

Testimony of Grace Bonilla, Administrator
New York City Human Resources Administration

Oversight: Hunger and Food Insecurity Hearing New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare

February 13, 2017

Good afternoon. Thank you Chairperson Levin and members of the City Council's General Welfare Committee for inviting us to testify and respond to committee questions today. My name is Grace Bonilla and I am the Administrator of the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). Before beginning my testimony, I would like to take a moment to welcome the new members of the Council as well as those members new this committee. I look forward to our partnership as we work together to improve the lives of low-income and vulnerable New Yorkers.

This committee's Annual Hunger Hearing is a welcome opportunity to discuss many of the initiatives and programs that this Administration has undertaken to address hunger, food insecurity, and access to nutritious food. HRA plays a pivotal role in minimizing hunger and ensuring that food assistance remains a vital, readily available support for low-income individuals and families. However, our work is not done in isolation and today I am joined by Barbara Turk from the Mayor's Office of Food Policy as well as my HRA colleagues Lisa Fitzpatrick, Chief Program Officer, and Marie Philip, Deputy Commissioner for Emergency Intervention Services.

It is an unfortunate truth that we live in a time of declining wages coupled with the rising cost of rent, food, transportation, and other commodities which contribute to food insecurity and hunger. These factors are exacerbated by under and unemployment which culminate in persistent income inequality. Food insecurity isn't only about hunger; hunger impacts health, including a higher prevalence of preventable illnesses. And as is so often the case, our youngest and oldest neighbors are the most vulnerable when it comes to food insecurity. There are negative impacts on school attendance, academic outcomes, and behavior challenges for children. And seniors who are unable to meet their nutritional needs, face an accelerated deterioration in health and quality of life from conditions such as cardiovascular disease, stroke, and increases of slips and falls.

At HRA, we provide essential programs and supports to low-income New Yorkers that reduce hunger and decrease the threat of food insecurity, but also work to eliminate their root causes.

Every day in all five boroughs HRA works to ensure that our services and benefits provide low-income New Yorkers the assistance they need, through a wide range of supports, including Cash Assistance and employment services, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP/food stamps), eviction prevention, and rental assistance to name a few. However, despite our efforts, as we testify each year, hunger, food insecurity, and lack of access to nutritional food options continue to be serious problems in

New York City. The reality remains: too many of our fellow New Yorkers find themselves in the position of having to choose between paying for vital expenses such as rent or purchasing nutritious food. These food insecure households routinely report the food they buy does not last long enough, or they cannot afford a balanced diet and/or are forced to skip meals or eat less despite still feeling hungry. According to the latest available data, 1.25 million New Yorkers or 14.9 percent of New York's population were food insecure at some point during 2015. And while this shows a decline from the year before, there are still far too many New Yorkers who don't know where their next meal will come from.

Thanks to the launch of the Poverty Tracker in 2012, an initiative of Robin Hood in partnership with Columbia University's Population Research Center, data was collected across the five boroughs through quarterly surveys of over 6,000 City residents over the past two years. This allowed for the collection of telling information from a representative sample of New York City residents. From this data we learned:

- Roughly 16% of NYC households experience persistent (ongoing) food hardship.
- Race predicts higher food insecurity, regardless of income and other factors.
- Food insecurity is significantly higher for non-White populations.
- Food hardship is tied to poverty and to other material hardships (i.e., trouble paying bills, or housing hardship).
- Having children and being a single-parent household are each separately significant drivers of food insecurity and being a female head of household increases the chances of food security.
- Having lower levels of education is tied to higher rates of food hardship

In an effort to address the devastating effects of food insecurity, increasing access to and retaining benefits have been a cornerstone of HRA's mandate as part of the de Blasio Administration. Our goal over the previous four years has been to make it easier for those New Yorkers seeking benefits for which they are eligible to both gain access to them and avoid losing them as a result of bureaucratic red tape.

SNAP/food stamps is the nation's most important anti-hunger program; the program assists more than 45 million low-income Americans, 70 percent of whom are families with children and more than 1 in 4 are households with seniors or individuals with disabilities. Currently, nearly 1.64 million New Yorkers receive SNAP, including 569,000 children and approximately 424,000 seniors. Of these nearly 1.64 million New Yorkers, 398,749 of them also receive Cash Assistance (CA), an important safety net for children and adults. Many SNAP recipients are employed, but their incomes are so low that they still qualify for benefits. And in addition to the direct support SNAP provides families and individuals, it also injects approximately \$5.4 billion into the local economy with most of these transactions occurring at small businesses across the city.

But hunger is not only about food. Between 2000 and 2014, the median New York City household income increased by just 4.8 percent in real dollars, while the median rent increased by 18.3 percent in real dollars¹. Meanwhile, between 1994 and 2012, the city suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units. Combined, these and other trends meant that by 2015 the city had only half the housing it needs for about three million low-income New Yorkers. As such, New Yorkers sacrifice a great deal to stay in their homes and maintain their connections to their communities. Some 360,000 New York City households pay

¹ Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City, pg 4. Retrieved from http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/news/publications/Turning_the_Tide_on_Homelessness.pdf

more than 50 percent of their income on rent and utilities. Another 140,000 households pay more than the 30 percent. This means a total of a half a million New York City households are paying an unaffordable amount of their income for housing. Additionally, according to a report by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, nearly 60% of New Yorkers do not have enough savings to cover a minimum of three months' worth of household expenses – which in stark terms means these households are a missed paycheck away from the threat of housing instability, including eviction and homelessness.

To address these drivers of hunger, HRA has expanded rental assistance and emergency grants, and, in partnership with the Council, has implemented the nation's first Universal Access to Counsel program, an unprecedented investment in legal services to help New Yorkers stay in their homes. Last month we announced residential evictions by marshals had declined by 27 percent since 2013 thanks to putting these prevention programs in place. During this time, there were also two consecutive years of Rent Guidelines Board rent freezes.

- * All of this is part of a broader effort to address income inequality and food insecurity – because when we are able to intervene to keep families and individuals stably housed we are also addressing hunger.

We also know that higher wage jobs and access to training and educational opportunities greatly improve food security and can prevent homelessness by helping families and individuals to achieve financial and housing stability. As we have reported previously, in April 2017, HRA expanded and improved its Employment Services by implementing new programs that emphasize helping clients to proceed on a career pathway and off the public assistance caseload. Evidence-based research supports these approaches. When clients are able to secure living wage jobs and move up the career ladder, families are more likely to be able to secure the resources and the means to avoid homelessness and permanently move off the caseload and out of poverty.

And to address the root causes of and close the gap created by income inequality, this Administration has been laser focused on additional anti-poverty initiatives. We would be remiss not to highlight among them: Pre K for All, increasing affordable housing development, and raising the minimum wage. This Administration has also expanded paid sick leave and resolved expired municipal labor contracts.

Each of these investments is essential to lifting New Yorkers out of poverty and thereby minimizing the risk of its collateral consequences: hunger, poor health and homelessness.

HRA: Reforming the Client Experience

Throughout the Administration's first term HRA reformed, streamlined, and eliminated bureaucratic and linguistic barriers to enrollment and recertification not only for SNAP, but also for other programs and vital services administered by the Agency. However, addressing access is only one part of the equation, we are also addressing stigma with respect to asking for and receiving help, whether real or perceived, through our outreach and advocacy. HRA, in partnership with CBOs across the city, continues to conduct outreach to SNAP- eligible families and individuals, with a focus on vulnerable populations that are particularly susceptible to food insecurity. And to ensure that clients who are receiving our benefits continue to get the support they need, we have implemented a number of reforms aimed at enhancing the client experience. We've implemented a series of reforms to provide reasonable accommodations for clients with disabilities

to improve access to benefits. We have conducted agency-wide Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning and Intersex (LGBTQI) cultural competency training in addition to our longstanding customer service training. And HRA has trained over 7,000 public-facing staff on a Full Day training entitled *Introduction to Disabilities: An overview of disability awareness, etiquette and culture*. And in 2017, HRA used telephonic interpretation services an average of 1,000 times per day. In total, HRA spent \$3.6M on language services in 2017. We have also implemented, through various waivers, a range of technology initiatives that have resulted in reduced wait times, decreased visits to our centers, and immediate access to case information.

I will now spend a few minutes discussing the benefits reengineering, technology improvements, and other efforts that impact our clients' experience.

Continued Improvements to Enroll in and Stay on SNAP

The goal of our reforms is to remove real barriers to access by creating a self-directed service model that allows applicants and clients to transact with the Agency without the burden of having to physically come to an HRA location.

- **Launched ACCESS HRA:** ACCESS HRA is an innovative internet-based tool that allows New York City residents to retrieve benefit information and or apply and recertify for SNAP and other benefits. This portal allows clients to create an ACCESS HRA account to gain access to over 100 case-specific points of information in real-time, including application and case statuses, upcoming appointments, account balances, and documents requested for eligibility determinations. Additionally, clients can make changes to contact information, view eligibility notices electronically, and opt into text message and email alerts. We continue to improve this tool to add new functionality and now clients can submit their SNAP Periodic Report online using ACCESS HRA. This new feature allows clients to report changes in household composition, income and other circumstances. As of December 2017 there were more than 1 million ACCESS HRA online accounts for SNAP households, and we receive over 24,000 online applications and 2,500 Periodic Reports each month. The change to on-line transactions has transformed the way HRA interacts with our clients. Because clients can do so many things from a PC outside of the centers and can easily call us for their interviews, SNAP in-center foot traffic has declined 32% since 2014.
- **Fortifying our partnerships with community-based organizations:** The ACCESS HRA Provider Portal is an online tool designed specifically for community-based organizations to connect with the clients that they serve. Through the ACCESS HRA Provider Portal, organizations can view real-time benefit information for their clients. Since the launch of the Provider Portal tool in September of last year, 185 organizations have signed up to utilize this tool.
- **Implementing On-demand interviews** allows clients to conduct their SNAP Eligibility interviews on an On-demand basis at their convenience, rather than wait for a call during a four-hour window under the old system, or come into a center and wait for an in-person interview. The clearest success indicator for On-Demand has been the channel shift of interviews taking place in-person at centers, to interviews being held over the phone at the clients' convenience. In October 2015,

before the implementation of the On-Demand call center, only 52% of the completed SNAP recertification interviews were completed via telephone. We now have 76% of the interviews held by phone – a 24% increase. On demand interviews for SNAP recertification have been fully in place for more than a year. On demand interviews for new SNAP applicants began to be phased in during the Fall of 2017.

- **Rolled out the HRA Mobile App**, a self-service mobile app to give clients the ability to use their mobile device to better manage their cases. Since the application's launch, clients have downloaded the mobile app 118,000 times, and uploaded over 2 million images.
- **Provided on-site self-services:** For clients who prefer to access our service inside one of our centers, we have a suite of self-service tools. These tools include self-service check-in kiosks and PC Banks to utilize ACCESS HRA and self-service scanning.

There are currently 15 SNAP centers and 185 community-based organizations across the City where clients can quickly and easily scan and submit documents electronically. In addition, 12 Job Centers have scanners and 12 Job centers have self-service kiosks.

I would like to pause now to provide a demo on ACCESS HRA and the provider portal.

Each of these singular technological improvements represents a reduction or elimination of a significant barrier. Together they represent a comprehensive change to the ways in which clients apply for and recertify for benefits – ultimately reducing the number of clients who do not receive this vital SNAP benefit because it is too hard to apply and recertify or the investment of their time is too great. By mitigating the barriers to access we can ensure clients maintain their benefits and reduce the churn of clients at recertification, i.e., reapplication within a short period of time after case closure which is a national problem.

Now I would like to discuss other initiatives and reforms that are helping to reduce hunger and tackle poverty in New York City.

New York City SNAP Participation Rate

Economic improvement generally correlates to a SNAP participation rate reduction. Not surprisingly, as the local economy continues to improve the SNAP participation rate in New York City declines; and it declined from 77% in 2013 to 72% in 2016. In line with our prior testimony, we believe HRA's SNAP participation rates should not be compared to the state and national participation rates released by USDA which this committee is familiar with. The best metric for comparisons across geographic areas is the Program Access Index (PAI), calculated by dividing the SNAP caseload by the number of people below 125 percent of the federal poverty line. Based on the PAI metric, SNAP coverage is higher in NYC than it is in the country and in the rest of New York State. Specifically, the NYC PAI is 84% (for 2016), compared to 75% in the US and 82% in NYS overall.

As I just summarized, under this Administration, we have taken significant steps to ensure that all eligible New Yorkers have unencumbered access to HRA benefits and services. And recent data show positive

trends. Today we are pleased to report that application rejections are down, and successful case recertifications are up.

SNAP Outreach

HRA's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Support Services (SNAP Support Services) seeks to educate the public about SNAP benefits and eligibility guidelines. In addition, this unit prescreens clients to determine eligibility, and assists applicants with the application process. In FY17, HRA's SNAP Support Services provided services at 1841 individual events at 373 individual community sites/locations and provided services at 175 sites on a recurring basis. These are sites where services are consistently scheduled at various frequencies throughout the year. HRA also partnered with 154 community-based organizations to provide SNAP outreach throughout NYC.

Among its many responsibilities, this group is charged with ensuring that eligible immigrants and/or qualified family members are enrolled in the SNAP program and receive SNAP benefits. This Administration significantly expanded our outreach services to immigrants as well as New Yorkers with low literacy and limited English proficiency by partnering with over 100 community-based, human services, and government agency organizations with proven track records of providing services to these groups.

Our most significant outreach effort is the SNAP Helps campaign that utilizes a special website called FoodHelp.nyc. Since the inception of the SNAP Helps campaign in April 2015, FoodHelp.nyc has seen approximately 230,500 lifetime users with roughly 85% being new users. The SNAP Helps campaign encourages New Yorkers struggling to afford food to seek help, targeting low-income seniors and immigrants. Additionally, there were approximately 71,000 click-throughs from FoodHelp.nyc to ACCESS NYC.

Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

In FY18, HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program's (EFAP) total funding for food and administrative expenses is \$18.7 million and includes a baseline of \$11.5 million, with \$7.2 million in funding added by the Administration at the time of adoption for FY18. The total EFAP budget in FY18 is \$19.5 million including the \$800,000 included by the Council. This funding is being used to provide additional food and increases for warehousing and transportation to build the capacity of the food distribution system to distribute more food to New Yorkers in need.

Food distribution to those in need remains our most important objective. In FY17, EFAP distributed more than 12.2 million pounds of food, including over 632,000 pounds of frozen food. In the same period, EFAP programs reported serving more than 14.8 million people (this is a self-reported, duplicated statistic). The actual purchase of these items is based on an analysis of the needs and trends of the emergency food network.

EFAP provides over 40 food items and purchases the most nutritious food items that also meet the dietary and cooking needs of special populations, such as homeless New Yorkers; those with HIV/AIDS, and those that need a Kosher or Halal diet. Overall these items tend to cost more. In addition, many of these food

items are packaged differently (i.e pop-tops; or pouches), which increases the cost. More expensive and lighter packaged food can also result in fewer pounds distributed.

While working to ensure that New Yorkers have a hot, healthy meal, we are also working to reduce the prevalence of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Since 2008, EFAP has required all foods purchased with City funding to be compliant with the NYC Food Standards requirements and meet nutritional standards, including, but not limited to, standards for sodium, sugar, and trans-fat.

In addition, HRA requires that all 528 emergency food programs funded by EFAP provide SNAP outreach services. These services include SNAP eligibility prescreening, assistance with the SNAP application process, and guidance on making healthy food choices.

As in previous testimonies, the Administration continues to recognize the work of the NYC Food Assistance Collaborative which formed in 2015 with an investment from the Helmsley Charitable Trust, in 2015 and the Director of Food Policy in the Mayor's Office, HRA, New York State HPNAP, and key NYC emergency food distributors formed the NYC Food Assistance Collaborative. The Collaborative came together to further the goal of enhancing coordination among emergency food suppliers and bringing new resources to support the important work of over 900 community-based food providers.

The Collaborative's work is focused on building capacity and increasing the food supply to the City's most underserved neighborhoods. By establishing a common metric (the Supply Gap) and information-sharing system to better match supply with need the Collaborative was able to:

- Identify priority neighborhoods for additional investment;
- Increase food supply from public and private sources;
- Strengthen pantry capacity to distribute safe, nutritious food, including
 - Starting new pantries where there were none;
 - Upgrading storage, especially for fresh food; and
 - Adding more distribution hours; and using alternative distribution methods (e.g., mobile vehicles) for hard-to-reach areas.

The Collaborative also leveraged technology to enhance pantries' ability to better serve clients. This included:

- Enhancing FeedNYC.org to share crucial information like detailed information about food supply
- Building an app called Plentiful, a simple mobile technology that enables better customer service at pantries. Plentiful allows pantry clients to reserve their place in line and allows pantries to understand their service statistics. Pantries have loved Plentiful, and we see rapid adoption. We have 100 registered pantries and over 32,000 households served already.

The Food Assistance Collaborative set a goal to distribute 10 million more pounds of food in its priority communities. The Helmsley Charitable Trust's investment of \$9.8 million funds infrastructure improvements and supports to current and new pantries. Their investment also includes the development of a new shared data and mobile app system. In order to supply food to meet this new capacity, this year's Adopted budget included an increase of \$7.2 million and \$800,000 from the Council which provided

additional food and other resources to pantries. An additional support of \$4.5 million from City Harvest and United Way have helped us achieve that goal.

As you know, the Preliminary Budget was released while the federal budget was still being negotiated and the current federal continuing resolution runs until March 23, 2018, and before the conclusion of the state budget agreement that is due on April 1. Prior to the release of the Executive Budget, we will evaluate the impact of the federal and state budgets as well as the results of the NYC Food Assistance Collaborative initiative, and I am sure we will be working collaboratively as we approach the Executive Budget.

ABAWD

In May 2014, New York City accepted the State's ABAWD waiver which allowed single able-bodied adults, also known as Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), who are unemployed or underemployed to receive SNAP when they could not find at least 80 hours of work per month.

Such waivers are permitted for areas with high unemployment, and as such New York State had been covered due to the effects of the Great Recession of 2008. However, the improved economy since then means some areas no longer qualify for a waiver. At the 2017 Hunger Hearing, we reported that the borough of Manhattan below West 110th Street and below East 96th Street was the only part of the City impacted by ABAWD requirements because the federal government determined that it did not meet the federal standard for a waiver. And last year we provided an update to the Council at the preliminary budget hearing that Queens, with the exception of Community District 12, was no longer eligible for the ABAWD waiver due to improving economic conditions. Given this change for New York City, HRA proactively reached out to all ABAWDs to alert them of this important change and the impact on their benefits. HRA sent multiple letters and conducted robo calls instructing clients to report that they met or were exempt from the work requirement or how we could provide employment services to maintain their SNAP benefits. As a result, 1,312 came into the HRA employment provider to report changes to their status or to connect with employment services to meet the ABAWD work requirement. 609 clients reported a change in status and 508 met their work requirement through work with employment providers or through their own employment. 2,700 lost their benefit after not meeting the federal ABAWD requirement.

I will now discuss efforts from our partners at the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and their work contributing to the Administration's efforts to address food insecurity and hunger.

Partnering with DOHMH

In an effort to help clients close the gap in their food budgets, DOHMH distributes Health Bucks coupons which can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets. Health Bucks represents a 40% increase for the customers' purchasing power. This benefits SNAP recipients enabling them to buy high quality nutritious produce and allowing them to support regional and local farms - which is an important link as Congress continues to try to decouple SNAP from the Farm Bill. In 2017, more than 500,000 Health Bucks were distributed at farmer's markets through the SNAP incentive and by community-based organizations as part of their nutrition and health programming and by elected officials and organizations that purchased Health Bucks to hand out through their programs. NYC DOHMH recently expanded this innovative program from a five-month season to a 12-month program so that SNAP

participants can stretch their purchasing power year-round. The result is exciting and we are pleased to report customers spent \$1,100,278 in SNAP benefits at GrowNYC farmer markets in 2018. We continue to report that EBT cards are now accepted at more than 125 farmers markets across the City.

Outreach to Older New Yorkers

Since 2014, HRA has employed Benefits Data Trust's (BDT) proven model of targeted outreach and application assistance, using enrollment data for the five boroughs and working with HRA to complement our own outreach, the New York Benefits Center implemented a phone and direct mail campaign for seniors who are not receiving SNAP. When seniors respond to this targeted outreach, highly-trained staff from the New York Benefits Center guide them through the process from beginning to end, offering application assistance, document support, and follow-up services.

