once. In addition to the dramatic growth in our community comes a drastic need.

- One in six New Yorkers is Asian, and the Asian American community is the fastest-growing demographic in New York City, the state, and the nation, making up 17.3% of the total population, or 1.5 million people.
- From 2010 to 2020, the Asian American population grew by 34.5%, the highest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group in the City. This growth was also the fastest in all five of the City's boroughs.
- One in three Asians in New York City lives in low-income households. Asian New Yorkers were twice as likely to live in poverty compared to white New Yorkers.
- Asian Americans have the highest rates of limited English proficiency in New York City, at 44%, more than any other major racial or ethnic group.
- Nearly one in four Asian Americans did not complete high school, the second-highest percentage of adults without a high school diploma among all major racial or ethnic groups in the city in 2021.

- Asian American older adults are the fastest-growing demographic among New York City's senior population and the second poorest compared to other racial or ethnic groups.
- The number of Asian seniors in New York increased by 68% from 2012 to 2022, and a rise in poverty accompanied this growth.
- Currently, 42% of Asian older adults are low-income, making them among the city's poorest seniors.

What we hear in the community regarding food insecurity is dramatic. Many of our members rely on federal funds to support their community. From food pantries funded under TEFAP (The Emergency Food Assistance Program) and EFSP (Emergency Food and Shelter Program), our communities rely on numerous government sources at all levels to feed their communities. And in this we are hearing from organizations around the city that community members are afraid to access food pantries for fear of ICE, that they are disenrolling from benefits, and that they have fallen victim to their benefits being skimmed due to their compromised cards, and in spaces there there is increased demand, organization have had pull from their limited resources to keep the community fed.

In an environment where our communities are surrounded by misinformation, fear, increasing isolation, fears for the economy, and food insecurity, AAF believes it is more critical to reinforce the CBOs that provide critical services that bridge the community's needs.

Recommendations:

1. Continue funding a network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs that provide alternative food benefits to older adults.
2. Expand funding to include culturally competent, in-language, and older-adult-focused non-traditional mental health service models. This includes prioritizing CBOs with a history of providing free or subsidized nontraditional, culturally competent services for funding opportunities.

At AAF, we know there is no easy answer to this confluence of crises. We understand that the trickle-down of cuts from the federal level to the state and the city is massive and causes deep concern. We applaud your ongoing leadership in continuing to look out for our communities in the most basic ways.

Thank you for your time.





## **Testimony**

### **New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Oversight and Investigation**

**Submitted by:  
Lakisha Morris**

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

**April 3, 2025**

**Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, Chair Brewer and members of the Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Oversight and Investigations,**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Catholic Charities Community Services regarding the challenges we face with food insecurity. My name is Lakisha Morris, and I am the Division Director for the Food and Housing Stability within the Community Outreach Services Division.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York is committed to upholding the dignity of every person, as made in the image of God, by serving the basic needs of the poor, vulnerable, and oppressed—regardless of religion. We collaborate with both Catholic and non-Catholic partners, as well as parishes, to build a compassionate and just society. Through a network of administered, sponsored, and affiliated agencies, Catholic Charities delivers, coordinates, and advocates for high-quality human services and programs that address nearly every human need.

### **Feeding Our Neighbors – Our Reach**

Over the past year, Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) has distributed over 5.8 million meals through our Feeding Our Neighbors program throughout the Bronx and Manhattan. This initiative has served over 58,000 households, supporting more than 650,000 individuals. We operate 27 food programs across New York City and have helped enroll over 2,400 households in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

### **Feeding Our Neighbors – A Growing Problem**

The demand for our services has increased by 25% due to rising food costs, reduced SNAP benefits, and the limited income many households face. With pending cuts to food programs

(such as the DOE, Food Banks, and City Harvest) and further reductions to SNAP, this issue will continue to escalate.

Additionally, we are experiencing a decrease in donations of food. While we continue to receive fresh food from City Harvest and Food Bank, these donations are insufficient to meet the growing needs of the communities we serve. Many of our pantries have seen an increase in new clients, partly due to the arrival of asylum seekers and the skyrocketing cost of food, particularly eggs, meat, dairy, and fresh produce, which have become unaffordable for many. Unfortunately, we are also facing increased costs as an agency, limiting our ability to regularly supply these essential items.

The consequences of these challenges include:

- **Increased Food Insecurity:** Reducing SNAP benefits will leave more individuals and families struggling to afford adequate food, leading to higher rates of hunger and malnutrition, especially among vulnerable groups such as children, seniors, and low-income families.
- **Higher Demand on Emergency Food Services:** As government support dwindles, food pantries, soup kitchens, and other emergency food services will face rising demand, further stretching limited resources.
- **Negative Economic Impact:** Cuts to food assistance will affect local economies, particularly in high-poverty areas, as reduced spending results in lower demand for goods and services.
- **Worsened Health Outcomes:** Inadequate access to nutritious food can lead to chronic health issues such as diabetes and hypertension, particularly among those already experiencing health disparities.
- **Strain on Social Support Systems:** These cuts will place additional pressure on other social services, as families and individuals seek alternative assistance, further burdening already strained resources.

## Feeding Our Neighbors – Our Limitations

Due to a recent hold on the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), a federally funded key resource for our food programs, we will be unable to sustain the same level of support as in previous years. Combined with an increase in individuals seeking support, this will negatively affect the communities we serve.

Additionally, the proposed 58% reduction in the city's Community Food Connection (CFC) program budget—cutting it to just \$20.9 million citywide—compounds the challenges we face. The pause on EFSP funding, along with cuts to CFC, will significantly hinder our ability to provide critical services.



The proposed \$230 billion cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) will exacerbate the growing number of households experiencing food insecurity, leading to poorer health outcomes and an increase in hospitalizations. Overall, the proposed cuts to SNAP would not only make it more difficult for households to meet their basic food needs but also lead to broader economic and health challenges, deepening the struggle for vulnerable populations.

Feeding Our Neighbors has seen a 25% increase in individuals served since last year, but the decline in donations and funding, combined with reduced SNAP assistance, makes it incredibly difficult to maintain our service standards.

## **Feeding Our Neighbors – The Answer**

To address these critical issues, we propose the following actions:

- **Request Funding at the City Level:** We have submitted several applications to the City Council for discretionary funding to support our food programs. With over 1.5 million New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity and an alarming increase in recent years due to the pandemic, inflation, and rising housing costs it is more important than ever that these requests are prioritized. The growing demand for food assistance is evident, with food pantries and meal programs reporting unprecedented numbers of people seeking support. In response, we must ensure that everyone in need has access to vital food services to help address this ongoing crisis. We respectfully request \$20 million to support the food programs.
- **Community Food Connection (CFC):** CFC funding plays a vital role in supporting food pantries and soup kitchens, which are essential in providing meals to individuals and families facing food insecurity. Without this funding, these organizations are unable to meet the increasing demand, leaving many people without access to nutritious food. Baseline funding of \$100 million would provide a substantial boost to food pantries across the city, enabling them to expand their reach and provide more meals. This investment would also help address the pressing need for healthier food options in our communities, contributing to better long-term health outcomes for those in need.

We would greatly appreciate City Council support on advocating for these issues:

- **Increase Funding for SNAP Benefits:** For a household of three, approximately \$287 per week is needed to cover meal expenses. However, current average SNAP benefits for such households range from \$364 to \$536 monthly, depending on income. Increasing SNAP funding is vital to ensure families can consistently meet their nutritional needs.
- **Ensure Stable and Consistent Funding for Food Programs:** Programs like the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and EFSP provide essential support to food programs. However, these programs have faced repeated cuts, undermining their long-term sustainability. Consistent and reliable funding is crucial to maintain the level of support needed by food assistance programs.

- **Enhance Access to Fresh Produce by Funding Nourish NY:** Supporting Nourish NY will allow food programs to offer not just meals, but also fresh, nutritious produce. Access to fresh produce is a luxury in many low-income communities and is vital to addressing health disparities. Additionally, Nourish NY benefits local farmers, which supports the state's economy.
- **Fund the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP):** HPNAP is a key funding source for food pantries and soup kitchens, enabling them to secure the food they need to serve their communities. Without continued funding, many pantries will be forced to turn individuals and families away.
- **Support the Good Food NY Bill:** Many of the communities we serve face significant health disparities. Food programs need to prioritize sourcing healthy food from vendors that support community health, worker well-being, and local economies. The Good Food NY Bill will help ensure that food programs can provide nutritious, sustainable food options that promote long-term health and economic resilience.

**Testimony of Lynnette Brown, Food Resource Coordinator for Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens  
to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Oversight –**

**Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala, Chair Brewer, members of the Committee on General Welfare and members of the City Council. I am Lynnette Brown, Food Resource Coordinator for Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. I have worked within our network of 21 food pantries throughout Brooklyn and Queens since 2023. Before that I was a volunteer at our network pantries, St Benedict the Moor in Jamaica and Our Lady of Mercy in Brownsville. I am happy to be here today as the subject of Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City is close to my heart.

Since the pandemic, many of our pantries have seen an increase in attendance of 1000% or more. Small parish pantries that fed 25-30 people each week started seeing 400-500 clients. Things started to level off in 2021, and while we never went back to pre-pandemic numbers, things became more manageable. By 2023, our network of 21 pantries was feeding an average of 25,000 people a month.

But we have seen a steady increase in the number of people needing food, and it is a diverse population that spans from young adults to the elderly, working families, college students and the under-employed. Our pantries in southern Brooklyn, especially Our Lady of Miracles in Canarsie, have seen an influx of newly arrived Haitians and Ukrainians. We are seeing more and more young people come to us for help. Last year we opened a pantry at Our Lady of Sorrows in Corona. Many of the clients there have families with young children or they are helping support their parents. Our pantries in Long Island City and Woodside, Queens are seeing larger numbers of people than ever before. Since the fall of 2024, we are feeding a total average of 37,000 people a month throughout all of our food pantries in Brooklyn and Queens.

The price of food is rising, and funding is becoming more difficult. As hard as last year was, this year is proving even more difficult. The uncertainty of what lies ahead for the Federal Government has everyone nervous. The price of staples such as eggs, butter, milk, fresh fruit and vegetables has surged. These increases have forced us to change our food distribution. We are not able to provide as much fresh produce to our clients and distribute mostly canned food. People rely on us to help them stretch their dollar and it is discouraging not to get them the healthy fresh food they need. As a client from the St. Patrick Food Pantry in Astoria once said "I am grateful for the food you provide, especially the plantanos. I can't buy them too much anymore."

Please support our continuing efforts to feed hungry New Yorkers by providing \$20 million in emergency food pantry monies in the Fiscal Year 2026 New York City Budget.

Thank you.



March 25, 2025

Good Morning/Afternoon, my name is Arianna Leon I am the Housing Assistant at Central Astoria LDC a nonprofit that has helped Astoria residents since 1979.

We average seeing about 140 clients a month for issues regarding SCRIE, DRIE, SNAP, as well as other issues. Recently the issues we have been experiencing with the SNAP clients is their SNAP renewals are getting lost in the mail, which delays the renewal process. Clients then receive letters from SNAP stating they might lose their benefits if not recertified ASAP. To resolve the issue clients must recertify once again and personally go to the HRA office at 32-30 Northern Blvd to drop off their paperwork. While this usually solves the issue, the stress this causes our clients cannot be ignored. In some more complicated cases their benefits are fully revoked due to the paperwork never being received by SNAP even though the clients have sent it in more than once. This then takes a while to resolve which can lead to clients not getting their monthly SNAP benefits without which they cannot feed themselves and their families.

Sincerely,  
Arianna Leon  
Housing Assistant  
Central Astoria LDC  
718-728-7820

Good afternoon. My name is Pernell S. Brice, III, and I am the Vice President of Policy & Advocacy for Children's Health Fund. I am here today to speak on behalf of the children and families of New York City who are struggling with hunger and food insecurity. As a city of great wealth, it is deeply troubling that so many of our neighbors, particularly our children, go to bed hungry or lack consistent access to nutritious food.

The statistics surrounding hunger in New York City are staggering and unacceptable. According to recent data:

- **1 in 5 New York City children**—approximately **400,000 kids**—are food insecure, meaning they do not have consistent access to enough food for an active, healthy life.
- Nearly **one in four families** with children in New York City experience food insecurity, with rates disproportionately higher among families of color.
- The **poverty rate** in New York City is approximately **18.9%**, but for Black and Latino children, that number is even higher, at **nearly 30%**.
- In a recent survey, **39% of New York City households** reported that they had to reduce food intake or skip meals in the past year due to a lack of resources.
- The **food insecurity rate for children** in the Bronx is as high as **40%**, the highest of any borough in the city, with neighborhoods like the South Bronx facing some of the highest rates of food hardship in the country.

These figures are not just numbers—they represent real children, families, and communities who are facing daily struggles to access basic sustenance. Hunger affects a child's ability to learn, grow, and thrive. Food insecurity is linked to developmental delays, poor academic performance, and long-term health problems. No child should have to worry about where their next meal will come from, especially in a city as prosperous as New York.

As we continue to navigate the challenges brought on by the pandemic, inflation, and rising housing costs, food insecurity has only deepened for many New York families. While the city has made progress with programs like **Community Food Connection (CFC)** and **Community Food Assistance Networks**, these efforts are often insufficient to meet the overwhelming demand.

The need for comprehensive and sustained action to combat hunger is urgent. As policymakers, you have the ability and responsibility to take action to ensure that every New York City child has access to the food they need to grow, learn, and succeed.

I urge the City Council to consider the following steps to help address food insecurity in our city:

1. **Increase funding for food assistance programs:** Programs like **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)** and **Summer Food Service Programs** need more resources to reach families who are struggling. A stronger investment in food banks,



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soup kitchens, and other food distribution networks will ensure that no family is left behind.

2. **Expand access to free school meals for all students:** Despite recent progress in providing free meals to students, we must continue to push for universal free school meals for all public school students in the city. No child should have to experience stigma or embarrassment when receiving meals at school, especially in a city as diverse as New York.
3. **Strengthen support for community-based food systems:** Local organizations and food pantries are critical in the fight against food insecurity. Expanding funding for these groups—many of which operate in neighborhoods with the highest rates of hunger—will ensure that food reaches those who need it most.
4. **Address the root causes of food insecurity:** Hunger is often a symptom of deeper issues like poverty, housing instability, and unemployment. Comprehensive solutions should focus on reducing poverty, increasing affordable housing, and improving access to stable, living-wage jobs.
5. **Encourage public-private partnerships:** We must leverage the strength of the private sector to help solve the food insecurity crisis. Public-private partnerships that provide food donations, meal distribution, and job training can make a real difference in communities.

Hunger and food insecurity are not just issues of charity—they are matters of justice. Every child in New York City deserves to go to bed with a full stomach and the promise of a brighter future. By taking action now, we can help ensure that no child, no family, is left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. And thank you to the New York City Council's continued funding support of the Children's Health Fund

Sincerely,

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



**Testimony of Jenny Veloz, Policy and Advocacy Associate  
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York  
Submitted to the New York City Council  
Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City  
April 3, 2025**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Ayala and all the members of the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's oversight hearing on hunger and food insecurity. To ensure the health and well-being of New York City children, we must make strong and robust investments in food and nutrition supports for all families in the city.

New York leaders must continue to address the widespread hunger crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the State Comptroller's May 2024 report on food insecurity, from 2020-2022, 11.3% of households in New York State experienced food insecurity, an increase from 10.3% during the period of 2019-2021.<sup>i</sup> This same report also highlights that households with children continue to experience the highest rates of food insufficiency when compared to households without children. In 2022, 16 percent of households with children experienced food insufficiency. Although that number decreased to 15.1% in 2023, it was still higher than the 10% of households without children.

With the federal government proposing cuts of up to \$230 million over 10 years for SNAP, households with low incomes in all states would lose vital anti-hunger resources, worsening food insecurity. New York City could lose up to \$870 million a year, affecting families already struggling with expenses such as rent, childcare, transportation and food.<sup>ii</sup> Although these potential cuts will impact households across the five boroughs, children will continue to be disproportionately impacted by SNAP cuts, with 560,000 children in the city receive SNAP.<sup>iii</sup> New York City's economy will also be affected by federal cuts to SNAP, as families will have less purchasing power and more families will be forced to rely on city resources like food pantries.

Anti-hunger programs like Community Food Connections (CFC) are a vital resource for families needing extra help in accessing healthy food options. Food-insecure families rely on food pantries and kitchens when they are unable to afford groceries. Community Food Connection provides funding to over 500 pantries and soup kitchens to help New Yorkers access food. Funding for programs like CFC is critical to combat food insecurity in New York City.



It is imperative that New York City continue to fund and invest in programs that are vital to the health and well-being of families and children. These food initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring families have the food and nutrition supports needed to thrive. Therefore we recommend the following investments in the CFY26 Budget to help fight food insecurity:

- **Increase funding for Community Food Connection program to \$100 million and baseline that funding.** This funding will meet the growing demand for food assistance across New York City, including enhanced access to fresh food.
- **Increase funding for free Health Bucks.** Health Bucks, managed by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, are \$2 coupons that can be used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables at New York City farmers markets, and are given to shoppers as a SNAP incentive. The current funding level for community and faith-based organizations has remained static at \$200,000 for several years, which is no longer sufficient to meet growing demand.
- **Create a \$5 million Food Justice Fund** for community-led projects designed to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities, aimed at addressing food insecurity and promoting a more equitable sustainable food system by distributing funds to community projects tackling these issues.

