



Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Homeless Services

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

Oversight Hearing: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare & Committee on Higher Education
February 14, 2019

Good Morning Chairperson Levin, Chairperson Barron and members of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees. Thank you for this opportunity to testify and offer updates on our efforts to address food insecurity among New Yorkers and respond to questions you may have today. My name is Grace Bonilla, and I am the Administrator of the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). I am joined today by Executive Deputy Commissioner Jill Berry and Chief Special Services Officer Annette Holm.

HRA provides a variety of essential programs and supports to low-income New Yorkers, including various initiatives focused on reducing hunger and tackling underlying socioeconomic factors that lead to food insecurity. We work closely with agencies such as the Department for the Aging (DFTA), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy to work towards a future where all New Yorkers have access to nutritious food.

The ever-increasing cost of living is a major contributor to food insecurity; as housing, food, and transportation costs rise, it is increasingly more difficult for low-income New Yorkers to feed themselves and their families. Moreover, nutritious food is often more expensive and disproportionately concentrated in higher-income neighborhoods, creating even more obstacles for vulnerable New Yorkers to access quality food. Not only do these circumstances often result in hunger, but they can also have drastic effects on health and productivity; in children, food insecurity is linked to poor academic performance, low school attendance, and behavioral and physical health challenges. For adults, it is associated with poor health outcomes, particularly for the elderly, including premature mortality, depression, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic diseases.

HRA Anti-Poverty Interventions

Too many New Yorkers are regularly forced to choose between paying rent or paying for groceries. At HRA, we work every day to disrupt the structural obstacles low-income New Yorkers face to live healthy lives. HRA's anti-poverty programs and initiatives, including rental assistance, universal access to counsel, employment services, and, more recently, Fair Fares, are meant to lessen the financial burden that low-income households face and alleviate the food insecurity they may be experiencing. Coupled with other initiatives - including the increase in the minimum wage, recently reaching \$15.00 for employers with more than 10 employees, and the recent enhancement to paid sick leave by allowing employees to use their paid leave if they are victims of

sexual assault, domestic violence or human trafficking - the goal is to continue lifting New Yorkers out of poverty and minimize hunger, poor health and homelessness.

Food insecurity results from insufficient funds to maintain a regular, healthy diet. SNAP benefits are a central component in addressing food insecurity. Currently, 1.57 million New Yorkers receive SNAP, including 532,000 children and 338,000 seniors aged 65 and over. Of these 1.57 million New Yorkers, 379,336 of them also receive Cash Assistance, an important safety net for children and adults. Many SNAP recipients work, but their wages are insufficient to handle modern-day living expenses and qualify them for benefits. And in addition to providing important dietary support, SNAP also generates business for local bodegas, farmers markets, and retailers and can put individuals and families in a position where they can also purchase other essential items, like baby products or medication.

According to a report by the Citizens Budget Commission, 462,000 New York City renter households are severely rent burdened - paying more than 50 percent of their income on rent— an unaffordable amount that drastically limits their ability to feed themselves well.

To address this major driver of poverty and hunger, HRA offers rental assistance and emergency grants to keep families and individuals housed. We have successfully helped more than 104,000 New Yorkers move out of shelter into permanent housing or avert entry into shelter altogether. While we know there is more work that we need to do to address the challenge of housing insecurity that has built up over years, this permanent housing assistance for these 104,000 children and adults shows the progress that we are making. In October of last year, we streamlined seven of the City rental assistance programs we administer into a single program, called CityFHEPS. This change will reduce the need to check a client's eligibility for multiple programs; make it easier to see if clients qualify for assistance; and ultimately make it much easier for clients, providers, and staff to navigate our rental assistance program. It also makes it easier for landlords to participate in the program, and better aligns our program with State and Federal rental assistance programs.

Without stable housing, it is difficult for families to escape poverty. Evictions can drive people into poverty where they are more susceptible to struggle with hunger and poor health. New York City is committed to making legal services available to all tenants facing eviction in housing court and public housing authority termination of tenancy proceedings. The Universal Access to Counsel program has been an extraordinary success. Residential evictions by marshals declined 37 percent since 2013, with approximately 18,000 evictions in 2018 compared to nearly 29,000 evictions in 2013. In 2018 alone, evictions decreased 14 percent, with 3,000 households and more than 8,000 New Yorkers across the five boroughs able to remain in their homes as a result. Since 2013, more than 100,000 New Yorkers who might otherwise have faced evictions have been able to stay in their homes. This decline in evictions follows a milestone in the Administration's efforts to combat homelessness and protect housing stability through its commitment to providing legal services for tenants facing eviction and displacement: as of June 2018, the City has provided nearly a quarter million New Yorkers with legal representation, advice, or assistance in eviction and other housing-related matters through tenant legal services programs administered by HRA.

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.

The Federal Landscape

The positive impact SNAP has for our City makes recent federal actions that challenge our work in providing SNAP benefits to those in need all the more chilling in their effect. Last year, the U.S. Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) issued a proposed rule change to the definition of public charge by including more non-cash benefits, such as SNAP, in the proposal. As Commissioner Banks previously testified before the Immigration Committee, we are working with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to inform New Yorkers that this rule has not gone into effect and that our office is open for business and that there have been no changes to eligibility. Comments in opposition to the drastic proposed changes were submitted by the de Blasio Administration, other elected officials, advocacy groups, and individuals highlighting the adverse impact on poverty levels and health in communities across the City. Earlier this month, in an effort to circumvent Congressional authority and the intent of the recently reauthorized Farm Bill, the Trump Administration issued a proposed rule to strictly enforce punitive work requirements associated with SNAP, and virtually do away with our ability to waive work requirements for single able-bodied adult SNAP recipients in areas with high unemployment in New York City. We are currently reviewing the proposed rule and will be submitting comments prior to the April 2nd deadline. We encourage others here today to submit comments as well.

Most recently, we endured a 35-day federal shutdown – the longest federal government shutdown in history. Under the direction of the US Department of Agriculture and working in concert with New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), we processed pending applications and recertifications early and issued February benefits for most clients in January to ensure the issuance of benefits before the USDA determined that there were no longer funds available to pay February benefits. We conducted a communications campaign to inform SNAP recipients of the unusual early issuance of February benefits so they could budget their food expenses appropriately, and reassure them that nothing else about SNAP had changed due to the shutdown. We expanded our reach of this important news by notifying elected officials, community boards, CBOs, service delivery organizations, and city agencies to share or post this critical information. I want to take this opportunity to thank the HRA employees who successfully handled the coordination and distribution of those SNAP benefits in this unconventional circumstance to so many New Yorkers that are entitled to this assistance to feed their families.

For March, OTDA has approved the distribution of SNAP benefits on a compressed schedule – from March 1st to March 7th – to limit the gap between the early February benefits and the March benefits. As of yesterday, we have initiated a communications campaign to inform New York City SNAP recipients and service providers of this important change.

The shutdown also directly impacted 18,000 federal employees in New York City who were furloughed and did not receive a paycheck during the shutdown. These were New Yorkers who did not have anticipated income to pay for housing costs, as well as food and other commodities. Understanding the gravity of the emergency they were facing, NYC set up a website so that these employees knew what resources they could access.

Additionally, many New York businesses, churches, and nonprofits stepped up and offered meals to federal employees impacted by the shutdown.

Notwithstanding these challenges, HRA proceeds in its mandate to address food insecurity by increasing access to SNAP and helping those New Yorkers retain those benefits.

NYC SNAP Participation Rate

As studies regularly conclude, improvements in the economy generally correlates to a reduction in participation in the SNAP program. Not surprisingly, as the local economy continues to improve, the SNAP participation rate in New York City declines - it decreased from 77% in 2013 to 72% in 2016 to 70.9% in 2017. In line with our prior testimonies, we believe HRA's SNAP participation rates should not be compared to the state and national participation rates released by the federal government. 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, reported in 2017, the NYC PAI was 85%, compared to 73% in the U.S., and 81% in NYS overall.

We have taken significant steps to ensure that all eligible New Yorkers have unencumbered access to HRA benefits and services. Our data show positive trends – application rejections are down, and successful case recertifications are up.

With 1.57 million New Yorkers currently depending on timely and proper delivery of benefits unburdened with bureaucratic barriers, HRA is devoted to continuously improving and streamlining the benefits delivery processes.

ABAWD

In May 2014, New York City accepted the State's ABAWD waiver which allowed able-bodied adults without children, 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. Otherwise, they would be limited to receiving SNAP benefits for only three full months in any three-year period unless they qualify for an exemption or are meeting work requirements.

Such waivers are permitted for areas with high unemployment. ABAWDs who live in the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Staten Island continue to have a waiver for 2019. In Manhattan, the strong economy means the areas below West 110th Street and below East 96th Street do not qualify for a waiver. The Borough of Queens is also impacted by the ABAWD requirements, with the exception of residents of Community District 12, which means the area that is south of Hillside Avenue and north of the Belt Parkway and between the Van Wyck Expressway on the west and Francis Lewis Boulevard and Springfield Boulevard on the east, and, effective January 1st, Community District 10, which is the area by the Van Wyck Expressway on the east, Liberty Avenue/103rd Avenue on the north, 165th Avenue and JFK International Airport on the south, and the Brooklyn/Queens Line on the west.

As I previously mentioned, the Trump Administration is using the regulatory process as an end run around the compromise reached by Congress in their reauthorization of the 2018 Farm Bill. The new rule would restrict waivers to areas where the unemployment rate is higher than 7 percent compared to the current unemployment rate threshold of 10 percent. This attack on low-income single adults will exacerbate food insecurity, forcing many New Yorkers to lose their SNAP benefits by not meeting the proposed ABAWD work requirement rules.

HRA Reforms to Improve the Delivery of Vital Services

In January of 2012, a Council hearing was held to focus on long lines, overcrowding, and long wait times at HRA Job Centers and SNAP Centers. And in 2014, this Administration began to build on prior efforts to address this problem through investing in significant reforms to modernize our technology systems, optimize operational efficiency, and improve the overall client experience. With federal and State approval, by removing real barriers to access and creating a self-directed service model for clients, we are now able to permit SNAP applicants and clients to conduct a broad range of transactions with the Agency without the burden of having to physically come to an HRA office.

Thus far, we have seen real results that reflect a changed client experience at HRA SNAP centers. For example, the percent of SNAP applications submitted online increased from 23 percent in 2013 to 87 percent in 2018 and the percent of SNAP application interviews conducted by phone increased from 29 percent in 2013 to 93 percent in 2018. As a result, SNAP in-center foot traffic has declined 30 percent since 2014 because applications and recertifications can now be submitted online and eligibility interviews can be conducted by phone.

At the core of our modernization efforts is the ACCESS HRA portal – an online tool that has remarkably improved the ways in which clients receive services:

- As of January 2019, there were more than 2 million ACCESS HRA online accounts for SNAP/food stamps households.
- We now receive over 20,000 online applications each month.
- Today, all SNAP eligibility interviews can be conducted at a client's convenience by phone, rather than in a rigid four-hour window under the old system, or clients can choose to come into a center for an in-person interview. On-demand interviews for SNAP recertification have been fully in-place for more than two years, and as of September 2018 on-demand interviews for new SNAP applicants are available citywide.

The 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, request a budget letter, 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.

Another component of our modernization efforts was the rollout of the HRA Mobile App, a self-service mobile app to give clients the ability to use their mobile device to better manage their cases by having immediate access to case details and the ability to submit required documents from their smartphones. Using ACCESS HRA is now as user-friendly on a mobile device as it is on a PC. This redesign will make transactions such as recertifying for SNAP even easier for clients who access the site from a mobile device because of the seamless integration between the ACCESS HRA mobile app to the ACCESS HRA Client Portal. Since the application's launch in March 2017, clients have uploaded nearly four million images and the app has scored a 4.6 App Store user rating.

In addition, we've modernized our SNAP centers by providing on-site self-services. For clients who prefer to access our services inside one of our centers, we now have a suite of self-service tools, which includes self-service check-in kiosks and PC Banks to utilize ACCESS HRA and self-service scanning of documents.

Overall, by providing an enhanced client experience in SNAP centers, these lower-touch service models free up our eligibility workers' time so they can focus on those clients who need more support and assistance.

These successes in integrating technological improvements to modernize our SNAP systems are only one part of the equation. We are also actively continuing our efforts to enroll low-income New Yorkers by reaching out to New York City's universe of direct service providers to familiarize them with the user-friendly features of ACCESS HRA, and develop partnerships with many sites that utilize the ACCESS HRA Provider Portal – an online tool designed for CBOs to connect with the clients they serve. Through the ACCESS HRA Provider Portal, organizations can view real-time benefit information for their clients and help them manage their cases – a service that reduces the possibility of benefits being lost due to a lapse in recertification, for example. Since the launch of the Provider Portal tool in September 2017, 230 organizations have signed up to utilize this tool. Our Office of Advocacy and Outreach (OAO) provides ACCESS HRA trainings for community-based organization staff who provide SNAP enrollment and case management services to their constituents. Specifically designed for CBO staff and case workers, these trainings provide in-depth instruction in the use and benefits of the ACCESS HRA Client Portal, Provider Portal, and the mobile app. Since July 2017, OAO has conducted 170 ACCESS HRA trainings.

In spite of HRA's technology improvements and progress in benefits reengineering, we recognize that many vulnerable New Yorkers are not receiving help and are susceptible to food insecurity.

SNAP Outreach

HRA's SNAP Support Services Unit dedicates itself to educating the public about SNAP benefits and eligibility guidelines. In addition, the staff prescreens clients to determine eligibility, and assists applicants with the application process. In FY18, SNAP Support Services provided services at 1,758 individual events at 380 individual community sites/locations and provided services at 132 sites on a recurring basis. HRA also partnered with 117 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.

HRA also has outreach staff onsite and readily available in housing developments and community sites, which include nine DFTA senior centers, that assist local residents with SNAP prescreening and application help. The HRA outreach staff regularly attend resource fairs, farmers' markets, and other community events, as well as speak to inmates at Rikers, and state and federal correctional facilities about how to apply for SNAP.

One of our most significant outreach efforts is the SNAP Helps campaign that utilizes a special website called FoodHelp.nyc with mirroring sites in local law languages (Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Haitian Creole, Korean, and Arabic). The SNAP Helps campaign encourages New Yorkers struggling to afford food, particularly low-income seniors and immigrants, to seek help.

The site features:

- Past and current HRA clients in video testimonials, sharing their stories about how SNAP benefits have helped them;
- A searchable map of sites to either apply or get help applying for SNAP in person within the five boroughs, and for locating more immediate food help such as local food pantries and soup kitchens;
- Prominently displayed links to the ACCESS NYC site to screen and/or to apply for SNAP and 30 plus additional City, State and federal health and human service benefit programs.

Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

In FY19, the HRA Emergency Food Assistance Program's (EFAP) total funding for food and administrative expenses is \$20.2 million and includes \$8.7 million in additional funding baselined by the Administration at the time of adoption for FY19. This funding is being used to provide additional non-perishable and frozen food; provide additional administrative grants for non-food related expenses; and cover increased cost for warehousing and transportation.

Food distribution to those in need remains our most important objective. In FY18, EFAP distributed more than 17.5 million pounds of food, including over 1.3 million pounds of frozen food. In the same period, EFAP programs reported serving more than 13.6 million people (this is a self-reported, duplicated statistic).

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 who need a Kosher or Halal diet. In addition, many of these food items are packaged differently (e.g., pop-tops or pouches). The actual purchase of these items is based on an analysis of the needs and trends of the emergency food network.

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 558 emergency food programs funded by EFAP provide SNAP outreach services. These services include SNAP eligibility prescreening, assistance with the SNAP application process, and distributing SNAP materials that promote this nutritional benefit.

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. The Director of Food Policy in the Mayor's Office, HRA-EFAP, New York State Department of Health - HPNAP, and key NYC emergency food funders formed this group in order 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 continues to focus on building pantry capacity and increasing the food supply to the City's most underserved neighborhoods. By establishing a common metric (the Supply Gap) and an 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 individual programs, food supply, and monitoring visits.
- Building and implementing Plentiful, a simple mobile application 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 232 registered pantries, compared to 100 last year; and over 160,000 individuals were served in FY18.

Partnering with DOHMH

In our efforts to combat food insecurity and hunger, we are grateful to partner with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and complement their work. In an effort to help clients close the gap in their food budgets, DOHMH distributes Health Bucks coupons which can provide New Yorkers who receive SNAP benefits with additional purchasing power to buy fresh, locally grown produce at all NYC farmers markets year-round. For every \$5 spent in SNAP benefits at farmers markets, shoppers get \$2 in Health Bucks representing a 40% increase in purchasing power. This benefits SNAP recipients by enabling them to buy high-quality nutritious produce and allowing them to support regional and local farms – which strengthens the rural economy in New York and in neighboring states. In 2018, more than 450,000 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. The result is exciting and we are pleased to report customers spent over \$1M in SNAP benefits at GrowNYC farmer's markets and other food program sites in 2018. We are happy to report that EBT cards are now accepted at more than 125 farmer's markets across the City.

College Students

We welcome the discussion on the prevalence of food insecurity among college students – a vulnerable population normally overlooked. In a time where real wages are steadily declining and the costs of rent, and food are increasingly rising, the additional burden of an expensive tuition makes it difficult for students to make ends meet. This difficulty is exacerbated for students coming from low-income families. Many college students find themselves food insecure and having to make the difficult decisions between affording food or other integral aspects of their college experience, such as textbooks or tuition. According to a study from The Urban Institute, 11 percent of students at four-year institutions and 13 percent of community college students experience food insecurity. The severity of this issue is clear to see in New York City. Approximately 15% of students in the CUNY school system have reported going hungry because they lacked resources to buy food and one-quarter of students had to skip a meal because they could not afford food.