In 2017, BDT began conducting outreach to seniors for whom it submitted the original application, to assist with recertification, and leverage the automated interactive voice response system (IVRS) process that many seniors are eligible for.

Last year, The Robin Hood Foundation and the City rolled out a joint campaign to increase participation in targeted benefit programs including SNAP, Women Infants, and Children (WIC), and the Earned Income Tax Credit – all proven anti-poverty programs. The campaign includes a mass media campaign which ran in Spring 2017, and community-based outreach and service delivery for potentially eligible individuals.

A major component of this two-year campaign is an expansion of the collaborative and targeted outreach among HRA, BDT, and the Robin Hood Foundation with the launch of two new SNAP initiatives. Informed by behavioral economics, the "Guardrails Strategy" sends data-driven robo-texts and robo-dials reminding clients to complete the necessary steps in the SNAP application and recertification process, and offers phone assistance to those that need it most. The Medicaid SNAP Connect (MSC) pilot, launched in November 2017, works to connect Medicaid recipients of all ages to SNAP.

Preventing Hunger in Schools

We know that it is difficult for students to thrive on empty stomachs, which is why this Administration has been focused on ensuring that every student is provided with high quality and nutritious food for breakfast, lunch, and in many cases dinner. The following initiatives are helping to ensure that the most vulnerable New Yorkers, our children, are able to have a nutritious meal regardless of the time of day or year. To accomplish this we:

- launched Free School Lunch for All beginning this school year;
- will launch breakfast in the Classroom in all elementary schools in FY18;
- made Summer Meals available for all;
- are procuring local, fresh, and sustainably produced school food;
- spent \$26 million on regional food in FY17;
- piloted Meatless Monday in 15 Brooklyn public schools;
- launched "New York Thursdays" – a locally sourced menu in partnership with NYS Ag & Markets;
- and

- were awarded a Farm to School grant for our Garden to Café program which supports the use of edible school gardens in cafeterias and in classrooms.

Conclusion

SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance Program, as well as other initiatives detailed in this testimony, will continue to provide necessary nutrition assistance to New Yorkers in need. But more remains to be done to ensure that no New Yorker wakes up or goes to sleep hungry as a result of an inability to afford and purchase food.

We are proud of our work to expand access and remove barriers to these essential benefits and services. For clients, it has resulted in shorter wait times to complete their transactions, and a better client experience for our low-touch population as well as for our clients in need of a more in depth worker intervention. Our workers are spending time helping clients when needed, rather than completing the scanning tasks, routing clients manually, and data entry.

We are also working to protect against any proposed federal cut that threatens the SNAP program or the nation's other safety net programs, as well as policies that may harm our immigrant community. Not only would cuts to SNAP be devastating to those New Yorkers who rely on this crucial benefit, they would also harm the local economy.

We look forward to continued collaboration as we work with this Council and advocates to protect the enormous gains we have made in recent years under the de Blasio Administration and to fight back against any proposed budget cuts or policies and regulations that harm low-income New Yorkers. I welcome your questions.

Thank you



moving victims of violence from crisis to confidence

**Testimony of
Danny Stewart
Safe Horizon, Inc.**

Oversight: Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City

**General Welfare Committee
Hon. Stephen Levin, Chair**

New York City Council

February 13, 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding efforts to reduce hunger in New York City. My name is Danny Stewart, and I am the Director of Operations and Finance of the Streetwork Project of Safe Horizon. Safe Horizon is the nation's leading victim assistance organization and New York City's largest provider of services to victims of crime. Safe Horizon's mission is to provide support, prevent violence and promote justice for victims of crime and abuse, their families and communities.

My testimony today will focus on the importance of the food and nutrition services in our Streetwork Project, including how the recent loss of New York State funding will impact our ability to continue providing food services to the young people we serve. We will also request the support of the City Council to restore \$150,000 of funding for Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project so that we can continue to offer nutritious meals to the youth we serve.

The Streetwork Project

A cornerstone of our agency's work is the Streetwork Project, which since 1984 has provided shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 16 to 24. What first began as an intervention targeting rising youth homelessness in Times Square has grown to serve youth across Manhattan every year through:

- two drop in centers (one in Harlem and one on the Lower East Side of Manhattan),
- a citywide mobile outreach team, and
- an emergency overnight shelter.

The impact is significant: the young people who come through our doors make up a vibrant, creative, and strong community, one which affirms, celebrates, and amplifies the voices of youth of color, queer and trans youth, immigrant youth, parenting youth, and others who have historically been marginalized and unseen.

Streetwork services are tailored to meet the diverse needs of young people in New York City. Over the past year, Streetwork has accomplished the following:

- made more than 14,000 outreach contacts;
- assisted 1,000 clients at its two drop-in centers;
- provided 250 young people with a safe place to sleep at its overnight shelter;
- placed 94 clients in permanent supportive, transitional, or long-term housing;
- connected 105 clients to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); connected 101 clients to Medicaid, 15 clients to Supplemental Security Income (SSI); offered ongoing benefits case management throughout the enrollment process;
- addressed mental health needs of 271 clients through on-site psychiatric care including psychiatric evaluation, medication management, diagnosis, and crisis intervention; and
- facilitated weekly on-site medical care for clients through partnerships with Callen-Lorde Community Health Center's Health Outreach To Teens (HOTT) and the New York Children's Health Project mobile medical units. These providers offer general medical care as well as testing for HIV and other sexually-transmitted infections.

Food insecurity and malnutrition are some of the most common, most frightening, and most preventable costs of youth street homelessness, presenting a critical risk to youth safety. Several studies have documented the challenges that homeless youth face in getting enough food to eat, with one study showing that a third of homeless youth had experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days.¹ Food insecurity can lead to poor health outcomes, including diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease.² Food and nutritional services must be part of any intervention to assist homeless youth.

Young people who work with Streetwork engage with us in many ways, but the central heart of our program is undoubtedly the community kitchen. When walking in to Streetwork, you immediately gravitate towards the kitchen, where young people are eating, cooking, laughing, opening up, and reaching out in ways traditional therapies cannot match. Streetwork's Youth Advocates, Case Managers, and leadership join the conversations around mealtime, making unique connections with young people and starting the path towards trust and stability.

Each year Streetwork offers over 70,000 meals to homeless young people. We serve two meals each day year round at our drop-in centers, including 35,000 home-style hot meals and over 25,000 'pantry' meals to go to the wider local community. When combined with meals at the Streetwork Overnight Shelter and the assistance we provide through our Overnight outreach teams, the food and nutrition program is a lifeline for safety and security. This program is critical to address the over-prevalence of food insecurity of malnutrition in the youth we work with – but it goes further than that. Sharing a meal is a way to build community, relax, regroup, and deepen engagement with our sites. Food at Streetwork is often the first step on a path to independence.

Loss of HPNAP Funding

For many years, Streetwork's food and nutrition program was primarily funded through a grant under New York State's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), enabling us to offer both hot meals and pantry-style meals to youth. However, HPNAP funds are now shifting away from city organizations, even as our homelessness crisis explodes and as food insecurity remains a challenge for nearly 16% of the City's population.³ Safe Horizon's HPNAP funding was not renewed and ended in Fall 2017, leaving the young people who make up our Streetwork community at risk. With the loss of \$150,000 of annual government funding, the need is urgent and pressing.

With this loss of funding, we are concerned about our ability to continue providing food and nutrition services at Streetwork. A meal is one of the most basic parts of ensuring the health and security of the young people we serve, and the inability to provide this service will be a significant loss for the program.

¹ Whitbeck, L. B., Chen, X., & Johnson, K. D. (2006). Food insecurity among homeless and runaway adolescents. *Public Health Nutrition*, 9(1), 47–52.

² *Importance of Nutrition on Health in America*, from Feeding America: <http://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger/hunger-and-nutrition/>

³ *New York City's Meal Gap: 2016 Trends Report*, from Food Bank for NYC: <https://www.foodbanknyc.org/wp-content/uploads/Meal-Gap-Trends-Report-2016.pdf>

In order for us to continue to help young people thrive in independent adulthood, Safe Horizon requests \$150,000 from the City Council for FY2019 so that this key service can continue. We hope the Council will partner with us to assist the young people we serve, as well as with other organizations across New York City who are facing similar funding shortfalls due to the loss of HPNAP funding.

Thank you for your ongoing support of Safe Horizon's work, and for considering this request. We are happy to answer any follow up questions.



Civil Practice Law Reform Unit
199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038
T (212) 577-3300
www.legal-aid.org

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President

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Attorney-in-Chief

Adriene L. Holder
Attorney-in-Charge
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Judith Goldiner
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Law Reform Unit

**Testimony of The Legal Aid Society
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Oversight Hearing Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City
February 13, 2018**

**Presenter: Susan Welber, Staff Attorney
Civil Practice Law Reform Unit**

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. We want to especially thank Chairperson Levin for his leadership in working to examine and improve the way the City of New York meets the most basic needs of its residents, including hunger. We also want to thank the entire City Council for its commitment to meeting the needs of low-income New Yorkers.

Background

The Legal Aid Society, 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 Society's unique value is in its ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals, and broader, more powerful systemic changes for society as a whole. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse-based offices in 27 locations in New York City, more than 2,000 attorneys, paralegal case handlers, and support staff, along with volunteer help coordinated by the Society's *Pro Bono* program, we provide comprehensive legal services to fulfill our mission that no New Yorker should be denied access to justice because of poverty.

Through three major practice areas—Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights—the Society handles approximately 300,000 cases a year in city, state, and federal courts. The Society's Civil Practice provides comprehensive legal assistance in legal matters involving housing, foreclosure and homelessness; family law and domestic violence; income and economic security assistance (such as unemployment insurance benefits, federal disability benefits, Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps, and public assistance; health law; immigration;

HIV/AIDS and chronic diseases; elder law for senior citizens; low-wage worker problems; tax law for low-income workers; consumer law; education law; community development opportunities to help clients move out of poverty; and reentry and reintegration matters for clients returning to the community from correctional facilities.

In particular, Legal Aid has been at the vanguard of securing and expanding access to government benefits for New Yorkers. Through our Public Benefits practice, we represent a large number of clients who are forced to rely upon public assistance and SNAP to get through difficult times that are often caused by a change of circumstances, such as unemployment, disabling medical and mental health conditions, domestic violence and homelessness. In the short-term, our clients turn to public assistance as a stop-gap in order to survive: to keep a roof over their heads or end a period of homelessness, and to feed their children. In the long-term, our clients seek a path to a more stable income: by finding a decent job that pays a living wage, seeking education, training or employment to build the skills to get decent jobs or securing disability benefits for those who are disabled and unable to work.

Recommendations For Addressing the Hunger Needs of New Yorkers

There are many ways in which the City of New York seeks to address hunger, but our focus today is one area: access to government benefits, including SNAP and cash assistance, that New Yorkers use to purchase food. Although we applaud many of the initiatives that have been taken by the de Blasio administration and New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) to expand access to government benefits including SNAP, the General Welfare Committee's oversight is needed to ensure that all New Yorkers who need assistance to address hunger are able to do so. Accordingly, we respectfully submit the following recommendations that would help the City address the hunger needs of New Yorkers:

(1) Improve Client Communications with HRA: Introduce Legislation Imposing Reasonable Standards for Access to Agency Personnel, Including Phone and In-Person Access Where Needed.

HRA is increasingly relying on telephone technology, including hotlines and automated call back systems as a means of fielding client requests and inquiries and in some cases conducting more in-depth interviews that were historically conducted in person. This is particularly the case for clients who need or receive SNAP but who do not qualify for or need Cash Assistance because they are in receipt of Supplemental Security Income or have work income. These clients, known as "SNAP only," essentially have the ability to deal with HRA without appearing in person at HRA offices. This is a very positive development for working SNAP recipients who cannot take time out of their work day to go to an HRA office and for the severely disabled, whose functional impairments make appearing at the SNAP center difficult. However, the success of this approach depends on adequate phone systems and staffing levels, and as described below, clients report great difficulty with these systems. Such difficulties result in problems getting or keeping their SNAP benefits, including the following specific problems:

- (a) **Applications** - HRA relies on telephone technology to conduct the application interviews that initiate the opening of SNAP cases, but clients report not being able to reach staff by telephone to complete the interview. This sometimes results in repeated

application attempts before an application is open.

- (b) **Recertifications** - HRA also conducts periodic recertification interviews needed to maintain open cases by telephone, but clients complain that they do not receive scheduled calls and cannot get through on the phone on their own. Where a phone recertification is not completed, the client will either have their case closed or miss benefits until they are able to go in person to the Center to complete the recertification, which can be very hard if not impossible for severely disabled clients.
- (c) **Required Client Reporting** - HRA instructs clients to report critical information that is needed to avoid case discontinuance, such as compliance with the Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents ("ABAWD") requirements which recently extended to almost all of New York City residents, by calling the Infoline, but they are not always able to get through leading to closed cases.
- (d) **Emergency Reporting** - Clients are also encouraged to affirmatively report emergencies by telephone via Infoline and a special phone number for disabled clients but the numbers are often busy due to lack of capacity. This means emergencies, including a lack of food, do not get dealt with in a timely way and result in hunger.

At each of these junctures, clients with severe disabilities are arguably the most negatively impacted because they are forced to rely on the telephone technology as many of them do not have the option of going into HRA offices in person.

Recommendation: Conduct oversight hearings to review specifically the ability of New Yorkers to reach HRA in the ways that are needed to get SNAP cases open and keep them open. Based on the hearings, the Council should introduce legislation requiring reasonable standards for access to agency personnel, including phone and in-person access.

(2) Look Beyond SNAP and Recognize the Connection Between Hunger and Access to All Benefits; Ensure that Benefits Are Accessible Generally and Monitor Obstacles to Access and New Programs.

Access to SNAP benefits most directly affects hunger, but problems that impact access to Cash Assistance also have an impact on hunger because many clients use some of their Cash Assistance to purchase food. The City Council has played a critical role in bringing to light many of the severe access problems HRA clients were facing under the past administration with respect to Cash Assistance and SNAP, including inadequate front-door screening for barriers related to language, disability and domestic violence. During the first term of the de Blasio administration many improvements were introduced. However, the City Council's continued oversight is still critical to address ongoing problems. The following three problems affect clients who need both Cash Assistance and SNAP:

- (a) **Problems with submitting documents can result in loss of benefits** - Though the agency has expanded the ways clients can submit documents from being primarily in person and via the mail, to faxing, scanning and uploading, clients continue to report problems with these systems and how they are administered. In addition, HRA makes frequent errors with these systems, often associating the client's documents with the wrong file. These problems result in case closings and loss of benefits, both SNAP and

Cash Assistance.

(b) **Clients' inability to read and understand HRA notices leading to missed appointments and potential adverse case consequences** - Although HRA is undertaking to improve the reading level and understandability of its notices, and now has systems for offering reasonable accommodations to clients who have difficulties reading and understanding, the number of clients who do not appear at certain HRA appointments, such as appointments to engage clients in approved activities and the conciliation appointments where problems can be addressed is still too high. Failure to attend these appointments can result in adverse case consequences that can contribute to hunger.

(c) **Need to closely monitor new systems for doing client assessment/intake and matching clients with work programs** - As HRA gets ready to introduce a new screening/intake process designed to ensure better access and implement a revamped set of work programs, advocates remain concerned, in particular about the use of technology to pose and receive answers to sensitive questions about disability, domestic violence and sexual orientation and gender identity. These new systems should be closely monitored because should the new screening/intake process and/or problems with the roll-out of the work programs have an adverse impact on access to benefits, it could contribute to hunger.

Recommendation: Introduce a reporting bill that would enable the Council and advocates to monitor access problems with systems for submitting documentation, missed appointments due to difficult to comprehend notices and the roll-out of the new screening process and work programs and ensure that these possible hurdles are not leading to denials and loss of critical benefits that often result in hunger.

(3) Support HRA and Other Agencies In Affording Continued Access to Government Benefits and Services to Eligible, Non-Citizen New Yorkers by Monitoring Aggregate Usage and Preparing for Possible Changes In the Law That Could Affect Many Non-citizen Clients.

Our nation's Immigration Law is in flux and this is affecting non-citizen New Yorkers in myriad, adverse ways. As the Council has recognized, some non-citizens, though eligible for many City-administered benefits and services, fear accessing those benefits because of concerns about the City maintaining confidentiality of information recorded regarding immigration status and increasing their exposure to ICE in public places. There have been anecdotal reports that undocumented parents are reluctant to access food pantries and/or apply for SNAP benefits for their citizen children. Health + Hospitals (H+H) has piloted methods of insuring immigrant access to health care in the "ActionHealthNYC" program, and any positive results of their pilot should be expanded within H+H and considered for implementation in the context of other agencies.

In addition, certain possible changes in Federal law or rules, like a possible expansion of the list of means-tested benefits that can form the basis for removal or denial of adjustment on "public charge" grounds, will likely have a huge impact on City agencies and residents. We applaud the Council for having adopted Int. No. 1578, a charter amendment creating an interagency task force on immigrant affairs, and we know the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs is planning for

possible changes in Federal rules and law. We emphasize that mobilizing the agencies and the resources needed to deal with such a legal emergency situation will be an enormous job, akin to what has been required to deal with natural disasters and the emergencies they cause and the Council's oversight is needed.

Recommendation: We encourage the City Council to (a) monitor for any marked decreases in City-administered benefits and services by eligible, non-citizen New Yorkers and mandate that agencies adopt practices designed to prevent decreases based on non-need based factors; and (b) monitor preparations for possible legal emergencies impacting non-citizens.

Conclusion

In conclusion, The Legal Aid Society commends the City Council's efforts to ensure that New Yorkers do not go hungry in our City. We thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Respectfully Submitted:

Susan Welber
Staff Attorney
Civil Practice Law Reform Unit
The Legal Aid Society
199 Water Street
New York, NY 10038
(212) 577-3320
sewelber@legal-aid.org

Testimony of Joel Berg, CEO, Hunger Free America

Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Committee on General Welfare

Oversight: Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City

February 13, 2018

My name is Joel Berg, and I am the CEO at Hunger Free America, formerly called the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. Hunger Free America changed its name in 2016 to better reflect the broad scope of our national work. I want to thank Chairman Levin and the rest of the Committee for your work fighting on behalf of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, as well as for the opportunity to testify.

Hunger in New York City

Hunger is a significant problem in the United States, as 41.2 million Americans,¹ including 12.9 million children lived in households that struggles to afford enough food in 2016. 2.5 million New York State residents, including 1.2 million New York City residents, lived in such homes.² In 2014-2016, one in every ten working adults in New York City and State were food insecure, approximately 388,671 New York City residents. Thirty-three percent of all food insecure adults in New York City were employed. Low-income communities face both income scarcity and time scarcity, compounding the challenges to overcome these barriers.

The top reasons for this food insecurity are low wages, too few jobs, the high costs of living, and an inadequate safety net programs. Unfortunately, these sustained levels were compounded by significant participation decreases in the city's main federal nutrition programs, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – formerly called the Food Stamp Program. New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) data indicates roughly a 14 percent drop in SNAP recipient participation from 1,906,610 in December 2012 to 1,635,635 in December 2017. In addition, according to the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the average monthly SNAP benefit declined from \$162 in December of 2012 to \$138 in December of 2017. That means, as a result of federal cuts, the average SNAP benefit in NYC declined from a paltry \$1.80 per meal to an even paltrier \$1.53 per meal.

¹ United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service. *Household Food Security in the United States in 2016*. 2017. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84973/err-237.pdf?v=42979>

² Hunger Free America. "Working New York Still Hungry." *New York City and State Hunger Report*, 2017. <http://www.hungerfreeamerica.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/2017%20NY%20City%20and%20State%20Annual%20Hunger%20Survey%20Report%20.pdf>

Combining the declining SNAP caseload with even lower average benefit allotments means that overall federal SNAP spending in New York City declined from an estimated \$3.5 billion in 2012 to an estimated \$2.9 billion in 2017, a \$600 million drop. Eligible low income New Yorkers are currently not receiving valuable benefits that would help them and to which they are entitled. The main barriers to claiming include stigma, confusion, concerns about the process, bureaucratic tangles, administrative delays, lack of awareness, and misinformation.