We also urge city leaders to continue funding the following City Council initiatives:

- \$8.26 million for Food Pantry
- \$2.134 for Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition Education
- \$1.5 million for Food Access and Benefits

Additionally, we recognize the importance of having reliable systems in place to ensure that anyone applying for benefits programs, such as SNAP, can do so efficiently and without cumbersome protocols. Therefore, we support the following City Council bills:

- **Introduction 245:** Would establish a universal benefits application.
- **Introduction 1028:** Would result in automatic enrollment in city-created benefit programs. We recommend bill language be modified to enable enrollees to opt-in to other programs. Opting in allows enrollees to determine whether they want to apply to programs without the worry of potential harm.
- **Introduction 1148:** Would require the Department of Social Services to provide a receipt for benefit applications or services.





Thank you for your time and consideration on this critical issue for children's health and well-being. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council and Administration to make sure that all New York City families and children have access to the nutritional supports they need and deserve to be healthy and thrive.

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<sup>i</sup> Food Insecurity Persists Post-Pandemic. May 2024. Office of New York State Comptroller: Office of Budget Policy and Analysis: <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/food-insecurity-persists-post-pandemic>

<sup>ii</sup> Millions of Low-Income Households Would Lose Food Aid Under Proposed House Republican SNAP Cuts. February 2025. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/millions-of-low-income-households-would-lose-food-aid-under-proposed-house>

<sup>iii</sup> "Federal food assistance cuts would crush 1.8 million Nyers." April 2025. Gothamist: <https://gothamist.com/news/federal-food-assistance-cuts-would-crush-18m-nyers-city-officials-say>

## **TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS**

**Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
Honorable Diana Ayala, Chair**

**Oversight – Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City  
April 3, 2025**

**Submitted by:  
Jeanette Estima  
Director, Policy and Advocacy  
Citymeals on Wheels**

Citymeals on Wheels works in partnership with the City and the network of meal providers to fill a significant gap in the City's nutrition services for homebound older adults by funding home-delivered meals on weekends. In addition, Citymeals is a citywide emergency responder bringing food to homebound older adults in localized and citywide emergencies and supporting the most vulnerable older New Yorkers with additional food programs. In FY24, Citymeals provided over 2 million meals to 22,000 older adults across all five boroughs.

Of the 1.8 million people aged 60 and older in New York City, 18% live below the poverty line and an increasing number are immigrants, women, and people living alone with limited social support.<sup>1</sup> The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have compounded these challenges, dramatically increasing food costs that persist to this day. As a result, we have seen food insecurity among older New Yorkers emerge as a crisis. Existing nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP and food pantries, are largely inaccessible to older adults who are unable to shop for groceries regularly or prepare their own meals. And our recent research found that the City's congregate and home-delivered meals programs simply do not go far enough with 60% still experiencing some level of food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> We must create new food programs to ensure

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<sup>1</sup> [1 U.S. Census Bureau. 2022. Population 60 Years and Over in the United States. American Community Survey, ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables, Table S0102. Accessed at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0102?q=S0102&g=160XX00US3651000](https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST5Y2022.S0102?q=S0102&g=160XX00US3651000)

<sup>2</sup> *Older Adult Hunger, Food Services, and SNAP Participation in New York City*. Citymeals and CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, 2024

that the City's most vulnerable residents have the food they need to live safely in their homes, while adapting existing programs to be more accessible to homebound older adults.

Finally, Citymeals is just one of many organizations that is set to lose some federal funding in FY26. Federal threats to SNAP, Medicaid, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (ESFP), and others have plunged the sector into uncertainty about what programs will remain open and the future of nutrition assistance. As the Council and the Administration work to negotiate their priorities in response to this challenge to our City's safety net infrastructure, we cannot lose sight of the needs of homebound older New Yorkers, who experience hunger out of sight and behind closed doors. Therefore, we respectfully request that the Council:

1. **Pass Intro 770, and invest \$20.6 million** to expand the City's home-delivered meals program so it provides a meal 365 days a year.
2. **Invest \$200,000 in Citymeals' innovative pilot programs**, providing a second meal or groceries to home-delivered meals recipients with the greatest need.
3. **Invest \$57 million in congregate meal programs** at Older Adult Centers and \$7.3 million in home-delivered meals programs.
4. **Increase baseline funding for the Community Food Connection (CFC) to \$100 million.**
5. **Continue to fund the following Council Discretionary Initiatives:**
  - a. \$8.26M for the Food Pantry Initiative
  - b. \$2.134M for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative
  - c. \$1.5M for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

## **Background**

The two main food programs targeting older New Yorkers generally provide one prepared meal on weekdays only; one program operates in a congregate setting at Older Adult Centers, and the other provides home-delivery of meals to those who cannot regularly get to a center, shop for groceries, or prepare their own meals. Last year, 153,220 older New Yorkers attended an older adult center and 24,472 received home-delivered meals (HDM).<sup>3</sup> These food programs were established in 1965 through the Older Americans Act, which still only requires that they serve one meal a day, five days a week. We have long known that this falls short in meeting the

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<sup>3</sup> Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. January 2024. Accessed at: <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2024/dfta.pdf>

needs of the most food insecure older adults who cannot regularly access additional food or other nutrition services. In a national survey from 2018, 66 percent of home-delivered and 54 percent of congregate meal recipients reported that these meals provide half or more of their daily food intake.<sup>4</sup> While the social benefits of congregate meals and contact with a HDM provider cannot be understated, this suggests that older adults are accessing these programs as a primary source of nutrition, not just to combat social isolation. As such, they must be considered as a vital part of the food assistance ecosystem.

Here in the City, these programs still leave too many older adults hungry. The cost of living has grown exponentially since they were started, and the Covid-19 pandemic has had a lasting impact on food security here and across the country. **While other food programs such as SNAP and food pantries are available and used by many older adults, they were not designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable older adults who are not regularly able to shop for groceries, prepare food, or cook their own meals.**

### **A Food Insecurity Crisis**

Citymeals partnered with the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute to better understand how congregate and HDM program participants met their food needs beyond the meals they receive through their programs. Our study documented a high rate of food insecurity among participants, with ***nearly half of all respondents “sometimes” or “often” experiencing indicators of food insecurity.*** This number went up to 60% for HDM recipients. Survey participants experienced a number of challenges getting groceries and preparing meals. First, affordability was a clear barrier with ***65% of respondents reporting incomes of \$15,000 or less.*** With such low incomes, purchasing additional food is extremely difficult, if not impossible.

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<sup>4</sup> Administration on Community Living. FY18 Older Americans Act Report to Congress. Accessed at: [https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/about-acl/2021-06/ACL\\_FY2018%20OAA%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf](https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/about-acl/2021-06/ACL_FY2018%20OAA%20Report%20to%20Congress.pdf)

Respondents cited difficulties in getting to the grocery store—half reported a 40-minute roundtrip walk to the grocery store while ***about 24% of respondents said they were only “sometimes” able to shop for groceries, and 17% are “never” able to do so.***

They also had challenges preparing and cooking food. ***About 38% said they were only “sometimes” or “never” able to wash, chop, or otherwise prepare food to be cooked, and 37% said they are only “sometimes” or “never” able to cook at home.*** This limits the kinds of meals they are able to make at home.

These findings may shed some light on the low food-program utilization reported by the older adults we surveyed. **We asked survey respondents about their use of SNAP and food pantries and found that only 56% reported receiving SNAP benefits and only 18% had used a food pantry.** Moreover, only 4% had used a mobile food pantry. These participation rates are much lower than they should be given the extremely low incomes reported. One third of those receiving SNAP said it was **not enough to meet their needs**, and of those not receiving SNAP 55% said they did not know if they were eligible. When asked about their use of food pantries, a focus group participant replied *“I can only access them when there are volunteers that bring it to me.”* **These data suggest a serious disconnect between the need and the services available to older adults.** It’s clear that SNAP and food pantries are simply not accessible for the nearly 40% of people who reported challenges getting to grocery stores or preparing and cooking their own meals.

Barriers to access can be mitigated with support from family, friends, or a personal care attendant, but we learned that 45% do not have that support. Moreover, 52% of those surveyed live alone. We cannot expect, then, that older adults can easily get assistance in accessing these other food programs.

We asked participants to tell us how they felt about their home-delivered and congregate meals programs and while they generally rated the programs highly, many indicated that they require more food and more choice and variety in what they receive. As one participant said,

the service is *“appreciated, but just not enough.”* When asked to imagine an ideal HDM program, **52% of all respondents said that it should provide two or more meals per day.**

Despite its limitations, we also found a significant, positive correlation between receiving home-delivered meals and food security and quality of life. Among HDM recipients:

- **90% report home-delivered meals help them to not be hungry**
- **87% state that the meals help them remain in their own homes**
- **85% state that the meals help them eat more healthily**
- **81% report that the program helps them manage one or more health conditions**

While the existing systems for providing food to older New Yorkers are in dire need of revitalization, the successes of the HDM program show the promise and potential of this infrastructure to provide targeted anti-hunger interventions at a larger scale.

### **Citymeals’ Food Programs**

To help fill in the meal gap for thousands of the City’s older adults, **we have launched a few pilot programs in FY25.** We have a long-term goal to reach 50% of our current service population (~10,000 recipients) with additional food while increasing choices and diversity of meals where possible. Using data provided by case managers, we identify meal recipients who are actively experiencing food insecurity and place them into one of the following programs.

Our **Breakfast Box** provides the equivalent of 30 breakfast meals including shelf-stable food (eg. oatmeal, yogurt, granola, cereal), four frozen meals (eg. breakfast burrito, omelet with potatoes), and seven pounds of fresh produce (mostly fruit), procured, packaged and delivered by Citymeals directly to homebound older adults on a monthly basis. We are currently serving nearly 2,000 recipients across the City and we hope to increase this to 4,000 people in FY26.

Our **Mobile Grocery Program** provides the equivalent of 9 meals with both shelf-stable pantry items and fresh produce to over 4,200 people across the City. We are also piloting a smaller program in partnership with the West Side Campaign Against Hunger that will reach 200 people

in the first year and 300 in FY26. This pilot program provides the equivalent of 18 meals including shelf-stable items, dairy, and fresh produce (eg. rice, tuna, beans, fruit, soft vegetables) with a few choices (between plant or animal-based proteins and milks, and all fresh produce or a mix of fresh and shelf-stable foods). Homebound older adults can order their grocery bags by phone, to be delivered directly to their door.

These pilot programs are directly in response to our research findings and the expressed needs of meal recipients. **We ask the Council as our partner in government to support these programs so we can continue to evaluate, adapt, and scale new solutions to elder hunger.** Funding for the Citymeals pilot programs would be put towards procurement, packaging, and delivery of additional food to current home delivered meal recipients deemed by their case managers to be food insecure. Each pilot will be evaluated to determine its impact and guide us in scaling up what works. For FY26, we respectfully request **\$100,000** to support these two pilots through the Older Adults Clubs, Programs and Enhancements Initiative and **\$100,000** through the Speaker's Initiative.

### **Sector-Wide Needs**

While our pilot programs create new ways to bring nutritious food to older adults, there is also work we can do to improve or expand existing programs so that they can better meet the needs of older New Yorkers. Along with our partners, we call upon the City Council to prioritize nutrition in the FY26 budget by:

1. **Passing Intro 770 and invest \$20.6 million** to expand the City's home-delivered meals program to provide a meal 365 days a year. As a core City service, this program must be made whole by providing at least one meal every day, rather than just on weekdays.
2. **Investing \$57 million in congregate meal programs at Older Adult Centers, and \$7.3 million in home-delivered meals programs** to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years that threaten providers' ability to feed their communities.



3. **Increasing baseline funding for the Community Food Connection (CFC) to \$100 million** to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC—including enhanced access to fresh food. With an 83% rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, shrinking federal budgets, and more food insecure New Yorkers than ever, NYC's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain. Cuts to CFC over the past several years weakened our safety net and an increased baseline means that providers can focus on feeding their communities.

4. **Continuing to fund the following Council Discretionary Initiatives:**

- o \$8.26M for the Food Pantry Initiative
- o \$2.134M for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative
- o \$1.5M for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

**Conclusion**

The City must support more programs that increase access to food, especially for older adults. Older adults must no longer be an afterthought in anti-hunger strategies. To maintain an effective safety net and eliminate service gaps, we must upgrade our infrastructure and ensure that the City's food programs are accessible to older adults and present a comprehensive approach to hunger.



## **Testimony: New York City Council Oversight Hearings Proposal: Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**Testimony by** *Debipriya Chatterjee, Senior Economist, and Jennifer Hinojosa, Policy Analyst,  
Community Service Society of New York*  
**April 3, 2025**

Thank you to Chairperson Ayala and to all the members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Debipriya Chatterjee, and I am the Senior Economist at the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), a long-time nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of low-income New Yorkers using research, advocacy, and direct services. Together with my colleague Jennifer Hinojosa, a Policy Analyst at CSS, we would like to present on the severity of food insecurity today in our city and suggest policy recommendations.

The Community Service Society of New York's statewide Annual Survey of Housing and Economic Security, conducted in the fall of 2024, provides valuable insights into the struggles households face across the city and the state.

CSS's survey shows that almost a quarter (24 percent) of city residents experienced food insecurity in the past year, defined as skipping meals or going hungry due to lack of food, or relying on free meals from a food pantry, soup kitchen, or meal program. Among low-income residents—those with incomes below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)—the rate was even higher at 38 percent. Even among those with full-time employment, 1-in-5 reported struggling to put food on the table. Unsurprisingly, food insecurity rates were higher among Black (27 percent) and Hispanic/Latino households (32 percent) compared to White households (17 percent), reflecting current and historical inequities.

Before we discuss proposals to alleviate food insecurity, it is important to understand how much a typical family in the city needs to spend on food. The [National True Cost of Living campaign](#), a joint effort by CSS and the Federation for Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA), commissioned the Urban Institute to develop the [True Cost of Economic Security \(TCES\)](#)—a new measure that accounts for the comprehensive costs modern families face alongside the resources available to them. Urban's report found that 62 percent of all families in New York City lack the resources to make ends meet. In other words, nearly two out of three families in the city are struggling. Among households with children, this figure increases to 74 percent. The TCES estimates that the median food costs for a family with children and no seniors amount to \$14,600 annually. For households with seniors and no children, the yearly food budget is \$10,300, while for multigenerational households—those with both seniors and children—food costs reach approximately \$19,600.

In a report published in 2023, we examined the dizzying rise and fall and rise again of food insecurity in the city between 2019 and 2022. Food insecurity spiked with the onset of the pandemic and ensuing job losses; declined with the expansion of support programs such as

SNAP Emergency Allotments, Summer Nutrition Assistance, and Pandemic EBT; and then increased again as these and other key programs like the expanded Child Tax Credit, expired.

Despite [strong job](#) and wage growth, [especially, at the bottom of the income distribution](#), households continue to struggle to afford basic necessities. To get a sense of the financial pressures New Yorkers face, we asked survey respondents, “If you paid less for housing, what would use that money for?” Across all income categories, one of the top three responses was food.

Today you have heard and will continue to hear from many non-profits and community-based organizations working tirelessly to ease food insecurity. In addition to echoing their requests, we urge the City to take proactive steps to improve the benefits access system and ensure that nutritional support is more accessible by passing Intros [0245](#), [1028](#), and [1148](#). In our testimony at this committee’s Preliminary Budget hearing, we highlighted improvements in SNAP processing times—up from around 40 percent in the summer of 2024 to nearly 90 percent today.

Administrative challenges not only make it take longer to receive benefits like SNAP, they also often cause recipients to lose their benefits entirely. Our survey shows that 15 percent of all potential recipients lost benefits in the past year, mostly due to incomplete or incorrect paperwork and missed application deadlines. Strengthening the City’s support infrastructure to help recipients complete and submit applications on time would enable more New Yorkers to access and retain the benefits they need.

We also want to highlight the critical role of local food pantries in addressing food insecurity. Among those in our survey who reported using a food pantry, soup kitchen or meal program, 43 percent were Hispanic, and more than half (53 percent) were families with young children. Food pantries serve as essential support for those receiving insufficient public benefits and those ineligible for public assistance programs.

Despite this demonstrated need, the Preliminary FY 2026 Budget includes concerning reductions to essential food security programs, including cuts in funding for the [Community Food Connection \(\\$31.9 million\)](#) and [Groceries to Go \(\\$5.2 million\)](#). According to a New York City Independent Budget Office [report](#), Community Food Connection-funded food pantries served 8.4 million individuals in the last quarter of 2024, underscoring their importance. Due to an [83 percent](#) rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, NYC’s emergency food system is under unprecedented strain.

We strongly urge the Council to:

- Increase funding to \$100 million for [Community Food Connection \(CFC\)](#) to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC.
- Restore FY 2025 [City Council initiatives](#) that remain unfunded in the preliminary FY 2026 budget, including:
  - \$8.26 million for food pantries,
  - \$2.13 million for [Access to Health Food and Nutritional Education](#) (which funds farmers markets, urban farms, community gardens, and programs to expand the use of SNAP benefits), and
  - \$1.5 million for the [Food Access and Benefits Initiatives \(HRA\)](#).