The inability to have consistent, healthy meals results in more than discomfort: It can lead to a higher predisposition to serious disease; it makes it difficult for students to concentrate during or complete their classes, and can lead to higher levels of stress. To alleviate this serious issue, New York State launched an initiative for all SUNY and CUNY campuses to have a food pantry on site – a great step in ensuring affordable access to healthy food for many college students. The Excelsior Scholarship Program launched in 2017 will also greatly assist many college students with the availability of free tuition for CUNY and SUNY schools. By eliminating this substantial expense for low- and middle-income families and individuals, students can pursue and aim to complete their college education and free up cash to purchase food, medication, and other essential items.

The City has also introduced several initiatives that make a variety of nutritious food widely available to everyone in the City and assist HRA in making SNAP a more effective and widely used program. One of these initiatives is NYC Green Cart, which is a mobile food cart program that offers fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhoods with limited access to healthy foods.

While much has been done to make food more accessible and affordable to New Yorkers, including college students, there is much more that needs to be done. Much of the inability to utilize SNAP as a tool to end food insecurity for college students in New York City is due to SNAP being federally regulated. According to the federal rules dictating SNAP eligibility, most college students are not eligible for SNAP unless they work twenty hours per week or receive a federal work study grant. They may also be eligible if they take care of young children, or they are in college as part of a workforce training program. HRA will continue to advocate for changes to federal policies covering the eligibility rules by employment status that limit our ability to provide SNAP to vulnerable groups in need, such as college students.

Targeted Outreach to Older New Yorkers

Since 2014, HRA has employed Benefits Data Trust's (BDT) proven model of targeted outreach and application assistance – using available enrollment data and working with HRA to complement our own outreach, the BDT's 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.

More than 31,719 applications were submitted on behalf of 38,245 seniors, resulting in more than 21,800 seniors enrolled in SNAP. A recent MIT study found that BDT's targeted outreach and application assistance triples SNAP enrollment among people ages 60 and over, and that providing information alone increased SNAP participation by 81 percent. We are currently reviewing NYC SNAP enrollment outcomes for households that received outreach from BDT but who did not respond or receive application assistance.

A development of our collaboration with BDT is the institution of the "Guardrails Strategy". This initiative uses technology to send timely, automated text messages and robo-calls to remind individuals to complete their SNAP application and recertification process. Initial evaluations of the project outcomes have shown a higher likelihood of enrollment interviews being completed and recertification forms being submitted, resulting from the guardrails approach.

The Medicaid SNAP Connect (MSC) pilot, launched in November 2017, works to connect Medicaid recipients of all ages to SNAP. HRA is currently evaluating outcomes, and initial data analysis shows a 75-80 percent enrollment rate for MSC submitted applications.

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 goes 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 and a better client experience.

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.



FOR THE RECORD

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**Testimony of The Legal Aid Society
Before the New York City Council Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education
Oversight Hearing on Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
February 14, 2019**

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

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 Reducing the Food Insecurity of New Yorkers

There are many ways in which the City of New York seeks to address hunger, but our focus today is on our area of expertise: access to government benefits, including SNAP and cash assistance, benefits 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 City Council's continued 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) Enhance and Ensure Access to All Benefits So that Low-Income New Yorkers Can Conserve Limited Funds for Food.

Overall income support is essential to addressing hunger in New York City. Access to SNAP is critical, but so is access to other benefits, including Cash Assistance and Medicaid. When low-income New Yorkers lack access to cash and health benefits, they use money budgeted for food to address other basic needs. The City Council's support for Cash Assistance based housing subsidies such as Housing Stability Support and (HSS) as illustrated by yesterday's rally and its efforts to address the homelessness and affordable housing crises in New York are also part of addressing hunger.

The City Council has historically 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. Low-income college students also had difficulties maintaining their benefits while pursuing degrees. During the first term of the de Blasio administration many improvements were introduced in terms of general access and for students. However, the City Council's continued oversight is still critical to address ongoing problems. We have the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

- (a) Make income available to pay for food: Push for increases in benefits amounts.**
Despite implementation delays, the City's introduction of the Fair Fares program

provides some economic relief to low-income New Yorkers who need to allocate more income for food. Many City Council members are already pushing for Housing Stability Support, a state-wide program that would likewise enhance cash assistance-based rent subsidies for households around the state freeing up income for nutrition needs instead of families having to siphon off food money for rent. We applaud both these initiatives. Meanwhile, in the face of threatened cuts to TANF funds contained within the Executive's budget, the City should lead the push in the opposite direction – for an increase in the levels of Cash Assistance benefits reserved for meeting basic needs. The basic grant has not been raised in many years, leaving even those clients receiving the full grant for their household size living well below the poverty level. For example, a family of 3 containing at least one dependent child receives just \$336 dollars for their non-rent expenses, and \$53 towards utilities. A college student living alone would be eligible for just \$158 a month, with \$25.10 for utilities. These amounts are far too low, especially when they are often needed to supplement SNAP for the purchase of food in addition to addressing all other every-day needs.

(b) Expand access by working with HRA to reduce the necessity for in-person appointments, and adopt the slate of client service bills that were the subject of the February 4 General Welfare Committee oversight hearing. In some cases, HRA is required to meet with clients in person by State law, such as for Cash Assistance application interviews and recertification appointments. New York City should help to lead efforts to amend these State laws to give HRA clients more freedom and flexibility to transact business with HRA. The client service oriented bills introduced by the Council in the wake of the gross mistreatment of Jazmine Headley in an HRA Job Center would also go towards expanding access by making it easier for clients who do need to go to the centers to get their issues dealt with expeditiously. Together these State and City level changes would amount to improved access, which would directly and indirectly enable low-income New Yorkers to better address their hunger needs.

(2) Continue to Oversee and Monitor HRA's Telephone and other Electronic Communication Systems To Ensure Client Access and Avert Hunger.

As discussed in the committees' joint briefing paper on food insecurity, 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. We are happy to hear that HRA is piloting this type of access to Cash Assistance. However, the success of this approach depends on adequate phone systems and staffing levels, as well as the ability to get through to the Infoline and centralized client complaint lines when things go awry. Clients report the following categories of problems:

- **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 delays because of repeated application attempts before an application is open.
- **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.
- **Required Client Reporting** - HRA instructs clients to use the Infoline 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, but they are not always able to get through leading to closed cases.
- **Reporting Complaints** - Clients are also encouraged to affirmatively report complaints by telephone via Infoline, and the Office of Constituent Services complaint line but the numbers are often busy due to lack of capacity. When someone does get through, sometimes they are erroneously advised that they cannot even lodge a complaint until they have waited for a certain minimum amount of time. This means a lot of issues, including problems that result in 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.

Recommendations:

- (a) Require the use of “Secret Shoppers” or other independent staff to monitor what is qualitatively happening with these phone lines and systems.** We heard DSS Commissioner Bonilla testify on February 4, 2019 that the policies in place governing these systems do not permit workers to refuse to take client complaints, but yet we have witnessed it firsthand. The only way for the agency to root out such conduct is to monitor its lines in a robust way that can lead to corrective action. We believe that the best way to track this problem is to require HRA to have “secret shoppers” attempt to call various phone systems used by HRA as well as 311. HRA should be required to review the findings of the secret shoppers, take corrective actions such as re-training staff and post the results to the Council and on the agency website.
- (b) Require quantitative data on phone services, including waiting times.** Many know from experience how it can take to get through to a live person on the centralized phone lines used by HRA. The agency collects data on the waiting time and many other data points. For example, we have data that during the first three quarters of 2018, the average time it took clients to speak to an Infoline agent,

including wait time, was 16 minutes. Callers to other centralized lines experienced shorter times, though still significant, at approximately 7-8 minutes. The City Council should demand that HRA report this data to the Council directly and on the agency website.

(3) Support the City's Fight Against Destructive Federal Policy Changes that Will Cause Greater Hunger in New York City.

Federal policy changes are putting New Yorkers at more risk of hunger, making it more critical than ever that the City fight back and protect New Yorkers. Last year, formal proposed changes to the "public charge" rules were introduced that have had been long anticipated. Although the rule changes are still pending, there is a chilling effect on non-citizen clients' willingness to access government services and benefits, including food pantries and soup kitchens. In addition, the Trump administration has introduced proposed rule changes that would make it more difficult for many adult New Yorkers to maintain SNAP benefits by subjecting even more clients to the extreme work rules and time-limits placed on SNAP receipt. Comments on the proposed rules are due on April 2. Through the leadership of the Council, the City should continue to fight back against both these rules and support the work of advocates to do the same. Our recommendations follow:

Recommendations:

- (a) Capture valuable data related to the decrease in use of various government benefits and services.** The City is uniquely situated to capture the extent to which use of benefits and services is declining, particularly among non-citizens. The Council should require the City to monitor and capture this data in a way that preserves the confidentiality of clients who use city benefits and services. Such data is an effective tool for use by the City in its own advocacy and will support the advocacy of organizations like Legal Aid fighting against this policy as well.
- (b) Mandate that agencies provide accurate information about benefits and any possible immigration related risks associated with receipt of various benefits.** The City can and should continue to counter the chilling effect by adopting practices that empower non-citizen New Yorkers who need benefits to make choices based on accurate information about risks. We at The Legal Aid Society continue to be available to consult with the City about ways to counter the chilling effect and make sure clients get what they need.
- (c) Monitor preparations for possible legal emergencies impacting non-citizens.** When families forego assistance they are eligible for because of fear they quickly can face food insecurity and hunger. We are already seeing the chilling effect, but it will be even worse when the final rule gets issued. The City's phone lines, like 311, need to be prepared to provide a very high volume of clients information on how to access both government benefits and services like food pantries and soup kitchens and to meet a wide range of needs that are likely to arise. The City Council can continue to play an important role in making sure the City and its agencies are prepared.
- (d) Submit comments opposing ABAWD rule changes.** The City of New York has a unique voice, and should use it to submit comments before April 2 on how the

proposed federal ABAWD changes would negatively impact New Yorkers, including students who are working towards building a more financially secure future. We at Legal Aid are happy to offer assistance to the Council as it moves forward with its comments and other advocacy on this issue.

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 submit testimony today.

Respectfully Submitted:

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FOR THE RECORD

Oversight – Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
Committee on General Welfare jointly with the Committee on Higher
Education

February 14, 2019

Testimony submitted by: Rachel Sherrow
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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, generates revenue for New York City as an added benefit, 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 and at worse, homelessness.

Our population is aging throughout the country and especially here, with 17% of NYC over the age of 60 and by 2050 the number of older adults will double, outnumbering children under 15. Living longer, and on fixed incomes means more struggle over access to food.

Hunger Free America's most recent hunger study showed that nearly 11% of NYC's seniors suffer from food insecurity which is perhaps an easier way of saying that they are hungry. According to the Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity, nearly 44% of older adults live in poverty in the city, almost matching the 50% of those 18 and under. Unfortunately, for homebound elderly to access supplemental food is a more difficult and often times impossible task. They are unable to walk to pantries, or wait in line and carry the bags home. 40% of our meal recipients are unable to leave their homes, and many do not have support to help them.

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

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. It is a cheaper alternative to institutionalization, more dignified, and what the majority of older adults prefer. The City has not kept pace with the rising costs in food, appropriate salaries and infrastructure and meal providers often operate in a deficit. We need to adjust this and make sure we have the appropriate funds in order to meet the needs of our homebound elderly now, and into the future. The aging coalition will be seeking funding from the Council for FY 20 in order to help right these discrepancies and to make sure additional money continues to be added annually.

Citymeals on Wheels has tried to do our part by creating a program to reach those most hungry, poor and frail with a Mobile Pantry bag. Because these most vulnerable meal recipients are unable to access food pantries themselves, we supplement their daily meal with additional food to ensure they have more to eat. Currently the

program is only reaching about 650 meal recipients in Upper Manhattan, parts of the Bronx, and Central Brooklyn, although we know the need is closer to 2,500 city-wide, we are unable to reach them due to the financial constraints of our organization. In fact, Citymeals is seeking Council funding for FY 20, to deliver an 8 meal box to all 18,000 meal recipients city-wide, comprised of shelf stable food to have on hand if meal deliveries are compromised due to localized emergencies, inclement weather or a citywide catastrophic event. This food can also be used to help supplement the one meal a day delivered and ensure there is always food to be had.

Citymeals is also working on a study with Columbia University School of Dental Medicine and The NYC Department for the Aging (DFTA), 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. These older adults often lack dental insurance or do not understand what they are eligible for under either Medicare or Medicaid and consider the costs prohibitive and unnecessary. Unfortunately, the lack of dental care can impact their ability to eat and we hope that our findings will help inform how we can better serve this part of the population receiving meals and ensure they are able to consume them and not go hungry.

Citymeals on Wheels fundraises for private dollars which is never easy and much more difficult in the new landscape for not for profits navigating the federal budget and the new tax laws, in addition to the city's budget for Aging services not keeping 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. Currently we are at 97% capacity for meals on wheels city-wide, and as the population increases, 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 for case management, 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 37th 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. ⁵ Measuring the costs and savings of aging in place. 2013. (Accessed December 3, 2014, at http://www.huduser.org/portal/periodicals/em/em_archive.html).



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Testimony prepared for the
Committee on General Welfare

on

Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

February 14, 2019

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council's General Welfare and Education committees' oversight hearing on Reducing Food Insecurity 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 last year's increase to baseline food funding for the City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and the Council's crucial Campus and Food Pantries Initiatives, alongside other robust efforts to support food-insecure New Yorkers.

Food Bank For New York City is 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 nearly 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank's food distribution provides approximately 58 million free meals for New

Yorkers in need in the past year. 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 \$115 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 limited 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 monthly 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 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. Our outreach collaborations have created more opportunities to apply for SNAP than have ever existed before—including initiatives for seniors, jointly deployed public education campaigns, and innovative technologies piloted in community-based settings like the Paperless Office System and AccessNYC. These systems are designed to reduce barriers to participation by facilitating and streamlining application and recertification processes. Food Bank and HRA have partnered since 1984 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: 208 MILLION

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. A federal entitlement program, SNAP now provides food assistance to nearly 40 million Americans.¹ SNAP is effective and efficient, and it is countercyclical, meaning it has the flexibility to grow to meet rising economic need.

New York City residents have lost \$1 billion in SNAP benefits since the Hunger Cliff, an unprecedented across-the-board SNAP reduction, took effect in November 2013. Food Bank For New York City analysis reveals what that cut looks and feels like on the ground: To

¹ Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) National Monthly Data, November 2018 (latest available month). United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

date, the 1.6 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP to purchase groceries and keep food on the table have lost the equivalent to more than 208 million meals.²

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 food³ – 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.⁴

New York City's Meal Gap is 208 million meals (as of 2016, the most recent year for which data is available).⁵ The breakdown by borough is as follows:

- the Bronx Meal Gap is 39.5 million meals;
- Brooklyn's Meal Gap is 80.8 million meals;
- Manhattan's Meal Gap is 37 million meals;
- The Queens Meal Gap is 42.8 million meals; and
- Staten Island's Meal Gap is 7.3 million meals.

We 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 THREATS TO THE ANTI-HUNGER SAFETY NET

Food security for low-income people continues to be threatened by decisions and proposals from Washington, DC.

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 adult SNAP recipients between the ages of 18 and 49 who do not have minor children or other dependents in their home, and who have documented a disability. Upon the loss of a job, to keep their benefits, SNAP recipients who meet the ABAWD criteria have up to three months to find a new job of at least

²*Reflections from Hunger's Front Lines.* Food Bank For New York City. November 2018.

³*Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City.* Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

⁴ 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

⁵ Gundersen, C., A. Dewey, A. Crumbaugh, M. Kato & E. Engelhard. *Map the Meal Gap 2017: Food Insecurity and Child Food Insecurity Estimates at the County Level.* Feeding America, 2017.

20 hours per week – or, if available, participate in a state-approved employment and training program or volunteer (workfare) program.

The recently passed Farm Bill maintains the option for states to request a waiver and apply for exemptions from the ABAWD time limit during times of high and sustained unemployment. However, the new Farm Bill reduced from 15% to 12% in FY2020 the exemptions that can be applied to the category of individuals subject to work requirements. 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 (OTDA) have worked collaboratively in the past to develop the broadest possible waiver from this time limit for New York.

This flexibility to protect underemployed and unemployed residents seeking SNAP is at risk as President Trump's administration announced plans to eliminate states' ability to apply for ABAWD waivers. The proposed rule would take away state flexibility to seek waivers, strip critical benefits from adults subject to the limit, while doing nothing to support workforce development. Similar proposals to take food benefits from ABAWDs were rejected during Farm Bill negotiations. The proposal both sidesteps Congress in an effort to push through unpopular and dangerous policies and would do great harm to the food security, public health, and economic well-being of communities across the country.

EMERGING THREAT TO IMMIGRANT COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

The Trump administration has also proposed a rule that would exacerbate food insecurity among immigrants seeking legal permanent residence (AKA green cards). The "public charge" test proposal adds benefits like SNAP to a list of criteria that can threaten a green card application. Even with this rule still pending, immigrant communities across the country who rely on benefits have reacted to this larger threat to their legal residence with fear, avoiding essential services to which they are entitled because they believe it may injure their immigration application.

Thank you to the City Council for introducing resolution number 608, and to Speaker Corey Johnson for submitting public comment raising concerns that the rule will harm New York City residents. Anti-poverty advocates and community members across the city and country joined you in submitted hundreds of thousands of public comments in opposition to this rule change.