It is no surprise, then, that the plight of hunger and poverty are still felt on the ground at emergency food programs, as shown by Hunger Free NYC’s Annual Hunger Survey report. In addition to finding that 1.2 million New Yorkers live in food insecure homes, it found that New York City’s food pantries and soup kitchens faced an increased demand of six percent in 2017, on top of an increased demand of nine percent in 2016, five percent in 2015, 7 percent in 2014, 10 percent in 2013, five percent in 2012, 12 percent in 2011, seven percent in 2010, and 20 percent in 2009.

Average Numbers and Estimated Prevalence of Food Insecurity 2014-2016

Category	NYC Citywide	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens*
Overall	1,182,424 (13.9%)	375,629 (25.9%)	387,645 (14.7%)	157,710 (9.6%)	234,023 (10.0%)
Children	341,266 (19.1%)	147,945 (28.8%)	101,214 (11.2%)	18,853 (5.2%)	63,798 (10.3%)
Employed Adults	388,671 (9.8%)	509,426 (14.1%)	130,224 (10.7%)	67,856 (7.5%)	93,826 (8.2%)
Seniors	199,379 (12.5%)	52,178 (22.0%)	72,166 (15.6%)	34,773 (10.5%)	40,261 (8.8%)

**Lack of sampling results in low counts and errors for data in Queens and Staten Island, especially in smaller samples such as Children and Seniors. Because of this, data for Staten Island are not available.*

*** Because of rounding errors, sampling errors and non-responses, not all counts and percentages might equal 100%.*

The Bronx continued to be the hungriest borough, with 26 percent of its residents overall, and 29 percent of its children, living in food insecure homes in 2014-2016.

Over One in Five New York City Children – Nearly Half a Million – Are Food Insecure

Citywide in 2014-2016, about 341,266 children – or one in five – struggled against hunger.

To be well read, children must first be well fed. To be schooled, they must be fueled. The United States suffers from high rates of childhood food insecurity and lags behind in educational performance, two highly interconnected problems. Food deprivation in the world's wealthiest nation is not only morally unacceptable, but it also severely hampers children's emotional, intellectual, and physical development. Child hunger costs the U.S. economy at least \$28 billion per year because poorly nourished kids perform less well in school and require far more long-term health care spending. Solving this problem will cost far less than not solving it.

School meals are a critical component to fighting child hunger. In the spring of 2015, New York City’s Mayor Bill de Blasio announced the introduction of “breakfast after the bell” – or serving breakfast to all kids in their classrooms or via “grab and go” – for all stand-alone elementary schools, which serve about 339,000 students. The policy is a win for the largest school district in the nation, to increase the number of students who begin the day with a nutritious breakfast,

where previously, only about 30 percent of students financially eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches were participating in the school breakfast program.

Likewise, instituting other universal meal programs, such as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) program, can increase the number of children receiving nutritious, affordable school meals each day. Because of Community Eligibility, during the 2015-16 school year more than 18,000 high-poverty schools served free breakfast and lunch to more than 8.6 million low-income students across the country. Expanding the service of universal lunch, which was introduced by the City Council in 2014, to all stand-alone middle schools, should be on the agenda.

It's not difficult to connect the dots – with kids out of school and missing out on the healthy, affordable meals provided there, family expenditures increase. And for many homes, this means cutting back on other necessities. Summer meals programs can make a huge difference, but only if children are able to access them. However, of the children who depend on free or reduced-price lunch during the school year, only a fraction are participating in the summer meals program.

Nationally, only about 15.8 percent of students who received free or reduced-price lunches also participated in the Summer Food Service Program (or Summer Meals) during the summer of 2016. After four consecutive years of growth in participation, 153,000 fewer children, 4.8 percent were served compared to the previous summer³. According to the Food Research Action Center (FRAC), while amongst one of the top performing, this number was only a little over a quarter of students in New York State. The City, however, is unique in the some of the challenges it faces with gaps in the SFSP service provision.

Whereas, outside of New York City, lack of access to transportation is often stated as the greatest barrier to participation in summer meals; this is not where we face hurdles. Based on a 2015 survey we did, convenience and not knowing hours, locations, and additional key information about programs were the top factors in determining whether parents and caregivers do or do not take their children to Summer Meals sites. The City can redouble its efforts to spread the word about this important program and expand the number of locations where the meals are served in order to ensure that children do not go hungry when school is out.

One of the most effective programs that helps feed millions of impoverished children is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or commonly known as WIC. Women enrolled in WIC purchase the healthy food that they need for themselves while they are pregnant and for their young children in their formative years. The program also provides other tools, such as nutrition counseling and assistance with lactation and/or formula. These benefits can ensure families that their kids are guaranteed the proper nutrients so that they can meet all of their developmental milestones.

Over One in Eight New York Seniors (Over the Age of 60) Are Food Insecure

In New York City, roughly 199,379 senior residents lived in food insecure households between 2014 and 2016. These numbers, are still at higher levels than they were prior to the recession

³Food Research & Action Center. "Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation." Summer Nutrition Status Report. 2017 <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/2017-summer-nutrition-report-1.pdf>

between 2006-2008, where an average of 132,113 NYC seniors were living in food insecure households, representing a 51 percent difference.

Living in an urban environment presents unique challenges for seniors. Though slightly below the national levels of food insecurity and poverty, the struggles that New York City and State seniors face should not be taken lightly.

The alarming number of struggling seniors should alarm us all. Hunger and poverty for older Americans presents a unique set of challenges with decreased mobility, physical disability, possible dietary restrictions/needs, and the frequent reliance on additional outside support. Living even adequately may be quite difficult for an older individual who may be alone, homebound, and retired or unable to work (for whatever reason). And, just like other federal benefit recipients, senior citizens must comply with the arduous paperwork and bureaucratic requirements to apply/recertify for each individual assistance program. There are some jurisdictions, like New York City, that have implemented administrative processes to ease this burden (e.g. allowing the elderly and disabled to recertify every other year, rather than annually and providing applications that can be completed by telephone, rather than in person). And this should be the norm, not the exception.

Some benefits that seniors receive also face the very real threats of federal budgetary cuts or of funding even running completely dry. In as prosperous a location as New York, and, for that matter, in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, no senior citizen who worked hard his or her entire life should have to live in poverty and fight to survive.

Mitigated Changes – Calm before the Impending Storm

The drop in US hunger was likely caused by a variety of factors, including a decrease in unemployment and increase in wages (some of which was caused by minimum wage hikes in key states, such as California and New York), as well as increasing participation of low-income children in the federal school breakfast and summer meals programs – all of which were a result of deliberate and effective government policies. This is the most recent proof that public policy matters – big time.

In contrast to these progressive advances in New York, the federal government may soon make changes that will throw us all backwards, dramatically *increasing* hunger. We all need to fight back on the national front. That's why the New York City Coalition Against Hunger expanded its policy and program work nationwide, and changed our name earlier in 2016 to Hunger Free America.

After the 2016 general election, we analyzed USDA caseload data for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly called the Food Stamps Program. Disproving the stereotype that SNAP recipients are all in 'inner cities' or blue states, we found that, out of the top ten SNAP-utilizing states, eight voted for Trump in the general election. This proves that large numbers of citizens who rely on federal nutrition assistance programs live in rural, mostly white, areas. With 44 million Americans – living in suburban, rural, and urban areas of every state – relying on SNAP, the 'they' is really 'us.' America can only be truly great if it feeds all its own residents, which is why we hope that President-elect Donald Trump commits to ending US hunger by creating jobs, raising wages, and bolstering the federal food safety net. At a bare minimum, we hope President-elect Trump pledges to stop House Speaker Paul Ryan's misguided

plans to again slash food aid to vulnerable Americans in order to pay for more tax cuts for the mega-rich.

One major danger lurking in the shadows of the presidential administration is the threat of block-granting or otherwise slashing federal nutrition assistance programs. Block-granting these programs would not only restrict and limit funding to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers that rely on them, but would also undercut the efforts this City has made towards increasing access to benefits and nutrition programs. These are proven methods to enable healthy growth in children and provide a solid economic return to our local communities. Any cuts made rejects the conservative imperatives of protecting families and promoting local economic growth.

President Donald Trump's Fiscal Year 2019 budget proposal, released yesterday, proposes slashing domestic food assistance in SNAP by \$213 Billion, \$20 billion more than the proposal last year. The proposal would also replace SNAP (formerly called food stamps) EBT benefits for households receiving over \$90/month in benefits with a shelf stable box of foods, to be selected by government bureaucrats that are supposedly equivalent to the displaced benefits.

Though the recent bipartisan budget agreement means it will most likely never become law, President Trump's new budget outline calls for even deeper cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), in addition to structural changes that could harm grocers and the nonprofits that serve hungry Americans. While it's always shocking to see \$213 Billion in cuts-- \$20 billion more than proposed last year to one of the most effective anti-poverty programs available, the structural changes to SNAP will make it even harder to combat hunger in America.

It would require a massive new governmental bureaucracy to micro-manage the food consumption of low-income Americans. Amazingly, this proposal would slash food aid but somehow manage to grow the size of big government. There's no way one can improve nutritional outcomes in families on SNAP by reducing the amount of money they have available for fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk. This proposal would add stress to the nonprofits that serve these individuals and hurt the grocery industry by taking SNAP participants out of the grocery store. The best way to enable low-income Americans to obtain healthier food is to increase the purchasing power of the SNAP program to enable them to do so.

The soaring hunger levels in New York and throughout our country harm health, hamper education, trap families in poverty, fuel obesity, eviscerate hope, and thus drags down our entire economy and places our national security at risk. Hunger harms us all. But, ending hunger *lifts* us all. We must build a grassroots movement and force our political system to enact the economic policies and social programs necessary to end US hunger once and for all.

Other Changes and Solutions

Hunger Free NYC receives support from a variety of public and private partners to help eligible New Yorkers access the SNAP program. In 2017 this resulted in approximately \$9 million in food purchasing power for low-income households struggling to put food on their tables.

As a nation, state, and city, we must create more living wage jobs and raise minimum wages. We must also ensure adequate nutrition assistance safety net and boost upward mobility through

strengthening the benefits of and expanding access to SNAP, school breakfast, school lunch, WIC, and summer meals. We must make these robust and effective programs available, free of stigma and hassle, for everyone in need.

We commend Commissioner Steven Banks and his staff at the Human Resources Administration on their efforts for not only treating low-income New Yorkers, and the advocates who represent them, as trusted partners, but for significantly improving technical and service provision standards. The introduction and implementation of various outreach efforts, application processing units, and internal procedures have significantly increased access to and the retention of benefits, thus decreasing bureaucratic inefficiencies. Requesting waivers from the State to eliminate application and recertification barriers, streamlining methods of communication for claimants for phone interviews, and eliminating redundancies on both application and retention sides not only assists claimants but saves the city and state time and money. Their willingness to ensure quality assurance is also displayed through their direct discourse with community based efforts and efforts to analytically evaluate what barriers to benefits may or may not exist.

We must ensure that these efforts on HRA's behalf continue. Senior staff at HRA have acknowledged this as a serious issue that is being internally address, we would just like to encourage that this process be expedited as soon as possible. Technological improvements can only be beneficial if they are being accessed and utilized in an effective and efficient manner

Unfortunately, while there are 1.69 million recipients of SNAP in New York City, there are still approximately 500,000 eligible New Yorkers not receiving SNAP. The public, corporate and non-profit sectors could strategically work together to unlock as much as \$500 million in mostly federal funds for struggling New Yorkers who are entitled to these benefits, but have not yet claimed them. Efforts could additionally be made to find administrative waivers to enable better access to SNAP for students pursuing higher education full time.

We also commend the Department of Education and School Food on their efforts in improving nutrition standards and the utilization of meals served to New York City school children. Access to in-classroom breakfast and universal school lunches at standalone elementary and middle school, respectively, has certainly improved the educational experience afforded to these children. Though many efforts have been made to increase access and strengthen outreach, there are still some actions that could be taken to make further improvements. Mayor de Blasio could expand universal school lunches into other schools throughout the City in his upcoming Executive Budget. Moreover, School Food could also work strategically with community based organizations, such as ourselves, to monitor and assess where improvements could be made to the Summer Food Service Program.

Hunger Free New York City/America recognizes that change does not happen overnight, especially with city bureaucracies the size of the Department of Education, and HRA, but with the number of people who need assistance, we are keenly aware that with each day that passes, people in need are waiting for benefits that could make the difference between feeding their family or going hungry.

Background on the Opportunity Costs of Poverty

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 rarely apply the concept to low-income people, acting as if their time is essentially worthless. Similar to a spouse who doesn't count your food shopping, cooking, cleaning, child-rearing, accounting for family finances, shuttling family member to appointments, taking care of your sick parents, etc., etc. as work.

Yet in addition to lacking money, low-income Americans frequently lack time. Just as many personal relationships collapse when people don't have "quality time" with each other, a lack of time works mightily against the efforts of low-income people to have constructive relationships with their families and with the broader society.

Many low-income people work two or even three jobs. If they are unemployed, they spend a great deal of time looking for work. They often travel by public transportation, laboriously making one, or two, or three connections to shuttle between home, work, social service agencies, houses of worship, and grocery stores. If they work as a nanny for someone else's children, because they themselves can't afford to pay for childcare or babysitters, they also must take the extra time to care for their *own* kids. If they work as home health aides to assist someone else's parents, because they can't afford home health care themselves, they also must take the time to care for their *own* folks.

While it's true that government safety net programs help tens of million Americans avoid starvation, homelessness, and other outcomes even more dreadful than everyday poverty, it is also true that government anti-poverty aid is generally a major hassle to obtain and keep. Congress, which creates the laws governing the programs, and most state and localities, which implement those laws, purposely make it extremely difficult to advertise these programs and enable families to access them. That's why many low-income people are actually unaware of all the government benefits for which they are eligible, reducing the amount of help going to Americans in need by tens of billions of dollars every year.

Even if low-income people *do* know about available aid, the journey to receive it is usually long, onerous, and time-consuming. They need to go to one government office to apply for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance benefits, formerly known as food stamps), a different government office to apply for housing assistance, a separate WIC (Women, Infants, and Children nutrition program) clinic to obtain WIC benefits, and a variety of other government offices to apply for other types of aid – sometimes traveling long distances by public transportation or on foot to get there, and then, once they've walked through the door, they are often forced to wait for hours at each office to be served. Even when people initially apply for benefits online, they often have to physically go to one or more government offices to follow-up. They need to bring piles of paperwork to each office, usually with slightly different combinations of documents every time. Making copies of the paperwork also takes time (and money). The lines in these offices can seem endless, and sometimes clients need to wait outside, for hours, in the worst kinds of weather. If the office is especially backed up that day, or if the government case workers lost the previously-submitted paperwork, yet another visit on another day will be required, taking the same excruciating travel and waiting times. Many offices don't have weekend or night hours, so if an applicant works, she or he will likely lose wages by applying for government help, since most low-income workers, unlike white-collar workers, often get no paid leave. Clients can try calling on the phone, but it's rare for a human being to actually answer, and the voice mailboxes are often full.

And when a bureaucrat finally sees an applicant at an office, they will usually ask many of the same intrusive, detailed, lengthy questions about finances and personal situations as similar government workers did at the last three offices. It's as if you have to explain to 12 different cousins at six different family get-togethers why your marriage fell apart and why you need to sleep on each of their couches for a night – while also having to hand over to each of them your complete tax records to prove why you are too broke to pay rent to them for that night of couch-surfing. In most places, families must even fill out additional forms, which their children must bring to school, to qualify their kids for free or reduced-price school meals.

To be sure, these government benefits provide a critical lifeline – and they often are the difference between a family eating and not eating and between them having a home or being homeless – but just because these programs are vital doesn't mean they are perfect. Besides, more affluent Americans aren't forced to jump through nearly as many hoops when they obtain far more expensive government aid, like farm subsidies or tax deductions for their vacation homes.

To obtain some form of help, low-income benefits applicants may also be required to attend job readiness classes, even if they have jobs or children at home. Such classes are often useless exercises in writing résumés for jobs that don't require résumés or in obtaining training for jobs that don't exist. Often these classes are worthless time sucks for attendees and exist to give large payouts to politically connected contractors. If applicants quit the classes, they often lose benefits for themselves and their children. The system pits parents against their children, over and over again.

Are you fed up? Are you tired yet? Well, if you live in poverty, your day has only begun. Most poor folks, like all of us, also have to file tax returns with the IRS, sometimes paying a tax preparer handsomely to do so, even if the government owes them an EITC refund payment. A Progressive Policy Institute study found that in 2016, low-income workers paid an average of around \$400 each to national tax preparation chains.⁴

But wait, there's more.

Given that the United States has hundreds of thousands of nonprofit groups providing social services, it is nearly impossible for struggling people to determine which of those organizations provides services they need, whether the organization is conveniently located, and for which services they are eligible. If they do figure out that a nonprofit (or multiple nonprofits) could help, they will need to take the time to visit each one, where sometimes lines around the block ensure yet another seemingly endless wait, only to fill out even more paperwork, and go through yet more interviews.

And since many government and nonprofit programs require frequent re-applications and re-certifications, a low-income person often has to jump through all these hoops every few months. In America, trying to get out of poverty can be a full-time job.

Plus, it's rare for the multiple government and nonprofit programs aimed at low-income people to work together in a coherent fashion to bolster families' long-term self-sufficiency. Too

⁴ Paul Weinstein Jr, and Bethany Patten, "The Price of Paying Taxes II: How paid tax preparer fees are diminishing the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)," Progressive Policy Institute, April 2016, accessed June 10, 2016, http://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016.04-Weinstein_Patten_The-Price-of-Paying-Taxes-II.pdf

often, these programs work at cross-purposes, so that obtaining one benefit might make a recipient ineligible for another. (The reverse is sometimes true, where getting one benefit makes a recipient automatically eligible for other benefits – but conservatives are trying to make that less common.) Sometimes a person can't win for losing, such as when she or he finally gets a raise and then loses benefits because of it, and the amount of the raise is less than the value of benefits lost. On the other hand, getting a job can make someone eligible for EITC payments, the value of which may exceed the amount of benefits lost. But that's a crap shoot too because it often depends upon household composition and a variety of other factors.

The Government/Nonprofit Social Services Status Quo



And that's not all.

If low-income people don't have a checking account or credit cards (and most don't), they can't pay bills by mail or online. Instead, they have to pay for everything in cash, spending money on extremely high fees at check cashing facilities that prey on residents of poor neighborhoods. And even then they aren't done, because paying bills in cash often requires a visit to the phone company, the electric company, the landlord, and the gas company, where more long lines await the person who must pay their bills in person.

Poor folks are less likely to have a washing machine in their homes or buildings, so more time must be spent at laundromats. There are neither doormen at their buildings, nor secured delivery spaces, so if they ever get a package, a trip to the post office is necessary – where they will inevitably find even more lines.

For all Americans, including well-off ones, modern life is complex. There are always a zillion family, work, personal, community, religious, and civic obligations. With ever-shifting and complex options, it's a challenge to effectively juggle them all and it can feel impossible to plan for the future. But affluent Americans are able to get professional help in sorting through their options and obligations, utilizing the best personal assistants, financial advisors, and

modern technology that their money can buy. Similarly, our government needs to get serious about helping low-income people clarify their options and simplify their lives.

Putting HOPE into the Palm of Your Hand

Technology has fundamentally revamped the lives of most Americans, usually for the better. Now it's time for use digital technology – combined with policy improvements -- to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents. That's why Hunger Free American has proposed that our federal, state, and local governments to create online HOPE (Health, Opportunity, and Personal Empowerment) accounts and action plans.

Here's how HOPE would work: The President and Congress would need to work together to enact a law that would authorize the federal Departments of Health and Human Services (HHS), House and Urban Development, (HUD), Treasury, and Agriculture (USDA) to work together -- and to form public/private partnerships with banks, credit unions, and technology companies – to create HOPE accounts and action plans that combine improved technology, streamlined case management, and coordinated access to multiple to federal, state, city, and nonprofit programs that already exist. States and localities would initially be asked to participate in pilot projects implementing the accounts and plans, and, if they would, would be required over time to implement them universally.

One the accounts and plans are in place, workers could voluntarily choose to also have their paychecks deposited directly into the accounts, which would be held by private banks and credit unions that voluntarily chose to participate in the program. Families could also use the accounts to increase their savings, which would be matched by government and private sources, incorporating both IDAs and Kids Accounts. Job training and placement services would be modernized to connect real people with real jobs, and people could use the account app to easily locate and sign-up for such services online. All these efforts would work together in harmony to better give people in poverty the tools they need to take charge of their futures and to implement long-term plans to climb into – and stay in – the middle class. If Congress fails to pass authorizing legislation, the next President could achieve much of the above administratively. Also, if Washington fails to act fully or at all, states or localities could step up to the plate to enact similar programs on their own.