The State budget proposes two noteworthy policies that address food insecurity: free universal school meals and a SNAP minimum benefit of \$50. This is welcome news at a time when city residents are bracing for the impact of federal policies. As proposed tariffs go into effect and trigger retaliatory tariffs, the average household will see over \$1200 lost in purchasing power. And tariffs are poised to hit low-income families even harder, eroding up to \$2000 in purchasing power. Combined with the proposed 20-22 percent reduction in SNAP benefits as included in the [House budget proposal](#), the city stands to lose almost \$1 billion in SNAP funding.

We hope that the City will recognize the moment for what it is and invest heavily to improve nutritional security for its residents.

Thank you again for this opportunity. Please reach out to me at [dchatterjee@cssny.org](mailto:dchatterjee@cssny.org) if you have any questions or comments.

**Testimony of Shirley de Peña**  
**The City University of New York**  
**Central Office of Student Affairs**  
**New York City Council General Welfare Committee**  
**Oversight: Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Ayala and members of the City Council. My name is Shirley de Peña, and I serve as a Director in the CUNY Central Office of Student Affairs and the Liaison to the Campus Resource Centers and Food Pantries. I begin by expressing my sincere gratitude for your continued support of CUNY's food security initiatives. Your investment has been critical in ensuring that thousands of students have access to nutritious food, allowing them to focus on their education rather than where their next meal will come from.

Food insecurity is one of the most urgent challenges facing CUNY students today. It is not simply about hunger—it affects academic success, physical and mental health, and the ability to persist to graduation. When students struggle to afford food, they often face increased stress, difficulty concentrating in class, and a greater likelihood of dropping out. Many of our students are already balancing coursework with jobs, family responsibilities, and financial hardships.

CUNY has adopted a multifaceted approach to addressing food insecurity, ensuring that students have multiple ways to access the support they need. Today, food pantries operate at 18 undergraduate colleges and two professional schools and are open up to six days a week to provide students with essential food resources. Importantly, CUNY has a system-wide policy that allows students to visit any food pantry, regardless of their home campus, removing barriers to access.

These food pantries do more than just provide groceries—the comprehensive approach ensures that students receive both immediate relief and long-term support. Many pantries are located within campus resource centers, where staff and volunteers assist students in applying for SNAP benefits, accessing emergency financial aid, and connecting with other critical services such as housing assistance and mental health counseling. This holistic approach ensures that students facing food insecurity receive not only immediate relief but also long-term support to stabilize their circumstances.

The demand for these services has grown exponentially. In 2024 alone, our food pantries recorded more than 206,000 visits—an alarming increase from 58,941 visits in 2022 and 146,544 visits in 2023. This surge reflects both the depth of need among our students and the critical role that these programs play in their well-being.

Beyond our food pantries, CUNY has expanded efforts to provide fresh, healthy food options through innovative partnerships. The Fresh Food Bag Program, supported by the City Council, has been a game-changer, providing students with nutritious and culturally appropriate food, including fresh fruits, vegetables, bread, and eggs.

The impact of these programs is real, and I want to share a story that highlights their importance. A student at one of our senior colleges—let's call her Maria—was struggling to afford food while balancing her coursework and a part-time job. She had been skipping meals to stretch what little money she had, and it was starting to affect her ability to focus in class. A professor noticed she was struggling and directed her to the campus food pantry. Not only was she able to get fresh groceries to take home, but she also received help applying for SNAP benefits. With that support, Maria was able to worry less about food and focus more on her studies.

However, despite the success of these initiatives, demand continues to outpace available resources, even as the demand for food assistance continues to grow.

CUNY students are hardworking, resilient, and deeply committed to their education. But no student should have to choose between paying for textbooks and putting food on the table. If we want our students to succeed, we must ensure that they have the fundamental resources they need to thrive. Investing in food security is not just about providing meals—it's about fostering a learning environment where every student has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

I urge the Council to continue and expand its investment in food security programs at CUNY. With additional resources, we can sustain and grow our food pantry operations, expand the Fresh Food Bag Program, and enhance the critical support services that help students move from crisis to stability.

Thank you for your time and for your ongoing commitment to addressing food insecurity among CUNY students. Your support is making a tangible difference, and together, we can ensure that no student at CUNY has to struggle with hunger while pursuing their education.



**CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute & Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy**

**Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
Regarding: Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**Date: 04/03/2025**

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Nevin Cohen Director of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute (CUFPI) and I am working in partnership with the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College, Columbia University. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding hunger and food insecurity in New York City. We appreciate the Council's continued leadership in addressing these urgent issues.

The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute and the Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers College bring decades of experience advancing equitable food policy in New York City. Our work centers community voices, especially those of low-income families, older adults, and students, to inform and improve the design and delivery of public programs. With persistent food insecurity and poverty disproportionately affecting Black, Latino, Asian, and immigrant New Yorkers, our mission is to help the City implement solutions that are not only evidence-based but community-validated.

Today's hearing on hunger and food insecurity is both timely and essential. Your committee report highlights that 1.4 million New Yorkers experience food insecurity, including one in four children, that nearly half of New York's aging population experienced food insecurity in 2023 and that food costs continue to outpace incomes. Furthermore, in our recent research with older adults, we found that 55% of non-participants in SNAP were unsure about their eligibility, representing a missed opportunity to reduce food insecurity. Against this backdrop, we welcome the Council's focus on legislation that promises to reduce administrative burdens and improve communication between agencies and applicants.

We see strong alignment between the goals of the three bills under consideration, Int. 0245-2024, Int. 1028-2024, and Int. 1148-2024, and our proposed community-based initiative, *Protect What Feeds Us*, which is designed to strengthen feedback loops between City programs and the people they serve. We are taking a two-pronged approach with the Tisch Food Center focusing on getting community input on school food programs, and CUFPI training CUNY students to advocate for better, more inclusive food policies across the city.



New York City's investments in food and nutrition programs are vital, but without robust mechanisms for community feedback, these programs risk underperformance and under-enrollment. While over 1.8 million New Yorkers are currently enrolled in SNAP, tens of thousands more remain eligible but unenrolled. Administrative complexity, unclear eligibility criteria, and lack of accessible guidance are keeping many New Yorkers from receiving the help they need.

The three bills before the Council today recognize this disconnect. Int. 0245-2024 proposes a universal benefit application and expanded use of Access NYC, critical tools to reduce fragmentation in the benefits system. Int. 1028-2024 goes further by introducing automatic enrollment, a strategy that will significantly increase participation while minimizing red tape. And Int. 1148-2024, by mandating receipts for submitted applications, addresses long-standing concerns about transparency, documentation, and applicant confidence.

Yet administrative fixes alone will not close the gap. To work as intended, these systems must reflect lived experience. That's where our project *Protect What Feeds Us* comes in, by ensuring that the parents, older adults, and shelter residents who rely on City services have a formal role in shaping them.

We see this as a necessary complement to the legislation: a practical, affordable model for surfacing problems early, building trust, and helping city agencies meet their goals more effectively.

## **Recommendations**

To support the Council's efforts to reduce hunger and improve access to food and public assistance programs, we recommend the following:

- Fund and implement community-driven feedback systems that inform the rollout and evaluation of initiatives like the universal benefits application (Int. 0245-2024) and automatic enrollment (Int. 1028-2024). Our *Protect What Feeds Us* project offers a practical model: using trained fellows and partners to gather input from program users such as parents, older adults, and food-insecure families, and deliver timely, actionable insights to agencies and Council Members.
- Integrate user-centered feedback into digital tools like Access NYC to improve clarity, trust, and usability. This is especially important as the Council codifies and expands Access NYC's role as the central portal for screening and applying for benefits. Feedback from the communities most at risk of exclusion, due to



language access, digital literacy, or eligibility confusion, should directly inform how these tools are updated and maintained.

- Support the full and equitable implementation of Int. 1148-2024, which would require DSS to provide receipts for benefit applications. While seemingly technical, this small step can make a significant difference for applicants who often struggle to track paperwork, prove application status, or contest wrongful denials. Community education and frontline staff training should accompany this policy to ensure it meets its full potential.

The three bills under consideration today represent a clear step forward in addressing the bureaucratic and structural barriers that prevent too many New Yorkers from accessing food and public assistance. They promise to simplify enrollment, reduce administrative burdens, and strengthen communication between City agencies and residents, core strategies supported by research and echoed in community experience.

But legislation alone isn't enough. Real progress requires an infrastructure for listening, an ongoing commitment to incorporating feedback from the people these programs are meant to serve. That's where our project Protect What Feeds Us comes in. This initiative will help ensure that tools like Access NYC are truly accessible, that automatic enrollment works in practice, not just in policy, and that benefit applicants are seen, heard, and supported throughout the process.

At a time of rising food costs and shrinking federal support, we urge the Council to match its bold legislative vision with equally bold investments in community-informed implementation projects like ours. Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to contribute to this important conversation. I welcome any questions.

Sincerely,

Nevin Cohen, Ph.D. Associate Professor, CUNY School of Public Health  
Director, CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute  
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## **Submitted Testimony**

**Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry**

**For the Committee of General Welfare Budget Hearing on the FY26 NYC Budget**

**April 3, 2025**

Thank you, Committee Chair Ayala and Members of the Committee on General Welfare for this opportunity.

My name is Stephen Grimaldi. I'm the Executive Director of New York Common Pantry and a representative of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access.

As you know, hunger in New York has reached epidemic proportions:

- 1.3 million households – nearly 3 Million people – in New York are struggling to make ends meet.<sup>1</sup>
- More than 3 out of 4 NYC households say the cost of food is rising faster than their income<sup>2</sup>
- And 1 in 3 New Yorkers has used a food pantry in the past three years.<sup>3</sup>

At New York Common Pantry, we see struggling city residents daily and have stepped up our provision of healthy and fresh food to communities in need. Last year, we:

- Served more than 11 million meals
- Assisted nearly 730,000 guests and
- Expanded our mobile programs to serve 350 community partner sites throughout the city

Last month we experienced a 13% increase in meals across our programs when compared to the same time last year, and that's on top of the 17% increase in individuals we served last fiscal year.

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<sup>1</sup> True Cost of Living Report, April 2023. Produced by Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington School of Social Work, for the Fund for the City of New York and the United Way of New York City

<sup>2</sup> [New York Hunger Survey](#), Change Research, April 2024, commissioned by No Kid Hungry.

<sup>3</sup> "The Annual State of Poverty and Disadvantage," Robin Hood and the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University, Volume 6, Winter 2024. <https://robinhood.org/news/poverty-tracker-spotlight-food-assistance-pantries-2024/>



New Yorkers face a series of hardships that are hard to overcome: rising costs and lack of access to quality food and healthcare, the high price of utilities, childcare and housing. We, and organizations like ours, battle daily to feed the millions of New Yorkers who are facing these hardships.

With the recent Department of Agriculture termination of the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement and the Commodity Credit Corporation's shipments of TEFAP products, and the potential cuts to Farm Bill appropriations that cover safety net programs such as SNAP, WIC and CSFP, Hunger Relief organizations are feeling the funding pressure more than ever. As New Yorkers in need are facing reductions in SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, and other public benefits, the organizations they turn to in these situations are experiencing the same painful funding reductions.

The City Council must fill the funding gap to support the organizations feeding food insecure NYC residents through the CFC program. Additionally, delays in processing CFC applications, like the one NYCP has faced, should be resolved quickly so that funds can be accessed. City contracting for other services and DYCD funds also are subject to backlogs in payment, which further exacerbate the pressures felt by providers. This must be addressed.

We applaud the City Council for adopting our recommendation, put forth at last month's Budget Hearing, to increase the Community Food Connections Program **baseline funding to \$100 Million per year**. This will help us to continue feeding all of our hungry neighbors. Greater support like this is essential for the city to be able to address the needs of underserved New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



*Testimony before the New York City Council  
- Committee on General Welfare -*

*April 3, 2025*

**Marcus Jackson**  
*Aging Friendly Community Organizer*  
Encore Community Services

Good morning Chair Ayala and members of the Committee. My name is Marcus Jackson, and I serve as the Aging Friendly Community Organizer at Encore Community Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on food insecurity among older adults.

Encore operates one of the city's largest home-delivered meal programs—more than **750,000 meals annually** to older adults who are homebound, medically fragile, and often entirely alone. For many, the meal we deliver is their only source of daily nutrition.

But the city currently only funds **one meal a day, five days a week**. That leaves thousands of older New Yorkers hungry over the weekends and undernourished every day. We're urging the Council to expand meal funding to provide **three meals per day, seven days per week** to every older adult who needs it.

We also need reimbursement rates that actually cover providers' real costs. Food prices, labor, and delivery expenses have all increased—but funding hasn't kept pace. Without action, providers like Encore will be forced to make impossible decisions about what we can afford to deliver.

Finally, nutrition is only one piece. Our **financial case managers** help older adults apply for SNAP, manage healthcare bills, and access rent relief. They're essential to preventing hunger before it starts. Expanding funding for financial case management must be part of the city's hunger response.

Encore has been serving older New Yorkers for nearly 50 years. We know what it takes to prevent hunger—and it starts with fully funding the programs that work.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to this issue. I welcome your questions.

## **Full Written Testimony**

### **Full Written Testimony**

#### **The Scope of the Problem**

At Encore, we see every day how food insecurity affects the health, dignity, and stability of older New Yorkers. We operate one of the largest home-delivered meal programs in the city, delivering more than 750,000 meals each year to older adults who are homebound, isolated, and often managing multiple health conditions. For many, the meal we provide is not just their main source of nutrition—it is their only meal of the day.

As food costs continue to rise and the population of older adults grows rapidly, the City must do more to meet this basic need. The current standard—one meal per day, five days per week—is insufficient. No one, especially our older neighbors, should go hungry on weekends or be forced



to stretch a single meal across an entire day. We urge the Council to support a commitment to three meals a day, seven days a week, for all older adults in need.

## **Reimbursement Rates Must Keep Pace with Reality**

The cost of preparing, packaging, and delivering meals has increased sharply due to inflation, labor shortages, and higher operating costs. Despite a modest rate adjustment in FY 2023–2024, the City's current reimbursement structure still falls short of covering the actual costs providers incur. This jeopardizes the sustainability of programs like Encore's and risks pushing providers to cut services or reduce quality.

We are grateful for the Council's past support, but more must be done. We urge you to push for reimbursement rates that reflect real costs and allow providers to maintain high standards of food safety, nutritional value, and delivery consistency.

## **Connecting Nutrition and Stability Through Case Management**

At Encore, we go beyond meals. Our financial case management program helps older adults navigate benefits like SNAP, SCRIE, and Medicare, and resolve housing or healthcare billing issues that may otherwise lead to instability or malnutrition. When a case manager visits a homebound client, they may find an empty fridge, expired medications, or signs of depression—and they take action.

Food insecurity is rarely just about food. It's about affordability, accessibility, and the ability to age in place with dignity. Expanding funding for financial case management is a direct way to prevent food insecurity and improve outcomes for vulnerable New Yorkers.

## **Conclusion**

Encore Community Services has been supporting older adults for nearly 50 years. We know what works: reliable meals, timely case management, and a system that is funded to meet today's realities.

### **We urge the Council to:**

- **Expand home-delivered and congregate meal programs to three meals per day, seven days a week.**
- **Increase reimbursement rates to fully cover providers' actual costs.**
- **Invest in financial case management as a frontline tool in the fight against hunger.**





**Testimony Submitted by**  
**Leah Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates**  
**Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare**

**Oversight - Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**  
**April 3, 2025**

My name is Leah Eden, Executive Director of Equity Advocates. Thank you to Chair Ayala and the members of the General Welfare committee for holding today's Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

[Equity Advocates](#) builds the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and systems change. We accomplish this through policy development, advocacy education and training, and coalition leadership. We provide coalition leadership for the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a multi-sector network of 60+ local food system stakeholders from that engage collaboratively and intentionally across sectors to foster relationships, advance education, and advocate for policies that ensure equitable access to a healthy, just, resilient, and sustainable food system.

At a time when [50% of working age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs](#), we appreciate the Council's focus on making food more healthy, affordable and accessible. And let's be clear—this is an equity issue. Food insecurity affects every borough, every community, and every demographic—but it does not impact all New Yorkers equally. Communities of color and low-income households bear the brunt of this crisis, and failing to fund emergency food programs only deepens racial and economic disparities. That is why we are calling on the Mayor and the City Council to baseline \$100 million in funding to the Community Food Connections program. This program is essential in ensuring that frontline emergency food providers can offer not just any food, but healthy, fresh, and culturally and religiously appropriate food. But I'm also here to urge the Council to support solutions that tackle the root causes of food insecurity. Our City must intentionally invest in local food supply chains and food businesses that create good jobs, build wealth within communities, and ensure families have the economic stability to afford nutritious food without relying on emergency assistance. We need a budget that reflects our city's values and meets the realities of this moment. A budget that ensures all New Yorkers—regardless of income, immigration status, or zip code—have access to the fresh, healthy food they need to survive today, and the economic opportunities they need to thrive in the future.

We urge the Administration and City Council to enact a new budget that invests in food and nutrition security, urban agriculture and the next generation of farmers, and fosters long-term resilience and economic opportunity leveraging our local food system. Specifically, we respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following recommendations in the FY26 City Budget:

## IMPROVE FOOD SECURITY

- **Increase baselined funding to \$100 million for Community Food Connection (CFC)** to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC. We applaud the City Council for including this critical investment in its Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Response. Due to an 83% rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, NYC's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain. A substantial investment in CFC—including enhanced access to fresh food—is essential to meet the growing demand for food, address increasing food prices, looming cuts to SNAP, and to provide critical support for vulnerable communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

According to the 2023 New York City True Cost of Living Report, published by United Way of New York City, 50% of working age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs. Families struggling to make ends meet live in every NYC neighborhood but across family composition, work status, and education, the report finds that people of color are disproportionately likely to lack adequate income. Further, 80% of households below the True Cost of Living had at least one working adult and the presence of children in the household almost doubles the likelihood that a household will have inadequate income.