FEDERAL SHUTDOWN WIDENS "SNAP GAP"

It was only last month that the longest government shutdown in U.S. history revealed how closely many Americans are living to the edge of economic insecurity. After going without a paycheck for two pay cycles, 800,000 furloughed federal workers - 18,000 of them based in New York City - suddenly faced having to make dire choices between equally essential needs. In order to pay for housing, transportation, and/or tuition, many had dip into savings funds,

turn to community organizations for food, learn how to navigate accessing emergency SNAP benefits, and even ration food for themselves and their children. Workers who were required to continue working throughout the shutdown despite not being paid were limited to seeking services from charities that could accommodate their work schedules.

Unfortunately, the reopening of the federal government has not ended insecurity for the charitable network and many who rely on it. As a result of lapsed funding, the 1.6 million SNAP participants in New York City received February benefits early, with a six-week gap before they would have access to their March benefit disbursement. As Food Bank For New York City has pointed out to this committee in the past, a typical month of SNAP benefits only covers food for about two weeks. The emergency food network often sees our highest uptick in need at the end of the month, when SNAP benefits have been exhausted.

Already meager SNAP benefits, the additional wait for March benefits, and the surge in need created by a lapse in pay for federal workers has created a “SNAP Gap.” In this gap, emergency food programs will see increased need for food starting in mid-February. This need will be exacerbated by the mid-winter break at New York City schools, during which 1.1 million students will be unable to access free school meals. Food pantries and soup kitchens across the city are already taking heroic steps to meet this surge head-on, but it is crucial to put the scale of the gap into context: Two months of SNAP benefits provides more meals to New Yorkers than the entire New York City emergency food distribution provides in a year.

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 anywhere near 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 food pantries and soup kitchens (84 percent) continue to see increased visitor traffic, while many continue to experience food shortages.⁶

In September 2018, Food Bank For New York City asked our member network of food pantries and soup kitchens to share key insights and reflections from hunger’s front lines:

- **More than half of food pantries and soup kitchens (54 percent) reported running out of food**, or particular types of food needed for complete pantry bags or meals;⁷
- **Nearly one-third (29 percent) reported having to turn people away** due to food shortages;⁸ and

⁶ *Reflections from Hunger’s Front Lines*. Food Bank For New York City. November 2018.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

- **The average emergency food program relies on 5 full-time volunteers** to operate, and nearly two-thirds (61 percent) cited lack of staff and volunteers as a threat to operating.⁹

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 2013 cuts. Attacks to SNAP, the cornerstone of our national anti-hunger response, continue to represent the biggest systemic factor reducing the food purchasing power of low-income people.¹⁰

It is critical to know who relies on New York City's emergency food programs, including soup kitchens and food pantries:

- an estimated **1.4 million New York City residents** each year;
- approximately **339,000 New York City children**, or approximately one out of every five;
- approximately **604,770 New York City adult women**, or approximately one out of every six;
- approximately **204,000 New York City seniors**, or approximately one out of every five; and
- approximately **70,000 New York City veterans**, or approximately three out of every ten.¹¹

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 the millions 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.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ For example, local unemployment, a highly influential factor in seeking food assistance, has been in steady decline in New York City since then.

¹¹ *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

Thanks to the leadership of the City Council and the vocal advocacy of the emergency food network, New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) received a historic increase to baseline food funding in the FY2019 City Budget. EFAP is a major source of food for our city's emergency food network, and 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.

The emergency food network is grateful that during the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 New York City budget process, EFAP became a top priority of the City Council, the Speaker, and the Progressive Caucus, and we hope to see the continued leadership that recognizes the need to fortify the emergency food network against food shortages, adjust for the rising costs of food, and invest deeply on behalf of the 1 in 5 New Yorkers who rely on food pantries and soup kitchens. At a time when we are facing devastating proposals at the federal level, we are proud to see our City Administration prioritizing the needs of New Yorkers struggling with hunger and the charities that serve them.

Given the ongoing challenge of New York City's current Meal Gap – 208 million meals – and the ongoing and emerging threats to community food security, **we urge the City to fortify the emergency food network by increasing EFAP food funding to \$22M in the FY2020 budget.** This increase 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. Increasing baseline funding in 2019 must only be another step in New York City's efforts to end hunger, as we have much more work to do.

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. It bears repeating that even at the currently reduced benefit amounts, two months of SNAP benefits provides more meals to New Yorkers than the entire emergency food network in New York City provides in a full year.

SNAP is our first line of defense against hunger, and we are extremely appreciative of 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, innovative ways to expand access to SNAP.

We 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 protect and maintain 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 and we also strongly support Breakfast in the Classroom, which has helped reduce the stigma associated with participation and allows students to start the day with a healthy meal – not with an empty stomach. We urge the City to support efforts to expand participation both of these programs that provide free meals to young people.

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 work but do not earn 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, high-quality tax assistance services available to low-income New Yorkers throughout our city. Food Bank will continue to partners on this work to ensure that low-income tax filers in New Yorkers receive every refund and credit to which they are entitled, including the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

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

HOW FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY IS FIGHTING HUNGER

Emergency Food Network

Food Bank For New York City procures, stores, and distributes approximately 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 South Bronx. A full-service delivery operation, Food Bank dispatches tractor-trailers from the warehouse five days a week to our citywide network of nearly 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, as well as 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 to make wiser nutrition choices even with limited food dollars.

Campus Pantry

Hunger doesn't discriminate; it affects students from low-income families of all ages — from kindergarteners to college students. Children who receive two free meals during the school day may still face going hungry when they return home, unsure if there will be enough to eat for dinner or to last the weekend. Likewise, many college students — an underserved segment of New Yorkers in need — often find themselves cash-strapped and struggling to afford food. Food Bank For New York City's dual-track Campus Pantry program helps bridge that 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.

In partnership with the City Council, Food Bank For New York City has opened 25 campus pantries in public schools across the five boroughs. The campus pantries not only provide food but also other household items that 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 essential for low-income New Yorkers who struggle to afford food. In the face of the emerging threats to SNAP, a well-informed outreach effort can be the difference between keeping individuals away from their benefits and visiting an already overwhelmed food pantry. 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

Food Bank For New York City applauds City Council for its leadership in fighting to do the most good for those in greatest need with the fewest resources. Central to these successes for the emergency food network is the increase to EFAP baseline food funding. The deep commitment this body has shown to alleviating poverty and food insecurity reinforces the necessity of the anti-hunger safety net: including SNAP, school meals, summer meals, WIC, the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), and Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). We can continue forward in that support and 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.



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**Testimony of Rebecca Glass, Agency Operations Manager
to the
New York City Council Joint Hearing
Committee on General Welfare &
Committee on Higher Education
February 14, 2019**

Good morning Chairpersons Baron, Levin, and the committees on General Welfare and Higher Education.

Thank you for holding this joint hearing today to address reducing food insecurity in NYC, specifically to discuss the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), and CUNY students facing food insecurity. As you know, these are very difficult times for food insecure New Yorkers. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what City Harvest is learning, seeing, and what we are doing to build food security in New York City. Additionally, I'd like to offer some suggestions for actions the City can take to respond to the growing demand and need for emergency food. I will conclude with considerations for the FY 2020 City budget that can enhance food security.

Background

City Harvest is New York City's largest food rescue organization, helping to feed the more than 1.2 million New Yorkers who are struggling to put meals on their tables. We will rescue 61 million pounds of food this year and deliver it, free of charge, to hundreds of food pantries, soup kitchens and other community partners across the five boroughs. Our programs help food-insecure New Yorkers access nutritious food that fits their needs and desires; increase our partners' capacity; and strengthen the local food system, building a path to a food-secure future for all New Yorkers.

Current State of Self-Sufficiency in New York City

We are proud to partner with United Way of New York City, the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement, and the New York Community Trust on the 2018 Self-Sufficiency Standard Report, which measures how much income is needed to meet families' basic necessities, without any public or private assistance. City Harvest uses the Self-Sufficiency Standard to better understand the realities so many of our neighbors are facing.

The latest report demonstrates that over 2.5 million New Yorkers are struggling to make ends meet in New York City. Yet only a third of that number qualify for public assistance, like SNAP, according to the federal official poverty measure. Consequently, a large and diverse group of individuals and families across our city are struggling and are regularly overlooked and undercounted. These are many of the New Yorkers who turn to the soup kitchens, food pantries, and other community food programs City Harvest serves in order to make ends meet.

Many working families find they earn too much income to qualify for most supports, yet they are still struggling to meet their basic needs. To make things worse, their efforts are exacerbated by the reality that housing, health care, and other living costs are rising faster than wages.

With food costs in New York City among the highest in the nation, many working families are forced to choose between paying their rent and buying groceries. There were nearly 25 million visits to soup kitchens and food pantries across the city last year, despite the fact that most households have at least one member who works full-time. 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.

City Harvest Taking Action

Partial Federal Government Shutdown

City Harvest has also been monitoring the impact of the recent partial federal government shutdown closely. At City Harvest, we were heartened to see that the Administration has announced a temporary end to the shutdown, reopening the government until Friday, February 15, while budget negotiations continue. We are encouraged by the news that federal workers who were furloughed or working without pay will soon be able to receive back pay. However, there is still a need for food right now.

More than 70% of our partner food pantries and soup kitchens are reporting that they need more food in order to meet the need for everyone turning to them right now. We're grateful to the many New Yorkers, city agencies, and partners who joined us to help our neighbors facing food insecurity, by:

- We packed nearly 2,500 bags of produce and non-perishable food, including squash, potatoes, canned tomatoes, pork and beans, and pasta at our Food Rescue Facility, which we distributed to TSA workers at LaGuardia Airport and other federal workers affected by the shutdown.
- We delivered produce and nonperishable food to Holding Hands, an agency in Brooklyn, which they distributed to TSA employees who work at JFK Airport.
- We distributed additional fresh produce directly to three of our partner agencies who are seeing an increased need due to the shutdown – Christian Pentecostal Church and Stapleton UAME Church in Staten Island and Masbia in Queens.
- We are welcoming federal workers to all nine of our Mobile Markets across the city, which remain open to anyone who needs help. Federal workers just need to show their Federal ID to receive this free food.
- We have received a grant to help 13 agencies in high need neighborhoods and high SNAP recipients purchase additional food from one of our vendors.
- We are targeting agencies that are within a two mile radius of the Metropolitan Detention Center to receive extra shelf-stable food to provide for the guards and their families along with families of detainees.

It's truly inspiring to see our city come together this way, but we know there is much more to do. The recent government shutdown only highlighted what we see and hear every day – too many of our neighbors are just one paycheck or one unexpected medical bill away from not being able to put food on their tables.

Threats to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs)

On Thursday, December 20, 2018, the same day President Trump signed the bipartisan 2018 Farm Bill into law, the Administration also announced a proposed rule to fundamentally change SNAP, the cornerstone of our nation's nutrition assistance safety net, which is critical in helping low-income individuals and families get the food and nutrition they need. We worked alongside our anti-hunger partners in New York City and across the country to advocate for a strong Farm Bill, and we were heartened that legislation was passed to protect SNAP by maintaining eligibility without additional harmful work requirements. We're dismayed that this

executive action rolls back all this progress and threatens to increase food insecurity among low-income New Yorkers.

The proposed rule impacts adults between the ages of 18 and 50 who do not have children – also known as Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs). Under current law, individuals in this group who participate in SNAP can only receive benefits for three months, unless they are working at least 20 hours a week. States currently have the ability to waive this rule in areas of high unemployment. However, the proposed executive action restricts states' right to waive the time limit, creating additional barriers for ABAWDs to receive SNAP as they face unemployment or underemployment. This change would cut SNAP benefits for 755,000 people across the country – including thousands of New Yorkers.

While we thank our members of Congress for their leadership in the 2018 Farm Bill process, and are grateful to all of you on the Council who stood with us to advocate for working families in our city and across the country, we again need your voices in urging the Administration remove this harmful proposal.

The rule is open to public comment through April 2. Join with us and Feeding America to advocate for our neighbors in need. It is critical to add your personal thoughts on how this policy impacts your community, as doing so ensures that the Administration reads and considers the comment.

The "SNAP Gap"

The most pressing issue for SNAP recipients is what many are calling the "SNAP Gap." Due to the partial federal government shutdown, New Yorkers enrolled in SNAP received their full benefits for February on their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards as early as Thursday January 17, 2019 – which is earlier in the month than usual. This was not an extra SNAP benefit for January. Therefore, it was critical that City Harvest and our partners inform food insecure New Yorkers receiving SNAP to budget and spend their February benefits with that in mind.

We know that due to the current government funding through February 15, 2019, New Yorkers receiving SNAP will see their March benefits on their EBT cards, and, in the event of a second partial federal government shutdown, New York State can ensure an early release of April SNAP benefits by March 15, 2019. With that reassurance, these unprecedented dynamics place an enormous strain on our network because most SNAP benefits last between two to three weeks.

To address the increased need during this time, City Harvest has worked with our partners to provide additional food to reinforce our agency network. This money is targeted to areas of high need and high SNAP recipients. Coupled with this, is the fact that next week, Public Schools will be closed and children who rely on school breakfasts and lunches will not have access to these meals putting a further strain on families who already are facing challenging times.

Food Insecurity at CUNY & SUNY

As part of Governor Andrew Cuomo's "No Student Goes Hungry Program" in the state's fiscal year 2019 budget, the administration called for solutions to food insecurity on state college and university campuses. That following August 2018, the Governor announced that 100 percent of all New York State public colleges at The State University of New York and The City University of New York will have a food pantry or stigma-free food access for students in need by the end of the fall 2018 semester.

Between the start of the initiative and the announcement for the fall 2018 semester, our colleague Vivian Nieves, Associate Director, Agency Operations has been in contact with the CUNY/SUNY Food Insecurity Task Force (the "Task Force"). The Task Force is comprised of a broad spectrum of interested constituencies, including students, staff, faculty, auxiliary food service providers, and community and philanthropic organizations. The goal of the Task Force is to study the issue of food insecurity on college campuses and recommend the necessary changes and best practices to alleviate the serious issue of food insecurity.

While City Harvest's presence in the higher education setting is not centered on emergency food distribution, we have remained in contact with Dr. John L. Graham, Associate Provost for Student Affairs at the State University of New York System Administration, regarding City Harvest's role in the solution to relieving food insecurity in these settings.

Maintain & Strengthen City Commitments to Reducing Food Insecurity

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 20 Preliminary Budget released recently, The Human Resource Administration (HRA) budget shows a baseline of \$16.9 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 in Fiscal Year 2019 to increase baseline EFAP funding to a total of \$16.9 million from HRA and \$3.1 million from the City Council to reach a total of \$20 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 total (the anti-hunger networks FY 19 ask) for FY 20 in order to address citywide food inflation, poverty, and insufficiency of the emergency food supply.

Healthy Food Retail Action Network Healthy Food Access Campaign

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 urge the Council to support programs that will increase access to nutritious food, especially for neighborhoods that have not seen historical investment, through:

- Open feeding centers (such as those available during the summer months) to provide for breakfasts and lunches for NYC public school children next week. If there are centers that are available, this information should be available.
- Advocate for enhanced SNAP benefits and call on the council to submit a comment on ABAWD rule making process
- Support \$22 million in EFAP funding
- \$15 million for SNAP Incentives: help New Yorkers afford fresh fruits and vegetables by expanding programs such as Health Bucks

- \$10 million for a Healthy Food Financing Initiative (HFFI): help local grocers open, expand, and improve grocery stores in neighborhoods that need food and jobs the most
- \$3 million for Healthy Corner Store Initiatives: increase the amount of healthy food offered in bodegas, particularly in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods
- Work together with our network and other food funders to provide capital grants and food assistance to the network of community programs who often operate on a “shoe-string” budget with limited infrastructure.

City Harvest is deeply interested in working with the Council and Administration to continue efforts in reducing food insecurity. Again, thank you for your attention to these urgent matters and for all your work on to improve the lives and conditions of low-income New Yorkers.

Rebecca Glass,
Agency Operations Manager
rglass@cityharvest.org



Safety
Net
Project

Testimony of the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center

Re: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education
New York City Council
February 14th, 2019

My name is Anelle Morales-Rojas and I am a Tenant and Benefits Advocate for the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. In discussing food insecurity, I would like to touch on the institutional factors that prevent full access to food assistance. HRA provides a wide variety of supportive services, and under Mayor De Blasio the agency has identified its mission as contributing to a larger fight against income inequality and poverty by deepening the local safety net. Nonetheless, the deterrent nature of HRA's service provision creates significant hardship for many New Yorkers. Indeed, as we see everyday at the Safety Net Project, benefits are regularly discontinued or delayed due to a variety of avoidable errors. It is important to note that these issues disproportionately impact people of color.

Given the context of the current regressive and reactionary presidential administration, and its embrace of a racialized bootstrap mentality, more than ever, recipients of public benefits face precariousness in accessing stable aid. The combination of these factors contributes to the larger issue of hunger and food insecurity in New York City.

Founded in 1984, the Safety Net Project (SNP) at the Urban Justice Center advocates for safe and secure housing and fundamental resources like food and cash assistance for underserved and marginalized communities in New York City. Specifically, our public benefits team represents over 1,000 households each year in Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx who are facing critical issues in accessing Public Assistance and SNAP benefits. Each week, we operate four walk-in legal clinics at major food pantries and soup kitchens across the City and speak to New Yorkers about their experiences seeking and receiving public benefits.