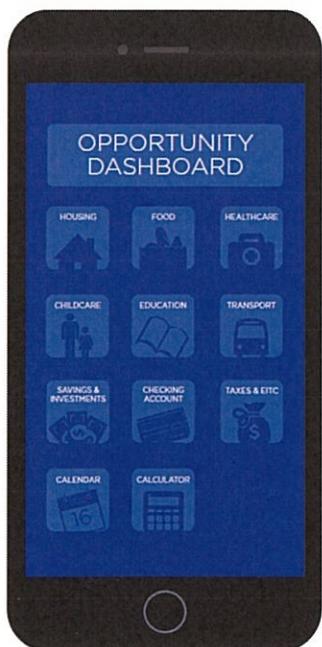
The federal government, and/or states and localities SUCH AS New York, could issue open calls to allow a variety of banks and credit unions to compete to create such accounts, and they pick a number of the best proposals, thereby allowing low-income consumers with a choice of financial institutions to pick. Once set up, HOPE accounts would enable families to use any smart phone, tablet, or computer to learn about the public and philanthropic programs for which they are eligible – including aid to improve health, nutrition, job training and placement, housing, income, etc. – and then apply for all of these programs at once from the convenience of their device. If supporting documents need to be submitted with the application, then families could take pictures of those documents and submit the pictures with the application. A surprising number of low-income people already have smart phones and/or home computers, not because they are luxuries, but because they are essential tools of learning and work in modern America. But families that don't own a smart phone, tablet, or computer could be provided a basic one, along with a subsidized Wi-Fi/Internet access plan, and people uncomfortable with technology could go to a library, government office, or nonprofit agency to be walked through the system.

For elderly and disabled shut-ins who can't access the technology, government or nonprofit employees and/or AmeriCorps national service participants could make home visits to help. As noted previously, the AmeriCorps program should be expanded dramatically to aid these and other vital efforts.

To make it easier to access health care, HOPE accounts would also clearly specify medical benefits, and any out-of-pocket costs, for each of the health plans for which the users are eligible, and empower them to easily select the plan that works best for them. The accounts would also enable working families to file for federal EITC refunds, and, in states and localities with their own supplemental EITC payments, to simultaneously file for those as well. Since the accounts will already have all the financial information needed to file for those payments, families could easily do so with this app, saving the time and money they would otherwise have to spend on third-party tax filing services.

While HOPE accounts are a new idea, the concept builds upon existing programs, such as the IDA program, and incorporates technological improvements in social services delivery that some forward-thinking states, cities, and counties are already implementing. For example, in New York City, the city government is already using updated technologies to allow families to apply online for multiple government benefits, through a portal called Access NYC (<https://a069-access.nyc.gov>), which allows users to pre-screen their eligibility for array of government programs, and, for some of the programs, to apply for them on line. The city has even started a pilot project to allow people to apply for SNAP and cash assistance, but not other programs, by smart phone. But even in New York, the number of programs to which someone can actually apply online is limited, and applicants still must follow various procedures, on various timelines to access various programs, and still must visit or call multiple offices.

A Better Alternative: Online HOPE Accounts



Building on such innovations, but moving beyond them, HOPE accounts would enable families to rapidly apply for – and quickly learn if they are accepted into – *all* federal, state, and local government programs, as well as offer users information for wide variety of services provided by nonprofit groups. HOPE accounts would also include a calculator system to help families understand the financial impact of one program upon other programs.

All program benefit funds would go into the same system, with health care, food, housing, and other specific benefits accounted for separately from the cash. Overall funding for these programs would be maintained, or increased, and federal benefits that are now entitlements, such as SNAP and Medicaid, should continue to be entitlements, which people would still have a legal right to obtain. Families would also be encouraged to put their own cash savings into the accounts, which could then be matched. Any cash in the account set aside for education, job training, starting a business, or buying a home would be non-taxable. Sure, that's a bit complicated, but still a heck of a lot easier for a family than figuring out all this out on their own. And if they still need help, some government and nonprofit social workers would still be available to guide them through the application and follow-up processes.

The accounts would allow low-income families to easily access and monitor – in one central online account – the status, amounts, and recertification deadlines for all their benefits and savings. They could also use the accounts to pay all bills online, saving outrageous check cashing fees, and enormous amounts of time.

The accounts could also include a budgeting function to give families real-time cash flow data and long-term financial planning data, including helping them to calculate how much they would lose in interest on credit cards versus how much they would gain in interest by saving more. The accounts would offer a calendar and scheduling function, enabling families to keep track of all job search, work, family, and school obligations, as well as any social service filing or appointment dates.⁵

Instead of a vast army of government and nonprofit caseworkers in charge of micromanaging the lives of low-income people, low-income adults would become, in effect, their *own* case managers. With this newfound power, people will be able spread their wings and take flight.

But to intrude on this love fest just as bit, I have to admit that these new apps and social service computer systems will be extraordinarily challenging to build and even more challenging to integrate with each other, especially given the current, antiquated condition of government social service computer systems, especially at the state level, and a unique system would need to be set up for each state.. These new system must combine ease of client access with very strict protections against fraud and theft, not easy considerations to balance. So the nation's top tech leaders and companies would need to be challenged to work together with government to make this a reality. Dear Mr. Gates, Zuckerberg or Bezos: if you successfully accomplish this, we'll add you to Mt. Rushmore -- or if you prefer, we'll carve a new monument on one of the Santa Cruz Mountains.⁶ Alternatively, the White House – with input from HHS, HUD, Treasury, and

⁵ Careful security and privacy protections would need to be put in place, so that only the family, and not the government, nonprofit, or banking partners, would be able to see the or track private financial and appointment information.

⁶ Dear environmentalists: just kidding about the Santa Cruz mountains part. Please don't send protesters in rafts to surround my apartment.

USDA – could sponsor a competition that would provide a monetary reward for the company (ies) that built the best app to fuse all these programs.

It is also vital to stress that technological innovation alone won't solve these problems – a wide variety of federal and state laws must change in order to ensure seamless interactions between varied social service programs.

Likely Objections from Both the Left and the Right

Some conservatives will no doubt fear that an approach like HOPE would make it easier for low-income people to get government assistance, thereby increasing dependency and government spending. But HOPE would reduce government bureaucracy and paperwork, and ensure that more of the money spent goes to helping families instead of bureaucracies, all of which are professed conservative goals.

Some conservatives believe that getting government help *should* be a difficult, shameful process, and making it less so would only increase dependency on government. But it's inconsistent for the Right to argue for government to be less intrusive in the lives of most Americans but more intrusive in the lives of low-income Americans. Plus, by freeing up parents' time to give them more ability to work, study, and spend time with their families, HOPE is “pro-family,” “pro-work,” and “pro-education” and thus would *reduce* long-term dependency.

Some liberals may also be wary because, at first blush, Hope accounts and action plans *appear* to be similar to the punitive contracts and safety net slashing block grant proposals advanced by Paul Ryan and other conservatives. But God is in the details, and, in reality, the HOPE accounts and actions plans would be 180 degrees different in both intention and implementation from conservative schemes. Yes, the delivery mechanism sounds similar, but we should not fixate too much on delivery mechanisms. After all, the Internet is a delivery mechanism that can deliver either text from the bible or pornography – it's the content, not the delivery mechanism – that truly matters.

The content of H.O.P.E is nearly the mirror opposite of the content of the Ryan plan. Ryan has used his anti-poverty plans as a cover for decimating existing government benefits for low-income families. In contrast, HOPE would provide anti-poverty benefits far above the current levels (out of *new* pots of money, *not* shifted from other antipoverty programs) so true self-sufficiency could be achieved. Unlike the Ryan and other GOP proposals that would replace existing federal programs, the HOPE accounts and plans would be *in addition to* existing government efforts. Unlike Ryan's proposal, which assumes that his proposed opportunity grants can somehow succeed even if the rest of the safety net is slashed and the economy is still failing, this proposal assumes that HOPE accounts and plans can be effective in tandem with a strong safety net and the broad-based economic growth that creates jobs and raises wages. HOPE would also end the arbitrary benefit cliffs that kick in when families marginally increase their incomes as they struggle to enter – and remain in – the middle class. Ideally, the HOPE initiative would be funded robustly enough by the government and the philanthropic sectors so that *all* those ends could be achieved.

Liberals may also worry that HOPE might undercut public employees and their unions, which provide liberal candidates with vital troops, votes, and donations. Given the union-busting campaigns undertaken by Scott Walker, John Kasich, and other GOP governors, such concerns

are understandable. So let me make it crystal clear that the HOPE proposal is based on the assumption that most public employees are dedicated, underpaid, and have a right to organize to defend their interests. Some social workers would keep jobs similar to their existing ones, in order to answer questions about HOPE over the phone or from clients who still prefer face-to-face meetings. While HOPE would indeed eliminate most other government positions that are currently for handling paperwork and client interviews, this proposal recommends that employees holding those positions over time be transitioned into more useful functions such as training and placing low-income adults into living wage jobs, staffing universal pre-k programs, or aiding shut-in seniors. Public employees themselves would be happier if they spent less time filling out paperwork and more time directly aiding the public.

Some liberals worry that merely suggesting that government programs can be improved or that low-income Americans have personal responsibility for their own futures reinforces conservative messages, effectively giving “aid and comfort to the enemy.” Some might argue more broadly that it’s inconsistent for anti-poverty advocates like Marianna Chilton and myself, to effusively praise safety net programs like SNAP, but also pointing out their significant flaws. Those arguments are also reasonable, but ultimately they are not convincing. There’s nothing inconsistent in pointing out that programs significantly improve the lives of recipients but could help beneficiaries even more if they were modernized. Just as even generally solid relationships can always be improved by both sides thoroughly addressing life realities (including painful realities), so too, social services can be further improved through an unflinching examination of their current defects.

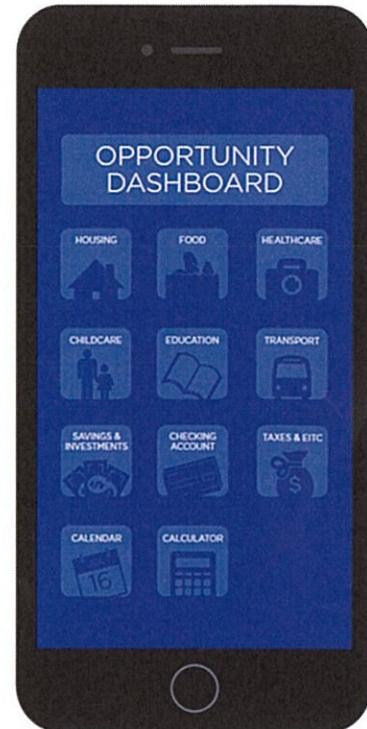
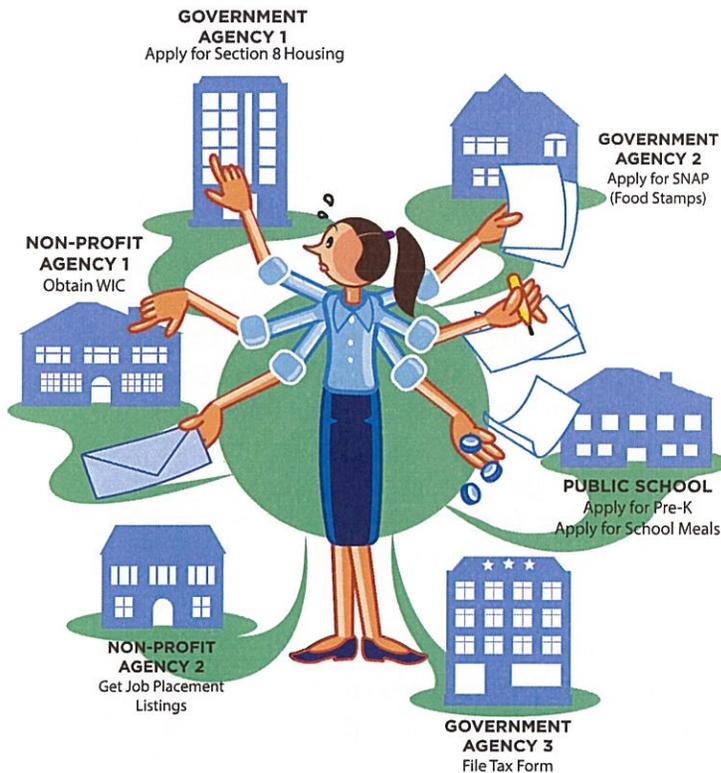
Some progressives might worry that funneling all anti-poverty funding into one program might it easier in the future for conservatives to cut them. Yet the recent trend of omnibus budget deals has *already* allowed conservatives to cut all anti-poverty programs at once with tools such as the sequestration process. Taking no action because you are afraid things could get even worse makes little sense. That’s sort of like when two people are in front of a firing squad, about to be executed, and one asks the other if they should ask for a cigarette, and the other responds: “Nah, I don’t want to make them mad.”

Taking the ostrich approach by ignoring both public concerns and real-life problems is a losing strategy, both substantively and politically. In contrast, FDR, the most successful progressive leader in US history, called for “bold, persistent, experimentation” because he understood that continually modernizing liberal programs was the best way to save them.

The most effective political defense is an offense. The best way to push back against possible cuts is to fight for *more* funding, which is why progressives should be clear that that the HOPE system would need *more* money than the current system.

In the end, though, the question that is most important is whether HOPE would make life better or worse – in both the short-term and the long-term – for the people the programs are intended to help. So let’s ask low-income Americans a basic question:

Should We Replace This ... With This?



Given low-income Americans' own frustrations with anti-poverty programs intended for their betterment the answer would likely to a resounding "yes."

Individuals should receive, if desired, all benefits for which they and their households are eligible. HRA providing the tools to simplify the process will avoid duplicative administrative costs and ensure the support for those in need. An econometric study estimated that SNAP caseloads increased by 6.2% in the year following implementation of automatically or "categorically" eligible for SNAP based on being eligible for or receiving benefits.⁷ A simplified enrollment process has been shown to improve participation rates, and reduce the rate of in-person visits to the SNAP office for recertification.⁸

Short recertification periods make it more challenging for families to maintain their SNAP benefits because it may be difficult to maintain paperwork and travel to SNAP offices for transportation or work-related reasons.⁹ An ERS-sponsored study found that in 2000, applicants who were ultimately approved for benefits spent an average of 6.1 hours on the process and were

⁷ Andrews, Margaret, and David Smallwood. "What's Behind the Rise in SNAP Participation?" Amber Waves. (March 1, 2012). United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Economic Research service. Food & Nutrition Assistance. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2012/march/what-s-behind-the-rise-in-snap-participation/>

⁸ Ibid [2]

⁹ Atasoy S, Mills BF, Parmeter CF. The dynamics of Food Stamp Program participation: a lagged dependent variable approach. Paper presented at: 2010 Annual Meeting; July 25–27, 2010; Denver, CO. <http://econpapers.repec.org/paper/agsaaca10/60963.htm>

required to make an average of 2.4 trips to the SNAP office. Prior to welfare reform, applicants spent an average of 3.9 hours and 1.6 trips to be approved for participation.¹⁰

“Churning” occurs when SNAP participants leave the program and reenter less than 5 months later, causing additional costs to the program despite what is most likely no change in eligibility.¹¹ Eligible adults who work full time during nontraditional hours (i.e. nights and weekends) were more likely to participate in SNAP than those who work traditional daytime hours, and eligible adults with more than one job are even less likely to participate in SNAP.¹²

Households tended to exit SNAP during the recertification process due to application deficiencies, such as missed recertification, financial ineligibility, or incomplete information. Current practices continue to emphasize limiting fraud, despite the program having the lowest fraud rate in its history.¹³ People’s needs during times of recession and long-term unemployment should outweigh this concern. To alleviate food access concerns, it is important that those who are eligible are encouraged and can easily participate in social services programs such as SNAP. Simplifying the application process is no silver bullet in light of other problems associated with SNAP, such as income cliffs for eligibility; however this initiative makes strides in the right direction to address the underutilization due to difficulty with continued eligibility recertification and lack of information.

Over the last few years under the de Blasio administration, New York City has made progress in the fight against hunger because we have made a concerted effort to do so. We acknowledge those efforts, as it is society’s duty to care for its most vulnerable. Through continued effort New York City can continue to be more effective at assisting those in need. We thank the Committee again for the opportunity to testify and look forward to working with you to make sure all New Yorkers and Americans have access to adorable nutritious food.

Summary of Key Recommendations

- 1) Ensure at least the same level of funding as last year (\$15,473,650) for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, which provides vital aid to hundreds of food pantries and soup kitchens.
- 2) Accelerate efforts to automate access to SNAP benefits, and combine that access with other programs, as detailed above.
- 3) Accelerate efforts to bring breakfast before the bell to all the city’s public schools.
- 4) Support state legislation to require breakfast after the bell in high-0needs schools statewide.
- 5) Oppose attempts in Washington to slash nutrition assistance programs or undermine the current structures of the programs.

Thanks again for your attention to these vital issues.

¹⁰ Ibid [4]

¹¹ Mabli J, Ohls JC. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program dynamics and employment transitions: the role of employment instability. *Applied Economic Perspective Policy*. 2012;34:187–213. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aep/ppr045>

¹² McKernan SM. Employment Factors Influencing Food Stamp Program Participation. <http://www.urban.org/publications/410800.html>

¹³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program payment error rates FY2011. <http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/qc/pdfs/2011-rates.pdf>



Testimony prepared by

Rachel Sabella

for the

Committee on General Welfare

on

Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City

February 13, 2018

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chairman Levin and members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of Government Relations and Policy at Food Bank For New York City. Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council for the committees' oversight hearing on Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City.

First, Food Bank For New York City thanks the City Council for your continued commitment to addressing the issue of hunger and ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food. We are grateful for the City Council's longstanding leadership on this issue, and pleased to see continued progress on anti-hunger initiatives since we last gathered for this annual hearing. The Council's instrumental role in securing this three straight years of increases to emergency food funding, through both the City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and the Council's Food Pantries Initiative – including the creation of 25 new school pantries – and the expansion of universal school meals to ALL New York City public school students has been especially appreciated, alongside other robust efforts to support food-insecure New Yorkers.

This year, Food Bank For New York City celebrates our 35th anniversary as the city's major hunger-relief organization, working to end food poverty throughout the five boroughs. Nearly one in five New York City residents relies on our programs and services. Through our network of 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank's food distribution provides approximately 62 million free meals for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) enrollment and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$110 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. In addition, Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 50,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet on a low budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts.

Food Bank's work would not be possible without our partnership with the City of New York, particularly with the Human Resources Administration (HRA), forged in the earliest days of our organization's history. This partnership has created numerous opportunities for productive collaboration over more than three decades. For example, Food Bank convenes the SNAP Task Force, which allows government agencies and non-profit organizations that engage in SNAP outreach to jointly examine trends and troubleshoot issues in the SNAP application and recertification processes. In partnership with HRA, Food Bank co-developed a nationally awarded SNAP mediation process, which allows the speedy and efficient resolution of adverse case outcomes. We have partnered on targeted SNAP outreach initiatives for seniors, jointly deployed public education campaigns, and piloted technologies in community-based settings (including the Paperless Office System and AccessNYC) that have created more opportunities to apply for SNAP than have ever existed before. In addition, Food Bank and HRA have partnered to ensure that food pantries and soup kitchens throughout New York City have reliable, year-round access to a full complement of nutritious food through the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).

My testimony today will focus on hunger in New York City and strategic funding and policy recommendations to work towards ending hunger.

NEW YORK CITY'S MEAL GAP: 225 MILLION

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. A federal entitlement program, SNAP now provides food assistance to 41.7 million Americans.¹ SNAP is effective and efficient, and it is countercyclical, meaning it has the flexibility to grow to meet rising economic need.