Looming federal cuts to hunger programs threaten to make an already dire situation even worse. Now is not the time to scale back our City's investment in the Community Food Connection program, as the Mayor's preliminary budget proposes. Instead, we must meet current need and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will likely occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers, and potentially raise food prices. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many of our neighbors. Yet, these essential services are being asked to do more with less. That is unacceptable. We need to invest in them, not cut them.

A substantial investment in funding for the CFC would accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need in New York City. This increase will also help to address the inefficiencies found in using third-party vendors particularly in the procurement of kosher and halal items. Kosher- and halal-observant New Yorkers make up 21% of enrollees in GetFoodNYC and so it is critical the City's food assistance programs need to have sufficient kosher and/or halal certified product available and allocate funding to agencies that can effectively store and distribute that food in a culturally competent way. Finally, we urge HRA to engage in an outreach and education campaign to ensure smaller, community-based providers are able to participate in the program, and are adequately supported so that they are able to continue serving their communities.

- **Combat older adult hunger by investing \$57 million in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers**, to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years. **Fight to restore over \$100 million in cuts to NYC Aging's overall budget** in FY26, which could cut one third of the

entire Older Adult Center budget leading to disastrous impacts. In addition, ensure NYC Aging has adequate funding to provide homebound older adults with home-delivered meals 365 days per year, in line with [Int 0770-2024 \(Lee\)](#). We appreciate that the Council's Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Response calls on the Administration to add \$20.6 million in baselined funding to the Department's budget for the delivery of HDMs on Saturdays and Sundays, bringing service up from five to seven days each week.

- **Increase funding for Health Bucks and Get the Good Stuff to enhance their reach and impact, while continuing to leverage federal GusNIP funds to maximize resources for these critical nutrition incentive programs.** Health Bucks, New York City's longstanding farmers market SNAP incentive program, has been baselined at \$500,000 for several years, which is no longer sufficient to meet growing demand. The current \$500,000 in baselined funding for Health Bucks is divided between supporting SNAP incentives at farmers markets and providing free Health Bucks to community and faith-based organizations (CBOs) for distribution through their nutrition and health programs. In 2024, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) received 600 applications from CBOs but was unable to fully fund all requests, leaving organizations underfunded or without support entirely.

By distributing Health Bucks through CBOs that integrate them into nutrition and health programming, the program reinforces nutrition education efforts, ensuring that participants have both the knowledge and the financial resources to choose locally grown, low-pesticide and seasonal fruits and vegetables. This incentive structure strengthens the impact of nutrition education, increasing the likelihood of sustained behavior change. Importantly, Community Health Bucks are not tied to SNAP participation, making them a vital resource for individuals ineligible for public benefits, particularly in light of proposed federal cuts to SNAP and threats to immigrant access to public assistance.

Get the Good Stuff, which provides SNAP users with matching dollars to purchase fresh produce at participating grocery stores, should also be expanded to include more stores and communities. The current \$10 per day match cap for SNAP incentives should be increased to further support families in purchasing sufficient ingredients for their families. As food prices have risen substantially, even at farmers markets, \$20 is not adequate to purchase fruits and vegetables to last several days, particularly for larger households. By increasing investment in these programs, the City can make fresh, healthy food more accessible to low-income communities while maximizing federal funding opportunities.

- **Continue to fund the following Council Discretionary Initiatives:**
  - \$8.26M for the Food Pantry Initiative
  - \$2.134M for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative
  - \$1.5M for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

#### INVEST IN URBAN AGRICULTURE

- **Allocate funding for the Office of Urban Agriculture** that should be used to create a position dedicated to ongoing, intentional community engagement to inform the urban agriculture advisory's development of a set of recommendations. **Further, we urge the City Council to move forward with appointing members to the advisory board as outlined in Local Law 123.**
- **Restore \$2.6 million in funding for GreenThumb and maintain funding for NYC community composting programs** to provide essential resources for community gardeners. We thank the Council for calling in its Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Response for an additional \$7 million in baseline administrative funding to stabilize operations, expand outreach, and scale capacity. As noted, this additional investment in community composting will support staffing, equipment, and site operations, allowing local partners to divert organic waste from landfills and process it into compost. It also boosts public education, encouraging broader participation in waste separation.
- **Maintain opportunities for young people interested in urban agriculture careers** with \$206.5 million in baseline funding for Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and \$31 million in funding for Work Learn Grow (WLG) and \$99.6 million for Summer Rising. Additionally, we urge the City to **notify families, schools and community-based organizations (CBOs) earlier in the year of their Summer Rising slot allocations about**. Currently, this information is often provided only weeks before the program starts, making it difficult to support students, ensure adequate staffing levels, and promote summer meal sites effectively. By contrast, the City announces SYEP placement sites as early as January. We recommend **adopting the same timeline for Summer Rising** to improve program operations and outreach.
- **Maintain \$1.5M to fund the Council Citywide Community Land Trust Discretionary Initiative for FY26.**

#### BUILD LOCAL FOOD ECONOMIES

- **Invest in creating and expanding market pathways for small and historically marginalized farmers** while increasing access to locally sourced food in public institutions. Dedicated funding is required to support farmers in meeting procurement contracts with schools, hospitals, city agencies, and other local institutions, including investment in food hubs, distribution networks, and aggregation infrastructure.
- **Create a \$5 million Food Justice Fund** for community-led projects designed to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities. In *Food Forward NYC*, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy calls for the establishment of a Food Justice Fund. We urge the City to



invest in this program at \$5 Million and offer grants for both planning and implementation projects serving high need areas identified by Racial Equity Task Force. Funding would be allocated directly to community food organizations historically serving NYC residents with a demonstrated history of meeting the cultural and food needs of their communities. This Fund could also be created as a new City Council Initiative.

As this field of work requires long term investments, the fund should prioritize 2 year grant cycles and allow for flexibility on spending deadlines upon receiving grants. We also ask that the City explore a private-public partnership and leverage its convening power to secure matching investment from local philanthropic foundations.

- **Increase funding to \$4.9 million for the City Council's Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative to allow for a specific focus on those operating in the food sector**

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the City Council to achieve these goals in the upcoming budget. If there are any questions, please reach out to Leah Kabran Eden at [Leah@nyequityadvocates.org](mailto:Leah@nyequityadvocates.org).



## 2025 Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City.

April 3, 2025

### Testimony of Kim Moscaritolo, Director of Communications & Advocacy for Hunger Free America

I am honored to submit this testimony today on behalf of the estimated 1.2 million city residents who now struggle against hunger.

Our overall message is simple: New Yorkers still face massive hunger and food insecurity crises citywide, and we need a massive response from the City, especially one that focuses on increasing participation in the federally-SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and new summer EBT programs. Given the massive funding cuts proposed, and in some cases already implemented, by the federal government, it is more important than ever that New York City step up and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to ample nutritious food.

We are here today specifically to support Intro 0245, which would mandate a report on the feasibility of creating a universal benefits application for local public benefit programs and mandate the creation of a universal benefits application as determined feasible by the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services.

While it is true that it's easier to apply for multiple benefits in New York City than in much of the rest of the state, it is still an onerous process to obtain those benefits. Rather than being able to apply for multiple benefits at one time, low-income New Yorkers are forced to spend countless hours travelling to, and waiting at, social service offices – or spending long times on calls waiting to be served – taking time away from work and/raising their children; if their employer pays by the hour, they often lose wages to do so.

Economists often apply the term “opportunity costs” to high and middle-income people, meaning that the time they spend on one task is time not available to perform other, potentially more



valuable tasks. But social scientists and program administrators rarely apply the concept of opportunity costs to low-income people, acting as if their time is essentially worthless. The reality is, applying for benefits in New York City is usually a time-consuming, humiliating, and costly process.

Hunger Free America has long championed the idea of a single portal for all City services and benefits. In 2021, then candidate Eric Adams promised to implement the MyCity portal, to make that a reality. When the website finally launched in 2023, it only offered eligibility screenings and applications for childcare benefits. Even now, New Yorkers who need to apply for SNAP, Cash Assistance and Medicaid renewal are directed to the separate Access HRA website. We were particularly disturbed by reports that City has already spent \$100 million on MyCity and none of the most important features are operational.

We are not technology experts, but every day our dedicated benefits access team works with struggling families to help them apply for, and receive, the benefits they desperately need. We see difficulties they face, and the pain and frustration they suffer because of this laborious process.

We realize that in addition to technology challenges, there may also be issues related to labor relations, program integration, management, and intergovernmental affairs, as well as potential legal challenges. But we believe that the potential upsides for the city once this portal is fully implemented will be enormous. It will save countless time and money for struggling New Yorkers, decrease the burden on city workers, and improve the local economy, since the people who receive these benefits will almost certainly use them in local New York City businesses.

Once again, we fully support INT 0245-2024, and we hope you will work expeditiously to get this work started. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

### **Background on The Current State of Hunger In New York City**

According to raw USDA data analyzed by Hunger Free America:

Across New York City, 14.3% of the population, or 1.2 million people, lived in food insecure households between 2021 and 2023. The Bronx is New York City's hungriest borough in terms of prevalence, with 19.1% of residents (227,086 people) living in food insecure households. Queens contains the highest number of individuals living in food insecure households, reaching 310,310 people between 2021 and 2023.

Nearly one out of every five children (18.6%) in New York City experiences food insecurity, while almost one third (32.2%) of children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity among employed adults increased slightly between 2021 and 2023, reaching 10.4%. The number of food insecure older New York City residents increased to 213,143 between 2021 and 2023.



At the same time, hundreds of thousands of City residents eligible for federally funded benefits do not receive them. The best under-participation estimates that we have for SNAP that are official are old (for 2018, pre-pandemic). For technical reasons we would be glad to discuss, we believe USDA's estimates, even in 2018, undercounted those who are eligible but did not then receive SNAP. But even if USDA's numbers were correct, that still meant that 1 in 10 people overall, 25 percent of working people, and 30 percent of older New York State residents who were eligible for SNAP did not get it. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State as a whole.

As for federally funded WIC benefits (for pregnant women and children under five), as of 2021, USDA estimated that whopping 45 percent of the pregnant women and children under five eligible for WIC statewide did not get it. Unlike SNAP, WIC has no immigration restrictions in the program and has slightly higher income eligibility than SNAP, so this under-participation in WIC is especially harmful. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State.

**As for steps the City can take to fight hunger, we have seven recommendations:**

- Increase funding to nonprofit groups (including Hunger Free America) that increase access to government food benefits through the NYC Benefits program and direct City Council funding.
- Accelerate the City's promised work to create a MyCity portal to allow application for multiple benefits.
- Urge the State to end the sub-minimum wage for tipped food service workers.
- Enact and fund a SNAP-like program, to be funded by the City, to give extra grocery funds to immigrants and working poor New Yorkers who are ineligible for federal SNAP benefits. California recently started such a program.
- Ensure that all classes in all New York City public schools provide either in classroom school breakfasts or grab and go breakfast in their hallways. Currently, New York City has the lowest school breakfast participation rate out of any big city school system in the United States, with 55.4 percent of kids who get school lunches failing to get school breakfasts.
- Work with nonprofit groups to launch a comprehensive outreach and enrollment campaign to ensure robust participation in the new Summer EBT program.

We also suggest that Council formally endorse the Congressional and State HOPE bills which would make it easier for people to apply for multiple benefits online and enable low-income families to develop assets by be able to buy a first home, start a small business, or save to pay for higher education or retirement.

We hope you can take all or some of these actions rapidly. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Good morning – my name is Bill Flynn – I am the Director of our Government Benefits Unit; our Disability Advocacy Unit; our LGBTQ+/HIV Advocacy Project; and our Veterans Justice Unit at Legal Services NYC in our Queens Office. I am here today to speak to INT 1148 introduced to this body in December by Councilmember Caban (who represents Queens!!) and how it will benefit and help our most vulnerable clients and your constituents.

The Units that I have the honor of supervising intersect the disproportionately poverty-stricken communities we both serve as constituents and clients. We at Legal Services NYC are very encouraged by the amendments offered in Councilmember Caban's bill.

Too many times – we meet clients who seek our help – who have been denied services from the Department of Social Services or HRA – sometimes multiple times – for the failure to provide the information and documents needed to complete their application for services – only to discover that the client had provided the requested information numerous times – delaying the much needed assistance that our clients

and your constituents are seeking help with in the first place. We have requested Fair Hearings to appeal such decisions. On a recent case where I represented a Veteran living with a disability who had just lost his part-time employment – needed to adjust his income with HRA to adjust the rental assistance he would be entitled to going forward. He was denied two times for not providing the requested income information to adjust his rental assistance – he came to LSNYC and we requested an expedited Fair Hearing – because the delay was putting his housing in jeopardy. The agency sent me their evidence packet prior to the hearing, which contained all the documents they claimed were not provided by our client. That is why we believe these changes to the NYC Code are essential – he was represented – our constant worry and fear is the countless New Yorkers in need that attempt to navigate these systems alone.

I understand – and have great empathy for agencies that are chronically underfunded and understaffed – leaving them ill equipped to serve our clients and your constituents effectively. The great lesson we learned as Legal Services providers during the pandemic is that we had to become

the access to these agencies when no one was picking up the phone. The measures proposed in this bill will give us further tools of accountability and greater access for our clients.

We applaud Councilmember Caban and her staff for coming up with the practical – common sense – measures proposed in this bill – to provide an application receipt to any applicant for benefits or services – that would include the date of the application, a description of what the agency received, a copy of the application and documents submitted to the agency, and (most importantly) an acknowledgement of whether the application is complete, and if incomplete, information on how to complete the application. I'll conclude my statements today echoing Councilmember Caban's own words, with which we wholeheartedly agree, when she introduced the bill in December – “this very simple measure will ensure accountability, transparency, and peace of mind for New Yorkers who rely on these life-affirming benefits. These aren't just bureaucratic processes – they are lifelines for our neighbors who deserve to have their basic needs met, and it's our responsibility as a City to

uphold the dignity of every applicant and ensure they receive the respect that they deserve.”

I thank the Committee for your time today – and please do not hesitate to refer your constituents to our offices for help navigating these safety net systems.



**MET  
COUNCIL**

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.  
Changing lives.

**New York City Council General Welfare Committee  
Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity**

Chair Ayala and fellow members of the New York City Council General Welfare Committee,

Thank you for holding this oversight hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City. Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) is the largest provider of emergency kosher and halal food in New York City and we urgently request that the City Council allocate \$20 million in discretionary funding for emergency funding for food pantries in the Fiscal Year 26 New York City Budget for both Met Council as well as our partners, Catholic Charities and the Hispanic Federation. Additionally, we want to express our support for the council's decision to call on the administration to baseline fund Community Food Connections (CFC) at \$100 million and reiterate the importance of this program.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments, ranging from 100% affordable housing to our award-winning family violence program, comprehensive Holocaust survivor assistance, senior programming, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher emergency food network. Over the past five years, we have also expanded our emergency food network to halal-observant communities and now regularly serve a network of halal pantries meeting the needs of Muslim New Yorkers. Met Council provides a wide array of support to over 320,000 New Yorkers annually, including those with religious dietary restrictions.

New York City is a refuge for millions of people. However, with this incredible diversity also comes the significant poverty that unduly affects millions of our residents. This poverty persists and directly affects food insecurity and the need for emergency food throughout the five boroughs of NYC. Improved access to nutritious foods results in lower healthcare costs, higher educational attainment, financial flexibility to pay rent or bills, and overall improvement in mental and physical well-being for all New Yorkers, including those with religiously informed dietary restrictions.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, at the height of need and significant uncertainty, New York City Council wisely created a special fund for emergency food — allowing for an injection of additional resources that allowed for targeted support to go to hard to reach, historically underserved communities.

This funding allowed Met Council, Hispanic Federation, and Catholic Charities to deploy needed resources to areas with limited pantry and social service infrastructure, to communities with religiously informed or culturally nuanced diets which have often been left out of the traditional emergency food system, and to programs that facilitated increased access through the use of innovative models that lead to an efficient and productive emergency food system. Due to the success of this initiative, Met Council, Catholic Charities, and Hispanic Federation are urging City Council to commit \$20 million to continue and expand on the important work that has been done.

Unfortunately, providers are once again seeing unprecedented levels of need in New York City. Amid an ever-growing affordability crisis, many New Yorkers turn to emergency food providers to feed their families. An estimated 1.3 million New Yorkers experience food insecurity and according to the most recent True Cost of Living Report, 63 percent of households with children cannot consistently meet their basic needs. Additionally, a new poll by No Kid Hungry New York found that 52% of NYC residents have taken on additional debt in the past year due to the rising cost of food.