The Safety Net Project also supports the Safety Net Activists, a group that organizes for change for underserved New Yorkers, with a focus on the public assistance, homeless shelter, and food stamp systems in New York City. Since the Safety Net Activists were founded in 2014, they have regularly advocated for change at HRA and DHS around issues such as SNAP cuts and accessibility. In organizing, various advocacy efforts, and meetings with officials, the activists share common problems, personal experiences, and recommendations for change in an attempt to address systemic issues and bring about reforms necessary to lessen the burdens faced by public benefits recipients.

SIGNIFICANT DELAYS IN SNAP PROCESSING

Significant factors contributing to inordinate food insecurity in New York City are delays and errors in SNAP processing. SNAP, formerly known as "food stamps", plays a crucial role in reducing hunger and poverty. Here, we want to draw the Committee's attention to the significant issues that applicants currently face with the timely processing of SNAP benefits that is required by law. By regulation, eligible applicants receive a decision on their SNAP application within 30 days of applying. However, we have seen dozens of cases in recent months where HRA has not processed SNAP aid within the required 30 day timeframe. Additionally, applicants often do not receive notices regarding their eligibility, and therefore are left in the dark without any

information or access to necessary food purchasing assistance. Clients who are already recipients of SNAP benefits also experience severe delays when submitting forms to make changes to their cases. In sum, households should not be forced to go without food because of HRA's insufficient staffing, technological problems, or callousness toward those it serves. Yet, even in violation of the city's legal obligations, households regularly suffer due to the aforementioned issues.

To emphasize this strain, I would like to point to two of the many examples of clients who had cases where delays in the processing of their SNAP benefits had a severe impact on their livelihood.

MR C. GOES 140 DAYS BEFORE RECEIVING BENEFITS FOR YOUNG SON

One June 7, 2019, a client of the Urban Justice Center went into a SNAP center to submit a change report son in order to add their young child to the SNAP case, and therefore get additional benefits to support the new household member. After submitting the report, this client did not hear back from the center for months. No additional benefits were issued and no action was taken on the case. The client met with the Urban Justice Center three months later. At this time, they were still not receiving adequate benefits for them and their son. The situation escalated to a fair hearing. It was not until another month later, October 2018, that the SNAP benefits were distributed onto their card. What was meant to be a simple administrative process became months of inaction, strained finances for food, and a litigation process.

MS. C GOES 115 DAYS HAVING TO CHOOSE RENT OR FOOD

Ms. C, a resident of Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, applied for SNAP benefits on June 4th, 2018 for herself and their child. Three months later, when they met with the Urban Justice Center, they still had not heard from the agency regarding their case. Without the financial support from food stamps, she was unable to pay her rent. She continuously tried to call the center for a status update and was told that the application was still pending. Benefits were not issued on the card until after two mediation requests from the Urban Justice Center. Applications delays forced this family to decide between food and housing.

Given this, we make the following recommendation: HRA must process all SNAP applications within 30 days, as required by federal law.

DOCUMENTATION ERRORS

SNAP recipients also experience delays or reductions in their benefits due to documentation errors that could easily be avoided. In our recently released report, "The Bureaucracy of Benefits: Struggling to Access SNAP and Public Assistance in New York City," a copy of which we have provided to the Committee with this testimony, we analyzed a total of 137 surveys collected from SNAP and PA centers in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. We found that over 25 percent of SNAP applicants or recipients stated that an HRA worker had lost

paperwork that they submitted. Notices that clients receive regarding their SNAP benefits are also often wrong or sent in error due to an outdated computer system.

Given this, we make the following recommendation: HRA should review the efficacy of its computer and notice automation systems, to ensure the agency's compliance with the stated guidelines.

WAIT TIMES AND MISTREATMENT AT SNAP CENTERS

In terms of technology, we commend HRA for the progress made with the online Access HRA system. However, SNAP centers and workers should not be neglected and left behind with the addition of this system, especially as internet use is still not accessible to all New Yorkers. Major issues at SNAP centers, as documented by our report, include excessive wait times and mistreatment. Our survey results revealed an average SNAP Center wait time of 2.78 hours, which drastically differs from the wait time listed on HRA's website of 47 minutes. These long wait times mean that people are forced to take time of work to visit SNAP centers, forfeiting pay checks and putting them in even more vulnerable positions. At SNAP centers, just under half of respondents reported that in 2017, SNAP workers spoke to them in a mean, hostile, or nasty manner at least some of the time. Twenty percent of respondents said that SNAP workers often or always spoke to them this way. This mistreatment creates further barriers to SNAP recipients accessing their entitled benefits.

Given this, we make the following recommendation: In order to improve treatment of constituents at SNAP centers, all staff should be trained in a trauma-informed approach to service, that a social worker be on-site at each center, that wait times are reduced to under one hour in order to meet with an HRA worker or supervisor, and that the physical space at centers be redesigned to create a more welcoming and family-friendly environment.

BARRIERS TO SNAP STAFF EFFICACY

At SNAP centers, workers also face significant barriers to doing their work effectively. From conversations we had with an Eligibility Specialist at a HRA TIPS Center, and as reinforced by the testimony of Eligibility Specialist Kenneth Clark at the February 4th hearing held by the General Welfare Committee regarding client experiences at HRA, we learned that staff are unable to process SNAP applications and make case comments in a timely and accurate manner because of significant delays in loading of screens in the POS system, 3-5 day delays in document indexing, and an inability to make certain types of changes in the system without contacting the Imaging Help Desk. These systemic issues, however small they may seem, can increase wait times and have a severe impact on individual's ability to receive proper benefits. Additionally, supervisors at SNAP centers have often not been trained as Eligibility Specialists; therefore, they often set unreasonable expectations for staff who are then unable to take the proper time to move through cases.

To mitigate these issues, we recommend efforts to improve the speed and functionality of the POS database using feedback from HRA staff and better training of SNAP center supervisors.

ABLE-BODIED ADULTS WITHOUT DEPENDENTS (ABAWD) STATUS

SNAP recipients who are designated as 'able-bodied', meaning without known disabilities, and without dependents, are often required to participate in work assignments per federal law. If a work-required recipient does not comply and cannot provide sufficient 'good cause' to HRA, a penalty is issued and SNAP benefits are withheld until the requirement is fulfilled. Many of those designated as ABAWD are homeless or precariously housed, and often experiencing numerous life-hurdles that make complying with these work requirements a barrier to accessing ongoing SNAP benefits.

Indeed, in our experience, historically, many of those designated as ABAWD's who find themselves facing punitive cutoff actions by HRA are homeless - many living on the street or in-between shelters. Address and mailing issues are a significant problem here. Due to the way in which cases are processed in the system, homeless individuals are sent work requirement notices to the mailing address on file, typically a community center, a drop-in, a shelter, a P.O. box, or the home of a relative or friend. As these individuals are unable to access these mailboxes in a consistent manner, SNAP benefits are subject to be cut off at any time.

The ABAWD work requirements create unnecessary bureaucratic barriers for some of those already struggling to get by, and these bureaucratic barriers make obtaining sustained access to food an unnecessary problem. Weaknesses in how the City manages ensuring these clients are adequately notified of requirements and changes to their case, and in processing their applications, are palpable.

While we would argue the ABAWD work requirements are unnecessary - no one should be required to work for food assistance - we recognize that decisions here lie at the federal level. However, we implore HRA to be more conscientious of the intersection of homelessness and ABAWD status in its communication practices, and develop processes by which those designated as ABAWD who find themselves facing benefit reductions are given additional opportunities to resolve case matters.

PUBLIC CHARGE

In late 2018, President Donald Trump proposed an expansion to the Public Charge rule. As defined by the National Immigration Center, a 'public charge' is a person who is considered primarily dependent on the government for subsistence. The term, mostly framed in the context of public benefits and social services, applies to when an immigrant is seeking admission or a lawful permanent resident status. Though it has always existed, the proposed change has lowered the threshold to include anyone who is likely to receive one or more benefits over a certain duration or dollar value. Even the proposal of this rule has had a chilling effect amongst

SNAP recipients. Indeed, since the rule's announcement, a stark 10% of immigrants disenrolled from the SNAP Program out of fear of risking citizenship. We have repeatedly been asked about this at our clinics. Furthermore, the confusing nature as to what deems someone a 'public charge' has led to individuals disenrolling their eligible children from SNAP as well. The proposed rule also has had an extreme negative impact on WIC enrollment, another essential nutrition benefit for many New Yorkers. The effects are even more widespread than just SNAP, as families are already forfeiting necessary housing vouchers that ensure their shelter stability. In sum, families are going hungry to protect the possibility of acquiring status in the United States.

HRA has the potential to serve as a resource in the times of unpredictable immigration policy changes. Information that clarifies policies and immigration resources should be posted within centers and sent to beneficiaries. Workers should go through routine trainings which address these clients' concerns and how to respond.

CLOSING OF BROOKLYN CENTERS

In September of 2018, HRA publicly announced a number of serious and detrimental changes to the Brooklyn SNAP Program - specifically, the closing of the Fort Greene and North Brooklyn SNAP centers. Beneficiaries of these centers were redistributed, but no new staff were hired. As it currently stands, Brooklyn SNAP centers are located in only three areas of Brooklyn (Coney Island, East New York, and Williamsburg), adding travel time to the notoriously long wait time at the centers. Centers are already at full capacity, and employees at the centers are overworked and underpaid. As a result, we've seen many cases that have had no action taken on them for months. As a consequence, applicants are left waiting and additional strain is placed on community food pantries, which are often forced to take on the remaining needs of families and individuals in need.

Given the above, we ask that HRA re-open a SNAP center in a more centralized area of Brooklyn to reduce work loads of SNAP workers and increase access to food assistance. We also ask that HRA produce data on its staffing levels at each center throughout NYC, specifying the number of workers in each role, and the case-to-worker ratio per center. We also recommend that Council require HRA to provide additional clarification on its publicly listed wait times.



Safety
Net
Activists

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TESTIMONY
T2019-3640 Oversight
Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

My name is Wendy O'Shields I am a New York City Welfare and Homeless Rights Advocate working with the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project and Activists.

I support Int Bill T2019-3640 Oversight Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City.

New York City Homeless, no and low-income individuals and families, disabled, unemployed and under employed, emancipated youth, college students, elderly, rent or debt burdened, and those with catastrophic medical expenses are hungry! These populations choose between their most urgent bills or a skipped inadequate meal. Many New Yorkers suffer quietly behind closed doors with gross malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies, and hunger because they are poor. Regular missed meals or meager meals, lead to a multitude of long-term expensive health challenges.

Additionally Int Bill T2019-3640 should consider setting aside funding for urban farming incentives with a focus on community and roof top gardens. Encourage individual windowsill gardens for herbs and other easily grown edible plants this allows for fresh produce in-house. Consider allocating more funding for Health Bucks a fresh fruit & vegetable farmer's market coupon program run by NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. The Health Bucks program should be further developed, expanded, and brought to a larger audience of eligible New Yorkers.

Advertise the NYC 5 Boroughs Food program on the MTA Subway, AM & Metro daily newspapers, and frequently run Public Service announcements on NYC1 television broadcast.

I thank you for considering my suggestions to reduce hunger in the City of New York.

Wendy O'Shields
Urban Justice Center
Safety Net Activists Founding Member
Safety Net Project Advocate Volunteer

ENDNOTE

ⁱ Health Bucks are \$2 coupons distributed by the NYC Health Department that can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets.

<https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/health-bucks.page>



NEW YORK

**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
and Committee on Higher Education Hearing on
Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City**

**February 14, 2019
Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York**

INTRODUCTION

Good morning Chair Levin, Chair Barron and members of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees of the New York City Council. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on reducing food insecurity in New York City.

First, we thank the City Council for your steadfast commitment to protect NYers from dangerous proposals as well as your continued commitment to addressing the issue of hunger. The City Council has long been a leader in this arena – from supporting Breakfast in the Classroom to the expansion of universal school meals to leading the charge for increased, baselined funding for food pantries and soup kitchens to creating food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools - and we are grateful to count you as our partner in this work.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national anti-hunger organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, our No Kid Hungry campaign builds public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day. In addition to our grant-making in all 50 states, we work with governors, state legislators, and federal policymakers to identify best practices that ensure hungry children have access to healthy meals while they're at school, and when they're out of school.

Since 2011, our No Kid Hungry New York campaign has helped connect thousands of children across the state with school breakfast and summer meals.

FOOD INSECURITY: THE NEED & WHY IT MATTERS

1 in 5 kids in New York City struggles with hunger. Here's what that means: In some families, the pantry is completely empty. In others, mom or dad skips dinner a few nights a week so the kids can have

something to eat in the evening. In others, families are making impossible decisions between paying the rent or buying groceries. This has a profound effect on kids and families.

When kids aren't getting the consistent nutrition they need throughout the day and throughout the year, it's harder for them to grow up healthy, happy, and strong. Hunger makes it harder to focus in class. Test scores drop, and students more likely to miss class time because they're in the nurse's office with headaches or stomach aches. Discipline problems rise, while attendance levels fall.

Ensuring that kids get healthy food is the first step on the path out of poverty. When kids get regular healthy meals they do better on tests, have fewer discipline problems, have fewer health problems and are more likely to graduate from high school. A healthier generation of kids means a stronger workforce, a stronger economy, and a New York City that is better able to compete in the global marketplace.

PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR NEW YORKERS

Luckily, we know that programs that already exist can help close this gap. One of the most effective ways to make sure hungry kids are getting the nutrition they need is to connect them to federal meals programs like school breakfast, school lunch, afterschool meals, and summer meals.

BREAKFAST AFTER THE BELL

We can dramatically reduce hunger by making sure kids in need are able to get a healthy school meal. One of the best ways to connect more kids to school breakfast is to serve breakfast as part of the school day, just like lunch, ensuring that breakfast is served while kids are at schools, not before they arrive. No Kid Hungry New York is focused on ensuring that more New York City kids have access to school breakfast. We were thrilled when in June of 2015, the New York City Council and the New York City Department of Education came to an agreement to implement Breakfast in the Classroom in 530 stand-alone elementary schools by the 2017-2018 school year. In April of 2018, New York State announced a mandate that all schools in New York State with more than 70% of students receiving free and reduced price lunch would be required to implement Breakfast After the Bell in September – more than 1,000 New York City public schools are on that list. We urge the City of New York to implement Breakfast After the Bell in EVERY New York City so that every child can have access to a healthy meal to start their day.

SUMMER

Over the summer, when schools are closed, kids also miss out on those school meals. The federal summer meals program aims to address this problem by providing free healthy meals to children in places like schools, libraries, and parks. When kids get nutritional meals throughout the summer, instead of experiencing a summer slide, they come back to school in the fall ready to learn and pick up where they left off. New York City has summer meals sites available in all 5 boroughs – in schools, playgrounds, pools, libraries and many other places where children gather throughout the summer.

But even with the summer meals program, sometimes meals are still too hard for kids to reach. Programs like Summer EBT help close this gap for kids and for families. To better reach low-income children with the nutrition they need during the summer months, the U.S. Department of Agriculture established a pilot program called Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer for Children (or Summer EBT) in 2010. This program was shown to be both efficient and effective. We urge New York City to consider implementing a Summer EBT pilot to support families' ability to purchase food in the summer.

SNAP

Another federal program that ensures family members get the nutrition they need is SNAP, which helps feed 1.6 million poor and low-income families across New York City each month. SNAP helps end hunger, making sure kids in low-income families get the food they need at home. SNAP also helps end poverty and promotes better education. Research shows that low-income kids who received SNAP benefits are 18% more likely to graduate from high school than their peers who didn't. SNAP benefits are also linked to a lower risk of anemia, lower levels of obesity, fewer doctor visits and fewer hospitalizations. SNAP pulls families out of poverty and prevents hunger, and is a critical program in the fight to end food insecurity.

By continuing to utilize and spread awareness about these federal nutrition programs, New York City can end hunger, especially among our most vulnerable: our children. We urge you to support outreach activities and initiatives to expand information and access to SNAP.

THREATS TO SAFETY NET PROGRAMS

These federal safety net programs are lifelines for struggling families and kids, and they must be protected. That's why as an organization, we so vehemently oppose the Department of Homeland Security's proposed Public Charge Rule that would force parents to choose between food and family.

By unfairly penalizing millions of immigrant families and their children – including children who are United States citizens – for accessing programs for basic needs like housing, healthcare and critical nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the proposed rule would increase childhood hunger and put millions of children across America at risk – including right here in New York City.

The proposed rule would create a chilling ripple effect across the country and right here in New York, causing harm to the health and well-being of thousands of children -- citizen and immigrant alike. This isn't about immigration reform. It's not about politics. This is about kids. And we as a city must protect them.

We also strongly oppose the Department of Agriculture's proposed rule that will undermine state flexibility to waive work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) receiving SNAP benefits. New York City has dealt with this issue over the last several years as waivers covered smaller geographic areas and if adopted, this rule would have a devastating effect on individuals across the country, including in New York City.

We urge the New York City Council to support programs and initiatives that will support families and communities during these challenging times.

CONCLUSION

Together, we can end childhood hunger in New York City. No Kid Hungry is working with partners across New York to make sure all kids get the food they need to grow up strong. We stand together to work with you and to ensure all children and their families have access to the food they need.

Food insecurity is a complex issue, but feeding a child is not. We know this is a problem we can solve. Thank you to the New York City Council for your continued support in this battle.

Testimony Presented by Deborah C. Harte, MHS.
Director, Single Stop Program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College
The City University of New York
before
New York City Council
Committees on Higher Education and General Welfare
Oversight Hearing - Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
February 14, 2019

Good Morning Honorable Chairs Barron and Levin and Honorable Committee Members:

I am Deborah Harte, Director of the Single Stop program at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). It is an honor for me to be here today representing the students of CUNY who experience food insecurity. Thank you for your time.