Nearly 1.6 million New York City residents currently rely on SNAP to keep food on the table.² Food Bank For New York City analysis finds that, to date, the cuts have cost New York City residents more than \$770 million in lost benefits that could have been used to purchase food for more than 223 million meals.³

Despite SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs (like school meals, and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC), **nearly 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food⁴ – evidence that a meal gap remains.** The Meal Gap is the most sophisticated food insecurity metric available, representing the translation into meals of the financial resources needed by food-insecure households to secure an adequate diet year-round.⁵

New York City's Meal Gap (as of 2015, the most recent year for which data is available) is 225 million meals.⁶ Disaggregated by borough, the Meal Gap for:

- the Bronx is 41.2 million;
- Brooklyn is 87.6 million;
- Manhattan is 40.6 million;
- Queens is 47.4 million; and
- Staten Island is 7.9 million.

As an attachment to my testimony, you will find a visual representation of the Meal Gap by City Council district. I look forward to meeting with individual Council Members to discuss the Meal Gap in your district and ways we can work together to ultimately eliminate it.

FEDERAL BUDGET THREATENS ANTI-HUNGER SAFETY NET

This week, the White House released its Fiscal Year 2019 budget proposal, which includes deep and significant cuts to resources for poor and vulnerable New Yorkers. Details continue to be released but we do know that with multiple assaults on the safety net, this proposal, if enacted, would only increase food insecurity. One of the most significant cuts targets SNAP as the budget includes proposals that seek to take food away from millions of individuals and families by implementing structural changes to SNAP that would slash its funding by \$213 billion over ten years – a reduction of nearly one-third. We expect the proposed SNAP cuts would result in over 40 billion meals lost over 10 years. The changes also undermine the basic dignity that comes from allowing SNAP recipients to shop for groceries like anyone else. In addition,

¹ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) National Monthly Data, November 2017 (latest available month). United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

² New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) as of December 2017.

³ Trade-Offs at the Dinner Table. Food Bank For New York City. November 2017.

⁴ *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

⁵ The meal gap was developed for *Feeding America* by food insecurity expert Dr. Craig Gundersen of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. When the City Council legislated that the Administration report food insecurity annually as part of its food metrics report, the Meal Gap was adopted by the City of New York as its official food insecurity metric

⁶ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2016: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level*. Feeding America, 2016.

the budget proposal also eliminates the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) which provides low-income seniors with 145 million meals a year.

The next step in the federal budget process is with the House of Representatives. The previous two budget proposals from the White House have contained several damaging provisions for SNAP that could be replicated in other budget proposals or in the upcoming Farm Bill, including:

- Removal of State/local authority to request waivers to the ABAWD time limit during times of high unemployment;
- Elimination of the SNAP minimum benefit, which will primarily impact low-income seniors and people with disabilities;
- Removal of categorical eligibility as a state option for SNAP, which will affect seniors with medical expenses, and working parents struggling to afford childcare;
- Elimination of the standard utility allowance determining heating assistance for SNAP participants;
- Replacing a portion of SNAP benefits with a pre-determined food allocation;
- Imposing fees on retailers for SNAP participation; and
- Giving states discretion to reduce the amount households receive in SNAP as part of a cost-sharing plan.

Prior to the release of the White House budget, the state of hunger was uncertainty, and for immigrants especially, fear. This budget is the clearest indication of the direction in which the Trump Administration intends to move federal anti-hunger policy, and the intention is unmistakable. These proposed cuts to federal nutrition programs when coupled with proposed reductions in housing, health care and income assistance programs, would have a devastating effect on New Yorkers struggling with hunger. We must work together to fight these harmful proposals and help struggling New Yorkers.

RISK OF HUNGER FOR JOBLESS NEW YORKERS

As the Committee may know, in recent years, a provision of welfare law from the mid-1990s requiring states to cut off certain SNAP recipients from their food benefits after three consecutive jobless months has taken effect in parts of our state and city. Called the ABAWD (Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents) provision, it targets nondisabled adult SNAP recipients between the ages of 18 and 49 who do not have minor children or other dependents in their home. Upon the loss of a job, individuals receiving SNAP who meet the ABAWD criteria are subject to a time limit of three months to find a new job of at least 20 hours per week – or, if available, participate in a state-approved employment and training program or volunteer (workfare) program – in order to preserve their benefits.

Federal law gives states the option to request a waiver from the ABAWD time limit during times of high and sustained unemployment. New York is among the states that have requested and received partial waivers for the counties and cities that continue to experience high and sustained unemployment. We appreciate that HRA and the State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance have worked collaboratively to develop the broadest possible waiver from this time limit for New York. Nevertheless, the borough of Queens (with the exception of Community District 12) and Manhattan south of 110th Street on the West Side and 96th Street on the East Side are subject to enforcement of this time limit.

For individuals who live in these areas, three consecutive months without a job or other qualifying activity will result in a loss of SNAP for three years – irrespective of their need for food, or their ability to afford it, in that time. For those who lose their SNAP benefits, a food pantry or soup kitchen might be their only place to turn.

OUR EMERGENCY FOOD SYSTEM

When cash, benefits and the generosity of family and friends have been exhausted, the emergency food network is the resource of last resort for those struggling to keep food on the table. Yet the emergency food supply, our last line of defense against hunger, is not sufficient to meet the need.

As referenced earlier, in November of 2013, sweeping cuts were made to the federal SNAP program. Three years after the cuts, four out of five (79 percent) food pantries and soup kitchens continue to see increased visitor traffic, while many continue to experience food shortages.⁷ In September 2017:

- **More than half (56 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens reported running out of food**, or particular types of food needed for complete pantry bags or meals;
- **More than one third (35 percent) of food pantries and soup kitchens reported having to turn people away** due to food shortages; and
- **Nearly half (46 percent) of food pantries reported reducing the number of meals provided in their pantry bags.**⁸

These statistics speak to a profound insufficiency in the emergency food supply, and the acute operational stress under which food pantries and soup kitchens have been functioning since the cuts. The November 2013 SNAP cuts continue to represent the biggest systemic factor reducing the food purchasing power of low-income people.⁹

It is critical to know who relies on emergency food programs:

- An estimated 1.4 million New York City **residents** rely on emergency food programs, including soup kitchens and food pantries, each year.
- Approximately 339,000 New York City **children** or approximately one out of every five, rely on soup kitchens and food pantries.
- Approximately 604,770 New York City adult **women**, or approximately one out of every six, rely on soup kitchens and food pantries.
- Approximately 204,000 New York City **seniors**, or approximately one out of every five, rely on soup kitchens and food pantries.
- Approximately 70,000 New York City **veterans**, or approximately three out of every ten, rely on soup kitchens and food pantries.¹⁰

⁷ *Trade-Offs at the Dinner Table*. Food Bank For New York City. November 2017.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ For example, local unemployment, a highly influential factor in seeking food assistance, has been in steady decline in New York City since then.

¹⁰ *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

POLICY PRIORITIES TO ENSURE NO NEW YORKER GOES HUNGRY

No New Yorker should go hungry: access to adequate, nutritious food is a fundamental human right. Thankfully, the policies and programs to realize this core principle are already in existence, and with the collective commitment of leaders across sectors, we can make this happen. While cuts to SNAP have intensified the challenge, policy and budget options well within the authority and discretion of City government can considerably improve the lives of New Yorkers who struggle to afford food.

New York City's anti-hunger resources – primarily those that bolster SNAP enrollment and fortify our emergency food system – are more vital than ever. Food Bank For New York City offers these recommendations on behalf of the emergency food network in a spirit of partnership. It is our hope this spirit will be met by constructive engagement by the City Council and the Administration as we take on hunger together. (Attached to the testimony you will also find a complete copy of Food Bank For New York City's 2018 Policy Priorities.)

Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) is a major source of food for our city's emergency food network. EFAP plays an especially important role because it provides a steady year-round supply of nutritious food for the approximately 500 food pantries and soup kitchens that participate. EFAP provides food from all five food groups, and all EFAP food meets the City's rigorous nutrition standards. In addition, EFAP is an important source of kosher food.

We are grateful that during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 New York City budget process, the City Council made EFAP funding one of its top priorities and helped ensure a significant increase to the program. We are, however, extremely disappointed that the Mayor's FY 2019 Preliminary Budget *cuts* EFAP food funding by \$7.3 million (reducing the baseline amount to \$8.2 million for emergency food). As referenced above, at a time when New York City already faces a Meal Gap of 225 million meals, **this funding reduction would mean a loss of approximately 6.8 million vitally needed meals.** This pattern of eliminating past years' EFAP funding increases in the Preliminary and Executive Budgets, with restoration of those funds (and potentially, increases) after negotiation with the City Council in the Adopted Budget introduces great uncertainty into an emergency food network already struggling to stretch resources as far as possible. At a time when we are facing devastating proposals at the federal level, we need this Administration to support New Yorkers struggling with hunger.

We urge the City Council to support increasing baseline food funding for EFAP to \$22 million, which would take into account rising poverty and food costs since the start of the Great Recession. It would allow pantries to adjust for the current inadequacy of the food supply, which only allows food pantries to provide 5.8 meals in a typical pantry bag – far short of New York State's nine-meal standard.

SNAP

While the November 2013 SNAP cuts have reduced the benefit amounts of those already participating, it remains of utmost importance to ensure that eligible New Yorkers who are not enrolled in the program avail themselves of the benefit – particularly emergency food participants. Even at the currently reduced benefit amounts, SNAP benefits provide our city about as many meals in *two months* as the entire emergency food system distributes in a year.

SNAP is our first line of defense against hunger, and we are extremely appreciative for the energy and resources that HRA has put into improving access to SNAP for all eligible New Yorkers. We have enthusiastically partnered in promoting HRA's #SNAPHelps campaign to spread the word about the availability of SNAP. We are also pleased that HRA is working to lower barriers to benefits, and taking advantage of technology in new ways to expand access to SNAP.

We also encourage HRA to coordinate SNAP outreach and application with other benefits and services that reach low-income populations, like senior programs, emergency food programs and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.

We also applaud HRA for its work over the last several years in partnership with organizations that provide SNAP assistance to ensure as many New Yorkers who meet the ABAWD definition as possible are aware of the criteria for exemption from the time limit. For those who are subject to the time limit and unable to find work, we encourage HRA to prioritize their placement in appropriate workforce development, training and education programs in order to preserve their food benefits.

School Meals

Food Bank For New York City applauds the City Council for continuing to prioritize school meals each year – expansion would not have occurred without your support and leadership. We celebrated the expansion of universal school meals to all New York City public school students. We also strongly support Breakfast in the Classroom as it has helped reduce the stigma associated with participation and allows students to start the day with a healthy meal – not with an empty stomach.

Income Support & Poverty Reduction Programs

Approximately one in five adults on food pantry and soup kitchen lines is employed - that's almost 200,000 New Yorkers who are working but not earning enough to provide for themselves and their families. Recognizing that there is no surer way off a food pantry or soup kitchen line than a living wage job, there is much our city can do to support working New Yorkers who are earning too little to afford needed food.

We urge the City Council to work closely with the Department of Consumer Affairs to expand free tax preparation services available to low-income New Yorkers throughout our city. Approximately 20 percent of tax filers eligible for the EITC in New York fail to claim it, and the high-quality free tax assistance services available throughout our city can ensure low-income New Yorkers receive every refund and credit to which they are entitled.

We encourage New York City to develop job creation, training and education strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction and to invest in economic development that both enhances the nutrition landscape and provides opportunities for employment in low-income communities.

WHAT FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY IS DOING IN THE BATTLE AGAINST HUNGER

Emergency Food Network

Food Bank For New York City procures, stores and distributes more than 62 million pounds of healthy food every year, including nearly 20 million pounds of

fresh produce this past year. The core of our food storage and distribution operation is our 90,000-square-foot warehouse in the Hunts Point Market in the Bronx. A full-service delivery operation, Food Bank dispatches tractor-trailers from the warehouse five days a week to our citywide network of approximately 1,000 schools and charities, including food pantries, soup kitchens, senior centers, after-school programs, daycare centers and more. Since our founding in 1983, Food Bank has supplied enough food for more than one billion meals for New Yorkers in need.

Nutrition and Health Education

Food Bank's nutrition education program in New York City public schools reaches more than 50,000 children, teens and adults. The curriculum for students ages 5 to 12 includes interactive cooking activities to foster children's enjoyment of healthy foods, and fun exercises to promote an active lifestyle. Teenagers take what they learn one step further, serving as good health ambassadors at their high schools by conducting nutrition education workshops for their peers. Through free workshops held at our network of food pantries and soup kitchens, we encourage thousands more people to make wiser nutrition choices with limited food dollars.

Campus Pantry

Food Bank For New York City's dual-track Campus Pantry program helps bridge the meal gap experienced at both ends of the student spectrum, enabling children and young adults to access emergency food that can be used to make balanced, nutritious meals at home. Hunger doesn't discriminate; it affects students of all ages — from kindergarteners to college students.

Children from low-income families who receive two meals a day at school may then go home hungry, unsure if there will be enough to eat for dinner or to last the weekend. And many college students—an underserved segment of New Yorkers in need — often find themselves cash-strapped and struggling to afford food. Now both have a place to turn.

In partnership with the City Council, Food Bank For New York City has been able to open 25 new campus pantries in public schools across the five boroughs. The campus pantries provide food but also products families desperately need, such as soap and menstrual products.

In addition, we are currently working with 11 college campuses – including 10 CUNY campuses - to provide pantry services to students struggling with hunger.

Benefits Access

Access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), also known as food stamps, is an essential issue for low-income New Yorkers who struggle to afford food. Food Bank For New York City's Food Stamp Direct Service & Outreach program works to educate and connect directly with low-income New Yorkers to ensure access to this key piece of the hunger safety net.

CONCLUSIONS

Over the last several years, the Administration and the City Council have continued to express a deep commitment to helping New Yorkers in need. This is a time of great uncertainty regarding the federal policies and programs that make up the most significant components of our nation's anti-hunger safety net: SNAP, school meals, summer meals, WIC, the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). This moment calls on us to come together as a city to show a commitment to the principle that no

New Yorker should lack access to an affordable, nutritious diet. Let us set a goal of closing New York City's Meal Gap and becoming the first city in the country to end food poverty. Food Bank For New York City looks forward to working together with the City Council and the Administration to develop a plan to ensure no New Yorker goes to bed hungry.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

New York City

Fortify the Emergency Food System

- Increase NYC's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) baseline food funding to \$22 million.
- Continue improvements to food quality by giving programs choice over food selection and by offering more minimally processed, fresh and frozen food.
- Enact a policy of cost-neutral preferencing of kosher and halal products.
- Increase funding for administrative and operational support.

Strengthen, Streamline and Simplify SNAP

- Maximize all federal options and waivers that lower barriers to participation and simplify program administration.
- Ensure employment and training opportunities for all Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) subject to work-related benefit termination.
- Develop a citywide SNAP outreach plan that utilizes all available sources of federal matching funds.
- Continue efforts to simplify and fully implement online SNAP application and recertification processes.
- Continue expansion of community-based sites for outreach and application submission, including emergency food programs and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.
- Continue improvements in SNAP administration, placing priority on the customer service experience.
- Use clear language for SNAP notices, avoiding messages that discourage participation.

Expand Access to School and Summer Meals

- Make Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) an opt-out program for middle and high schools.
- Fund capital improvements for school cafeterias to ensure infrastructure and capacity for full implementation of Universal School Meals (USM) and BIC.
- Increase the number of Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) sites open for the entire summer.
- Ensure neighborhood access to open SFSP sites in all high-need areas of the city.
- Ensure that the Department of Education publicizes the SFSP program before the end of the school year.
- Engage the reach and capacity of the emergency food network in promoting school and summer meals.

Tackle Poverty to End Hunger

- Enhance the City's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
- Expand funding for free tax service programs for low-income New Yorkers.
- Adopt policies that support a living wage with access to medical benefits and paid time off, and that make living-wage jobs more accessible to low-income people.
- Develop job creation, training and education strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction.
- Invest in economic development that both enhances the nutrition landscape and provides opportunities for employment in low-income communities.
- Expand initiatives to increase access to needed non-food items, such as menstrual hygiene products.

New York State

Fortify the Emergency Food System

- Increase funding for the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) in the Fiscal Year 2018-2019 State budget to \$51 million to adjust for rising food costs and increased need.
- Increase funding for administrative and operational support.

Strengthen, Streamline and Simplify SNAP

- Maximize all federal options and waivers that lower barriers to participation and simplify program administration.
- Allot annual Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) funding to "Heat & Eat" households to maintain SNAP benefits at higher levels.
- Ensure employment and training opportunities for all ABAWDs subject to work-related benefit termination.
- Restore eligibility for all documented immigrants.
- Develop a statewide SNAP outreach plan that utilizes all available sources of federal matching funds.
- Coordinate among multiple benefits so that New Yorkers can apply for several programs and services simultaneously.
- Leverage the health insurance exchange platform to enable screening for SNAP and other programs.
- Expand educational programs and job readiness opportunities covered under SNAP Education and Training.

Expand Access to School and Summer Meals

- Provide funding to help offset any startup costs associated with schools undertaking or expanding USM and/or BIC.

- Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site.
- Ensure that the Education Department publicizes SFSP before the end of the school year.
- Encourage participation in SFSP by New York State park sites.

Protect and Strengthen WIC

- Ensure access to a WIC site in every low-income neighborhood in New York.
- Reject any cuts to State WIC funds, and any proposals that would require WIC to compete with other nutrition assistance programs for funding.
- Promote referrals of eligible WIC participants to SNAP.
- Expedite the transition from WIC coupons to EBT.
- Promote deeper collaboration between the New York State Department of Health and county/municipal social service agencies to provide SNAP outreach and enrollment opportunities at all WIC sites.

Expand Access to Nutritious Food

- Increase farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in low-income communities.
- Adopt transportation policies that would facilitate access to local food and make nutritious local food more affordable.

Tackle Poverty to End Hunger

- Enhance the State's EITC.
- Eliminate the use of discriminatory auditing practices for low-income, cash-earning EITC claimants, and implement transparent documentation requirements and auditing practices for EITC claimants.
- Allow New Yorkers to designate all or part of their tax refunds to directly open and fund a 529 college savings account.
- Index scheduled State minimum wage increases to inflation.
- Adopt policies that support a living wage with access to medical benefits and paid time off, and that make living-wage jobs more accessible to low-income people.
- Develop job creation, training and education strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction.
- Invest in economic development that both enhances the nutrition landscape and provides opportunities for employment in low-income communities.

Federal

Support a Farm Bill that Protects and Strengthens the Anti-Hunger Safety Net.

- Reject any cuts to SNAP, or any changes to its entitlement status.
- Restore the ARRA benefit reduction that took effect in November 2013.
- Restore eligibility to all documented immigrants.
- Coordinate among multiple federal benefits to allow individuals to apply for all simultaneously.
- Increase authorized funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), including for Storage & Distribution expenses.
- Introduce a need-based trigger for federal commodities purchases.
- Expand farm-to-food bank initiatives to supply more nutritious food for food pantries and soup kitchens.
- Reauthorize the Commodity Supplemental Food Program for low-income seniors.

Expand Access to School and Summer Meals

- Reject any effort to pay for enhancements to child nutrition programs by cutting funding to SNAP or other anti-hunger/-poverty programs
- Promote federal incentives to provide universal, free school lunch in schools.
- Provide increased funding for meal reimbursements.

Protect and Strengthen WIC

- Reverse sequestration cuts to WIC.
- Provide USDA with more funding for WIC Farmers Market Nutrition Program coupons.