Alongside these numbers, New York City is also home to the largest Jewish population and one of the largest Muslim populations in the country. Research shows that poverty within the Jewish population tracks alongside general poverty and that Muslim Americans face food insecurity at a higher rate than nearly all other religious groups in the country, which means hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are likely either kosher-observant or halal-observant, and low income. (Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, "Jewish Americans in 2020"; Met Council, March 2023, "Food Insufficiency and Halal Observance Among American Muslims"). New Yorkers observing religiously informed diets are often put in a position to compromise their religious observance or go without food when they try to utilize the emergency food system which does not meet their needs. It is essential that the New York City Council adequately funds programs that enable frontline emergency food providers to access a wide variety of kosher and halal food in order to meet the needs of their communities.

Emergency food providers are working to meet this continuously growing demand but are facing widespread cuts to the federal funding sources on which they rely. The NYS Ag & Markets program New York Food for New York Families (NYFNFF) has been cancelled, a significant portion of The USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) has been frozen with no end date or guarantee of reinstatement, and major cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are predicted later this year. All of these programs enable hungry New Yorkers to access the food they need to feed their families. Without these programs emergency food providers will be facing increased need with severely limited resources.

Due to continually increasing need for emergency food in New York City, Met Council is joining other anti-hunger leaders in expressing our support of City Council's decision to call for baseline funding of \$100 million for CFC. CFC is New York City's largest purchasing program for emergency food providers. The program allocates funds to more than 700 emergency food providers in the five boroughs. According to the Human Resources Administration, in 2023, the food pantries funded by CFC served 30,134,733 people (including repeat visitors) and soup kitchens provided 3,448,196 meals.

Unlike many other state and federal programs, CFC enables pantries to select the food that meets the needs of their communities. The flexibility of CFC funding is particularly valuable for kosher and halal food providers, as it enables them to procure foods for their communities that are not accessible through other streams of funding. Nearly 20 percent of New Yorkers are Muslim or Jewish. Thirty-five percent of American Jews keep or prefer kosher and 83 percent of American Muslims keep or prefer halal (Met Council, March 2023, "Food Insufficiency and Halal Observance Among American Muslims"). As mentioned previously, Jewish and Muslim New Yorkers face poverty and food insecurity at a rate similar to or higher than the national average. By continuing and expanding the funding for CFC, New York City Council can take steps toward a more equitable emergency feeding system that adequately serves the kosher and halal observant populations in New York City.

In this uncertain moment, when federal anti-hunger programs are under attack, it is essential that the City Council step in to fill the gap that federal cuts will leave behind. For Met Council, the

importance of this funding cannot be overstated. Frontline emergency food providers are a last resort when New Yorkers need to feed their families. When emergency food providers do not have the resources to meet the need, New Yorkers go hungry. By committing \$20 million in discretionary funding for emergency funding for food pantries and baseline funding CFC at \$100 million, this committee could provide great benefit for food-insecure New Yorkers, particularly those with religiously required dietary restrictions.

We thank you for taking the time to review our testimony, and we hope to continue to work with this committee and the City Council to better meet the needs of all New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dickran Jebejian', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dickran Jebejian  
Director of Policy  
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty





NEW YORK

**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
Oversight - Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3, 2025**

**Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York**

Good morning, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare of the New York City Council. My name is Rachel Sabella, and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City.

First, we want to thank the City Council for your unwavering commitment to protecting New Yorkers from food insecurity. Your leadership has been instrumental from securing increased support for school meal operations and championing culturally responsive meals to expanding no-cost school meals for every child and leading the charge for Summer EBT.

Now, more than ever, we are grateful to have you as a steadfast partner in the fight against food insecurity as we see federal programs under attack.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, No Kid Hungry New York builds and supports public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day.

With 1 in 4 children in New York City facing hunger, we are counting on your continued partnership and leadership in the fight against food insecurity. Even when other levels of government have stepped back, New York City found the means to prioritize the fight against child hunger in our schools. New York City has a tremendous opportunity to lead the nation in this work again and can do that by investing resources in programs that connect families with meals. Together we can make no kid hungry a reality.

**No Kid Hungry New York believes that all children, no matter their borough or circumstance, deserve the opportunity to be nourished and safe, so they can live up to their full potential and achieve their dreams.** Adequate nutrition, both at school and at home, helps lay the foundation for a child's physical and emotional development, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Years of data and

research have demonstrated that federal nutrition programs are our nation's most effective defense against hunger and food insecurity and have helped lift millions of families out of poverty.

## **2025 NEW YORK HUNGER SURVEY FINDINGS**

This March, No Kid Hungry New York released the findings from our third annual Hunger Survey and the findings are extremely concerning. As New Yorkers grapple with an affordability crisis and the cost of food continues to rise, more New Yorkers are struggling to make ends meet. A staggering 86% of respondents say food prices are increasing faster than their income—[showing no improvement from last year's crisis](#). The impact is undeniable. Families are being forced to make impossible choices just to put food on the table.

One mother from the Bronx shared, “Being on a budget, the rise in food costs strains my pockets. There are times where I have to use my credit card just to make sure there’s enough food in the house for me and my son until my next paycheck.”

Over the past 12 months, 53 percent of New Yorkers have taken on additional debt just to feed their families. The situation is even more dire for Hispanic families, with 73 percent going into debt to ensure their children do not go hungry. With costs rising – including housing, electricity and transportation – it is even harder for families to put healthy food on the table.

In addition to their financial health, the rising cost of food is taking a toll beyond the dinner table—63 percent reported that their mental health has suffered, and 52 percent say their physical health has deteriorated over the past year.

Despite these challenges, there is broad agreement that food assistance programs make a difference. A majority (60%) believe grocery benefit programs like SNAP, WIC, and Summer EBT have a positive impact on local economies. Even more—70%—say these programs strengthen the state’s economy as well as local businesses in their area (76%).

New Yorkers are also clear about what they do not want: cuts to food assistance. A majority (62%) oppose reducing funding for programs that help families put food on the table. And nearly all New Yorkers (96%) agree that child hunger should not exist in our state, while 91% believe ending childhood hunger should be a bipartisan priority.

These numbers send a powerful message: food insecurity is a growing crisis, and New York families need real solutions.

## **PROTECTING CRITICAL FEDERAL PROGRAMS**

Right now, Congress is considering massive cuts to critical anti-hunger and poverty programs like SNAP and school meals as part of its budget plans, and we need your help to make sure kids and families do not lose access to the food and resources they need.

- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).** SNAP is the backbone of New York’s nutrition safety net, serving nearly 3 million residents. While all nutrition assistance programs play a vital role, none have the same reach or impact as SNAP (also known as the first line of

defense against hunger). SNAP supports households across the state, most with children, and a significant number with older adults and people with disabilities.

SNAP is not just about putting food on the table; it is one of the most effective anti-poverty tools we have. It helps families afford nutritious food while freeing up limited budgets to cover essentials like rent, medical care, and other necessities. Studies consistently show that SNAP reduces food insecurity, particularly for children, and improves health outcomes while lowering healthcare costs.

A key strength of SNAP is that it seamlessly integrates with the existing food system—families can use their benefits where they already shop. It is also highly responsive to economic downturns, ramping up quickly to provide support when people lose jobs or income. This flexibility not only helps families but also drives dollars into local economies, benefiting retailers, farmers, and producers alike.

The House Majority has floated a range of proposals that could weaken SNAP. One possibility is a rollback of the Thrifty Food Plan, which had been updated in the 2018 Farm Bill and lead to an average increase of in SNAP benefits of \$1.20 per day effective October 2021. Another is shifting costs to states, requiring states to pay for a portion of SNAP benefits for the first time. This would fundamentally change the nature of the program and significantly weaken its economic impact. It would also force states to choose between maintaining SNAP benefits and eligibility and funding other priorities. Further, there is interest in creating additional SNAP work requirements and potentially raising the ABAWD age limit. There have also been discussions about restricting consumer choice in SNAP, which would undermine the dignity of SNAP participants and limit their ability to make individual choices that meet their own or their children's health needs, lifestyle, and cultural preferences.

Any rollback to SNAP would have a devastating impact on New York City families, especially as food prices and other costs continue to rise.

- **Broad Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE).** Another SNAP proposal that would set us back in the fight against hunger is the House Majority plan to eliminate BBCE. BBCE helps families with low incomes cut through red tape so they can access the nutrition assistance they need through programs like SNAP, school meals and summer meals.

BBCE is not an automatic pathway to SNAP benefits. But it is an effective, practical policy that helps families enroll in SNAP if they are already participating in other anti-poverty programs.

When you sync up the eligibility for these programs, it does a lot of good for families in need. First, it reduces bureaucratic red tape, meaning families in need of benefits receive a streamlined application process. It also encourages families to work and grow their income by gradually decreasing SNAP benefits as their wages rise.

When the first Trump administration sought to restrict this policy, it was estimated that more than 3 million people, including children, would lose access to SNAP. With even more states -- including those led by Republican governors -- adopting BBCE since then, the impact now would be greater. Kids whose families participate in SNAP are automatically enrolled in the school

meals and summer meals programs, including Summer EBT. This helps ensure kids receive the three daily meals they need year-round to grow up healthy and strong.

This means that restricting BBCE would not just impact access to food at home. Earlier efforts to limit BBCE were estimated to lead to nearly 1 million children across the US losing access to school meals. Although many of these kids would remain income eligible for free or reduced-price meals, experience tells us that far too many will fall through the cracks. Confusion about eligibility, complex paperwork, human error and stigma all create barriers to enrollment.

Broad Based Categorical Eligibility works. It helps families work and build savings, increasing their financial stability and self-sufficiency. It ensures that their kids get the fuel they need to grow and reach their full potential—goals everyone can agree on.

- **School Meals.** For many students, a healthy meal is the most important school supply--as important to their learning as a new notebook and pencils--and school meals are a healthy, convenient and affordable way to ensure students have the nutrition they need to thrive in the classroom and beyond. School meals play a critical role in ensuring kids get three healthy meals a day while also helping families stretch their food budget. Thanks to the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), a federal program, New York City is able to provide a no-cost school meal to every child in the New York City Public Schools.

Unfortunately, the House Majority has also expressed support for proposals that could rollback access to no cost school meals. One proposal would be to dramatically lower the CEP eligibility threshold, which likely means fewer schools able to adopt CEP, fewer students participating in school meals, and higher administrative costs for schools that no longer qualify for CEP. Another proposal to require all families to submit proof of income with a school meals application would further add to the administrative burden and limit access. This would also have a negative impact in New York, which has a CEP incentive and the proposal to expand no cost school meals to every child in the state is included in the Governor's budget proposal. With families facing an economic crisis as well as an affordability one in New York City, no-cost school meals are even more critical to preserve and protect.

It is essential that the New York City Council come together in a bipartisan manner to advocate to the New York Congressional delegation to protect and strengthen SNAP. Cuts to benefit levels or changes that restrict access will make it even harder for families to afford groceries, especially as food prices continue to climb. Such changes would lead to more hunger, more hardship, and more strain on vulnerable communities.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO TACKLE HUNGER IN NEW YORK CITY**

New York City can take many steps to address hunger and poverty across the five boroughs. As you continue to combat food insecurity, we have included the [No Kid Hungry New York City Policy Agenda](#). Last year, the City Council was a tremendous partner in building an outreach and awareness strategy for Summer EBT. We are thankful that the New York City Council immediately engaged in advocacy efforts last year to prevent cuts to school meal programs – so much so that funding was restored in a month's time!

## **Full Implementation of Breakfast After the Bell**

Students who start the school day with breakfast have higher attendance rates, better test scores and fewer chronic health problems. Breakfast in the Classroom and Grab and Go programs are proven effective to connect more kids with breakfast. Despite New York City's longstanding leadership in expanding access to breakfast, some schools claim operational barriers to implementing the 2018 New York State legislation mandating Breakfast After the Bell and do not participate in a meaningful way. New York City must ensure ALL schools offer alternative breakfast models and create a strategy that is focused on expanded participation.

## **Summer EBT**

The summer months can be some of the toughest months for parents. With many children relying on schools for breakfast and lunch, that burden traditionally fell on parents resulting in greater cost to fill that gap. Summer EBT provides eligible families with \$120 per child in grocery-buying benefits during summer break, helping replace the meals kids would otherwise get at school. Last year, New York State saw the successful rollout of Summer EBT resulting in more than two million children statewide receiving more than \$245M in benefits that could be spent in the community.

While New York State will be administering the program, it is critical that New York City take action to promote the program to eligible families. We encourage the City of New York to create a comprehensive strategy for outreach and awareness that could involve partnering with the City Council to promote, ensuring every city agency and office is sharing information about the program and encouraging eligible families to enroll. It's also important to note that these funds support the city's economy whether being spent at national retailers, local businesses or greenmarkets.

## **Summer Meals Accessibility**

Summer meals historically reach far fewer eligible students than meals served during the school year, making summer the hungriest time of the year. In New York City, barriers to access often include accessibility of meal sites and lack of program awareness among families. Broad promotion of available meal sites is integral to reducing summer hunger among New York City's children. Ensuring that information regarding meal sites comes from trusted messengers, such as schools, elected officials, principals, parent advisory councils, and faith leaders, is an important way to encourage families to participate in the summer meals program. Expanding the number of meal sites and strategically placing them with input from local stakeholders to avoid gaps in service are both essential strategies to increase summer meals participation.

## **Expand School Pantries and Mobile Markets**

In 2016, New York City created first-in-the-nation food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools. These school pantries provide food, cleaning supplies, menstrual products and tools to address hygiene. Knowing how many communities across the city struggle to access fresh produce, partnering with other city agencies and nonprofit organizations to set up mobile markets could also increase access to fresh produce and resources for families. School pantries also provide another opportunity to

promote other safety net programs. We continue to hear from principals, community organizations and other school stakeholders on the need for increased school pantries across the city.

Additional recommendations to address child hunger and poverty can be found in the [No Kid Hungry New York City Policy Agenda](#).

## **CONCLUSION**

As Congress considers massive cuts to federal nutrition programs, it is more important than ever that we come together to protect and strengthen programs that help New Yorkers put food on the table. The New York City Council has played a key role in combating hunger and food insecurity and has set an example for the rest of the nation. No Kid Hungry New York looks forward to working with the City Council and partners across the city to continue to address child hunger and poverty. We are grateful that we can count on you as a partner in this effort to ensure no kid is hungry.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my testimony.



NEW YORK HEALTH FOUNDATION: Improving the state of New York's health

## **Testimony of Liz Ward, M.P.A., Senior Program Assistant, New York Health Foundation**

### **Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Oversight – Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City**

**April 3, 2025**

The New York Health Foundation (NYHealth) is a private, independent foundation that seeks to improve the health of all New Yorkers, especially people of color and others who have been historically marginalized. Through our *Healthy Food, Healthy Lives* program, we support policies and programs that connect New Yorkers with the food they need to thrive. Our work has provided us with in-depth knowledge of the widespread impact food insecurity has on the health of children, families, and communities.

NYHealth has a longstanding commitment to fighting hunger. Since 2014, we have invested millions of dollars to improve food security across New York State. For example, NYHealth has supported campaigns to improve the quality of food in the emergency food system, to make it easier for individuals to access nutrition benefit programs, and to expand universal school meals across the State. Notably, NYHealth's investments helped secure universal free school lunch for New York City's 1.1 million public school children.

Access to nutritious food affects health. Food-insecure New Yorkers are twice as likely as their food-secure counterparts to report poor health.<sup>1</sup> They are also more likely to have lower diet quality, higher rates of diet-related disease, and higher healthcare costs.<sup>2,3,4</sup>

### **Hunger is at the Highest Point in Five Years**

Despite considerable State investment, food insecurity remains a serious concern for millions of New Yorkers. For the past five years, NYHealth has tracked food insufficiency—a more severe, short-term version of food insecurity—in New York State using U.S. Census data. Our most recent analysis shows that, in 2024, food insufficiency rates in New York are higher than they

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<sup>1</sup> New York Health Foundation. "NYHealth Survey of Food and Health." August 2022. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/nyhealth-survey-of-food-and-health-2022/>.

<sup>2</sup> Morales, M.E.; Berkowitz, S.A. The relationship between food insecurity, dietary patterns, and obesity. *Current Nutr Rep.* 2016;5(1):54-60.

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, C.A.; Coleman-Jensen, A. Food insecurity, chronic disease, and health among working-age adults. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. 2017;235. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Berkowitz, S.A.; Basu, S.; Meigs, J.B.; Seligman, H.K. Food insecurity and health care expenditures in the United States, 2011-2013. *Health Services Research.* 2018;53(3):1600-1620.

were during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>5</sup> The recent rise in food insufficiency is likely due to the expiration of federal pandemic-era safety net programs—such as increased Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, expanded Child Tax Credits, and pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT) payments.

Disparities persist. Nearly 1 in 5 Black and 1 in 7 Hispanic New Yorkers experienced food insufficiency last year, compared with 1 in 11 white New Yorkers. Nearly a third of New Yorkers in the lowest income bracket (those with annual income of less than \$25,000) experienced food insufficiency, 13 times the rate for New Yorkers in the highest income bracket (those with annual income of \$100,000 or more).<sup>6</sup> Stronger safety net programs are critical, especially for historically marginalized populations in New York.

Recent federal cuts to the safety net make City investment all the more critical. Just last month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture cut more than \$1.6 billion in food assistance by ending the Local Food Purchase Assistance and Local Food for Schools programs—slashing \$500 million from food banks and \$660 million from schools.<sup>7</sup> The agency also paused \$500 million in funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), effectively freezing half of the program’s entire budget.<sup>8</sup> In real terms, this means shipments of poultry, produce, eggs, cheese, and other essential foods that were destined for food banks won’t arrive. In New York City alone, 2.5 million meals are at risk.