As a child growing up in Guyana, South America, I hated weekends for a good portion of my young life. The reason that I was not a fan of weekends is because I knew that there would either be no food or very little food in my home. My parents did their best to provide for their sixteen children but it was not always easy. I recall days of having to drink "sugar water." Literally, water mixed with sugar. Or other times that my Aunt, who worked at a hospital, bringing the left-over food so that we can have some solid food.

My favorite part of the week, however, was weekdays. I not only loved school because I loved learning, but I loved that there would be, at the very least, two meals that I would be able to eat. I enjoyed the milk and cheese sandwiches but more importantly, I was happy that I would be able to focus and not experience the headaches associated with hunger.

My students at BMCC who come to the Single Stop Office are oftentimes suffering the same level of hunger that I did as a child. There is nothing more heart wrenching than to speak with a student

on Monday morning who has not eaten in days because there was either nothing to eat, or because they chose to pay a bill or use the money for transportation to get to school. BMCC and Single Stop have responded to this level of need by providing students with a cafeteria food voucher, or a supermarket gift card, or access to our food pantry. We are fortunate to have some funding to provide this emergency assistance. But in spite of our response, the need is much greater. As an example, from the time we opened the Panther Pantry at BMCC in April 2018 through January 2019, we have provided over 340 families with over 2 tons of food. However, during that same period we were unable to serve over 430 students and family members. Included in that number is 196 children, 205 adults, and 30 seniors.

We want to ensure that students have access to the Single Stop services and as a result, the BMCC's Office of Student Affairs sends email notifications to our students about the availability of the Panther Pantry. Faculty and staff are also notified via email on the operation of the pantry, and they have often referred students they suspect or know to be facing food insecurity or hunger to Single Stop for Panther Pantry bags. Furthermore, Single Stop staff members conduct orientation and classroom presentations to highlight services available for students, including the Panther Pantry. At campus events throughout the year, Single Stop staffs a table to provide information about the pantry. Advertising for the pantry is also in rotation on intercampus television screens. Many of our students are being referred via word of mouth from students who have previously utilized the pantry. Additionally, students coming to the Single Stop Office for other services are screened for food pantry need and eligibility. Our intake process allows us to identify students who are facing emergencies that qualify for pantry assistance. The Single Stop Office also continues to promote the Panther Pantry website to further publicize the availability of the pantry to the student body. These outreach strategies are working.

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to bring to your attention, the crisis that our students are facing on a daily basis in relation to food insecurity.

**Testimony Submitted by
Loresa Wright, Director of Crisis and Housing Supports
on behalf of United Way of New York City**

Before The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare & Committee on Higher Education

Oversight – Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
February 14, 2019

My name is Loresa Wright, the Director of Crisis and Housing Supports at United Way of New York City. Thank you to Chairperson Levin and Chairperson Barron as well as the members of the City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Higher Education for holding today's hearing on food insecurity in New York City. We appreciate the Council's continued commitment to holding this annual oversight hearing.

For nearly 80 years, United Way of New York City has worked to support vulnerable New Yorkers throughout the five boroughs. We partner across the business, government, non-profit and philanthropic sectors to fight for the health, education, and financial stability of every person in New York City. Our mandate is to stem the root causes of poverty and create systems-level change so that everyone can access quality education and the opportunity to lead healthy and financially secure lives.

2.5 Million New Yorkers Struggle to Make Ends Meet

Two in five working-age New York City households— over 905,000—lack enough income to cover just the necessities, such as food, housing, health care, and child care. This translates to over 2.5 million men, women, and children struggling to make ends meet in New York City.

United Way of New York City partnered with the Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement and City Harvest to release "Overlooked & Undercounted 2018: The Self-Sufficiency Standard for New York City", a recently released study that determines the required income to achieve economic independent for more than 700 family types in each of the boroughs. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is a nuanced measure of the income a household needs in order to afford basics necessities without turning to public or private assistance. Unlike the federal poverty level, it accounts for variability based on the number of people in the household, their ages, geographic location and a specific point in time.

Our 2018 report shows that a single adult living in the Bronx must earn at least \$15.18 hourly, or \$32,050 annually, to afford basic, minimal expenses. If that single adult lived in Queens, the hourly wage would need to go up to \$17.55 and the annual to \$37,065. If that adult in the Bronx were a parent of a young child, the hourly wage floor would go up to \$29.70 and the annual to \$62,724, to pay for the child's expenses and to afford the high cost of childcare so that he or she could work.

We learned that wages are simply not keeping up with expenses. Between 2000 and 2018, the cost of basic needs have risen nearly three times the rate of wages. There are too many New Yorkers who have a job but are not earning enough to make ends meet. In fact, 84% of households making insufficient income have at least one working adult.

The three budget items with the largest increase across New York City between 2000 and 2018, are housing at 111%, transportation at 92%, and child care at 91%. Food costs have increased an average of 68% across New York City and food costs more here than most other places across the country. The difference within our boroughs are even more dramatic. Purchasing groceries for the same family type in Manhattan is 66% higher than in the Bronx. To make matters worse, a household's food budget often sees the most impact of economic instability due to its "flexibility". One cannot pay just part of rent, or child care, or a health care premium without losing access to those services. That means that because food is the most flexible budget item, families will skip meals or select less nutritious items so they can pay for those fixed-cost necessities. This can result in a poorer quality diet, decreased health outcomes, additional stress and burden. It can also impact adults' work performance and children's academic achievement and health levels.

As we all know, when the grocery budget is insufficient, families supplemented with private and public assistance, such as through visits to a food pantry or SNAP. According to the report, only 31% of New York City families below the Standard received SNAP. SNAP eligibility in a high cost place such as New York City is a challenge, as income eligibility standards use the federal poverty guidelines, which limits the number who can access this assistance in high cost places. We saw that many families below the Standard are food insecure, yet do not qualify for SNAP.

The relationship between hunger and educational achievement cannot be overstated. High school graduation rates are lower among those experiencing hunger and in 30% of households with hunger among children, the adults did not have an education beyond high school. Furthermore, higher levels of education are associated with higher rates of income adequacy - only 23% of those with a four-year college degree or more have below adequate incomes, compared to 22% of people without a high school degree. To increase the earning potential of all New Yorkers requires that access to a quality education begins in a child's earliest years, and that resources commensurate with need are available to keep children – particularly those from households and communities below the self-sufficiency standard – progressing along the cradle to college or career continuum.

UWNYC's Hunger Reduction Programs

To address some of these challenges, UWNYC has worked with a cross-section of partners around the city for more than 30 years to ensure that our Emergency Food System, and the soup kitchens, food pantries and community-based organizations that comprise it, have strong and effective operations, and make healthy and nutritious food not only accessible but a staple to the clients they serve. In 2018, we invested \$11million in more than 500 community-based organizations so that thousands of children, adults, seniors and families could access emergency food, emergency shelter, and income supports to meet their basic needs. UWNYC initiatives include:

- FeedNYC program strengthens 500+ food pantries and soup kitchens with healthy and nutritious food, operational capacity building supports, and funds for capital equipment.
- Emergency Food and Shelter Program funds community-based organizations to meet a range of costs associated with emergency food, lodging and services to homeless families.
- Emergency rent, mortgage and utility payments provide emergency funds for thousands of families to prevent homelessness by covering a month's rent, mortgage or utilities.

- SNAP funding enables caseworkers to outreach and screen thousands of New Yorkers every year, with more than 6,500 individuals enrolled in SNAP in 2018.
- In 2018, we provided technical assistance and support to 40 pantries to help them convert to a client choice-based distribution system that encourages client dignity by allowing people to select the right mix of foods for their household based on nutritional and cultural preferences.

Four years ago, United Way of New York City joined forces with the New York City Mayor’s Office of Food Policy, City Harvest, New York City Human Resources Administration, and the New York State Department of Health-Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP), to form the New York City Food Assistance Collaborative —determined to improve the emergency food system. The Collaborative developed a shared metric of success, enabled data-sharing, and built innovative technologies. These contributions helped close the emergency food supply gap with an additional 15 million pounds of food.

Out of the Collaborative’s mission to direct emergency food resources effectively and efficiently, Plentiful was born. This free, easy-to-use app for emergency food providers and their clients has improved or streamlined how food insecure New Yorkers can locate emergency food in their area, make a reservation, and easily pick up food at a scheduled time. Pantries that have adopted the reservation system see a reduction in wait times for their clients by 90%. This technology is allowing pantries to better manage their day to day operations and communicate with their clients in 9 languages, helping to better serve the populations who need it most. Most importantly, Plentiful is helping New Yorkers access food with greater dignity. To date, Plentiful has reached more than 130,000 households in New York City—that’s about 25% of households that use emergency food services and continues to grow.

Recommendations for Addressing Food Insecurity

1. Support the Emergency Food System

We urge the Council to increase HRA’s Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) baseline food funding to \$22 million to fully fund our vital emergency food system. To further fill these gaps, we ask City Council members to investigate opportunities to meet the storage, distribution and staffing needs of the Emergency Food Programs in their districts with discretionary funds.

2. Lower Food Costs and Increase Access to Healthy Food

The City and HRA have made great strides in improving access to benefits and we urge the agency and the Council’s efforts to simplify SNAP application and recertification processes including improving data sharing among city and state agencies so that New Yorkers can apply for several benefits simultaneously. We also urge the Council to expand funding and awareness for SNAP nutrition incentives, including the City’s Health Bucks program, that increases the affordability of healthy food.

3. Increase wages to align with the true cost of living and annually index to inflation

The greatest driver of increased self-sufficiency is higher wages. By the end of 2019 all New York City workers will be covered by a \$15 minimum wage. This policy change made a powerful difference for many New Yorkers, but it is critical to note that even an hourly wage of \$15 does not constitute a self-sufficiency wage for most New York City households across the five boroughs. Furthermore, we need to ensure these gains are not lost over time as living costs continue to rise and acknowledge that the current minimum wage increases have left out tipped workers in New York City that receive a subminimum wage. We urge the Council and City to work with state lawmakers to support efforts to index wages annually to keep pace with inflation and work to eliminate the tipped wage credit.

4. Ensure college students have the supports they need to obtain a high-quality education

We know how critical education is to lifelong success. Going to school – or going back to school – helps propel one forward but it is critical those students have all the supports they need to achieve once they get there. That includes not worrying about where their next meal is coming from. We applaud the City and State’s recent efforts to ensure that hunger is not a barrier for those seeking higher education. The effort to establish physical food pantries on all SUNY and CUNY campuses and increase awareness about SNAP eligibility is a great start.

Conclusion

For the hundreds of thousands of working households who cannot afford to meet their basic needs and must chronically rely on the emergency food system to eat, we must support the hundreds of emergency food programs in our City as well as rigorously pursue a parallel track of policies and system changes that address the root causes of hunger. Let’s work together to put more people on a pathway to economic security. The clearest roadmap requires higher wages, career pathways, lower costs of living, and education that is a pathway to college and career.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Neighbors Together

Testimony of Neighbors Together
Delivered Before the General Welfare & Higher Education Committees at the
New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Reducing Food Insecurity

February 14, 2019

About Neighbors Together

Neighbors Together is a soup kitchen and community-based organization located in central Brooklyn. Our mission is to end hunger and poverty in the surrounding neighborhoods of Ocean Hill, Brownsville, and Bedford-Stuyvesant. We serve over 10,000 unique individuals per year, and assist people who are struggling with poverty, insufficient income, lack of affordable housing, histories of incarceration, addiction, and homelessness. We serve over 80,000 hot nutritious meals to people in need each year, and we are a member agency of the Food Bank for New York City. In addition to our Community Café, our Empowerment Program provides stabilizing services such as benefits access and retention, supportive housing application assistance, housing advocacy, and on-site clinics for psychiatric evaluations, legal services, and Medicaid and Medicare enrollment. Our third program, the Community Action Program, engages our members in community organizing, policy and legislative advocacy, and leadership development. Neighbors Together believes that directly impacted people should be at the front and center of any change making process, determining the narratives and solutions to the issues that affect their communities, based on their lived expertise. Our primary campaigns focus on ending homelessness and creating affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers.

Increasing Baseline Funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program

Neighbors Together thanks the New York City Council for prioritizing anti-hunger programs in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget, and thanks the Council for its leadership in securing an increase in baseline food funding of \$16.9 million for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Neighbors Together relies on EFAP for the food used in the meals that we serve to our members twice a day. **We strongly urge the Council to continue its critical leadership role in protecting low-income and food insecure New Yorkers by increasing baseline funding for EFAP to \$22 million in Fiscal Year 2020.**

Despite New York City's reputation as a one of the wealthiest cities in the United States, deep poverty persists, and hunger remains as pertinent an issue as ever. At Neighbors Together, over 10% of the meals served go to senior citizens, and we continue to see working people and families with children come to us for the income support that free hot meals provide. Our members include people who are working, people on fixed incomes, people who are housed and those who are homeless. Community District



Neighbors Together

16, where we are located, ranks 3rd among all community districts citywide for the meal gap rate, which represents the meals missing from the homes of those who are struggling to put food on the table. Neighbors Together relies on emergency food program funding such as EFAP in order to continue to provide hot, nutritious meals to our neighbors in need.

Threats to the Anti-Hunger Safety Net

Now, more than ever, we need the Council's continued leadership to protect the anti-hunger safety net, particularly in the face of continued attacks from the federal administration. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has faced continual threats through proposed regulatory changes, the Farm Bill process, and budget negotiations. If SNAP were to be cut, or if rule changes went into effect that reduced access to SNAP benefits, it would have a devastating effect on low-income New Yorkers. In Community Board 16, one in three people relies on SNAP to put food on the table. If cuts were made, soup kitchens and pantries across the emergency food network would be the last line of defense, the ones to absorb the need. In addition to proposed changes to SNAP, the proposed federal rule change around "public charge" could have equally devastating consequences by discouraging eligible recipients from applying for SNAP. Although the final rule change has not yet been announced, organizations are already reporting a chilling effect, whereby immigrants are opting to not apply for or use their SNAP benefits out of fear. Again, emergency food programs such as our own will be the places that people turn to when they cannot access food anywhere else.

In the face of the increased threats to food security for low-income New Yorkers, Neighbors Together has seen decreases in both federal and state level emergency food program funding. As the need for emergency food has grown across New York State, the state level funding provided through the Hunger Prevention Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) is being split among more emergency food programs, which results in decreased funding per organization. Because of these decreases in other government funding, Neighbors Together is relying on EFAP more than ever to provide for the community members who come through our door; from Fiscal Year 2018 to Fiscal Year 2019, EFAP's portion of our food budget has increased by five percent.

Improving the Effectiveness of the Emergency Food Assistance Program

The Emergency Food Assistance Program plays a critical role in sustaining our Café and the thousands of people who come to us from across the five boroughs to access warm meals and the income support they provide. We are grateful for the funding we receive through EFAP, and we know that with increased baseline funding and a few systems improvements, we could do so much more to provide delicious, nutrient rich meals to those in need. An increase in baseline food funding would help meet the need of hungry people across New York City and help protect against potentially devastating cuts coming down from the federal government. Additionally, increased administrative funds via EFAP would help



emergency food programs such as us to support all of the operational needs that keep our soup kitchen running smoothly. Most emergency food programs run with little to no staff, and without administrative funding to support operations, it can prove difficult to sustainably operate food programs well, creating worse outcomes for the agency and the people they serve. Another way to support emergency food programs to run as effectively as possible is to offer increased access to diverse, nutrient rich, high quality food, such as proteins and fresh produce. While we need the staples we receive through EFAP, such as pasta and rice, we need high quality staples and increased access to proteins and produce to round out a whole and healthy plate. People accessing food through emergency food programs deserve delicious, healthy, dignified meals as much as anyone else, and these changes to EFAP would make that increasingly possible. Last but not least, instituting the choice model for programs utilizing EFAP funding would increase effectiveness of those programs. Allowing agencies to choose the types of food they want to purchase with their EFAP funds means that they will be better able to provide wholesome, healthy and culturally appropriate meals to the communities they serve. It will also allow agencies to control the flow of food into their space, a common-sense solution to the fact that emergency food programs vary greatly in size, set up, and their ability to absorb large food deliveries.

Conclusion

Neighbors Together thanks the New York City Council for its leadership on preventing hunger in New York City, and we urge the Council to increase funding for New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) to \$22 million in baseline food funding in Fiscal Year 2020. Strong City Council support for anti-hunger and anti-poverty policies creates opportunity for government and community-based organizations to work together and ensure that New Yorkers are able to live lives of dignity, health and wholeness.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any further questions or would like more information related to the above testimony, please contact Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy at Neighbors Together: 718-498-7256 ext. 5003 or amy@neighborstogether.org.



Testimony of Mr. Jason M. Hilliard, Chief of Staff - The Community Food Advocates, on the Committee on General Welfare Joint Oversight Hearing with the Committee on Higher Education on Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

Thursday, February 14th, 2019

Good afternoon Chairs Levin and Barron, and members of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees. My name is Jason M. Hilliard, Chief of Staff at the Community Food Advocates (CFA). It is a pleasure to testify on Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City, and to inform this distinguished body of our Lunch 4 Learning FY2020 budget priorities, which is aimed at ensuring the successful implementation of the “Universal Free School Lunch for All” (Universal) program and to build on its foundation.