Tackle Poverty to End Hunger

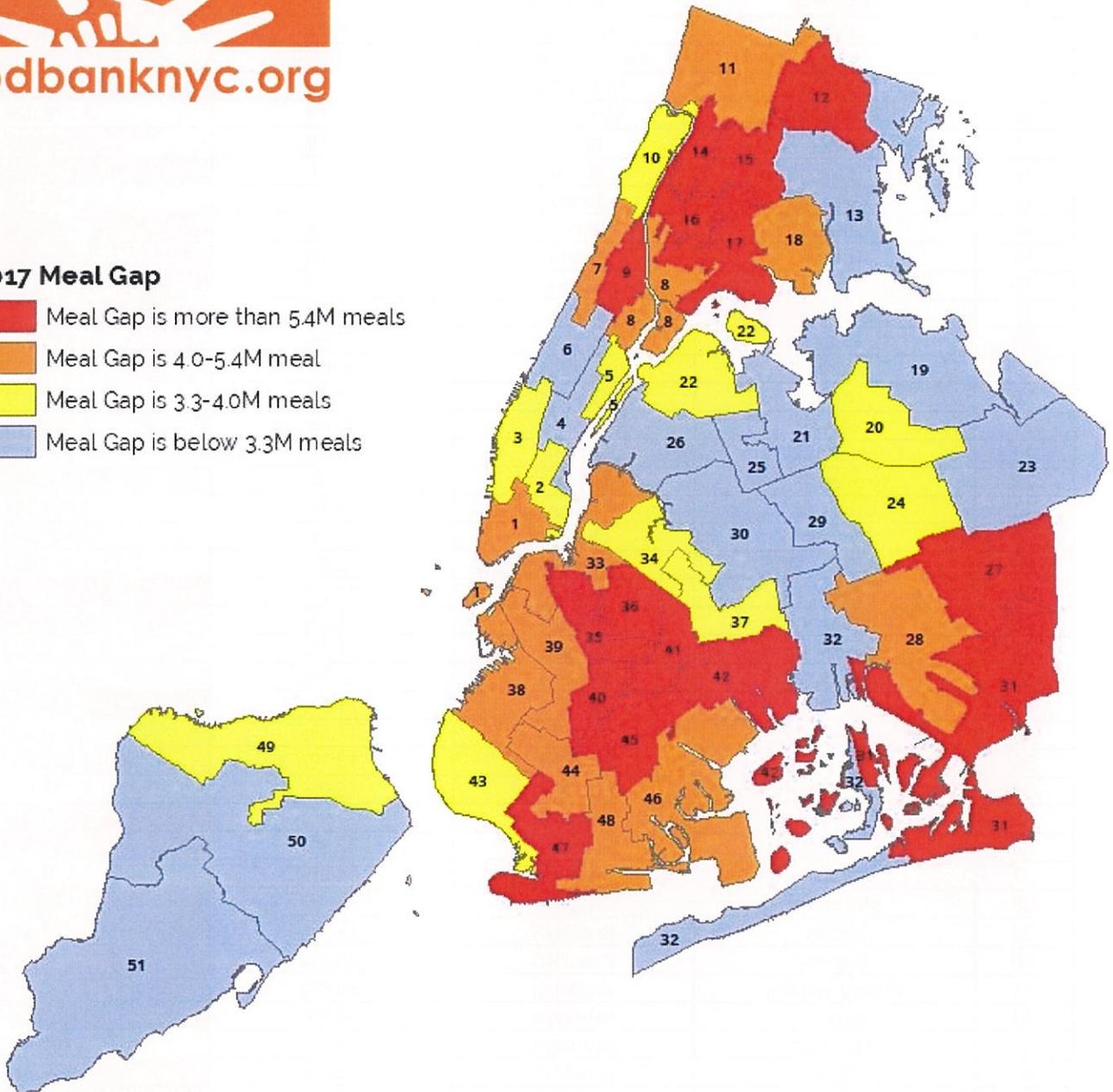
- Enhance the federal EITC.
- Expand funding of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.
- Reject proposals to increase filing requirements for VITA preparers and/or self-preparers claiming an EITC and/or Child Tax Credit.
- Raise the federal minimum wage, and index it to inflation.
- Adopt policies that support a living wage with access to medical benefits and paid time off, and that make living wage jobs more accessible to low-income people.
- Develop job creation, training and education strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction.



Meal Gap by City Council District

2017 Meal Gap

- Meal Gap is more than 5.4M meals
- Meal Gap is 4.0-5.4M meal
- Meal Gap is 3.3-4.0M meals
- Meal Gap is below 3.3M meals



The Meal Gap, New York City's official measure of food insecurity, represents the meals missing from the homes of families and individuals struggling with food insecurity - that is, when household food budgets fall too short to secure adequate, nutritious food year-round

Food Bank For New York City analysis based on Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. Map the Meal Gap 2017: A Report on County and Congressional District Food Insecurity and County Food Cost in the United States in 2015. Feeding America, 2017.

District	Council Member	Borough	Food Insecurity	2017 Meal Gap
1	Chin	Manhattan	15.2%	3,923,310
2	Rivera	Manhattan	14.5%	3,742,632
3	Johnson	Manhattan	13.4%	3,458,708
4	Powers	Manhattan	10.8%	2,787,615
5	Kallos	Manhattan	14.0%	3,613,575
6	Rosenthal	Manhattan	10.3%	2,658,559
7	Levine	Manhattan	18.3%	4,723,459
8	Ayala	Manhattan/Bronx	19.8%	5,110,628
9	Perkins	Manhattan	28.3%	7,304,584
10	Rodriguez	Manhattan	12.7%	3,278,029
11	Cohen	Bronx	16.3%	4,381,457
12	King	Bronx	23.6%	6,343,705
13	Gjonaj	Bronx	9.9%	2,661,130
14	Cabrera	Bronx	20.1%	5,402,901
15	Torres	Bronx	21.4%	5,752,342
16	Gibson	Bronx	22.9%	6,155,544
17	Salamanca	Bronx	21.2%	5,698,582
18	Díaz	Bronx	17.9%	4,811,539
19	Vallone	Queens	8.8%	2,235,054
20	Koo	Queens	14.4%	3,657,361
21	Moya	Queens	7.5%	1,904,875
22	Constantinides	Queens	13.9%	3,530,369
23	Grodchik	Queens	9.3%	2,362,046
24	Lancman	Queens	14.4%	3,657,361
25	Dromm	Queens	11.2%	2,844,614
26	Van Bramer	Queens	12.0%	3,047,801
27	Miller	Queens	23.2%	5,892,415
28	Adams	Queens	18.2%	4,622,498
29	Koslowitz	Queens	11.3%	2,870,012
30	Holden	Queens	9.5%	2,412,842
31	Richards	Queens	21.5%	5,460,643
32	Ulrich	Queens	11.5%	2,920,809
33	Levin	Brooklyn	18.1%	4,628,407
34	Reynoso	Brooklyn	15.0%	3,835,696
35	Cumbo	Brooklyn	26.9%	6,878,682
36	Cornegy	Brooklyn	32.3%	8,259,532
37	Espinal	Brooklyn	14.0%	3,579,983
38	Menchaca	Brooklyn	15.4%	3,937,981
39	Lander	Brooklyn	16.0%	4,091,409
40	Eugene	Brooklyn	29.4%	7,517,964
41	Ampry-Samuel	Brooklyn	30.9%	7,901,534
42	Barron	Brooklyn	30.9%	7,901,534
43	Brannan	Brooklyn	14.5%	3,707,840
44	Yeger	Brooklyn	18.0%	4,602,835
45	Williams	Brooklyn	23.4%	5,983,686
46	Maisel	Brooklyn	18.1%	4,628,407
47	Treyger	Brooklyn	22.8%	5,830,258
48	Deutch	Brooklyn	16.9%	4,321,551
49	Rose	Staten Island	12.4%	3,388,597
50	Matteo	Staten Island	9.4%	2,568,775
51	Borelli	Staten Island	7.4%	2,022,227



FOR THE RECORD

**Testimony on Behalf of BOOM!Health
On**

**The New York City Council Oversight Hearing (Committee on General Welfare) Examining Efforts to
Reduce Hunger in New York City**

Meeting Date: February 13th, 2018

Hello my name is Sherifa Thomas and I am the Director of Food and Nutrition at BOOM!Health and I wanted to thank the City Council, the General Welfare Committee and Chair Stephen Levin for the opportunity to speak about the importance of baseline food funding in New York City. We urge the city council and Mayor Bill De Blasio to support baseline food funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) at \$22 million dollars in the Fiscal Year 2019 New York City budget.

BOOM!Health is a community-based nonprofit organization in the Bronx, NY and is deeply committed to a vision of health, wellness and safety for all, particularly the needs of marginalized and stigmatized communities at highest risk of homelessness, overdose, HIV, Hepatitis C, and other chronic health conditions. Guided by an ethos of harm reduction, we aim to remove barriers to accessing primary care, as well as HIV and Hep C prevention services, while supporting participants on their journey towards wellness and self-sufficiency. The Momentum Project is a subsidiary of BOOM!Health and helps to provide strength, sustenance and support for people living with HIV and AIDS with sites in the Bronx and Manhattan. Momentum offers counseling and supportive services including access to nutritionists and help accessing entitlements for clientele as well as serving meals and giving out pantry to the community at large.

The BOOM!Health Harm Reduction Center, located in the heart of the South Bronx, is a safe haven for many community members who rely on our organization for basic necessities including food. BOOM!Health and The Momentum Project are ground zero for serving the city's most vulnerable populations. Recent data shows that more than 1.3 million New York City residents, or 14.9% of the total population, are food insecure. New York City's food insecurity rate is 11% higher than the national rate, and 18% higher than the New York State rate. In 2017, The Momentum Project served approximately 2,282 meals and 1,776 pantries on a monthly basis. BOOM! and Momentum clientele face food insecurity, frequently live in food deserts and are often confronted with the stigma of utilizing government assistance programs like SNAP. They face an excess of barriers accessing fresh markets including limited hours of operation, inconvenient locations, the high cost of organic and fresh produce and their limited shelf life.

A balanced diet and good nutrition are important to all people regardless of their health status; however, individuals living with HIV, AIDS or HCV may experience conditions such as wasting, diarrhea and lipid abnormalities, putting an even greater necessity on access to healthy, nutritious meals in order to maintain strength, energy, and a healthy immune system. A majority of the clientele served

Central Office
540 East Fordham Rd
Bronx, NY 10458
718.295.5605

Harm Reduction Center
226 East 144th St
Bronx, NY 10451
718.292.7718

Wellness Center
3144 Third Ave
Bronx, NY 10451
718.295.5690

www.boomhealth.org

are diagnosed with serious illnesses and have comorbidities including HIV and HCV and many are homeless or unstably housed. Addressing basic needs such as access to healthcare and housing are made even more challenging without consistent access to healthy food. BOOM! and Momentum staff have witnessed people's health deteriorate quickly from not eating properly, not eating enough and taking medications which require food consumption on a timely basis. The mixtures of some foods and medications can cause reactions in some individuals that could result in hospitalization.

Grant funding addressing hunger has become increasingly competitive and award amounts have decreased in recent years. As a result, our communities suffer and we have been forced to downsize the number of nutritionists and nurses on staff. Nutritional staff are essential to our mission and help individuals navigate medication adherence and stay motivated in making healthier lifestyle choices. This decrease in funding is profound and has direct and indirect impacts on the overall health of the individuals we serve.

Our community cannot handle a decrease in EFAP funding and needs sustained access to affordable, nutritious foods. It is essential to the livelihood of our community to support baseline food funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) at \$22 million dollars in the Fiscal Year 2019 New York City budget.

On behalf of BOOM!Health and The Momentum Project thank you for your time and attention.



MET COUNCIL

The Largest Jewish-Sponsored Social Safety Net in America

**New York City Council Oversight Hearing:
Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City
February 13, 2018
250 Broadway, 14th Floor, New York, NY 10007**

Thank you to General Welfare Chair Stephen Levin and to the City Council, for your continued support of anti-hunger programs in New York City.

My name is Aaron Cyperstein and I am the Director of External Affairs at Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty.

For more than four decades, Met Council has supported and championed families, seniors and adults living in poverty and near-poverty. Met Council provides immediate assistance to New Yorkers in crisis and creates pathways to self sufficiency through the following programs: America's largest kosher food pantry system, emergency social services, family violence services, home repairs, benefits enrollment and outreach, and affordable housing. Our grassroots Jewish Community Council network provides support to families in their neighborhoods—right where they live.

As an organization founded on Jewish values, we serve everyone with dignity and empathy, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. Our culturally sensitive professionals provide an array of services that move clients from crisis to stability. In FY17, Met Council aided 205,000 New Yorkers in their fight against poverty and hunger:

- We provided more than 7 million meals through emergency food
- We aided more than 10,000 households with SNAP benefits
- We distributed more than \$500,000 in food assistance cards

As many people in this room know, there are 1.3 million food insecure New Yorkers, of which more than 300,000 people live in poor and near-poor Jewish households that observe kosher dietary laws. For many of our clients, the high cost of kosher food presents a unique challenge. While, Statewide, most families run out of SNAP benefits by the third week each month, a family that keeps kosher runs out by the second week. To be successful in our fight against hunger, we rely on a strong emergency food system. We ask that City Council support a fortified Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) through a baseline increase in funding to 22 million for FY18. We also ask that the City Council support a policy of cost-neutral preferencing of kosher and halal products within the EFAP system, ensuring that clients with religious dietary restrictions have equitable access to emergency food.

As the first line of defense against hunger, we recognize the critical impact that SNAP has in lifting people out of poverty and aiding them on their path to self-sufficiency. The federal SNAP program provides 10 times more food than food banks can. Strengthened EFAP and SNAP programs ensure that we can continue to secure positive outcomes for clients like Leah.

Leah is a mother of two who is disabled and hearing-impaired, who was facing insurmountable challenges as Supplemental Security benefits for one of her children had stopped, her rent was three months in arrears and her utilities were about to be shut-off due to nonpayment. When she came to us, she was feeding her children water and cereal, as it was all that was left in her home. We immediately provided her with emergency food from our pantry and an emergency food card. We aided her in gathering documents in order to apply for SNAP benefits. As the TTY line was not an option for her, our staff worked with her Rabbi to ensure that her phone interview was completed, securing her \$512 in monthly SNAP benefits. We also referred her to our Crisis team, who was able to aid with the rent arrears and utility shut-off.

To ensure an effective and responsive SNAP program, we ask that City Council support the maximization of all federal options and waivers to reduce barriers to SNAP participation, particularly for vulnerable households and adults that have difficulty securing employment. Met Council also encourages the development of a citywide SNAP outreach plan that draws down on all available sources of federal matching funds. As a partner of the Robin Hood Foundation's Billion Dollar Campaign to expand access to benefits, we would be eager to partner with any city agencies or community based organizations to develop, administer and execute this work.

We applaud the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) efforts to expand access to SNAP through simplified, web-based application portals. We also appreciate the steps that HRA has taken to improve its customer service, particularly with on-demand interviews and its responsiveness to our client advocacy efforts.

Once again, I want to thank the City Council for allowing us to speak today. We look forward to working with you to strengthen EFAP and SNAP and ensure that they work in tandem to effectively reduce hunger in New York City. I would be happy to take any questions you have at this time.



Making New York a better place to age

FOR THE RECORD

**New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare, Chair, Council Member Levin
February 13, 2018
Oversight: Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City**

LiveOn NY thanks Chair Levin and Committee on General Welfare for holding this important hearing on efforts to reduce hunger in New York City.

With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations, LiveOn NY's members serve 300,000 older New Yorkers annually with core services including senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, NORCs and NY Connects. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.

LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program that targets older adults in the communities where benefits are most underutilized. This program educates thousands of older adults, including those who are homebound, about food assistance options, and screen and enroll those who are eligible for SNAP, SCRIE and other benefits. LiveOn NY also staffs a call hotline (212) 398-5045, staffed by a professional client services team that assists older adults and caregivers with benefits screenings and applications, serving approximately 1,000 clients per quarter.

LiveOn NY respectfully offers this testimony outlining challenges, case examples and recommendations. We look forward to working with the City Council and Administration to address this important issue.

Many older New Yorkers face daily food insecurity and rely on the Department for the Aging (DFTA) funded services

For many older New Yorkers, food insecurity remains a harsh reality of daily life. In the U.S., it is estimated that 1 in 6 seniors are currently struggling with hunger. Further, with 250 million meals needed to reach food security for the entirety of New York City, and seniors making up an estimated 19% of the overall population, the demand for nutrition services among seniors is likely substantial.¹ For older adults, inadequate nutrition can exacerbate existing conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease or osteoporosis.² It has been found that the risk of hunger is not equal among all populations, as seniors with disabilities, African Americans, and other minorities are more at risk of hunger.

These statistics highlight the incredible need for nutrition services geared towards the senior population. Fortunately, a framework to meet this need already exists. Funded by the Department for the Aging (DFTA), a network of services, many of which were borne out of the Older American's Act, work together to combat hunger among seniors.

¹ Food Bank for York City, 2014

² Department for the Aging, Annual Plan Summary, 2019



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For many seniors, congregate meals offered at their local senior center serve as the vehicle to not only meet a senior's nutritional needs, but also helps to prevent isolation and enhance the individual's overall quality of life. For older adults with mobility impairments, case management services screen seniors to begin receiving life sustaining home-delivered meals. This daily, hot-meal delivered to a homebound senior's door is more than a meal, for many it is the only human interaction experienced each day.

The benefits of home-delivered meals have been well documented after years of programmatic success. Meals on Wheels of America found that 92% of seniors say home-delivered meals enables them to remain in their homes.³ Given the cost of nursing home use, the ability for home-delivered meals to facilitate the aging in place model should be seen as a cost-savings mechanism for the city. Further, 81% of seniors stated that home-delivered meals improve their overall health and 90% agree that the program makes them feel more safe and secure. The majority of seniors utilizing the program tend to be women, living alone, receiving meals that on average account for ½ or more of their total food for the day.

Older New Yorkers are consistently under-enrolled in public benefits due to barriers and difficulties with the application process

Within New York, older adults and adults with disabilities are consistently “under-enrolled” in public assistance benefits. Among those living with hunger, the under-enrollment rate of SNAP benefits is around 40%. This underutilization is consistent among other benefits as well. Among the top barriers for benefit utilization particularly among older adults include stigma or misunderstanding, language barriers, apprehension about the process and government systems, and physical obstacles such as travel distance or unwelcoming environments. Because LiveOn NY works directly with older adults and their caregivers through our outreach, as well as the feedback we receive from our members who do benefits outreach, we see first-hand these issues that contribute to under-utilization.

LiveOn NY commends HRA for their steps to make the benefits screening process more efficient through SNAPNOW. We also applaud the recent upgrades to ACCESSHRA which has improved the ability to use as well as allowing the ability to upload documents through mobile devices. We also commend the implementation of the Provider Portal which has made it more efficient for community based organizations to help clients with their SNAP cases. These ongoing client-focused improvements are efficient and useful for advocates, caregivers and client representatives. Despite the ongoing improvements, older adults still face some unique challenges with the process as outlined below.

Case examples from LiveOn NY's outreach team that demonstrate the multiple challenges older adults face with access to food

Case 1: Jane Doe is a 61 year old woman from Manhattan. She received Social Security Disability (SSD) and is suffering from memory loss. During screening, the client had extreme difficulty following and understanding the application process. Not only was Ms. Doe exhibiting

³ Meals on Wheels of America, 2017

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confusion, but she was also very reluctant to disclose information. She had two social workers assisting her from her senior center but they still needed LiveOn NY's assistance in applying. Ms. Doe had a lot of difficulty with the documentation requirements for SNAP. She had trouble finding appropriate copies of documents and ones that were in good enough condition to use. LiveOn NY's client service coordinator was able to bridge communication between Ms. Doe., her social worker, and our follow up team. Her documents had to be submitted at different points through the application process. She was eventually approved for \$185 per month in SNAP benefits. It is not likely she would have gotten the benefits without assistance.

Case 2: Ms. Smith is 75 years old. She lives in NYCHA housing in Queens. She uses a motorized scooter to get around and has some health issues. She has had her fair share of complications with her SNAP case dating back to the first time LiveOn NY assisted her in July 2015. First, her benefits got cut off because HRA had never received an interim report that she says she submitted. We were able to intervene and save her case. She came back to us this Fall to recertify her SNAP. After submitting her recertification as usual, we learned that she was in fact invited to recertify through the IVRS system which is a computerized phone system that allows certain clients to recertify without submitting any paperwork. Because her recertification was submitted already, she could not take advantage of the IVRS option. Shortly thereafter she was denied. HRA said they never received her recertification package. Through mediation with HRA, our client service coordinator was able to have the case reopened after proving that the client was in compliance. She receives \$148 monthly in SNAP benefits and did not experience and interruption in benefits. These case complexities are so nuanced: it would be difficult for most to navigate this system without knowledge of the HRA's back-end processes.

LiveOn NY's Recommendations

1. Fully Fund DFTA Congregate and Home-Delivered Meals, Including Culturally Appropriate and Therapeutic Meals in the City Budget

Given the programmatic importance to the lives of thousands of older New Yorker's each year, the city must work to ensure the continued success of universal free home-delivered and congregate meals for older adults by both modernizing and contextualizing the programs.

Currently, many of the not-for-profit, community based providers of these life-sustaining nutritional services live on the brink of insolvency due to inadequate reimbursement rates, and outdated capital investments. This inadequate funding places great long-term nutritional risk to these services, especially as a growing senior population threatens to exacerbate capacity of already stretched providers.