Considering these recent data and policy developments, we recommend the below actions to address food insecurity in New York City:

**Continue to invest in the Community Food Connection program.** With 1.4 million New Yorkers relying on emergency food each year, the City’s support for programs like Community Food Connection (CFC) is vital.<sup>9</sup> Many families don’t qualify for nutrition benefits—or still struggle even with them—making emergency food essential. An NYHealth survey on Food and Health found that most pantry visitors are satisfied with the food offered, and two-thirds say the food is high quality and something their families enjoy.<sup>10</sup>

Thanks to advocacy by New York City Food Policy Alliance members like Equity Advocates, West Side Campaign Against Hunger, and Met Council, the City allocated \$52 million for emergency food, including \$30 million in new funds to make fresh produce a permanent part of the system.<sup>11</sup> But with food insufficiency rising, these investments must grow to meet the need.

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<sup>5</sup> Okonkwo, C. Ford, M. McCarthy, J. Barrett, A. Havusha, A. Sandman, D. 2025. “Hunger on the Rise: New York’s Food Insufficiency Rates Hit New Highs and Exceed Pandemic Levels.” New York Health Foundation. 2024. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/hunger-on-the-rise-nys-food-insufficiency-2024update/>.

<sup>6</sup> Okonkwo, C. Ford, M. McCarthy, J. Barrett, A. Havusha, A. Sandman, D. 2025. “Hunger on the Rise: New York’s Food Insufficiency Rates Hit New Highs and Exceed Pandemic Levels.” New York Health Foundation. 2024. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/hunger-on-the-rise-nys-food-insufficiency-2024update/>.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, M. “USDA Cancels \$1B in Local Food Purchasing for Schools, Food Banks.” *Politico*. March 10, 2025. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/10/usda-cancels-local-food-purchasing-for-schools-food-banks-00222796>.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, M. “USDA Halts Millions of Dollars Worth of Deliveries to Food Banks.” *Politico*. March 19, 2025. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/19/usda-halts-deliveries-food-banks-trump-00239453>.

<sup>9</sup> NYHealth. “Equity Advocates.” <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/grantee/equity-advocates-2/>.

<sup>10</sup> New York Health Foundation. “NYHealth Survey of Food and Health.” August 2022. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/nyhealth-survey-of-food-and-health-2022/>.

<sup>11</sup> NYHealth. “Equity Advocates.” <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/grantee/equity-advocates-2/>.



The City should continue to work with advocates to expand CFC and ensure all New Yorkers can access fresh, nutritious food when they need it most.

**Ensure timely payment of City contracts.** Nonprofits—especially those providing emergency food—are essential to New York City’s social safety net. Federal cuts threaten their financial stability, but the City can act now by paying what it owes. More than \$4 billion in federal aid supports this work, yet many service providers are still waiting on overdue City payments.<sup>12</sup> The City must honor its commitments and pay providers on time to keep these critical services running.

**Use your collective voice to oppose harmful federal cuts.** NYHealth is grateful for the City’s shared commitment to food security. We urge the City Council to continue its leadership by protecting emergency food investments, pushing for timely nonprofit payments, and using its voice to oppose harmful federal cuts. Together, we can ensure all New Yorkers have reliable access to the nutritious food they need to live healthy, dignified lives.

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<sup>12</sup> N.Y.C. Comptroller Brand Lander. “NYC Comptroller Lander Convenes Nonprofit Leaders Amid Trump Administration’s Threats to Health and Social Service Funding.” March 27, 2025.  
<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/nyc-comptroller-lander-convenes-nonprofit-leaders-amid-trump-administrations-threats-to-health-and-social-service-funding/>.

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group,  
Oversight – Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City,  
And in Support of Int 0245-2024, Int 1028-2024, and Int 1148-2024  
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
April 3, 2025

Deputy Speaker Ayala, Council Members, and staff, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on General Welfare on the topics of hunger and food insecurity in New York City, and in support of Int 0245-2024, Int 1028-2024, and Int 1148-2024. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am the Project Director of the Shelter and Economic Stability Project at the New York Legal Assistance Group ("NYLAG").

NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustices. We address emerging and urgent needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality.

The Shelter and Economic Stability Project at NYLAG provides free legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access public shelter in New York City, and those having trouble accessing or maintaining Public Assistance and SNAP (food stamp) benefits. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process, assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the

transfer process, and seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs. We also represent clients at Administrative Fair Hearings, conduct advocacy with the Department of Social Services ("DSS"), Benefits Access Centers and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of shelter and benefits.

While our clients are resilient and strong, they often face the simultaneous and intersecting insecurities of hunger and housing instability. Based on my experiences, and those of my clients, I appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

#### I. Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City

Far too many of our neighbors are going hungry. In a city of roughly 8 million people, almost 1.3 million New York City residents are currently struggling to feed themselves and their families.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, 1 in 5 children in New York City are suffering from food insecurity.<sup>2</sup> In 2023 alone, 31% of adult New Yorkers and 44% of families with children in New York City experienced food hardship.<sup>3</sup> Since the pandemic, the situation has grown more dire, as 1 in 3 New Yorkers have relied on a food pantry over a three-year period post-pandemic, and monthly visits to soup kitchens and food pantries across the City are up 75%.<sup>4</sup>

These statistics do not affect the City's diverse population equally. Unsurprisingly, families and communities of color face higher levels of hunger.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, rates of diabetes and hypertension, which are closely linked to nutritional intake, are higher among people

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cityharvest.org/hunger-in-nyc/>

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

<sup>3</sup> <https://robinhood.org/reports/poverty-tracker-spotlight-food-assistance-nyc-pantry-system/>

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/nycfoodbythenumbers.pdf>

of color.<sup>6</sup> In fact, people of color are twice as likely to experience diabetes compared to their White neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

Community health is inextricably linked to adequate nourishment, and research overwhelmingly demonstrates that food insecurity has significant health and economic consequences.<sup>8</sup> In adults, the medical implications of inadequate nutrition include, but are not limited to, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, depression, and fatigue.<sup>9</sup> In children, the consequences extend to low birth weights and delayed cognitive development.<sup>10</sup> Such health concerns can then lead to lowered productivity and higher medical costs.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, children who are well fed do better in school; seniors with adequate food access need not make the choice between feeling nourished and purchasing other necessities; families that are satiated thrive. As such, a discussion of food access is not only about individuals, but also extends to a concern for our collective health and communal strength.

Because of all of this, it is vital that the City prioritize access to food-related benefits that residents are entitled to. But in fiscal year 2024 only 65% of SNAP applications were adjudicated within the timeframes mandated by federal law.<sup>12</sup> That echoes our clients' experiences, as they frequently encounter problems completing their applications and recertifications because of systems at DSS that are either not functioning well or that are not accessible. These include barriers to completing the phone interview, and documents

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<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

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

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.harvesters.org/Learn/How-Many-are-Hungry/The-Impact-of-Hunger>

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

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2025/01/nyc-getting-faster-distributing-snap-and-cash-assistance-benefits/402671/>

that are not timely indexed and added to their case. Both persistent issues lead to cases not being adjudicated within the appropriate timelines and result in improper denials.

My team has assisted numerous clients who were hungry and reliant on SNAP benefits for their nutritional needs, but because of DSS's failure to process their applications or recertifications, have had their SNAP benefits denied and/or discontinued. While we are able to get their benefits restored retroactively, as we all know, people need food on a constant basis and cannot eat retroactively. Many of these recipients are elderly or live with disabilities, and when their SNAP is discontinued, they don't know where to turn to access food.

One NYLAG client, Mr. S. was a food-insecure elderly holocaust survivor with limited mobility and a number of disabilities. Mr. S. (with the help of his community social worker) mailed in his recertification papers for SNAP, and his social worker called DSS to ensure that his recertification package was received. On that date, DSS confirmed it had received the recertification package and supporting documentation. Nonetheless, Mr. S. did not receive the next month's payment. When Mr. S's social worker called DSS to find out why he did not receive his payment, she was told that Mr. S. had failed to submit his recertification documentation. Moreover, Mr. S. never received a notice of discontinuance. Mr. S.'s elderly wife began visiting food pantries but was not able to get the types of food they needed, so they compensated by eating less.

While NYLAG was able to reactivate Mr. S's case, this scenario is far too common for NYLAG clients. DSS must be adequately funded in order to perform its mandate - provide critical, life-sustaining benefits to those in need.

#### a. Food Insecurity in New York City Shelter

Food insecurity in the City's shelter system runs rampant. NYLAG clients frequently report that the meals they are served in shelter are too small to abate their hunger. They say they are only allowed to have one serving of each item per meal, and that the serving sizes themselves are very small. As a result, clients in shelter are left perpetually hungry. As we are sure that the Committee on General Welfare is already aware, and as aforementioned, such practices are inevitably damaging to the physical health of shelter residents; food insecurity is disproportionately linked to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes.<sup>13</sup> For children, the consequences are particularly devastating. Research shows an association between food insecurity and delayed development in young children; risk of chronic illnesses like asthma and anemia; and behavioral problems like hyperactivity, anxiety, and aggression in school-age children.<sup>14</sup> Hunger has a direct impact on children's academic achievement and ensuing economic prosperity. Inadequately feeding shelter residents only further disenfranchises them. "Providing food" is not the same as providing enough food.

Moreover, shelter residents with a job are often faced with an impossible choice: work or eat. NYLAG clients who are employed or have work assignments report difficulty accessing food served by their shelters. This is due to the fact that shelter meals are served at specific times and if the residents are not present at those times, they cannot get a meal. Additionally, they cannot get a meal when they return to shelter and are not allowed to take their meals early. Thus, if an employed resident wants to eat, he or she cannot go to work, and vice versa. This is further complicated by the fact that recipients of cash public

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

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

assistance are not awarded the "restaurant allowance" supplement if they reside in a shelter that serves meals. As such, job hours preclude residents from accessing food at their shelter, but their public assistance also and additionally leaves them without a means to purchase food. New policies need to be put into place whereby residents who work or have other commitments can be provided with food at times that work with their schedules. Working shelter residents should not be punished with hunger for being employed.

The problem of shelter resident hunger is further amplified by shelter policies that prevent residents from bringing in outside food. When residents miss meals and are prevented from bringing in and/or storing outside food, they are left with no option but to skip a meal. This is particularly harmful for residents with health issues or disabilities that need to eat between meals for their wellbeing or to safely take medication. While residents can be granted reasonable accommodations, the reasonable accommodation process can take months to approve and requires the active cooperation of the resident's health care provider. A system must be put into place where residents can eat at non-mealtimes.

These problems with the provision of food in shelters are further exacerbated by the fact that individuals and families who reside in shelters that purport to provide meals have their public assistance benefits reduced based on the fiction of readily available food. For the reasons outlined above, that equation does not represent the lived reality of NYLAG clients in shelter.

Problems with food access are even worse in the non-DHS shelter system solely for new immigrants. This shelter system does not comply with the minimum shelter guidelines mandated in New York City and does not provide the residents with adequate assistance transitioning to permanent housing. Among numerous other problems, NYLAG clients



residing in these shelters report that they are not being provided with adequate food, and that they are not being served hot food.

Compounding the difficulty for our new immigrant neighbors, most new immigrant shelter residents are not eligible for SNAP benefits. Though many can achieve classification as Permanently Residing Under Color of Law ("PRUCOL"), most commonly by applying for asylum or being paroled into the country, which grants access to Public Assistance benefits through the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, SNAP benefits are largely unavailable to new immigrants in shelter, and their public assistance grants are reduced based on the alleged availability of meals in shelter. Our clients consistently report anxiety about food security and must turn to community groups for gap-filling services to address their persistent hunger.

NYLAG thanks this Council for examining the important issue of hunger in New York City and encourages the Council to ensure that those eligible for benefits receive them in a timely manner and that food in shelter is available, abundant, and nutritious.

## II. Int 0245-2024

NYLAG strongly supports Int 0245-2024, particularly those parts establishing a universal benefits application for city benefits and codifying Access NYC. Any efforts to enhance New Yorkers' access to the benefits they are entitled to is of the utmost importance. One note, however, is that if the common application includes SNAP or other federal benefits that require verification with the federal SAVE system verifying immigrant eligibility, this may have unintended consequences of alerting the federal government where to find immigrants vulnerable to removal. New York State and New York City allow for immigrants who are PRUCOL (as explained above) to be eligible for certain non-federal benefits. The application must have a way for those ineligible for federal benefits not to be

run through a federal verification system. If that safeguard is not implemented, it is likely that immigrants will not want to engage in a common benefits application.

### III. Int 1028-2024

NYLAG applauds the intent of automatic enrollment of eligible individuals in city-created benefit programs, however, we are concerned about collateral consequences of involuntary enrollment. While this bill does contemplate an "opt out" provision, it is very likely that many people will never know that they have been enrolled or how to opt out. In the current political climate, people have many valid reasons why they may not want to access public benefits they are eligible for. Moreover, the bill is silent on people who don't meet the requirements for the benefits they are accidentally enrolled in and/or what type of repayment for benefits wrongly issued would be mandated. In sum, at this time, NYLAG does not support automatic enrollment of people in public benefits, and thinks that all benefits should require an "opt in" not an "opt out". However, in keeping with the spirit of the bill, NYLAG would support an automatic screening with a simplified opt-in mechanism, so individuals are able to more easily access city created benefit programs for which they are eligible.

### IV. Int 1148-2024

NYLAG wholeheartedly supports requiring DSS to provide a receipt for all applications for benefits or services, and particularly a detailed receipt for the documents submitted. So many times, NYLAG clients visit DSS offices to attempt to apply, recertify or otherwise change their public benefits and come away empty handed. Clients are later told that documents are needed when they were already submitted, or clients are denied for failure to submit documents that they did in fact include with their application or within the timeframe required. Given the disorganization of DSS and how many applications or

recertifications are simply not acted upon, it is imperative that receipts are given so that clients may follow up on their applications.

We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the work it has done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers, for holding this hearing and taking this opportunity to engage the community's perspectives on hunger and food insecurity in New York City, and for giving us an opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation. We hope we can continue to be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



*43 Years of Service to Staten Island 1982 – 2025*

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Hello,

Thank you to the Chair of the General Welfare Committee, Councilwoman Ayala, for holding this hearing and to hear the testimony, and cries, for help. My name is Alex Hughes. I am the Sr. Director of Hunger Prevention and Advocacy with Project Hospitality. We are the largest social service agency on Staten Island. I've served the community since 2016 with Project Hospitality and oversee our network of pantries, mobile pantries, and hot meal programs. I also come to you as a person who has lived the struggle. I know what it is to be hungry with nowhere to turn. I truly wish that upon nobody.

I am here to be the canary in the coal mine. Emergency food programs with direct links to the community, such as ours and the rest of the Roundtable, (which we are a proud founding member) are feeling the heat. To put it as simple as I can, we all see the lines getting longer with resources to help dwindling in front of our eyes.

One critical program, and I do mean critical, has been the Community Food Connection program. Without this program, the 30,000 people on Staten Island we serve annually would suffer.

The reality is our work and people we serve are under attack with reckless and inhumane policy decisions at the federal level. SNAP, WIC, Medicaid, TEFAP, school meals....all the programs we KNOW work at tackling poverty are under siege. When the USDA cut the LFPA program, which provided LOCAL produce and food to LOCAL schools and food banks, the USDA said this program "no longer effectuates agency priorities." In the face of all this, our drive and commitment to this work will always remain an unwavering priority.

An all too common ask in the pantry-world I this: can't you do more?

We always want to do more. It is not a matter of want. It is a matter of having the proper amount of resources to make the work happen. It does not happen on its own.

I implore then committee and council: please think of the hungry. Think of those who are suffering and cannot stock their shelves at home. Think of the single mother or father who skip meals so their children can eat. Think about the person struggling to choose between healthcare and food....

One way to do this is to, as so many orgs here are saying, increase the CFC baseline to \$100 million. This won't stop the bleeding, but it could soften our landing as we fight every day not just to serve meals, but to end hunger.

In a time of discussion about priorities and what should be cut and what shouldn't, please do not forget us, our work, and our people. In the hardest of times, New Yorkers lean into each other for support. **Now** is the time we must lean on each other as organizations, as professionals and as individuals. Now.

Thank you,

Alex Hughes  
Sr Director of Hunger Prevention and Advocacy  
Project Hospitality



Testimony before the New York City Council  
Committee on General Welfare

April 3, 2025

**Barbara Hughes**  
*Executive Director of City Beets Kitchens*  
Project Renewal

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is Barbara Hughes, and I am the Executive Director of City Beet Kitchens at Project Renewal, a New York City homeless services nonprofit agency. Thank you to the City Council for convening this hearing.

For over 55 years, Project Renewal has provided shelter, housing, health care, and employment services to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. We are grateful to the City Council for its ongoing support of our programs. We are proud to have partnered with the city to address some of New York's biggest challenges, including food insecurity and hunger.

**The Challenge of Food Insecurity in NYC:** More than 1.2 million New Yorkers are food insecure, with over 1.8 million receiving SNAP benefits and countless others relying on approximately 400 food pantries and 80 soup kitchens throughout the five boroughs. We are encouraged to see that the General Welfare Committee is prioritizing legislation to make it easier for New Yorkers to apply for and receive benefits from food assistance programs.