Community Food Advocates (CFA) spearheads the Lunch 4 Learning campaign, a broad, diverse coalition-based group that advocated for Universal in all New York City public schools, which resulted in the Department of Education’s Universal program. Universal free and healthy school meals eliminate the poverty stigma associated with school lunch while getting more students eating, which has an impact on childhood hunger, public health and educational outcomes, but much more work is needed.

New York City has one of the highest concentrations of wealth in the world. Yet, nearly 1 in 4 children experience food insecurity; and in the 2016-17 school year, nearly 80% of the City’s public school students came from families with incomes low enough for the children to qualify for free or reduced price school meals. These children rely on school food programs for their daily nutrition. As part of our mission, CFA strives to identify and promote strategies that improve access to nutritious food, including through school meal programs.

CFA has two immediate requests that would have a positive impact on our school community. We are very excited about the Office of Food & Nutrition Services’ deli-style redesign, and we would like to see it in our school community. The presentation of school lunch has a direct impact on school lunch participation rates. Food Court style (deli-style) serving lines, smaller diner style booth and round tables seating transform school cafeterias from an institutional configuration to a more welcoming environment for students. Combining universal and the deli-style serving lines have resulted in a significant increase in the participation rate.

Additionally, the Food Court style serving lines have reduced the time students stand on line to obtain their lunch, allowing for more time to eat and socialize.

Second, we must ensure that every child in the New York City public school system and their parents are well informed of this transformative policy through a sustained marketing campaign. We believe the best avenue to realize this goal is to baseline \$3.1 million in the Department of Education's (DOE) budget for Fiscal Year 2020. Baselineing \$3.1 million for school lunch marketing will provide resources to ensure that DOE has funds dedicated to promoting universal and other school food initiative in a comprehensive, sustained and creative marketing campaign. This should be a priority.

Master Plan for Cafeteria Redesign for All NYC High Schools & Middle Schools

Presentation of school lunch and the environment in which it is served has a direct impact on school lunch participation rates. NYC Office of Food & Nutrition Services initiated an exciting cafeteria redesign model that implemented new Food Court style (deli-style) serving lines, smaller diner style booth and round tables seating for a less institutional, more welcoming environment for students. In thirty-four public school buildings that have been redesigned to date, we have seen a significant increase in student participation. The new serving line essentially presents the same nutritious school lunch in much more appealing ways.

In all of the schools we have visited, the school food staff have consistently reported, and we have verified through observation, that there is considerable increase in salad consumption while peanut butter and jelly sandwiches consumption decreased. Similarly, at Edward R. Murrow High School that have both USL and the Food Court style serving lines, participation has gone from 25% to 44%. Moreover, Lunch participation in high schools with enhanced cafeterias went up by 30.1% in the first year. This is approximately double the increase under USL in non-enhanced high schools, which was 13.5%. The Food Court style serving lines have significantly reduced the time student(s) stand on line to obtain their lunch, allowing for more time to eat, socialize, and contribute to overall student wellness.

As a result, we propose that New York City Department of Education adopt a Master Plan to phase-in redesign in half of its high school and middle school cafeterias to better benefit all members of the school community. We believe this master plan should be equitably distributed across School Districts, phased-in by priority: High need/Low participation rate; High need regardless of participation rates; and low participation rates/mixed income. Prioritization should also include a new policy for closed campus (No out lunch). The onetime cost is approximately \$500,000 per school, so the redesign is not a major renovation, but adds meaningful benefits. Even though the food is largely the same, the presentation looks very appealing. With diner-style booths and round tables, the cafeterias are more comfortable and inviting, replacing the institutional rectangular tables with attached benches.

Baselining \$3.1 Million for Marketing/Promoting USL & School Food Initiatives

Although the USL announcement at the beginning of last year's school cycle was notable, it fell far short of the sustained marketing and promotional efforts that should accompany such a significant change by the Department of Education (DOE), such as Universal Pre-K. Besides a well-attended press conference and recent subway and bus ads (April/May 2018), there has been little consistent, sustained communication efforts to maximize this transformative program. In fact, many parents, students and some elected officials still are unaware of the "Free School Lunch for All" program. For this reason, I am here to request that \$3.1 million be baselined in the city's budget for marketing USL and other school lunch initiatives. This funding will provide dedicated resources to ensure that DOE has funds for promoting USL and other school food initiative in a comprehensive, sustained and creative marketing campaign. Any message development should include engaging students and parents to identify the most effective messaging possible.

The marketing campaign should encompass print: subway and bus ads, community newspapers, including different languages; digital: social media with geo-targeted banner ads; and radio. In addition, these funds should be used to create a comprehensive citywide school-based publicity campaign to ensure consistent message distribution to all students and parents through superintendents, principals, assistant principals, parent coordinators, school food staff and other key staff throughout all school communities. Moreover, the focus on parents should include quarterly robocalls, test messages, emails and backpack notices. There should be a push at Parent Teacher conferences, Parent Association/Parent Teacher Association (PTA/PA), Community Education Council (CEC), Chancellor's Parent Advisory Council (CPAC), ECC, District Leadership Team and School Leadership Team meetings.

It is important to note that in switching from the traditional reimbursement model to USL through the USDA's National School Lunch Program Community Eligibility Provision, NYC is bringing in an additional \$38 million in federal and state reimbursements. The \$38 million does not account for the increased reimbursements for the additional 30,000 lunches being served daily. Therefore, the City is leaving money on table by not maximizing USL through a creative and enthusiastic marketing campaign.

We are asking the City Council to correct this oversight by baselining \$3.1 million for marketing USL and other school food initiatives.

Making halal and kosher school meals accessible to NYC public school students

We have heard throughout communities that NYC public school students with dietary restrictions based on religious observance cannot fully participate in the school lunch program. Parents and students throughout NYC have raised this as a major concern. For many students and families, the inability to access school meals has a negative impact on student well-being and creates an added strain on family budgets.

We believe that providing halal and kosher meals for students in NYC public schools is an essential service and a basic access issue. New York City should make sure all students have full access to the benefits of school food.

Final Thoughts

As you know, our public school children face many challenges; however, school lunch should not be one. Baselineing \$3.1 million for school lunch marketing in the budget will provide resources to ensure the DOE has funds dedicated to promoting universal and other school food initiatives in a comprehensive, sustained and creative marketing campaign. And combining universal and the Food Court style serving lines have had a net positive impact on participation rates. The Community Food Advocates stand ready to work with the City Council, which was very influential in advancing "Free School Lunch for All," to continue our partnership on this matter.

Good morning everyone and thank you to the Hunger Free NYC organization for inviting me here today to speak to this Hunger Welfare Committee today Valentine's Day, February 14th

My name is Medhat Garas and I am low income member of Hunger Free NYC's Food Actions Board for the past 5 years. As members we advocate for SNAP benefits for low income individuals who depend on SNAP benefits as well as the generosity of Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens in New York City. During these past 5 years I have volunteered at my local community Soup Kitchen in S.I to help other families put food on their table. During these years I have seen hundreds of people in my community struggle. Coming in to the pantry, to get food for the week and to eat at our Community Soup kitchen is sometimes their only option.

There are too many families and people living in poverty, in shelters, and living in food insecurity, I have seen Seniors Citizens, unemployed people like I myself at the moment, immigrants from

every country and people from every denomination and religious backgrounds as well as veterans, disabled people, and single mothers, single men, and family, food insecurity does not discriminate.

Coming to the pantry just to eat and share food with their family. They all need to eat and they all need to be fed, food Stamps, as well as Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries need to be a well-funded nationwide priority until we end hunger in this country.

Remember just last month how many federal employee were not being paid and were forced to go to pantries just to eat because of the government shutdown. I am here today to let the Welfare Committee and all of those in attendance to know that our low income people, and seniors as well our children and all of those who are vulnerable in our society need to eat, and that SNAP programs as well community food pantries and soup kitchens need to be well funded and need to remain open all year round just to help families in need. No woman, man, or child citizen of the Great State of New York should go hungry.

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

NYC Council, Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education

Honorable Stephen Levin, Chair, Committee on General Welfare
Honorable Inez D. Barron, Chair, Committee on Higher Education

Submitted by:

Ariel Savransky, UJA-Federation of New York
Oversight: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

February 14, 2019

Good morning Chairperson Levin and Chairperson Barron and members of the Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education. 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 18 percent and about 1.2 million people live in food insecure households, with one in five relying on food pantries and soup kitchens. Furthermore, discussion on the Federal level about imposing onerous work requirements on individuals receiving assistance by limiting a state's ability to waive work requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs), 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 continues 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, the Governor included a series of proposals in his Executive Budget presentation aimed at reducing food insecurity across New York State. These include: seeking a waiver from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to operate an Elderly Simplified Application Process (ESAP) to make it easier for older adults to enroll in SNAP; and expanding resources to support screenings for food insecurity in clinical settings as well as referrals to nutrition assistance programs. These proposals will help to expand enrollment in vital nutrition assistance programs and **we urge the Council to work with the Administration to support the implementation of these initiatives.**

The Governor also announced that 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. Once more details are released, 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, 66 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens saw an increase in first time visitors; 63 percent saw an increase in elderly clients and 62 percent saw an increase in families with children in September 2018 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), fresh fruits and vegetables and dairy.³

We would like to thank the Council for working with the Administration to secure an increase of \$8.7 million in the baselined food funding for EFAP in the FY19 budget. **We urge the administration to increase this investment and fund food related costs for EFAP at \$22 million to keep up with rising food costs and increased need from New Yorkers across the City. This represents an additional \$5.1 million investment in these crucial services and would bring the total baselined funding for EFAP to \$25.2 million.**

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.**

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>

² Food Bank for New York City. *Reflections of Hunger from the Front Lines*. November 2018. https://1gqgs400j4830k22r3m4wqg-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/Legislative-Breakfast_Key_Findings_final.pdf

³ Id.

We would like to thank the Council for working with the Administration to invest \$2.8 million in one-time funding in FY19 for Home Delivered Meals for seniors. However, congregate and home delivered meals are funded by the city at a rate of 20 percent less per meal than the national average. Additional investment is needed to increase the rate to be on par with the national average which would allow agencies to provide culturally competent meals, adequately fund staffing and address the unfunded costs of running senior center kitchens so that seniors can eat nutritious, culturally competent meals. Furthermore, 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. **We urge the Council to work with the Administration to invest an additional \$20 million for congregate meals and \$15 million for home-delivered meals to account for these costs and the increased need among this population.**

Lastly, we would like to thank the Council for investing \$1 million in a pilot program in FY19 to provide halal and kosher lunches in four schools throughout the city. **We urge the Council to move forward on the implementation of this initiative so that students that observe these dietary laws can participate in the school lunch program.**

4) Support UJA-Federation's Digital Pantry System and 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 System and two Hubs.

Digital 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 allows 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 three pantries with the goal of rolling it out to an additional 14 pantries in coming years.

We are already beginning to see the digital system having the intended results. The number of people served has increased significantly at each site, especially among families with young children, as they feel more comfortable coming to the pantries. One of our digital pantries has seen usage triple. Wait times are also down and pantries have doubled and even tripled the hours they are open, making them more accessible. Furthermore, the amount of protein being distributed has increased by more than 100 percent across all three pantries and the amount of fresh produce being distributed has increased by 25 percent.

Although this model has been successful at the three pilot sites and there are plans for expansion, our pantries continue to face challenges in procuring 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.

5) Food insecurity on college campuses

Food insecurity among college students is a growing concern with several recent studies suggesting that both two-year and four-year college students are more likely to be food insecure than the general U.S. population. Prevalence of food insecurity on college campuses ranges from 14 percent to 56 percent.⁴ According to the Healthy CUNY study, about 15 percent of students throughout CUNY campuses report they had gone hungry sometimes or often in the past year because they lacked resources to buy food and almost a quarter reported that they had to skip a meal because they could not afford food.⁵ Based on this survey, about 60,000 CUNY students experienced food insecurity. This is especially concerning because food insecurity is associated with lower academic success.

However, in 2015, only 9 percent of CUNY undergraduate students reported using food assistance resources or services in the past 12 months, despite the relatively large prevalence of food insecurity among students. The most common reasons given for not using these resources were that students did not think they were eligible or they did not know where to get assistance. As part of Governor Cuomo's No Student Goes Hungry campaign, there are now food pantries or stigma-free food access for students in need on all State University of New York and most City University of New York campuses. **We urge the Council to work with the Administration to invest in a campaign to ensure that students are aware that these resources exist and are open to all students. We also urge the Council to work with the Administration to ensure that there are culturally competent food options, including Halal and Kosher food, at these pantries.**

Lastly, we urge New York to look into the option of expanding SNAP access for college students. According to SNAP guidelines, an individual who is enrolled at least half-time in an institution of higher education is not eligible to participate in SNAP unless the individual qualifies for a specified exemption including: receiving TANF or disability payments; have paid employment of 20 hours per week or more; get Federal or State-funded work study payments; or be enrolled in an education and training program that is operated by the state or local government.⁶ In 2010, Massachusetts defined this last provision to include most community colleges and state colleges since they provide education and training as defined by USDA rules.⁷

⁴ Dubick J, Mathews B, Cady CL. *Hunger on Campus: The Challenge of Food Insecurity for College Students*. College and University Food Bank Alliance, 2016.

⁵ CUNY SPH Graduate School of Public Health & Health Policy. *Healthy CUNY: Promoting Health for Academic Success: An Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities at City University of New York*. February 2018. http://sph.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Promoting-Health-for-Academic-Success.2.12.18_-FINALpdf-2.13.18.pdf

⁶ Government Publishing Office. *CFR 2009 Title 7*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2009-title7-vol4/pdf/CFR-2009-title7-vol4-sec273-5.pdf>

⁷ Mass Legal Services. Food Stamps/SNAP benefits now available for more community college students. June 2010. <https://www.masslegalservices.org/content/food-stamps-snap-benefits-now-available-more-community-college-students>

Illinois and New Jersey have also redefined this last provision. New York State could potentially do the same and define most income-eligible students at community colleges, CUNY and SUNY as eligible for SNAP due to being enrolled in an education and training program as defined by USDA rules. This could be an important step towards alleviating food insecurity on college campuses.

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

**Testimony of Mr. Joel Berg
Chief Executive Officer, Hunger Free America**

For Hearing “RE: Oversight - Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City”

**Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare jointly
with the Committee on Higher Education**

February 14, 2019

I am Joel Berg, Chief Executive Officer of Hunger Free America, a nationwide direct service and advocacy organization based in New York City. I thank Chairs Levin and Barron and both committees for holding this vital hearing.

Background on Still Sky-High Food Insecurity in New York City and New York State

Hunger Free America’s 2018 report on hunger in New York City and State, based on our analysis of federal food insecurity data, found:

- Hunger decreased in New York City, the New York Metropolitan Region, and New York State over the last six years, but remained higher than before the recession. This is the first time in at least the last two decades that food insecurity in the state, city, and region have demonstrated sustained, multi-year reductions, likely because of increases in wages and employment.
- In New York City, the number of people living in food insecure households – unable to afford an adequate supply of food – decreased by 22 percent during the past six years, declining from 1.4 million people in 2012-2014 to 1.09 million in 2015-2017. However, the number is still 22 percent higher than the level of 0.892 million in 2005-2007, before the recession, and one in eight city residents still struggled against hunger. We must not accept mass deprivation in the wealthiest nation in world history as any sort of “new normal. Hunger is unacceptable in any society, but it’s particularly outrageous in a nation as wealthy as the United States and in a city as wealthy as New York.
- In 2015-17, 12.8 percent of the city’s population suffered from food insecurity, including 18 percent of all children, 8.9 percent of all employed adults, and 10.9 percent of all seniors.
- The Bronx remains New York City’s hungriest borough in every category, with more than one in four Bronx residents (26 percent) experiencing food insecurity. This includes more

than 37 percent of all children, nearly 17 percent of working adults, and almost 24 percent of seniors.

- The number of children living in food insecure households in New York City is not decreasing as quickly as the overall number of food insecure people. While the number of food insecure individuals in New York City decreased by 22 percent from 2012-2014 to 2015-2017, the number of food insecure children (324,432 in 2015-2017) fell by 16 percent. Conversely, the number of food insecure working adults (351,912 in 2015-2017) experienced a larger drop of 26 percent in the same time period, likely due to the minimum wage increase.
- While food insecurity among working adults declined, most likely due to minimum wage increases, the area is still facing a “working hungry epidemic.” The number of adults working but still struggling against hunger in 2015-2017, was 351,912 in New York City, 666,852 in New York State, and 692,937 in the New York Metropolitan region.