Further, as of 2015, almost 50% of older New Yorkers were foreign born, reflecting a significant need for meals that are culturally appropriate to an array of backgrounds.⁴ The diversity of religious and health requirements also impacts the variety and associated cost of the meals providers must serve. According to DFTA's senior center standards, providers must offer menus that "are appropriate to participants' cultural backgrounds". This requirement brings a fiscal implication: for example, in 2015, DFTA stated that, "in DFTA's HDML network, each catered

⁴ Center for an Urban Future, 2017



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Kosher [meal] is on average \$1.38 more than non-Kosher catered meals." Similar to Kosher meals, Halaal, gluten free, vegetarian, vegan, or other consumer demands have an associated cost-increase.

LiveOn NY advocates that the city fully reimburse providers for all types of meals and support provider's efforts to serve culturally appropriate meal variations as needed.

Further, LiveOn NY believes that the city must modernize the structure of cost per meal reimbursements to one that consistently reflects rising food costs such as ingredients and labor. From 2008-2013 alone, the cost of food increased by 11% according to the Consumer Price Index. **As inflation continues to rise, a system must be put in place to automatically reimburse providers for the full cost of each meal, rather than reimbursing at a consistently insufficient rate.** Currently, this lack of adequate reimbursement forces providers to subsidize all meal contracts, a practice that is exacerbating the system's ability to make ends meet. **Additionally, senior center and home delivered meal contracts should be fully funded in terms of the cost of administrative and overhead costs associated with a contract. This change would enable providers to deliver high quality services to older adults as a result of full funding.**

These recommendations are supported by the findings from LiveOn NY's recently held membership convening entitled *Senior Centers: Visions and Priorities for the Future*. Here, 80 representatives from LiveOn NY member organizations engaged in thoughtful and productive conversation discussing priorities and their vision for how to serve older adults today and in the future. What we found was that members overwhelmingly identified "enhanced nutrition capabilities" as one of the top five collective priorities when looking at their vision for the future. Discussions around this issue included increasing their ability to offer high quality and more variety nutrition options to best serve their communities.

2. Advocate for a Shortened SNAP Application Form for Older Adults

As demonstrated by the above case examples, as well as the underutilization statistics, LiveOn recommends that HRA advocate for a streamlined Elder SNAP Application form and associated waivers for older adult applicants. Because older adults' incomes generally remain stagnant, or even worse, decline over time, removing one of the initial barriers to application for benefits would help older adults, as well as reduce the immense amount of time that often multiple caseworkers need to spend per applicant.

Several states have explored the usage of a shortened application form for older adults through pilot programs. LiveOn NY recommends that HRA explore this option, as well as related waiver options to streamline the process for older adults. LiveOn NY would be happy to work with HRA to discuss the importance of this issue further.

3. Form an HRA Senior Task Force to address the barriers to enrollment for older adults

LiveOn NY applauds the New York City Department of Finance (DOF) for their foresight in establishing a SCRIE Task Force which includes stakeholders from the government as well as community based organizations. LiveOn NY has been active with this Task Force and it has been

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a valuable experience to discuss challenges and recommendations to strengthen the SCRIE program. LiveOn NY also participates on a SNAP Task Force with the Food Bank that has been very beneficial to generate ideas to help strengthen the SNAP program.

LiveOn NY recommends that HRA form a senior-focused task force, which would include governmental representatives, beneficiaries, stakeholders from the community and caregivers, among others, to discuss barriers and practical solutions to increase access to benefits for older adults, including SNAP. Older adults are also often accessing benefits across multiple systems and departments, so a Task Force could explore cross-department challenges and solutions. LiveOn NY would welcome the opportunity to participate in this Task Force.

LiveOn NY looks forward to working with NYC City Council and the administration to implement policy and secure funding to bolster the critically important nutritional programs for seniors in every community as we work to make New York a better place to age.

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130 East 59th Street, New York, NY 10022
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TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

NYC Council, Committee on General Welfare

Honorable Stephen Levin, Chair, Committee on General Welfare

Submitted by:
Ariel Savransky, UJA-Federation of New York
Oversight: Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City

February 13, 2018

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*Executive Committee member **Of Blessed Memory

Good afternoon Chairperson Levin and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Ariel Savransky and I am an Advocacy and Policy Advisor at UJA-Federation of New York. Established 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to our mission is to care for those in need. We identify and meet the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. We connect people to their communities and respond to crises in New York, Israel and around the world. We support nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services. On behalf of UJA, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The rates of poverty, food insecurity and hunger remain staggeringly high in New York City. According to the most recent U.S. Census data, the overall poverty rate in New York City is 20 percent and about 1.4 million people live in food insecure households, with one in five relying on food pantries and soup kitchens. Furthermore, proposed funding cuts to SNAP, as well as discussion about imposing onerous work requirements on individuals receiving assistance, will further tax already limited resources and result in the inability of our agencies to respond to the increased nutritional needs of the individuals with which they work.

It is essential that the City continue to make the fight against poverty, food insecurity and hunger a top priority in the Executive budget by investing in crucial hunger assistance programs, as well as ensuring that New Yorkers have access to the benefits for which they qualify.

We submit the following recommendations:

1) Continue to invest in expanding the anti-hunger safety net

Many of our agencies work with their clients to help to enroll them in the benefits for which they are eligible. We know that the City administration and the City Council have been taking steps to expand enrollment in programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program through strategies such as identifying eligible New Yorkers using Medicaid data matching as well as allowing applicants to submit necessary documents using their smartphones and recertify for benefits over the phone. **We urge the Administration to continue to expand efforts such as these so that more eligible individuals can enroll in this program.**

Additionally, beginning this year, the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service anticipates launching a SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot which will allow SNAP recipients to use their benefits to purchase food online with specific retailers. This option will be especially helpful for both those living in neighborhoods with limited access to fresh, healthy food as well as for homebound seniors served by many of our agencies. **We urge the City to invest in efforts to publicize this program so that SNAP recipients are aware of this option. We also urge the City to think about ways to remove barriers to participation in this program, such as the delivery fees or expense of food available through the participating vendors.**

2) Increase funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

EFAP provides a vital supply of nutritious food to food pantries and soup kitchens across the City, including for many of our providers that host these services for their communities. Federal cuts to SNAP in 2013 decreased the amount of SNAP benefits that New Yorkers receive each month, resulting in increased reliance on EFAP to get adequate nutrition throughout the month. For families of three, the cut amounted to about \$29 a month.¹ Because of this increased reliance on EFAP, according to a report by the Food Bank for New York City, more than 75 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens saw increased

¹ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. *SNAP Benefits Will Be Cut for Nearly All Participants in November 2013*. August 2013. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-benefits-will-be-cut-for-nearly-all-participants-in-november-2013>

visitor traffic and an increased number reported experiencing food shortages in September 2017 compared to September 2013.² Additionally, many food pantries struggle to obtain an adequate food supply, especially in terms of proteins (meat, poultry and fish).³

Despite the need, the preliminary budget failed to restore the \$7.2 million investment that was made in FY2018, which will result in reduced resources for the food pantries and soup kitchens serving the 1.4 million food insecure New Yorkers. **We urge the administration to not only restore this cut and fund EFAP at \$22 million to keep up with rising food costs and increased need from New Yorkers across the City. This represents an additional \$13.8 million investment in these crucial services.**

3) Increase access to meals, especially kosher meals

There are over 500,000 people living in poor or near-poor Jewish households in the greater metropolitan area. The high cost of a kosher meal – which on average is 30 percent more expensive than a not-kosher meal – presents a unique challenge for many of our agencies in their work with clients who observe these dietary laws. SNAP recipients often exhaust their SNAP allotments by the last week of the month, but for those observing kosher dietary laws, benefits may run out much earlier in the month because of the increased cost of kosher food. In addition to expanding access to EFAP which will ensure that our agencies can better fill the gaps when their clients run out of SNAP benefits, it is also **essential that the City invest resources in ensuring that food pantries are equipped with enough food to serve their clients, especially culturally competent foods, such as kosher and Halal foods.**

In addition, it is imperative that the City invest in the agencies that run congregate or home delivered meal programs. These agencies are largely underfunded in part due to the lack of an escalator for the cost of home delivered meals in the Department for the Aging's contracts. Some of our agencies have reported running out of food for weekend and holiday meals. More resources are clearly needed to ensure that individuals receive the nutritious meals they need to thrive.

4) Think creatively about ways to support UJA-Federation's Digital Choice Food Pantry System and Community Resource Hubs

UJA-Federation of New York is amplifying our current anti-poverty efforts and investing in more efficient, effective, and dignified ways to serve the most vulnerable in our community and foster systemic change. Our vision includes creating a Digital Choice Food Pantry System and two Community Resource Hubs.

Client choice food pantries are the best practice model of food distribution, and the one in which we are now investing. This dignified, empowering model allows people to choose the food that best meet their families' needs. On the back end, the digital choice system will allow for more streamlined communication between Met Council's food warehouse, the primary purveyor of kosher food throughout our network, and the 30 kosher pantries they serve, ultimately creating a more efficient and effective food distribution system across the entire region. This digital ordering system is now being piloted at four pantries – two of which will be connected to the Community Resource Hubs – with the goal of rolling it out to an additional 14 pantries in coming years.

² Food Bank for New York City. *Trade-Offs at the Dinner Table: The Impacts of Unwanted Compromises*. November 2017. https://www.foodbanknyc.org/wp-content/uploads/Trade-Offs-at-the-Dinner-Table_FB-Research-Brief_Nov2017.pdf

³ Food Bank for New York City. *Meeting NYC's Need: Bolstering the Emergency Food Network in 2017*. <http://www.foodbanknyc.org/wp-content/uploads/MeetingNYCsNeedNetworkBrief20172.pdf>

The Community Resource Hubs will be located in the areas of greatest Jewish poverty – Central Queens and Central Brooklyn – but will serve all New Yorkers. Both will offer a broad range of social services under one roof including, financial counseling, benefits enrollment, legal services, and emotional support groups. Each will have one critical service at its core in order to meet the most pressing need in each community. The central focus of the Brooklyn Hub is food given the overwhelming poverty in this neighborhood and the central focus of the Queens hub will be employment and career services.

The Brooklyn and Queens Hubs will offer onsite access to the Digital Choice Pantry System, with food orders delivered from Met Council's nearby warehouse throughout the day. The Brooklyn Hub will also feature nutritional counseling and a demo kitchen to teach clients how to prepare healthy meals with the food they receive from the pantry.

One of the biggest challenges our food pantries continue to face is the procurement of kosher protein and kosher fresh produce. **We urge the City Council and the Administration to think creatively about ways to increase access to kosher protein and produce for food pantries so that we can ensure our clients have the nutritious food they need. We also recommend exploring ways to open the City procurement process to those entities operating under kosher supervision so that agencies purchasing kosher food can benefit from economies of scale.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Please contact Ariel Savransky (savranskya@ujafedny.org or 212-836-1360) with any questions.



**Testimony of Melissa Olson
Director of Nutrition
Community Healthcare Network
Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
RE: Oversight – Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City
New York City Council Chambers
Tuesday, February 13, 2018**

Thank you Chairperson Levin and members of the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. My name is Melissa Olson and I am the Director of Nutrition at Community Healthcare Network (CHN). CHN is a non-profit network of 13 Federally Qualified Health Centers, including two school-based health centers and a fleet of medical mobile vans. We provide affordable primary care, dental, behavioral health, and social services to 85,000 New Yorkers annually in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx.

Access to quality, healthy food is a significant concern for many New Yorkers. In 2015, 1.25 million New Yorkers experienced food insecurity, according to the Mayor's Office on Food Policy. This issue especially impacts low-income communities, many of which are served by CHN health centers. Nearly 65% of CHN patients live at or below the federal poverty line, and many reside in communities with limited access to full-scale grocery stores. We are expanding our nutrition services to meet the demands of our patients and other community members. In 2017, 11% of CHN patients made appointments with registered dietitians, and in the same year, we scheduled over 10,000 nutrition visits. During these visits, our nutritionists work with patients to create realistic dietary plans, manage chronic health conditions, and offer other related services.

However, many patients have difficulty accessing healthy food in the first place. Many of the neighborhoods our clinics serve possess some of the highest rates of meal gaps per person – including East New York, Washington Heights, Harlem, and the South Bronx. Our patients tell us that cost, distance, and convenience are some of the biggest barriers to food security.

CHN has taken on a variety of initiatives to address hunger in these communities. For over eight years, our Nutrition team has participated in the city's Health Bucks Program. We use this program as an opportunity to tell our patients that they are eligible to use their EBT card at any New York City Farmer's Market and receive increased purchasing power to buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Our Nutritionists also host "educational walks" to nearby Farmer's Markets to show patients how easy it is to use the Health Bucks program to access high quality produce in their neighborhood. One barrier to utilization, however, is limited patient time. Some patients tell us that they cannot take time out of their schedule to travel to Farmer's Markets on scheduled market days.

In response to this challenge, CHN partnered with Corbin Hill Food Project to implement a weekly vegetable box program at our clinics in Crown Heights and Williamsburg. In contrast to the traditional farm-share model which involves a significant financial commitment up front, our vegetable box program allows patients and community members to purchase fresh, local, and in-season produce on a weekly basis and accepts EBT cards as a form of payment. A weekly box costs \$15 and participants can decide to opt-in or opt-out each week. In 2018, Corbin Hill received a grant to subsidize the cost of the program – reducing the weekly cost to \$10 per box.

This program has been popular among our Brooklyn patients – we have about 125 participants that rotate in and out weekly, averaging 10-25 vegetable boxes per site each week. Our nutritionists frequently hear positive feedback: patients' children are trying new vegetables for the first time, families feel inspired to cook at home, and participants are satisfied with the

quality and availability of the produce. Based on this success, we expanded the program to our Long Island City Health Center in 2018.

At CHN, we take every effort to address issues of hunger in our communities. Our Nutritionists often conduct outreach at local food pantries – educating community members about healthy eating and referring them to our nutritional program. We also refer low-income patients to our Social Work team to help patients sign up for SNAP benefits.

However, many of our patients frequently run out of benefits by the end of the month, preventing them from having consistent access to food resources. This is not an uncommon experience. According to a recent study, SNAP recipients spend nearly 60% of their benefits within the first week of issuance, leaving many participants struggling to eat by the end of the month. While our Nutritionists work with patients to develop a weekly spending plan, many patients continue to struggle with this issue. We've also observed that patients who are "undocumented" frequently experience food insecurity as their immigration status generally makes them ineligible for SNAP benefits.

We are seeking new ways to address these challenges. In the Spring of 2018, CHN will launch a Nutrition and Wellness Advisory Board, drawing on the strengths of community-based organizations and stakeholders to address issues of hunger in New York City. Some of our first partners include Wellness in the Schools, Shop Healthy Harlem, and the Food Bank for New York City. We hope to partner with the Council to identify additional solutions.

We thank the Chairperson and Committee, again, for their time and the opportunity to speak.

We hope to continue working together to address the issues surrounding food security in New York City.

CHN Centers

Open Weekday, Evening, Weekend,
and Holiday Hours

Washington Heights

511 West 157th Street
New York, NY 10032
212-781-7979

Phoenix School Based Health Center

511 West 157th Street
New York, NY 10032
917-521-3130

South Bronx

975 Westchester Avenue
Bronx, NY 10459
718-320-4466

Harlem

81 West 115th Street
New York, NY 10026
212-426-0088

Bronx

Tremont

4215 Third Avenue, 2nd FL
Bronx, NY 10457
718-294-5891

Manhattan

Lower East

150 Essex Street
New York, NY 10002
212-477-1120

Queens

Long Island City

36-11 21st Street
Long Island City, NY 11106
718-482-7772

Seward Park School Based Health Center

350 Grand Street, Rm 240
New York, NY 10002
212-634-7550

Brooklyn

Sutphin Boulevard

97-04 Sutphin Boulevard
Jamaica, NY 11435
718-657-7088

Williamsburg

94-98 Manhattan Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11206
718-388-0390

Jamaica

90-04 161st Street, 5th Floor
Jamaica, NY 11432
718-523-2123

Crown Heights

1167 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11225
718-778-0198

East New York

999 Blake Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11208
718-277-8303

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Offer primary care, and sexual health services, such as HIV testing, birth control, PrEP/PEP, Plan B, and low-cost STD testing. Call 212-545-2495 for more information, times and NYC locations.



CHN Fast Facts

Who We Are: We are a not-for-profit organization providing health care to underserved New Yorkers of all ages. We have 11 Health Centers, plus five Mobile Health Centers and two School Based Health Centers. We never turn anyone away from care, regardless of ability to pay.

We offer sliding scale fees based on income. We screen all our uninsured patients for insurance eligibility.

Annual Impact	Care Support Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 85,000 patients• 250,000 medical and ancillary visits• 40,000 visits for STI testing and counseling• 36,000 patients with one or more chronic conditions• 34,000 HIV tests• 3,700 smoking cessation visits• 5,500 back-to-school physicals• 11,200 mental health visits• Helped 1,600 New Yorkers apply for insurance through the NY State of Health Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary Care Physicians, NPs, and other providers in Family Practice, Internal Medicine, OB/GYN, Pediatrics, Med-Peds, Mid-Wifery, Dental, Psychiatry, Podiatry• Supportive Services HIV treatment adherence counselors, Nutritionists, Mental Health Therapists, Social Workers, and Health Educators• Health Homes care managers and patient navigators• Family planning services for teens and adults• Integrated addiction services for patients addicted to opioids <p data-bbox="1041 857 2005 922">Comprehensive Centers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Primary care teams at each site• Holiday, evening and weekend hours• Walk-ins Accepted• Integrated use of electronic medical records

Unique Services and Programs

- **Transgender health services** integrated into primary care.
- First New York State primary care and psychiatric **Nurse Practitioner Fellowship Program.**
- **Health Literacy Department** trains healthcare professionals on effective patient care communication strategies.
- **Nutrition experts** create individualized eating and exercise plans, and counseling on health and wellness issues.
- Fitness classes, yoga and meditation, acupuncture, wellness workshops, and health coaching provided in the **wellness program.**
- **Health Homes** coordinate patient care and services, including public benefits, housing, mental health and substance abuse
- **Teens P.A.C.T.** program to empower teens to prevent unintended pregnancies and sexually-transmitted infections.

Patient Centered Medical Home: We provide each patient with a primary care provider and an expert team supporting his or her care





50 BROAD STREET, SUITE 1103
NEW YORK, NY 10004
212-825-0028
HUNGERFREEAMERICA.ORG

**Testimony of Annette Jackson, Food Action Board Member,
Hunger Free NYC
Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Committee on
General Welfare
February 13th, 2018**

Good afternoon everyone and thank you for inviting us to give testimony. My name is Annette Jackson. I am retired senior citizen after a career in advertising and on the Board of Education. I am a United States citizen, a registered voter in the state of New York and I live in the borough of Manhattan. I am proud to be a Food Action Board member, with Hunger Free NYC, formally known as the New York Coalition Against Hunger. This organization advocates on behalf of the low income in New York. I am also a volunteer with the food pantry at West Side Campaign Against Hunger on 86 St. in Manhattan. I have been there for five years. During these years, I've seen hundreds of hungry people and families coming to the pantry, to get food for the week and to eat at our soup kitchen.

I have being struggle since 1960 when I move from South Carolina to New York. Today I am a widow and still struggle for myself. I know how hard is to make ends meet. I have been there, and that is the reason I volunteer here at the food pantry to help others avoid what I went through when I raising my family while working and earning minimum wage. Back then and still today, there are many challenges for the low income people in New York, please do not cut programming we need all the vital services to feed the hungry.

There are too many families and people living in poverty, in shelters, and in food insecurity. I see senior citizens, unemployed people, immigrants from many countries, veterans, disabled people, and single mothers with families coming to the pantry. They all need to eat and they all need be feed. If SNAP (food stamps), as well as funding for food pantries and soup kitchens are cut or discontinued it would be devastating to so many people trying to feed their families and children.

I believe that the inability to get enough to eat will increase so many other problems in the city, because without food everything becomes harder. Food is a necessity. Seniors citizen will be more vulnerable to this problems. I am here today to tell you, we need our SNAP Program, food pantries, and soup kitchens. I see hundreds of families who survive from this program, I see homeless, immigrants, and low income New Yorkers from all the borough who are in need of these nutrition programs. Please do not cut or discontinue them. I am a senior citizen, a mother, and a Grandmother who knows how important these programs are for our low income families and for anyone who is in need of these great programs in our great city of New York.