**City Beet Kitchens' Impact:** City Beet Kitchens, which I oversee, is a social enterprise that plays an integral role in combatting food insecurity throughout New York City. As one of the largest food providers to New Yorkers in need, we serve 2.6 million meals each year at shelters, supportive housing, and senior centers across the city. Beyond our catering services for events and meetings, we prepare meals for people living in shelters and for other nonprofit organizations. We also organize food drives and special holiday dinners to ensure families don't go hungry during the holidays.

**Workforce Development Through Culinary Training:** Our Culinary Arts Training Program provides New Yorkers facing barriers to employment—including veterans—with world-class culinary education and pathways to fulfilling careers. Many graduates secure positions in corporate kitchens, local restaurants, and within City Beet Kitchens itself. We've witnessed the powerful transformation of New Yorkers who once faced employment barriers now working full-time to support others facing similar challenges.

**Request for Continued Support:** To sustain and expand City Beet Kitchens and our Culinary Arts Training Program, we rely on city investment. We thank the Council for its continued support of our programs and applaud the priority this committee is placing on alleviating food insecurity in our City. By investing in nonprofit food providers and facilitating access to SNAP and other food benefits, the Council plays a vital role in addressing the hunger crisis in our city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions you may have.

March 17, 2025

Dear Members of New York City Committee on General Welfare,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the NYC budget for 2025.

The Health & Housing Consortium is a collaborative network of healthcare, housing, homeless and social services organizations, and government partners with the shared goal of improving health equity and housing stability. Our priority areas focus on (1) equipping frontline workers with the information and resources they need to support people with unmet health and housing needs, (2) fostering cross-sector relationships, (3) conducting research to better understand the needs of this population, and (4) advocating for policies that will improve the care and services people receive while addressing the impacts of structural racism on health and housing.

For Fiscal Year 2025, we respectfully request that the City Council ensures a budget that will meaningfully support vulnerable New Yorkers and ethically promote public safety. **Rikers Island Jail Complex, which costs over half a million dollars per person per year, wastes resources that are desperately needed for housing, mental health treatment, education, and other investments.**

In order to follow through on the legal and moral obligation to Close Rikers, City Council must secure a budget that will improve community safety and reduce our City's overreliance on incarceration. **To that end, we urge the city to reallocate \$39.8M in Rikers Island funds toward underfunded housing and mental health services.** These include:

- Building on the City Council's investment last year and appropriating \$4.8 million more in annual funding for [Justice Involved Supportive Housing](#), and reissuing the RFP for 380 new units with service funding levels in line with those of similar supportive housing programs.
- Allocating \$22M more to create 15 more [Intensive Mobile Treatment](#) teams. The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people.
- Allocating \$7M more to create more [Forensic Assertive Community Treatment](#) teams and cut the long wait times (average of 6 to 12 months) to access this service.
- Allocate \$6M more to open **four new crisis respite centers**, in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.



A comprehensive approach to promoting public safety also includes:


- Fully restoring cuts to the Office of Criminal Justice for ATI (\$8.9M) and reentry (\$8M) programs, as well as increasing discretionary funding for alternatives to incarceration (ATIs) by \$2.4 million.
- Fully restoring cuts to the Board of Correction and increasing their headcount to at least 1% of the number of people in DOC custody.
- Eliminating vacancies for DOC uniformed staff. The Department of Correction is budgeted for 7,060 uniformed officers, but as of January 1, 2025 they employed 5,908 and 1,152 positions were vacant.
- Reducing overtime spending by consolidating operations and permanently closing jails on Rikers, starting with the vacant Anna M. Kross Center, where 109 officers are still assigned

The Consortium envisions a world where all people live healthy, fulfilling lives and experience safety and holistic wellbeing in the housing and communities of their choice, with the support they need to thrive. We must guarantee the support of New Yorkers with behavioral health needs, invest in service delivery around the experience and dignity of the individual, and ensure the workers delivering these services are paid a living wage.

Sincerely,



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**Testimony of The Legal Aid Society  
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare**

**Oversight Hearing on Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York**

**April 3, 2025**

The Legal Aid Society appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Chair Ayala for today's hearing examining the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report and the opportunity to testify.

### **Background**

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal, and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

In particular, our Government Benefits Practice assists the neediest New York City residents to obtain and maintain subsistence Cash Assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (or "SNAP") benefits issued by the Human Resources Administration ("HRA") as well as disability benefits issued by the Social Security Administration. Moreover, while our work spans meeting the urgent needs of individual clients for cash, food, health care, disability benefits, and housing benefits, we also engage in impact litigation, and conduct legislative and administrative advocacy at the city, state, and federal levels. In so doing, we aim to meet client needs, improve social welfare systems that prevent clients from reaching their goals of economic security, and defend against adverse changes in law and policy.

### **The Crisis in Access Needs to Be Addressed**

Relevant to today's hearing, The Legal Aid Society represents individual clients in all five boroughs whose Cash Assistance and SNAP benefits have been erroneously delayed, denied or terminated by HRA. Through our work with individual clients and as class counsel on *Forest v. City of New York*, and *Reynolds v. Giuliani*, the Legal Aid Society is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to benefits access in New York City. Legal Aid, along with the New York Legal Assistance Group and Dechert LLP, sued HRA in *Forest v. City of New York*, to address the systemic issues which were prohibiting New Yorkers from getting timely access to benefits. As a result of that lawsuit, we obtained a Court Order which required HRA to eliminate its processing backlog for applications and recertification for cash assistance and SNAP benefits.

We are pleased with the progress that the agency has made to improve its timely processing of applications and recertifications for Cash Assistance and SNAP benefits, thus ensuring that eligible New Yorkers are able to access life-sustaining benefits when they need them. Despite this progress, systemic barriers remain and continue to prevent and delay New Yorkers from getting the benefits they need to eat and pay their rent. As

we ready to fight against anticipated cuts to SNAP, and foresee new hurdles in accessing both SNAP and Medicaid in the form of block grants and work requirements, HRA must take immediate steps to improve its systems to make sure that New Yorkers are able to navigate this new landscape and get access to life-saving benefits.

Applying or recertifying for Cash Assistance and SNAP benefits is a multi-step process. Both new applicants and recertifying participants must complete the appropriate form, and then submit documents, and be interviewed to verify their eligibility. At each phase of this process, applicants face barriers in completing the necessary steps. Further, the agency fails to consistently provide clear confirmation that an applicant has successfully completed an individual step. Many of our clients report not learning that the agency believes they failed to complete part of the process until their application is denied. This lack of information breeds confusion and frustration as applicants are forced to reapply and survive without essential benefits.

### **Systemic Barriers Causing Application and Recertification Delays**

There are ongoing systemic barriers to completing each of these steps which underlie HRA's failed performance.

#### **Forms**

To submit the application or recertification form, individuals may fill out the form online through HRA's portal on AccessHRA, go in person to the appropriate Benefits Access Center or SNAP Center, mail or fax in an application or request a Home Visit for individuals who need assistance completing the form and are not able to go in person. For individuals who go in person, they will be directed to sit at a kiosk and complete the application online.

Many Households cannot complete the online application and recertification forms – HRA fails to provide real alternatives to ACCESS HRA. Even those who appear in person at HRA must apply online. Households are expected to use the online system, ACCESS HRA, to apply and recertify and are often impeded by the complex system and in many cases, even blocked by the ACCESS HRA system. Individuals who submit an application or recertification online generally see a confirmation screen after they successfully submit an application or recertification form, however, as the agency testified during the oversight hearing, New Yorkers who submit their forms using any of the other method of submission are not guaranteed a similar or equivalent receipt which confirms that the agency received their submission and crucially preserves their application submission date which determines the date by when HRA must make a decision on the application. The SNAP Act requires HRA to provide a “clear written statement explaining what acts the household must

perform to cooperate in obtaining verification and otherwise Completing the application process”. 7 U.S.C. § 2020(e)(3).

### **Phone Interviews**

Many households are denied or cut off because they cannot reach HRA by phone to participate in their mandatory phone interviews.

For all cases, applicants must complete their mandatory interviews by calling HRA’s On Demand line. Despite its name, the “On Demand” system involves long waits. Applicants regularly wait more than two and half hours on the line or for a return call (“call-back”) from an HRA representative to complete the interview. In some instances, they never receive the return call. If the household misses the call-back, they risk having their case erroneously denied or closed for failing to participate in a required phone interview. The agency does not currently provide receipts to applicants confirming that they have completed their interview, therefore if the agency fails to record the interview in their system correctly and ultimately denies the application for failure to complete the interview, the applicant has no ability to verify that they’ve already waited on hold and provided the necessary verification.

### **Documents**

To submit documents, applicants can use the AccessHRA mobile upload app or the HRA documents submission app on their phones. They can also go in person and scan documents or mail/fax them in.

Many households are denied or cut off because the required documents they submit to HRA are lost or ignored and HRA fails to check its own records. Applicants are often required to submit the same documents multiple times and are repeatedly told that the agency does not have the documents they submitted. Further, more often than not the agency fails to provide applicants with receipts to confirm what documents they have submitted and what purpose the agency will use them for. If the applicant does get a receipt, it fails to include an accurate description of the document and clear confirmation about what component of the application the document is verifying. The agency has refused to commit to a deadline by when a document will successfully be made a part of an applicants’ case record and without a receipt, applicants have no way to confirm that documents have successfully been made a part of their record.

### **Crucial Solutions**

The City Council is a critical partner in ensuring the success of the efforts The Legal Aid Society and our partners are pursuing in the courts. Through its oversight role, the Council can ensure that what will hopefully be improvements and/or failure of the agency to meet its mandated goals is transparent for all branches of government. We applaud Council Members Caban and Hudson for introducing their bills, Int. No. 0245, Int. No. 1028 and Int. No. 1148 which seek to improve HRA's processing systems and improve access to benefits. In addition to the changes they advocate for, we offer some additional suggestions below.

## 1. REPORT ON DELAYS AND STAFFING SHORTAGES

- **Report on Application and Recertification Processing Delays for each month and Corrective Action Plans When They Fall Below 95% Timeliness.** HRA should be required to report and post on its website: the number of applications and recertifications for each month and the number and percentage decided within statutory deadline of 30 days; and those which are delayed beyond 30 days, 31-60 days, and 61-90 days. The data should also report on those eligible for expedited processing for SNAP benefits because of very low income and resources. HRA's timeliness in responding within the seven-day period required by law, and the timeliness for immediate needs grants which must be processed the same day are meant to address the dire needs of New Yorkers, but they must be timely to do so. HRA should also report on any projected delays for the next six months. Moreover, when timeliness for applications and recertifications falls below 95%, HRA should be required to publish a corrective action plan detailing how it will achieve timeliness within 90 days and publish interim progress reports.
- **Report on Staffing Shortages and How they will be Addressed to Eliminate Application and Recertification Backlogs.** HRA should also be required to report and post on its website: the agency's staffing numbers, staff retention, worker caseload ratios, average amount of time required to process applications and recertifications, and salary data. HRA should be required to specify the number of staff positions needed to eliminate current processing delays for applications and recertifications – and without negatively impacting other HRA benefits including Medicaid. HRA should detail its plans to address the staffing shortages identified.
- **Report all Program Waivers the Agency has Requested and Received from the Federal Government and OTDA.** HRA should be required to maintain and publish a waiver database listing all program waivers they have requested and received from the state and federal government. This will ensure that the operational rules for each benefit program are transparent.

## **2. MANDATE THAT THE AGENCY TO TAKE STEPS NEEDED TO ADDRESS SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS**

Addressing systemic problems is essential to ensuring that SNAP and Cash Assistance households are able to submit applications and recertifications for these benefits. HRA should be required to:

- **Address HRA staffing shortages & Reform the Self-Service Model.**  
HRA must address staffing shortages which are preventing the agency from meeting legal deadlines. They must process applications and recertifications and provide benefits within the time frames mandated by law. Moreover, HRA should be required to report on the number of staff needed at each of its centers to provide in-person assistance to HRA clients, and HRA should be required to reform its current self-service model so that clients who appear in person are able to receive help from the agency during their visit.
- **Ensure Real-Time Help is Provided to Users of ACCESS HRA.**  
HRA operations are now premised on households using its online system – ACCESS HRA, to apply and recertify for benefits and to get information about their cases. HRA recently announced that it would be implementing an Access HRA Application Call Center that connects applicants with staff at a Community Based Organizations (“CBOs”) who can assist them with Access HRA questions in real time. This promises to be a huge improvement and HRA should ensure the success of this new program by adequately funding and supporting the CBOs who will staff this program.
- **Provide Realistic Alternatives to Applying Online.**  
HRA should be required to: a) make paper applications widely available; b) provide widespread information about the availability of phone applications and train HRA staff on this option and ensure adequate staffing to take phone applications; and c) create community partnerships with nonprofit organizations to help New Yorkers apply and recertify for benefits.
- **Provide Guidance for Households on How to Best Use the On Demand Phone System.**  
HRA should publish guidelines about wait times, how to use the call-back feature, and what to do if you miss a call-back to ensure that households can connect with an HRA worker to complete their interview.
- **Fix HRA Infoline/“One Number” Without Delay and Staff it Adequately.**  
HRA’s central phone line system is a disaster. The system lacks adequate capacity to meet client needs. HRA replaced the old Infoline system with a single phone number that is not adequately staffed and is difficult to use. There is no escaping it because it is the ONLY number New Yorkers can use to get in touch with the agency. HRA has eliminated all of its



other phone numbers. This means New Yorkers cannot get in touch with HRA by phone and cannot even complain about it because there is no separate complaint number to call.

- **Reform and audit its systems of verifying documents and provide real-time receipts.** Many households are denied or cut off because the required documents they submit to HRA are lost or ignored and HRA fails to check its own records. HRA acknowledges that the agency is failing to timely index documents and that it does not provide receipts to those who submit documents at centers. HRA should be required to: a) retrain staff to only require document submission after HRA has confirmed that it lacks the documents in its systems and that the document is indeed required; b) provide receipts for documents at the time they are submitted; c) eliminate all backlogs in indexing documents; and d) audit its systems and report on processing delays in indexing documents -- in addition to posting application and recertification delays, the agency should be required to post each month the number of days the agency is behind in indexing documents.
- **Seek waivers to speed processing and post the waivers requested and granted on HRA's website.** HRA should seek waivers of federal and state rules for Cash Assistance and SNAP benefits to speed processing of applications and recertifications. Such waivers requested should include at a minimum, waiving the interview requirement wherever possible and extending certification periods. HRA should be required to post on its website all waivers requested along with responses to those waivers.

### **3. STOP KEEPING NEW YORKERS FROM REACHING HRA: INSTRUCT 311 TO TAKE INQUIRIES AND COMPLAINTS ABOUT HRA.**

New Yorkers should be able to reach out to HRA to get information on their cases and request disability help. Currently, HRA instructs individuals on their website to contact the HRA Office of Constituent Services to do so. But the phone number posted is the same Infoline/One Number line that has long hold times and prevents clients from getting through to HRA. And 311 does not take HRA complaints – they refer callers to Infoline/One Number. HRA is, effectively, hiding the complaint box. HRA should be required to provide an alternate phone number and the City should also require the 311 system to take requests for disability help as well as inquiries and complaints about HRA. All callers should be provided with a confirmation and tracking number to enable clients to track their calls and ensure that HRA resolves outstanding issues.

#### **Int. No. 245, Int. No. 1028 and Int. No. 1148**

We commend the Council for considering these bills as part of the April 3, 2025 oversight hearing which focus on solutions to some of the systemic issues we have outlined above.

#### **Int. No. 245**



We Support Int. No. 245 which mandates a report on the feasibility of creating a universal benefits application for local public benefit programs and mandate the creation of a universal benefits application as determined feasible by the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. It makes sense to explore all options to make the process of applying or benefits more straightforward. As outlined above in our testimony, we also urge the council to address barriers with the existing application submission systems including providing real-time help to Access HRA users and providing meaningful alternatives to online application submission.

**Int. No. 1028**

We support the goal of Int. No. 1028 which requires the Commissioner of DSS to create a system that will automatically enroll individuals in City-created benefit programs, like Fair Fares. We agree that the agency must do everything possible to make sure that all New Yorkers know what benefits they are eligible for and that the enrollment process is as straightforward and clear as possible.

**Int. No. 1148**

We support Int. No. 1148 which seeks to make the application and recertification processes administered by HRA more transparent by providing applicants with receipts when they submit an application form and any subsequent supporting documentation to verify their eligibility. Receipts improve participation and transparency in the application process by making sure that all applicants are aware of their rights and obligations and provide the agency with all necessary information to evaluate their eligibility for life-sustaining benefits.

**Conclusion**

We thank the Council for the opportunity to provide written testimony. We look forward to further collaboration to ensure that HRA eliminates backlogs and processing delays so that all New Yorkers are able to access the SNAP, Cash Assistance and Rental Arrears benefits to which they are lawfully entitled.

Respectfully Submitted,

Emily Lundgren  
Staff Attorney  
Civil Law Reform Unit  
The Legal Aid Society  
49 Thomas Street, Floor #5  
New York, NY 10013

Laboni Rahman  
Staff Attorney  
Civil Law Reform Unit  
The Legal Aid Society  
49 Thomas Street, Floor #5  
New York, NY 10013  
LRahman@legal-aid.org

Elundgren@legal-aid.org  
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Pronouns: She, Her

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### **About The Legal Aid Society**

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal, and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State, and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 2,400 attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, LAS provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

LAS's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by LAS's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of nearly 200,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.