Table 1 – Overall Food Insecurity in New York City

	NYC Citywide	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens
2015-17	1,090,936 (12.8%)	290,469 (26.3%)	368,799 (11.5%)	180,326 (11.3%)	202,417 (8.7%)
2012-14	1,403,496 (16.9%)	396,326 (29.6%)	569,659 (20.3%)	227,261 (13.6%)	192,416 (8.4%)
2005-07	892,214 (12.1%)	246,128 (20.6%)	211,988 (9.5%)	179,016 (13.5%)	200,366 (8.8%)

Figure 1 – Overall Food Insecurity by Borough

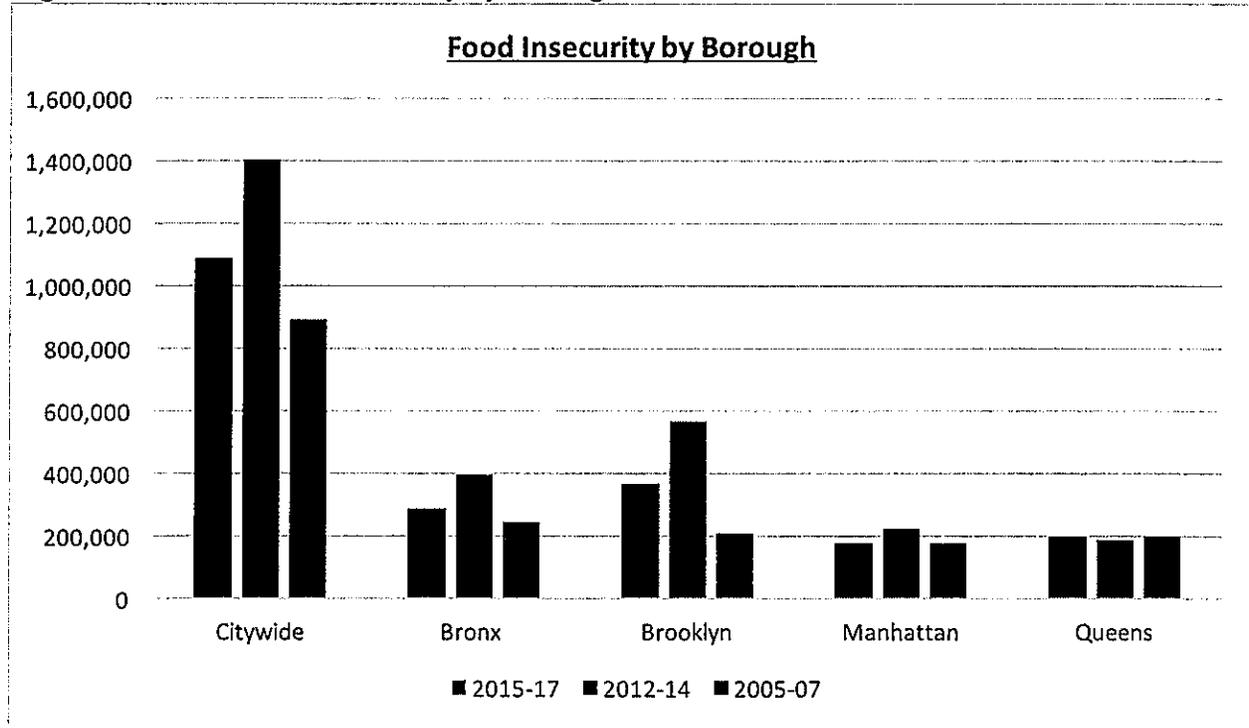


Table 2 – Food Insecurity Among Children in New York City

	NYC Citywide	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens
2015-17	324,432 (18.0%)	95,365 (37.6%)	105,122 (14.2%)	47,761 (17.5%)	56,619 (11.8%)
2012-14	385,004 (21.4%)	100,963 (30.6%)	186,657 (25.2%)	42,006 (17.8%)	74,556 (11.3%)
2005-07	271,689 (15.4%)	92,453 (23.6%)	74,034 (13.4%)	43,922 (20.8%)	54,810 (10.2%)

Figure 2 -- Food Insecurity Among Children by Borough

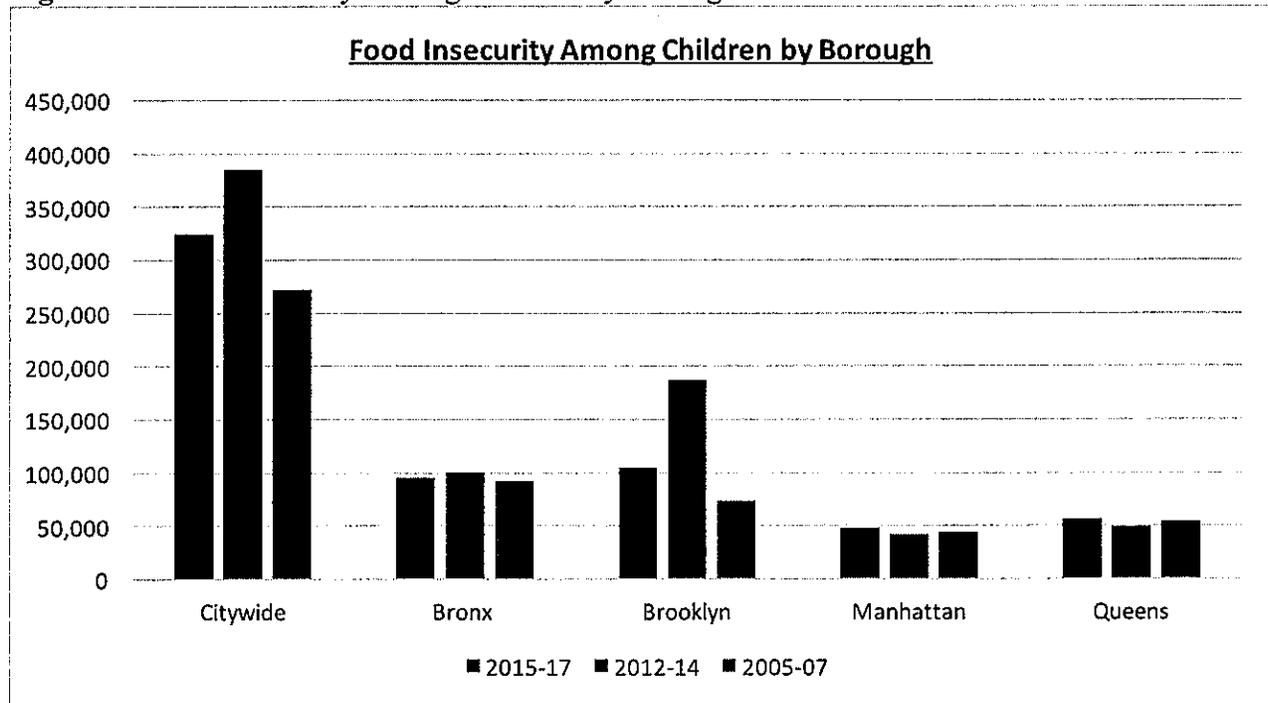


Table 3 – Food Insecurity Among Employed Adults in New York City

	NYC Citywide	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens
2015-17	351,912 (8.9%)	67,896 (16.7%)	113,148 (7.9%)	74,509 (8.4%)	75,505 (6.9%)
2012-14	476,604 (12.7%)	128,796 (27.0%)	175,422 (14.9%)	80,456 (9.3%)	88,015 (7.9%)
2005-07	277,550 (8.3%)	69,606 (15.5%)	65,454 (6.8%)	58,827 (8.3%)	72,045 (6.8%)

Figure 3 – Food Insecurity Among Employed Adults by Borough

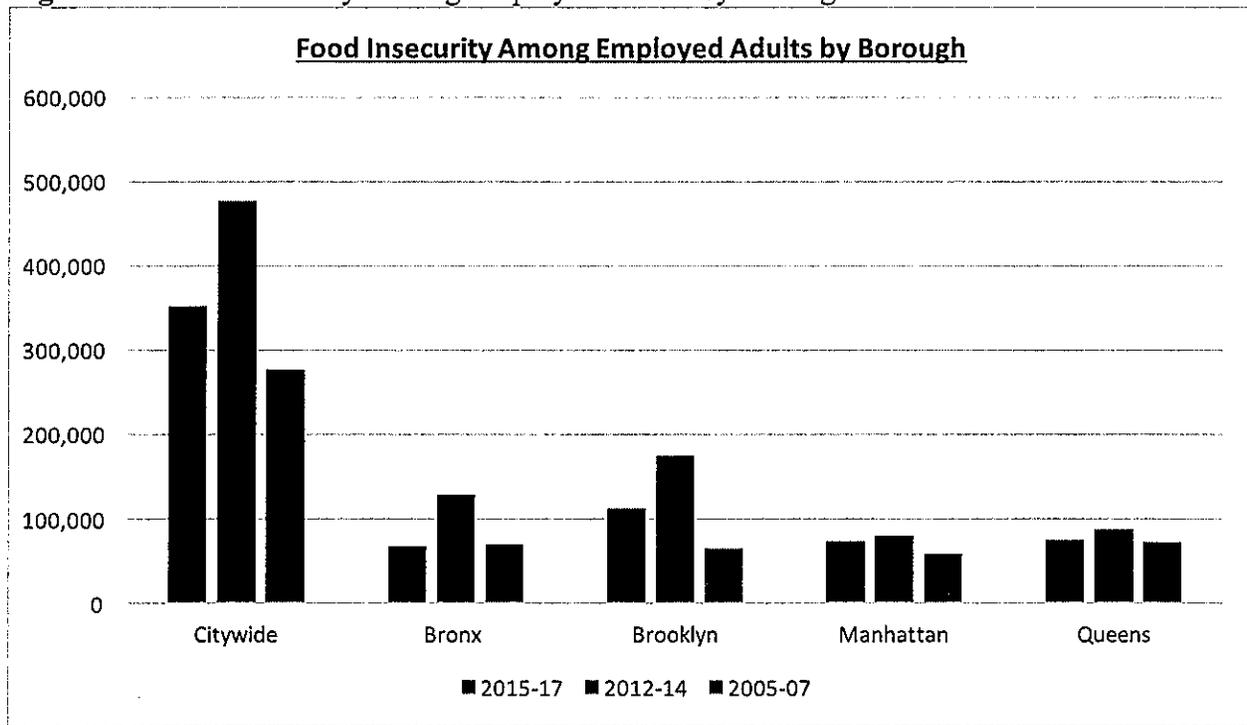
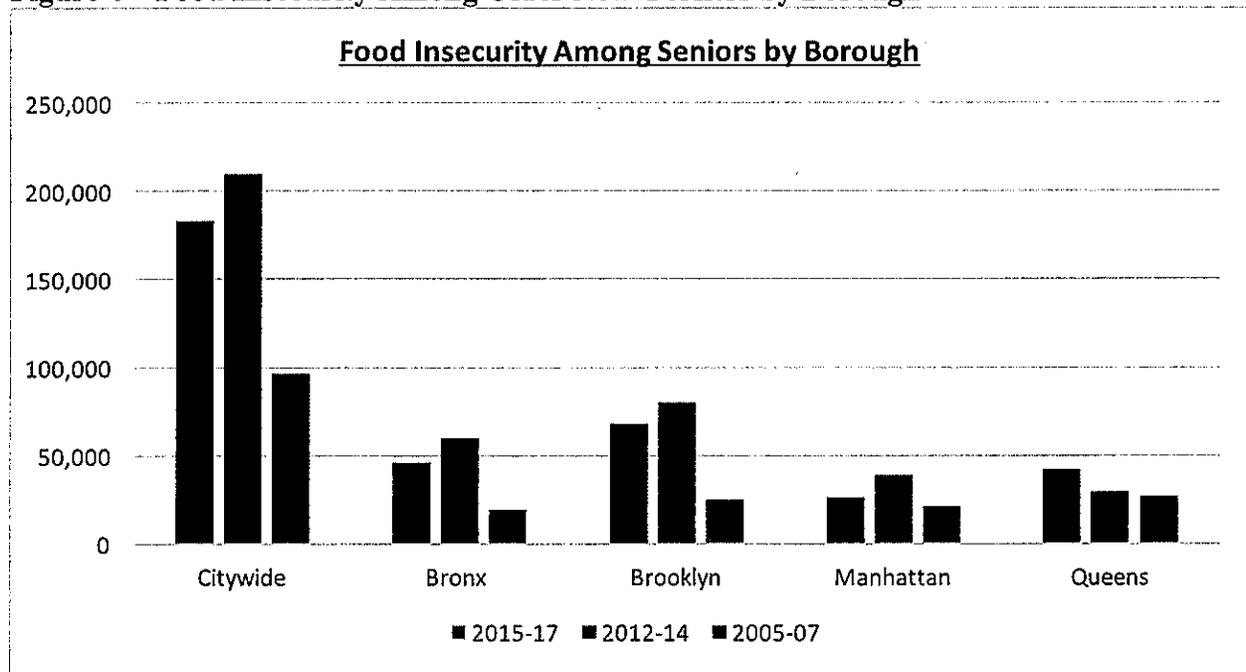


Table 4 – Food Insecurity Among Seniors (60+) in New York City

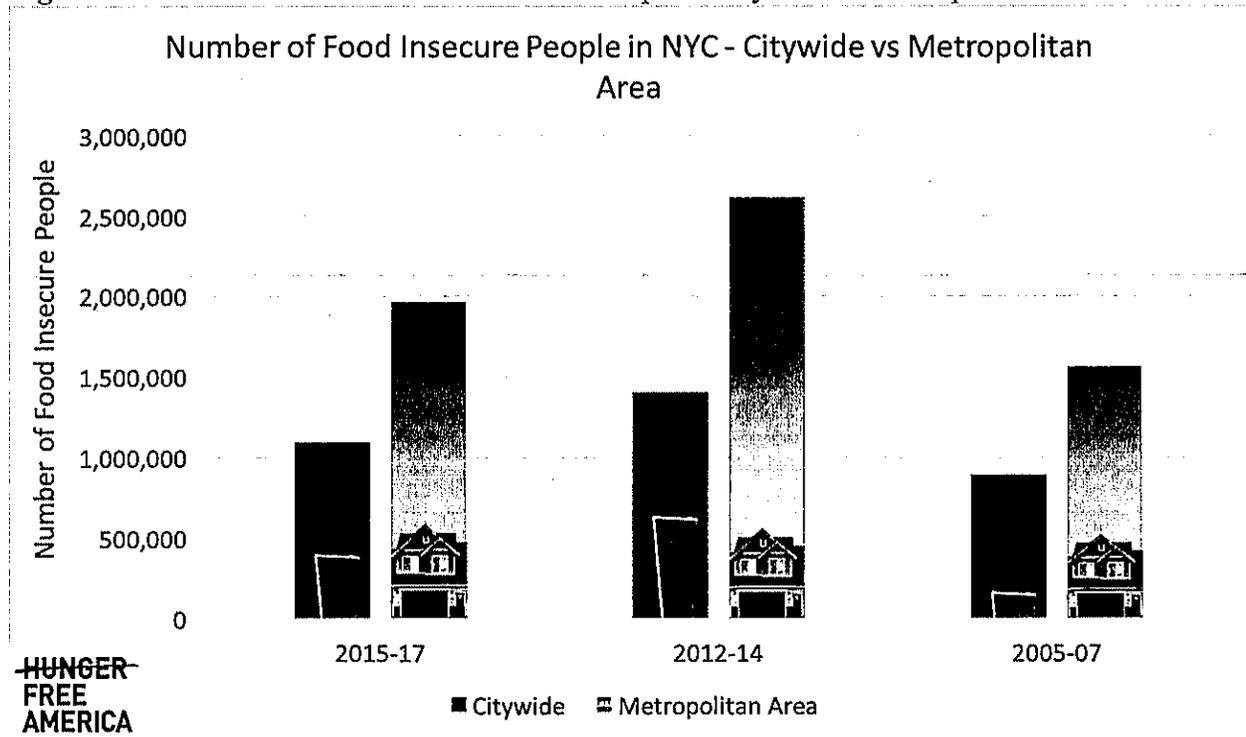
	NYC Citywide	Bronx	Brooklyn	Manhattan	Queens
2015-17	183,290 (10.9%)	45,665 (23.7%)	67,789 (10.7%)	26,530 (9.0%)	42,103 (8.8%)
2012-14	209,892 (14.3%)	59,753 (27.1%)	80,160 (18.5%)	39,248 (11.6%)	29,326 (7.1%)
2005-07	96,609 (8.5%)	19,438 (12.2%)	24,860 (6.9%)	21,004 (9.5%)	27,204 (8.1%)

Figure 4 – Food Insecurity Among Older New Yorkers by Borough



For the first time, we compared hunger in New York City to the entire metropolitan area, which demonstrated that this is a widespread problem in both the city and the suburbs.