Now my question to all of you who are listening today on the General Welfare Committee, is if they cut the SNAP Program, soup kitchens, and food pantries how will low income, our most vulnerable senior citizens, children, and families find food, where will these people eat?

God bless and thank you for listening.



**Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City
General Welfare Committee**

February 13, 2018

**Testimony submitted by: Rachel Sherrow
Associate Executive Director
Citymeals on Wheels
355 Lexington Avenue, NYC 10017
(212) 687-1234
Rachel@citymeals.org**

My name is Rachel Sherrow and I am the Associate Executive Director at Citymeals on Wheels. I would like to begin by thanking the Council for their continued support of aging services and Citymeals on Wheels which will help to deliver over 2 million meals to nearly 18,400 homebound elderly citywide this year.

As most of you know, Citymeals is a not-for-profit agency working in a public/private partnership with the New York City Department for the Aging. The Department funds the meals that homebound elderly receive Mondays through Fridays, and Citymeals funds the same network of providers to deliver weekend and holiday meals. On the days the city does not provide a meal, Citymeals steps in to prevent our aging neighbors from being without food or human company. In fact, Citymeals, as an added benefit generates revenue for New York City through the federal government's cash in lieu of commodities program which reimburses DFTA approximately 67

cents for every meal funded by Citymeals. All of this money goes toward the city-funded weekday meals program, bringing in over \$1.4 million last fiscal year and an additional 180,000 home delivered meals for those who need it. In-home services like meals on wheels are incredibly vital to those who are frail and vulnerable and often can help prevent them from slipping into deeper poverty.

Throughout our nation and right here in NYC, our population is aging, with 17% of our city over the age of 60 and by 2050 the number of older adults will double, and will outnumber children under 15. Living longer on fixed incomes means more struggle over access to food. Because income for older adults remains fixed, or worse, declines, many experience increased difficulty affording healthy food.

In addition, since 2012, New York City's older adults experienced an increase in poverty from 16.5% to 19.1%. According to the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, 1 in 3 New Yorkers over the age of 65 live in poverty.

Therefore it is not surprising that the Nutrition Screening Initiative estimates that one in four senior citizens living in our communities is malnourished.¹ It has also been estimated that up to 55% of seniors admitted to hospitals are suffering from malnutrition.² In addition food insecure seniors are 60% more likely to suffer from depression, and 40% more likely to experience congestive heart failure.³ A Hunger

Study conducted by LiveOn NY shows that 35% of older adults in NYC are living with food insecurity, or hunger.

Meals on wheels is a vital service for our homebound elderly to prevent hunger, decrease isolation and ensure our older neighbors can remain in their homes and live within their communities and neighborhoods. In addition, Citymeals on Wheels created a program to reach those most hungry, poor and frail with a Mobile Pantry bag. These most vulnerable meal recipients are unable to access food pantries themselves and therefore we supplement the daily meal they are receiving with additional food to ensure they have more to eat. However, the program is only reaching about 300 meal recipients in Upper Manhattan and the South Bronx, when we know the need is closer to 2,500 city-wide due to budget constraints.

Citymeals is also working on a study with Columbia University School of Dental Medicine on oral health issues and the impact on meal consumption. Many of our meal recipients have oral health issues which create problems for eating part or all of their meals which leads to malnourishment and hunger. Along with DFTA, we are hopeful that our findings will help inform how we can better serve this part of the population receiving meals and ensure they are able to eat and not go hungry. Universal lunch, an option the aging committee's Chairperson Chin supports would guarantee older

adults who need a meal would be able to receive them without the fear of having to spend money they might not have.

However, Citymeals on Wheels fundraises for private dollars which is never easy and more competitive in the new landscape for not for profits navigating the federal budget and the new tax laws, and the city's budget for Aging services has not kept up with the increasing need and growth in population. We must adequately fund core services like meals on wheels and case management as it is crucial to be able to have a safety net for these most vulnerable New Yorkers. As the population increases, and currently we are at 97% capacity for meals on wheels city-wide, we are concerned many who are in need will not receive essential services and we will end up having more older adults fill our emergency rooms, become severely isolated and depressed, unable to pay their bills, and even perhaps end up homeless. SNAP benefits which help combat hunger by allowing people to purchase additional food can be obtained through case management services. However if there are wait lists, we will be faced with the larger costs of the burden of poor diets which result in chronic disease and end up costing more in Medicaid dollars.⁴

Bringing a meal to the door is one less struggle for the homebound to worry about financially. In addition, this food delivery is one way to prevent them from slipping into more expensive kinds of care.

Evidence does support the fact that programs like meals on wheels which allows older adults to age in place, may help save costs for families, government and our health systems.⁵ This is a savings in Medicaid costs that the city would bear if these economically disadvantaged and elderly neighbors of ours were institutionalized instead. It is in their interest and ours to keep them with us, right here in the communities where they have lived for so long. Meals on wheels is also a benefit to the growing population of caregivers whose emotional, physical and financial efforts can be unburdened by knowing a meal is being delivered to their loved ones allowing for respite and relief on so many levels.

Together with the Department for the Aging, and The New York City Council, Citymeals is determined to keep 18,400 elderly New Yorkers and growing, fed 365 days a year plus some extra. We hope you, our partners in city government, will help us to continue to advocate on behalf of those who are often forgotten and marginalized.

As we move through our 36th year, we thank you for consistently working with us and I hope we can count on all of your support once again this year as we seek increased funding to keep up with the need and ensure our elderly neighbors have access to nutritious food.

¹ 2000 to 2010 Census, as reported in NYC Department for the Aging's "Census 2000: Changes in the elderly population of NYC 2000-2010. ²ibid. ³Mazon.org ⁴ American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Building on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's Success: Conquering Hunger, Improving Health Neal D. Barnard, MD, David L. Katz, MD, MPH. ⁵Measuring the costs and savings of aging in place. 2013. (Accessed December 3, 2014, at http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/em/em_archive.html).



JITA Community Outreach Center
89-17 139th Street, Jamaica NY 11435

Testimony Prepared by **Danette Rivera**

For the **General Welfare Committee**

Oversight Hearing: **Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City, Feb. 13, 2018**

On behalf of **JITA Community Outreach Center**

Hello, my name is **Danette Rivera**, and I am the executive director of **JITA Community Service Center** in Jamaica, Queens. Thank you Chairman Levin and the General Welfare Committee for spending time today to hear more about how community based organizations like my own, partner with New York City to address food need in our communities.

JITA provide services to the community including a twice-weekly food pantry. We are a member of Food Bank For New York City and rely on resources including New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (or EFAP) to help alleviate hunger for the people that come to our door. Each week, I am a witness to this fact first hand as thousands of my clients – men, women and children, including seniors – repeatedly find hunger relief at my community center.

EFAP is important to our Queens community not only because it provides food, but because by assisting low income households with these essential items, it helps relieve financial burdens such as housing and other necessities for families in need. Furthermore, the food service EFAP provides to our community center allows us to be a trusted space to offer a variety of resources that reach people at the core of their need.

For low-income households, every meal counts. EFAP coincides with other important programs like SNAP as well as school meals. I asked one of the people that visits our center to tell me what our program means to her. She wrote me a short letter that I'd like to share with you. Her name is Natasha Valoy and she is a single mom of two, who currently lives in a shelter 5 blocks away from my community center, this is what she has to say:

"The EFAP program has helped to put food on my table for my boys and me when I didn't have anything else. There were many days when I didn't know how I was going to feed my kids, but when I walk to the pantry, I found exactly what I need to put a warm meal on our plates. Without the EFAP program, I wouldn't know how to make it work sometimes. If we lost this program many families including mine are going to bed hungry. This program has helped me in so many ways and that is why it is so important to keep it up and running. So many single mothers and poor families from our communities don't have to worry about how they are going to feed their children when SNAP benefit runs out."

For Natasha, EFAP helps her family be hunger free. Thank you for fighting for her and all people served by New York City's anti-hunger program. I urge you to fight the good fight and make EFAP stronger knowing that you will not allow hunger to win.



Hello, my name is Daniel Reyes, Deputy Executive Director at New York Common Pantry. Thank you to the City Council, especially Speaker Corey Johnson and General Welfare Chair Steve Levin for giving me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the thousands of families that NY Common Pantry serves. Last year we served over 6 million meals to New Yorkers across the 5 boroughs out of our locations in East Harlem, Mott Haven, Longwood and through our mobile teams that travel across the Bronx, Queens, Brooklyn and Manhattan. At NYCP our strategy is to alleviate food insecurity through access to healthy food; wellness/nutrition education; and the acquisition and management of resources like SNAP, Health Insurance and rental assistance.

We are grateful that the City Council has prioritized anti-hunger programs, including three years of increases to the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) as well as expansion of universal free school lunch in nearly all NYC public schools. At NYCP we are gravely concerned that even though New York City is facing a Meal Gap of 225 million meals, the preliminary budget for FY 2019 proposes a cut in EFAP food funding to \$8.2 million. EFAP provides a vital supply of nutritious food to soup kitchens and food pantries across the city and to the 1.4 million New Yorkers who rely on the emergency food network to put food on their table.

NY Common Pantry continues to extend its reach across the city to ensure that no family or individual goes hungry, but we cannot do this alone. Due to the continued scale of the need we confront, we are committed to continue our investment to expand services to reduce hunger for all New Yorkers in need. This investment starts with the dollars raised from our private supporters that are leveraged with government resources to drive impact. We opened a new Choice Pantry site in the Bronx in April 2017, increased the capacity and reach of our Help 365 case management program through a New York State award from the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance in 2016, and increased visibility and presence of NYCP throughout New York City from partner sites and mobile programs. This has resulted in a significant rise in meals served and resources accessed for our guests over the past three years. Our ability to continue on this track will require continued support from the City of New York, through EFAP, council discretionary dollars, and other funding streams.

For the families of NYCP and for all New Yorkers every meal counts, and increasing funding to EFAP is essential to ensure emergency food programs can serve every New Yorker in need. Please prioritize increased funding to EFAP in the FY2019 New York City budget. It is absolutely vital to our ability to serve all families who turn to us in need of food support. Thank you for your continued support. We look forward to working with you ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry.



Testimony of Christa Perfit, Senior Manager, Healthy Retail, City Harvest

New York City Council Hearing of the Committee on General Welfare

February 13, 2018

Oversight: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

Good morning Chairperson Levin and members of the Committee on General Welfare. Thank you for holding this timely hearing on food insecurity in New York City. My name is Christa Perfit and I am the Senior Manager for Healthy Retail at City Harvest.

I testify today to state our continued concern for those hungry in the communities we serve. At a time of mounting uncertainty regarding support at the federal level, we look to the city to remember the many low-income New Yorkers striving to balance food security, personal well-being, and costly housing. The need for emergency food in New York City is staggering. The SNAP program brings millions of dollars into New York City to support families facing food insecurity and the retail businesses where they shop. The Trump administration proposing to cut the budget for this program by one-third over ten years through structural changes, and replacing choice for low-income families with prescribed food boxes, is not the path to self-sufficiency, and is a stark reminder of the importance of our local EFPs.

Background

City Harvest pioneered food rescue in 1982 and, this year, will collect 59 million pounds of excess food to help feed the nearly 1.3 million New Yorkers struggling to put meals on their tables. Through relationships with farms, grocers, restaurants, and manufacturers, City Harvest collects nutritious food that would otherwise go to waste and delivers it free of charge to 500 soup kitchens, food pantries and other community food programs across the five boroughs. In addition, our *Healthy Neighborhoods* initiative addresses long-term food insecurity through community partnerships that work to increase access to affordable and wholesome food.

From 2011 to 2016, City Harvest dramatically grew our impact to respond to a new reality of sustained hunger in New York City. We increased our annual food deliveries from 29 million to 55 million pounds, expanded our Healthy Neighborhoods initiative to all five boroughs, and raised more than \$130 million to support this growth. In the fall of 2016, City Harvest studied the state of hunger in New York City and developed a new strategic plan to address it over the next five years. The plan's roadmap charges City Harvest to:

- Grow to distribute 75-80 million pounds of food annually
- Focus on underserved neighborhoods and customize strategies for each
- Connect New Yorkers to the food they need through direct distribution and other platforms
- Increase the composition of fresh produce in our deliveries and emphasize variety
- Advance our holistic approach to hunger and nutrition, Healthy Neighborhoods

We at City Harvest know we cannot tackle hunger in NYC alone. We look to both public and private partners to collaborate on this critical issue.

Human Resource Administration – Emergency Food Assistance Program

New York City is one of few local municipalities in the country that directs funds to emergency food. In the Mayor's FY 19 Preliminary Budget released recently, The Human Resource Administration (HRA) budget shows a baseline of \$8.2 million to EFAP, which serves about 500 soup kitchens and food pantries. These providers are commonly referred to as "EFAP agencies." There was successful advocacy last year for a one-time addition of \$7.2 million in FY 18 through City and money through the Council to reach \$15.4 million. Due to consistently high demand, we are now using EFAP at our Mobile Markets and would like to see that program grow. **We request the EFAP funding be brought up to \$22 million (the anti-hunger networks FY 18 ask) for FY 19 in order to address citywide food inflation, poverty, and insufficiency of the emergency food supply.**

Healthy Food Retail Action Network

We believe efforts to address hunger should always include improving access to healthy food retail and the affordability of healthy food. Existing programs like Health Bucks and various healthy retail programs work to tackle these issues. City Harvest is a founding member and co-chair of the Healthy Food Retail Action Network (HFRAN), a citywide alliance that brings together healthy food retail practitioners, non-profit organizations, advocates, academic institutions, business representatives, and policy makers working to increase equitable access to healthy and affordable food in brick and mortar retail venues across New York City. HFRAN provides a space for these diverse players to collaborate and share best practices and resources to ensure healthy food retail programs are sustainable and impactful. We are strive to connect with stakeholders working within the NYC food landscape (retail, farm, policy, etc.) in order to share information, reduce duplicity and constantly explore policy priorities. **We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the City and work towards creating new opportunities to move the dial on healthy food access.**

Conclusion

City Harvest remains optimistic and eager to work with the Administration and support its genuine efforts to alleviate hunger for all New Yorkers. Food insecurity is not only destructive on a personal level; the ripple affect can cause lasting social and economic damage throughout the community. Thank you for your earnest determination to address the pervasive hunger that continues to threaten our great City.

CHRIST JESUS BAPTIST CHURCH



February 16, 2018

Dear General Welfare Committee Members,

Thank you for your attention to Reduce Hunger in New York City. I am Yolanda Lewi, Executive Director for Christ Jesus Baptist Church Food Pantry. I would like to share with you a little about the experience of food insecurity in my community.

Food insecure does not mean “poor”...at least, not in the sense that we may be used to. Many people in my community work 2 or 3 jobs, but still struggle to make ends meet. These are the working poor. These households may be too “rich” to receive public assistance, but after paying the rent, Con Edison, MetroCard to get to work, these same households are too “poor” to buy enough food for the week or month.

Some of the people we serve at our pantry are senior citizens, some retired Veterans, whose budgets allow for just enough money to pay the bills and little if anything left over for food. We’ve served homeowners who have no money left for other essential items after paying the mortgage. We have met single men, who have worked most of their lives that are now returning to work in their 70s and 80s, buying work clothes at thrift shops, because they can’t afford to retire and eat. We’ve met a couple where both the mother and father are working 2 jobs in order to pay their sick son’s medical bills.

Food insecure does not mean someone else; it means our neighbors and our community. Food insecurity does not mean black or white, shiftless or lazy, or even “rich” or “poor”. It means it is an opportunity for us to do everything we can to prevent it. It is a New York issue. It is an American issue.

Food pantries are a major source of assistance in filling the meal gap that exists. At our food pantry, our lines have grown longer everyday. EFAP funding is a necessary and essential part of allowing us to continue in the battle against hunger, and it helps allow pantries to provide more complete meals to those working poor, retired Veterans, seniors, parents and children in need of food.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Lewi
Executive Director

Testimony for the **General Welfare Committee** Oversight Hearing:
Examining Efforts to Reduce Hunger in New York City, February 13, 2018

Dear Council Members,

My name is Zulma Cruz and I am the Director of Food Advocacy at Project Hospitality and the Chair of the Staten Island Hunger Task Force, a coalition of more than 30 food pantries, serving across our island. Our task force has been in existence since 1984. At Project Hospitality, I am responsible for all SNAP applications completed in our agency. More than 500 families receive SNAP for the first time or as a recertification through our efforts. We also sponsor the largest emergency feeding program on Staten Island, providing food through our shelters, soup kitchens food pantries and community meal programs such as after school programs and monthly community meals. The majority of people we serve are disabled or working poor families.

This past year of 2017, we served more than 1,745,000 meals. We depend on New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and food surplus programs, especially free produce programs through the Food Bank For New York City and City Harvest to provide fresh produce to our pantry participants. We cannot underscore enough the importance of City Council funding to provide significant food allocations to our emergency feeding programs.

We express our gratitude for the free school meals programs that have provided a consistent source of nutritious food to our children, without stigma, during school.

In addition to progressing the City's anti-hunger priorities, we urge you to make every effort to protect and strengthen State and Federal nutrition programs. We support additional funding for New York State's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), and we call on our New York City representatives to continue to fight for federal anti-hunger programs like SNAP (formerly known as food stamps) and TEFAP, The Emergency Food Assistance Program, especially in this year of re-authorization of the Farm Bill.

As rents in our borough rise, people are forced to live doubled up and tripled up, sharing tight food resources and unable to find adequate affordable housing. As anti-hunger advocates, we also urge you to make more affordable housing available in the borough of Staten Island, a place where rent controlled and rent stabilized housing is virtually nonexistent. We believe if people did not have to direct all of their income to housing at such high rents, they would be better able to provide food on the table for their families.

Thank you for again for your work and for caring for the people we serve.

Respectfully,

Zulma Cruz
Director of Food Advocacy, Project Hospitality

**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: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: AARON CYBERS TETEN

Address: _____

I represent: MET COUNCIL on Jewish Poverty

Address: 77 WATER 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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Joel Bstg

Address: 1 Plaza street Brooklyn

I represent: Hunger Free America

Address: 50 Blvd 1 NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: Susan Welby

Address: The Legal Aid Society 149 Water

I represent: St. NY NY

Address: 10038

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jordyn Rosenblatt

Address: 228 E 144th St Bronx NY

I represent: Booni Heartmealson

Address: Wheels

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Sherrow

Address: _____

I represent: Citymealson

Address: Wheels

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Savella

Address: 59 Broadway NY NY

I represent: Food Bank For New York City

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sabrina Simmonds

Address: DF DSS

I represent: Community Engagement Supervisor

Address: 4 WTC

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Fitzpatrick

Address: HRA

I represent: Chief Program Officer

Address: 4 WTC

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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: Barbara Turk

Address: Mayor's office of Food Policy

I represent: Director

Address: _____

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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: Marie Phillip, Deputy Commissioner

Address: HRA

I represent: Emergency Intervention 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: Grace Bonilla

Address: HRA

I represent: HRA Administrator

Address: 4 WTC

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laura N. Allen

Address: 70 E 108th St, #13D, 10029

I represent: MASBIA

Address: 1276 47th St, Fl. 3, 11219

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Annette Jackson

Address: 38 W. 91 ST

I represent: Action Food Bd.

Address: 12. 161 ST. BX

Please complete **THE COUNCIL** Sergeant-at-Arms
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/2018

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Danny Stewart

Address: 401 W. 25th St. #16B 10001

I represent: Safe Horizon

Address: 209 W. 125th St. 10027

Please complete **THE COUNCIL** Sergeant-at-Arms
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/18.

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Olson

Address: 406 Prospect Ave. #3 Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Community Healthcare Network

Address: 60 Madison Ave. 5th floor NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Danette Rivera

Address: _____

I represent: JTA Community Outreach

Address: 89-17 139th St Jamaica

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alexander Rapaport

Address: 951 45th St Brooklyn NY 11219

I represent: Masbia Soup Kitchen Network

Address: 1276 47th St Brooklyn NY 11219

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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: Daniel Leys

Address: NY Common Pentry

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 02/13/2018

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ruben Diaz

Address: 10623 95th Avenue, Queens, NY 11417

I represent: Masbia Of Queens

Address: 10847 64rd, Forest Hills

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: 2/13/18

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aniel Savransky

Address: _____

I represent: VJA-Federation

Address: _____

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