April 3, 2025

Good morning/afternoon Chair Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee.

My name is Alex Malescio, and I am the Senior Director of Government Relations at Urban Upbound, a nonprofit organization dedicated to breaking cycles of poverty in New York City's public housing and low-income neighborhoods. On behalf of Urban Upbound, I am pleased to offer strong support for Introductions 1148 and 245.

At Urban Upbound, our benefits access team works directly with New Yorkers to help them obtain essential public benefits, namely SNAP and Fair Fares, through the Human Resources Administration's online portal. These benefits provide immediate and necessary relief, helping individuals cover basic expenses during periods of financial hardship.

While our benefits access team focuses on connecting New Yorkers to these critical supports, our workforce development and financial counseling teams help them pursue longer-term financial and career achievements. Through skills training, job placement, and financial education & counseling, we assist individuals in securing employment, reducing debt, opening bank accounts, building savings, and improving their credit scores. Public benefits often serve as a vital first step on this journey, allowing individuals the stability they need to focus on larger financial milestones.

However, our experience shows that the current benefit application and re-certification processes create unnecessary barriers. We frequently work with individuals who are frustrated with the complexity and redundancy of multiple applications, as well as the lack of transparency regarding their application status. The time and energy spent navigating these administrative hurdles detract from the very efforts that promote economic mobility—such as job applications, workforce training, and financial planning.

Introductions 1148-2024 and 245-2024 offer commonsense solutions to these challenges. By streamlining the application process, enhancing transparency, and improving access to real-time status updates, these bills will reduce the administrative burden on benefit recipients. This will enable New Yorkers to more easily access and retain the benefits they are entitled to, freeing them to focus on achieving meaningful financial and career milestones.

Everyone can agree that promoting economic mobility is in the best interest of all New Yorkers. Ensuring that individuals can access and maintain public benefits without unnecessary obstacles is essential to that effort. We urge the Council to pass these bills and continue working toward an efficient and transparent public benefits system that operates as a springboard rather than a ceiling.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.

Alex Malescio  
Senior Director of Government Relations  
Urban Upbound

12-11 40th Avenue, Long Island City, NY 11101 • T: 718-784-0877 • F: 718-729-1288 • [www.UrbanUpbound.org](http://www.UrbanUpbound.org)



**Make the Road New York**  
**Testimony to General Welfare**  
**Written version**

Good afternoon, Chair Ayala and Council Members. My name is Arline Cruz Escobar , and I am the Director of Health Programs at Make the Road New York (MRNY). On behalf of our 28,000+ members and staff, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share our support for Int 1148-2024 - A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the department of social services to provide a receipt for applications for benefits or services. Make the Road firmly believes this law would positively impact all New Yorkers applying for benefits and services, and elevate community member's ability to defend and advocate for the benefits which they are entitled to and eligible for.

Entitlement benefits, such as, SNAP, Medicaid, One Shot Deals, and numerous other benefits reduce barriers that impact the overall health and well being of individuals and families. These vital benefits provide support which immigrant, working families and low wage workers depend on to get by and live dignified lives. They are a lifeline and empower people to improve their lives in moments of crises, such as job loss, homelessness, and beyond.

Applying for these benefits and services, many times, presents hardship for people to gather all the necessary information and documentation. People often receive notices stating they aren't eligible, are missing documentation to properly determine eligibility, or never hear back about their enrollment. The lack of clear communication and these negative experiences serves as a deterrent for future application and deters enrollment into other benefits (should they need them) for individuals and families, and creates misconceptions about an agency, such as, DSS.

Our clients and members often comment on the anxiety and stress caused by applying for these critical benefits and services. Providing a receipt would help ease the fears people feel when applying and renewing for benefits, and would serve as a tool to advocate for wrongful denials and requests for documentation. For instance, our SNAP advocates ensure applicants have all necessary documentation, confirming documentation dates are correct, such as consecutive pay stubs and valid identification. However, many times applicants receive a notice stating pay stubs are missing, proof of residency is outdated, and so forth. With a receipt, an applicant or their

advocate can adequately support their application, help troubleshoot, and avoid denials, suspension and delays. It would also allow individuals and advocates to hold the agency accountable for errors and wrongful delays, which impact the lives and families of the applicants’.

The City Council should do everything in their power to improve the application process for the communities they serve, and MRNY firmly believes this law would improve the application process, ease the fears and concerns applicants and advocates often face in anticipation of hearing back about their application, and support those who face hardships due to personal circumstances. These benefits and services are available in order to decrease inequities and enhance community health, and this law would support these efforts.

Thank you for standing up for these vital benefits and services that immigrant and working class New Yorkers depend on.



Golden Harvest Pantry was established in 1996 as part of Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation's (NEBHDCo) Community Programs to deliver tenant support programming. The pantry's purpose focused on the specific essential need of food insufficiency in very low- and low-income households. Since its creation and evolution to date, it has addressed the broader issues of food deserts and food insecurity advocacy and policy in a state-of-the-art 2-story, 5,000 square foot facility located at 376 Throop Avenue with a client choice pantry on the ground floor and Demonstration Kitchen and benefits office on the second floor. We are currently transitioning back to more in-person initiatives, where clients use choice boards to select their food before the distribution. We also have a mobile food pantry program that delivers pantry staples and fresh produce to home-bound seniors, disabled, and parolees.

In April 2022, we began to see an increase in the number of clients affected by the border crisis. As it stands, 60-65% of our new clients from June 2022 to the present have been migrants bussed to NYC, and roughly 20% of our total pool of clients use our pantry. The pantry serves approximately 300-500 clients weekly. We've also seen a sharp increase in senior clients and working families. The target population to be served primarily includes residents of Brooklyn. Still, since the pandemic, we have had patrons from Queens and the Bronx and an influx of immigrants due to the current crisis (inflation and immigration). In November 2023, we served over 5000 people due to our successful Thanksgiving event, where we distributed over 500 Turkeys with trimmings (produce and side items). This year's toy drive (2024) distributed 91 toys thanks to individual donations and community volunteers.

**The Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative** integrates, strengthens and expands food access, nutritional education, and community development in some of New York City's most economically challenged neighborhoods. While COVID-19 has faded from the forefront of public concern—now often grouped with the flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses—its lasting effects continue to deeply impact our communities. Many individuals still face challenges such as income loss, housing insecurity, and limited access to education, job training, and affordable housing. These difficulties are further intensified by the growing needs of New Americans arriving through our Southern Borders. In response, both our city and our



organizations have remained proactive, adapting swiftly to meet these evolving challenges and underscoring the critical need for sustained support and resources.

In response to these ongoing challenges, the community-based organizations that comprise the Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition Initiative remain committed to addressing the urgent and immediate needs of food security and health while simultaneously strengthening and expanding our long-term programs.

Our collective mission remains unchanged: to holistically support the health and well-being of the residents who live and work in our communities.

In 2024, the five organizations that participated in this Initiative were: Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation (Cypress Hills, East New York, Brooklyn); New Settlements Apartments (Mt. Eden, Bronx); Northeast Brooklyn Housing Development Corporation (Central and East Brooklyn); West Harlem Group Assistance (West Harlem); and Banana Kelly Community Improvement Association, Inc. (South Bronx/Northern Manhattan).

Despite limited funding and a growing demand for healthy food and health resources, the members of the collaborative worked tirelessly to expand food distributions and provide both virtual and in-person community support initiatives. At the same time, member organizations enhanced their food and nutrition programs through a range of activities, including community meetings, workshops, cooking demonstrations, garden-based initiatives, outreach to local bodegas, and collaborative efforts with partners in the Access to Healthy Food and Nutrition Initiative. Additionally, a strong emphasis was placed on delivering accurate information and guidance on COVID-19, influenza, and RSV, including testing, prevention, and vaccination efforts.

In response to the growing numbers of immigrants and migrants in our communities, initiative members welcomed these New Americans by providing access to food and nutrition, assistance



with ID NYC card applications, legal information, and connections to essential health services. Member groups also hosted dedicated health and nutrition resource events to support asylum seekers and help them integrate into the community, this year adding several Asylum Seeker Fairs for the new arriving families to our supportive mechanisms.

Our reach expands beyond just our base of operations with buildings, gardens, markets, pantries and classes serving residents in 15 City Council Districts (one more than in 2023) including/working with: Districts 7/ Shaun Abreu, 8/ Diana Ayala, 9/ Yusef Salaam, 10/ Carmen De la Rosa, 14/ Pierina Ana Sanchez, 15/ Oswaldo Feliz, 16/ Althea Stevens, 17/ Rafael Salamanca, 29/ Lynn Schulman, 35/ Crystal Hudson, 36/ Chi Ossé, 37/ Sandy Nurse, 41/ Darlene Mealy, 42/ Christopher Banks and 49/ Kamillah Hanks.

2024 saw increases and expansions in the programs and activities of the five Initiative members across many of the metrics. Over the past year these organizations collectively served over 225,567 residents through local food pantries; distributed close to 900,000 lbs. of food through food pantries, gardens and farmers' markets; engaged approximately 228,378 residents in various nutritional education activities including lessons with children and youth, virtual and in person cooking and nutrition workshops, cooking demonstrations at farmers' markets, Green sidewalks, ZUMBA and other fitness classes, classes, and other community events and in food budgeting classes. The organizations also served 2,600 New Yorkers with prescreening, referrals and enrollment in SNAP. Families whose SNAP benefits have been electronically stolen , (36 families totalling 99 people) were helped in completing and submitting the claim form to replace their benefits. Over 1275 Health Bucks were distributed; Full time jobs created numbered 4 and we hired 18 part time employees (including interns); Sales at farm stands reached \$41,286 and 5,773 lbs. of food were donated through these farm stands. New in 2024 was a Mobile Food Market, where two events were held providing 200 families with fresh, locally grown produce. Almost 600 gift cards were distributed with a value of over several thousand dollars. We produced some 2,000 lbs. of food in our community gardens. Finally, in terms of mental





health, our residents have access to NAMI-NYC, which provides FREE peer support services. What is more, 100 of our residents received access to free therapy through BetterHelp.

The five members of the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative significantly expanded our partnerships with agencies, organizations, and companies involved in food, nutrition, and health activities. This expansion greatly enhanced our reach, allowing us to better serve New Yorkers, including our New Americans: ACS, AFYA Foundation, BOOM! Health Wellness Center, Bronx Green Up/NYBG, Bronx Medical and Wellness Center, BronxCare Special Services/ Comprehensive Cancer Center/Ogden Family Medical & Dental Center, BronxWorks, Brooklyn Community Services, Brownsville MultiService, Butler Cornerstone, Care Connection, City Harvest, Concourse SNAP Center, Crotona SNAP Center, Cypress Hills-Fulton Street Senior Center, DOCCS, DOHMH, Expecting Relief, Family Preservation WIC, Food Bank NYC, Forever Young Senior Day Center, Good Shepherd Services, GrowBrooklyn, GrowNYC, Heart to Heart, Heartshare, HELP, High Bridge Islamic Center, HousingWorks, Institute for Community Living, La Familia Senior Day Center, Me Oh My Farm, MHHC Main Site/ Women's Center/ Annex/ Melrose, Morrisania/Bronx Care/Montefiore/ PHS East Tremont WIC, Mott Hope Family Practice, National Grid, New York Psychotherapy, New York Restoration Project, NY Cares, NY Common Pantry, NYC DOH, Partnerships: FBNYC, St. Barnabas Health and Wellness Center, Sunshine Days, The New York Milk Bank, TLC Adult Day Center, Tremont Social Garden, United Community Centers- East NY Farms, United Way, Union Community Health Center, Urban Horizons Family Health, Walton Family Health Center, People's Choice (SmartChorce and Salesforce); Flex Dance Program, Expecting Relief, Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger, Agape Food Rescue, Cherylle's Kitchen, Aleathea Todaro Cooking, Tris Pies, Jess Cookies, Chef Caldwell, Chef K, Cake Imagery, Union Community Health Center, Sun River Health, GMHC/NYOH, Bronx Leadership Organization Coalition, The Door, Save Our Streets, Bronx Works, BetterHelp, NAMI-NYC.

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**Tamer Mahmoud**

[REDACTED]  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
[REDACTED]

2nd April 2025

**General Welfare Committee**

New York City Council  
City Hall Park  
New York, NY 10007

Dear General Welfare Committee Members,

I am writing in support of the Food Bank of New York City's push for more funding for the City's Community Food Connection Program. Food insecurity is a real issue in New York City that must receive the proper attention it deserves.

I reside in the North Shore section of Staten Island and it is a food desert due to a large swath of the [population of Staten Island living in poverty](#), as per a 2024 article from the Staten Island Advance. Not only that, but many of the households do not own a car, which is necessary to transport their groceries. As such, many of those households have to rely on food pantries and various non-profit organizations for their daily food needs.

This is where programs like Community Food Connection come in. It helps provide funding to community kitchens and food pantries across the cities and areas that are food deserts, to help impacted communities survive daily. While the pandemic era played a role in exasperating this chronic issue, current economic factors are also not helping. Inflation continues to adversely impact food prices, making grocery shopping unaffordable for those who live on a low income.

Therefore, the Mayor and City Council must allocate \$100M in the upcoming budget to help support the Community Food Connection. Let's strengthen our food security and provide support for those who need it!

Sincerely,

**Tamer Mahmoud**

Early last year, I fractured my toe—a seemingly small injury, but one that drastically changed my day to day experiences. My job required me to be on my feet every day, and with my mobility limited, I struggled to keep up. Since I was still in my probationary period, I was let go and just like that, I lost my source of income.

With no other choice, I turned to government benefits and unemployment to stay afloat. But instead of receiving the support I needed, I found myself trapped in a maze of delays, miscommunication, and frustration. My food and cash assistance were held up because a document was missing—a termination letter from my previous employer. The worst part? No one told me.

I spent hours on hold, call after call, desperately trying to figure out why my application wasn't moving forward. Each call lasted around two hours if not more, each resulting in the call being ended because of limited hold time or some other reason—until finally, someone answered. Only then was I informed by a caseworker that the letter of termination was needed and only then was the request entered into the HRA system for me to be able to send in the document.

Once I obtained the letter, my benefits were approved. But it should not have taken this long. Had there been a clearer system in place—one that kept applicants informed at every step—I would have known right away that this document was needed. Instead, I endured weeks of uncertainty, stress, and hunger, all because of a system that lacks transparency and accessibility.

No one should have to fight this hard just to receive the help they are entitled to. The system must do better.

**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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: First Deputy Commissioner Jill Berry

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: HRA Administrator - Scott French

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: 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: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Seannette Estimer

Address: 355 Lex NYC 10017

I represent: Citymeals

Address: same

**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: 4/4/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Liz Wood

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New York Health Foundation

Address: 1385 Broadway, fl 23, NY NY 10018

**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: Stephen Grimaldi

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: New York Communist Party

Address: 8 East 109th St NY NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0245 1028 <sup>114P</sup> Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 04/03/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lo Anderson, Student Engagement/coord

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: CUNY students

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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Eckert

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Met Council

Address: 1 State Street Plaza NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0245 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kimi Moscaritolo

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Hunger For America

Address: 50 Broad street 10004

**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: DEBIPRIYA CHATTERJEE

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: COMMUNITY SERVICE SOCIETY

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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenny Veloz

Address: 14 Wall Street

I represent: Citizens' Committee for Children of NY

Address: 14 Wall Street

**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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alex Hughes

Address: Staten Island NY 10301

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: Anita Kwok

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: United Neighborhood Houses

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: 4/3/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shirley De Rosa

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: City University of New York (CUNY)

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. all Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DEBORAH BERKMAN

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: NEW YORK LEGAL ASSISTANCE GROUP

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: Lakisha Morris

Address: 1011 First Avenue

I represent: Catholic Charities Community Services

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. 0245, 1029, 1148 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: April 3rd

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Naima Danir

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Arabic American Family Support Center

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: Lynette Brown

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Catholic Charities - Diocese of Brooklyn

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: Lakisha Morris

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Catholic Charities - Archdiocese of NY

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: Molly Fickerle

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Met Council on Jewish Poverty

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: Joseph Rosenbaum

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Catholic Community Relations Council

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 245 1028 Res. No. 1148

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ericke

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ NY 11385

I represent: Volunteers of America - Greater New York

Address: 135 W. 50th St NY NY

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: Leah Eden

Address: [REDACTED] NY 10530

I represent: Equity Advocates

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: 4/3/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NICK RUESS

Address: 39 BROADWAY NYC 10006

I represent: FOOD BANK FOR NYC

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: MARTINA SANTOS

Address: [REDACTED] NY 10968

I represent: WSCAH

Address: 263 W 86 ST

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

29

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marcus Jackson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Encore Community Services

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: Angie Vega

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Children's Health Fund

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: Genavieve Brown-Ross

Address: displaced

I represent: better value on the budget for everyone

Address: apart of homeless population

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



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

26

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1148 245 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alex Maliescio

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Urban Upbound

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

27

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Leon Johnson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

28

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/3/2005

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sharon Brown

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Address: 43 Madison Street 3F

Bklyn NY 11238  
Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

25

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lynnette Brown

Address: [REDACTED] Jamaica 11434

I represent: Catholic Charities Bklyn + Queens

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

*Appearance Card*

24

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 04/03/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Sabella

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: No Kid Hungry NY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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