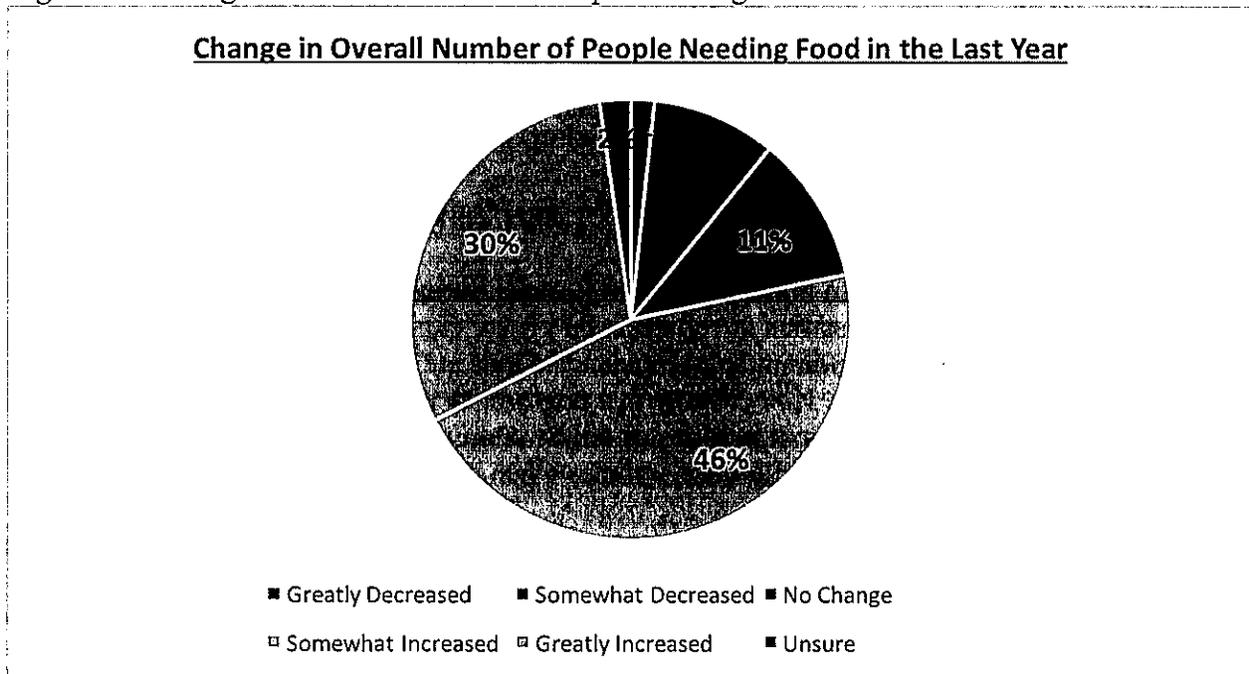
Figure 5 – Overall Number of Food Insecure People – Citywide vs Metropolitan



Hunger Free America’s 2018 survey of New York City’s food pantries and soup kitchens found:

- New York City food pantries and soup kitchens fed five percent more people in 2018 than the previous year, compared to annual increases of six percent in 2017, nine percent in 2016, and five percent in 2015.
- In 2018, 34 percent of pantries and kitchens in New York City were forced to turn people away, reduce their portion sizes, and/or limit their hours of operation due to a lack of resources. In contrast, the proportion of feeding agencies that were forced to reduce food distribution due to lack of resources was 38 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2016.
- When asked if the overall number of people needing food has changed in the last year, 30.3% of pantries and kitchens reported that it had greatly increased, while 45.7% said it had somewhat increased (figure 8). Collectively, 10.3% reported that the number of people needing food had decreased and 10.9% reported no change. When asked about specific populations utilizing their services, 45.7% of kitchens and pantries reported an increase in homeless populations, 35.4% reported an increase in employed individuals, 65.2% reported an increase in families with children, 65.1% reported an increase in senior citizens/elderly, 47.4% reported an increase in immigrants, and 48.57% reported an increase in people who have lost or had reductions in their SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) benefits.

Figure 6 – Change in Overall Number of People Needing Food



It is important to note the persistent increase in demand facing emergency food programs in conjunction with the decrease in overall food insecurity witnessed in recent years. Although food

insecurity is dropping in New York City, it is evident that food pantries and soup kitchens are a strong contributor to this success.

Background on College Hunger

Because student aid often fails to cover true living costs, many students struggle with hunger.

About 60,000 CUNY undergraduates — about one in four — experience food insecurity, according to the CUNY Food Policy Institute. Even students at wealthier post-secondary institutions can't always afford enough food, as evidenced by the fact that students at Columbia University created a campus food pantry.

Nationwide, more than a third of college students struggle against hunger, according to a survey published by Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab. Yet a report by the United States General Accountability Office in 2018 analyzed data from 2016 and concluded that almost two million students who may be eligible for SNAP benefits failed to receive them.

Proposed Federal Public Policy Steps

- 1. Defeat the Trump Administration's proposed "public charge" rule that would make it more difficult for legal immigrants to get food, health care, and housing help.**

On February 25, 1923, my mother, Bejla, two months old, arrived at Ellis Island on the S.S. Minnekahda, along with her two parents, Etel and Levi, fleeing Czortków, Russia.

This was no easy time to arrive here. The New York Times reported that the city had been so cold that the harbor was "ice-clogged" that day and that coal deliveries across the Hudson were made "under great difficulty." The city was also in the throes of a deadly influenza epidemic.

Times were tough, but they were openly embraced by New York and America.

My father's two parents were also immigrants from Eastern Europe. While none of my family members then were formally classified as refugees, they were clearly fleeing the anti-Semitic violence and destitution so common in their homelands. Odds are, had they not escaped, they would have been killed during the Holocaust or in a pogrom, as were many other members of my family who stayed. Thus I, and tens of millions of fellow descendants of immigrants, literally owe our lives to welcoming U.S. immigration policies when our families arrived.

So, few things trouble me more than when recent immigrants – or children or grandchildren of immigrants (such as Donald Trump) – want to take away the welcome mat for immigrants who come after them (except those they marry). That's why I am so outraged that the Trump Administration recently unveiled a proposed administrative rule that would force legal immigrant families to make an unfathomable choice: either turn down temporary food, housing, and health care aid that their family needs to avoid hunger, homelessness, or unnecessary disease or risk losing a path to citizenship that could keep their family together.

Make no mistake about it: If this proposal is implemented as proposed, it will increase poverty – and the worst symptoms of poverty such as hunger, homelessness, and early deaths – in New York City and nationwide.

Hard-working legal immigrant families would lose key assistance for health care, housing, and food. Not only would such a policy be an immoral rejection of America’s welcoming ethos (under which most of our families entered this country), it would be economically counter-productive.

While new immigrants have higher rates of poverty and lower median incomes than native-born Americans, immigrants who have become naturalized citizens have lower rates of poverty and higher median incomes than native-born Americans. Therefore, making it harder for new immigrants to obtain the temporary benefits they need to lift themselves out of poverty as they work will only hamper their ability to enter the economic mainstream of society.

If enacted, the rule would also slam the economy in other, broader ways. Even the proposed rule admits that, if enforced, this cruel new guideline would also harm hospitals, landlords, grocery stores, and farmers by limiting immigrants’ use of Medicaid, nutrition benefits, and federally-funded housing.

President Trump’s administration has implied that, if the rule is implemented, non-profit groups such as Hunger Free America, will be able to pick up the slack. That’s nonsense. Many Americans – particularly middle and low-income ones – already donate very generously to fund anti-poverty work, but if this rule is implemented as proposed, all the charitable efforts in the nation won’t be able to come even close, and we won’t be able to fill the vast gap left by government.

This nation welcomed my family, and tens of millions of others. Now it’s all our jobs to ensure that we continue to welcome those seeking safety, health, and freedom.

2. Defeat the Trump Administration’s proposed rule that would take away food from temporarily unemployed Americans.

A new rule has been proposed by President Trump’s appointees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — the agency that oversees SNAP. According to the administration’s own calculations, the rule could take food away from up to 755,000 of the most vulnerable low-income Americans, taking up to \$15 billion worth of food out of their shopping carts over the next ten years.

The rule limits the ability of states with high levels of unemployment to qualify for waivers of certain rules mandating up to 20 hours of work activities per week for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) to receive SNAP benefits.

The newly proposed, harsh rule would deny food for people who are temporarily unemployed. Since 1996, every state except Delaware has used the waivers currently in place to halt time limits on SNAP. The current rules give states the flexibility needed to support residents during

tough times, and this heartless rule would limit that flexibility. This rule would, ironically, force unemployed people to halt their job search to go to government offices to attest that they are looking for work. It will increase hunger while doing nothing to increase employment.

In 2017, according to USDA, 40 million Americans, (a population larger than the combined populations of Texas and West Virginia, suffered from food insecurity, unable to always afford a sufficient supply of food. Hunger Free America's analysis of USDA data found that 14.76 million American adults in 2015-2017 were working for income but still lived in households that were food insecure. While food insecurity across the country overall – as well as food insecurity among working people – would be far higher if SNAP did not exist, we believe that the single most important goal for improving SNAP should be to expand and strengthen it so that it helps virtually eliminate food insecurity and hunger in America.

It is vital to note that the SNAP program is already incredibly effective in enabling work outside the home. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 90 percent of SNAP households with children had at least one parent working for income the year before and the year after getting SNAP and nearly 75 percent of adults who participate in SNAP in a typical month work either that month or within a year of that month of participation.

As is the case with unemployment insurance, people pay for SNAP with their tax dollars when they are working, and, if they are temporarily unemployed, they then receive back (in the form of benefits) a bit of what they have previously paid into the system.

Moreover, the vast majority of Americans who rely on SNAP are children, older Americans, people with disabilities, and working people. Only about 7 percent of SNAP recipients are classified as Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) who are not currently working. Many people who are in this category are veterans, some of whom have undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorders.

So we note the great irony that, rather than focusing on ending food insecurity for the 40 million Americans who suffer from it, the Trump Administration is hyper-focused on taking food away from the seven percent of the caseloads that are ABAWDs.

The best way for the executive and legislative branches to slash U.S. food insecurity and increase paid employment is to create more jobs and ensure that these jobs pay a living wage. But for the foreseeable future in the U.S., there will not be enough living wage jobs. Additionally, increased wages alone will not end hunger for most children, older Americans, people with disabilities, or people looking for work. Moreover, we believe no American of any age or status should go hungry.

Some people judge the success of anti-poverty programs solely on whether the use of those programs goes down over time. Such a limited metric makes little sense and is tantamount to judging the success of a hospital solely by how many people leave the hospital, without differentiating between how many people leave the hospital cured, equally ill, or dead. A reduction in the SNAP caseload should only be considered a success if it corresponds to a reduction in food insecurity and hunger in America. That principle should apply to a reduction in

the ABAWD caseload as well, which should only be judged successful if hunger decreases among the ABAWD population.

Limiting ABAWD waivers would increase hunger and fail to increase employment. It would be the wrong solution to the wrong problem. Such a change would be based on the false assumption that low-income Americans don't want to work, so they need to be forced to do so. Yet the vast majority of low-income adults – including SNAP participants – are regular workers. Most proposals to limit ABAWD waivers do not include an extra penny for job creation, job training, or job creation; trying to place more people in employment without spending more money on employment would be as ineffective as trying to solve drought without more water. Eliminating waivers won't create jobs; doing so would mostly increase bureaucracy and paperwork by forcing SNAP participants to take time out of their jobs or their job searches to report to a SNAP agency that they are working or looking for work, and then force states and counties to record and report those activities. Furthermore, under the Trump Administration, USDA has repeatedly said it wants to increase the flexibility that states have to administer SNAP; it is wholly inconsistent to then reduce flexibility that states now have to aid SNAP participants. The executive and legislative branches should work together to eliminate special ABAWD requirements entirely and use the administrative funds saved to support concrete job creation activities.

3. Congress should both expand SNAP eligibility and increase benefit allotments for SNAP by adopting the moderate cost food plan.

Too many food insecure families remain legally ineligible for SNAP. The current average benefits, equaling \$1.37 per meal, are far too meager to fund sufficient, nutritious food.

4. Congress should remove the counter-productive requirement that full-time college students work 20 hours per week in addition to their studies in order to qualify for SNAP.

Given that obtaining a post-secondary degree is one of the best ways to reduce poverty, and thus hunger, federal law should make it far easier for low-income post-secondary students to obtain SNAP.

5. Congress should make it easier for low-income, active duty military families to receive SNAP.

Military housing allowances should no longer count against SNAP eligibility for active duty military families.

6. Congress should pass a Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill that significantly reduces child hunger.

The bill should:

- a) Make in-classroom school breakfasts universal, free, paperless and mandatory.
- b) Make school lunches universal and free.
- c) End the congregate feeding program for summer meals.
- d) Dramatically expand efforts that increase funding on EBT cards for families with children over the summer.
- e) Make the WIC Program for pregnant and small children an entitlement available to all who need it.
- f) Increase The Emergency Food Assistance Program food and funding for food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

7. Congress should authorize state and local pilot projects to create H.O.P.E accounts to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally, as proposed by Hunger Free America.

See <https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/REPORT-Fighting-Poverty-with-HOPE.pdf> Instead of a vast army of government and nonprofit caseworkers in charge of micromanaging the lives of low-income people, low-income Americans would become, in effect, their own case managers.

8. Congress should raise the national minimum wage and index future raises to the rate of inflation.

It is simply outrageous that, according to Hunger Free America's analysis of USDA data, 14.76 million American adults in 2015-2017 were working for income but still lived in households that were food insecure.

9. Congress should create a national targeted jobs program focused on repairing our infrastructure, boosting energy independence (a Green New Deal), and bringing broadband service to isolated rural towns and urban neighborhoods.

This program should combine real work with 21st century job training and apprenticeships to ensure that all created jobs are long-term and pay a living-wage.

10. Congress should fund a dramatic expansion of the AmeriCorps national service program to both fill unmet societal needs and make post-secondary education attainable for everyone willing to serve.

AmeriCorps provides modest living allowances and tuition assistance to Americans who perform significant and structured community service by responding to natural disasters, boosting education, bolstering public safety, fighting poverty, improving health, helping the environment, and protecting homeland security. Any middle-class or low-income student should be able to pay their entire way through college by successfully serving in AmeriCorps.

11. Congress should enact an employee profit-sharing and employee ownership initiative to make it easier for workers to have a real stake in the success of their workplaces.

Trickle-down, crony capitalism is failing our city and our society. It's time to restore opportunity capitalism, America's post-war ethos, under which working families prospered and people in poverty were able to climb into the middle-class.

Proposed New York State Public Policy Steps

1. The State should aggressively and universally implement the new law requiring that all high-needs schools in the state serve breakfast in the classroom.

According to a new report by the Food Research Action Center, during the 2017-2018 school year, only 51.8 percent of children who received school lunch statewide received school breakfasts, giving NYS the 36th worst participation rate in the nation. See: <http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/school-breakfast-scorecard-sy-2017-2018.pdf>

Especially given that all the breakfasts are funded by the federal government, rapid school breakfast is the smartest, most cost-effective way to reduce child hunger statewide and citywide.

2. The State should take concrete steps to make it easier for post-secondary school students to receive SNAP.

Campus food pantries should be the last – not the first – resort in fighting college student hunger. Since food pantry funding almost always comes out of limited, discretionary funding sources, any additional food and funds that would go to a college food pantry would likely come out of budgets for other vital efforts. Moreover, even the best food pantries and soup kitchens nationwide are not a great solution for hunger. They are humiliating, often have limited supplies of food, and offer recipients little or no choice. College students who live in dorms may not always have proper facilities to use them and those who commute would be forced to carry heavy food objects long distances.

Thus, when it comes to student hunger, New York State and City should focus first and foremost on making it easier for students to get SNAP benefits, which can be used at virtually any food store and most farmers markets. Here are four reasons why this is an even better approach:

- a) SNAP benefits are paid entirely for by feds, as opposed to campus pantries, which are paid for by the state. Given the strict state budget cap, it is very difficult to make state funds available for even vital purposes. Given that reality, if a function can be funded by mostly the federal government instead of the state, we should certainly do everything to get the federal government to fund that function.
- b) If students get SNAP they can buy any food they need and will not be restricted by what pantries happen to have for them.
- c) Many students have long commutes. It would be much easier for them to buy food with SNAP near where they live than have to lug pantry food back home from campuses.
- d) SNAP purchases bolster employment in the local food retail sector and at farmers markets, while food pantries don't aid job creation or business at farmers markets.

There are two ways for the state to make it easier for students to obtain SNAP. The first way, which New Jersey, Illinois, and Massachusetts have already done, is for New York State to make it easy for many community college students to access SNAP by defining essentially all community colleges as job training centers, as defined by SNAP regulations. Doing so wouldn't cost the state a penny other than the staff time of existing OTDA employees; furthermore, the Governor (though OTDA) has the unilateral authority to do this without the approval of either the state legislature or the federal government.

Normally, under federal law, college students usually can't get SNAP unless they work 20 hours or more on top of their studies, an impossibility for most full-time students. Here are the USDA rules that apply to SNAP eligibility for post-secondary students. See Section 273.5:
<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2009-title7-vol4/pdf/CFR-2009-title7-vol4-sec273-5.pdf>

In general, college students attending school at least half time or more cannot obtain SNAP, no matter their income; however, there are many key exceptions. Here are a few of the key exceptions, as explained in that regulation, which means that students in these categories who are otherwise eligible by income and immigration status **can** obtain SNAP. These students:

- Are receiving TANF or disability payments.
- Have paid employment of 20 hours per week or more.
- Get federal or state-funded work study payments. (Note that this provision does not include a minimum number of hours of work – thus, even an hour of work a week could make a student SNAP eligible.)

- Are participating in a State or federally-financed work study program during the regular school year.
- Are enrolled in an education and training program that is operated by a state or local government.

This last provision is key to what New York State should implement. Massachusetts has defined that provision to include most community colleges and state colleges since they provide education and training as defined by the USDA rules:

<https://www.masslegalservices.org/content/food-stamps-snap-benefits-now-available-more-community-college-students>

Therefore, New York State could potentially define most income-eligible students at community colleges, CUNY schools, and SUNY schools as eligible for SNAP under this provision. The state of Pennsylvania did the same. See this link for more details: <https://clsphila.org/learn-about-issues/need-help-paying-food-most-community-college-students-can-now-get-snap-food>

Here is the state's implementation

memo: http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/snap/c_271849.pdf

Illinois also did the same:

<http://foxillinois.com/news/local/40000-illinois-college-students-eligible-for-snap-benefits>

Just a few weeks ago, the State of New Jersey did the same:

<http://fios1news.com/news/new-jersey/health/murphy-administration-announces-expansion-to-snap-program-for-college-students/page/11/>

The State can also do a much better job of utilizing work-study slots to enable students to get SNAP. As noted in the regulation above, if a student works so much as one hour per week in a work-study job, that hour automatically meets the student work requirements for SNAP. Thus, for example, if a campus had funding for 100 hours of work study and allocated that to ten students working ten hours each, that could make SNAP available to ten times as many students as it would have if it allocated all 100 hours to one student.

Beyond SNAP, the State and City could fund public institutions, and press private ones, to provide free meals plans to all low-income students. For instance, my alma mater, Columbia University, has an endowment of more than \$10 billion — larger than the GDP of about 50 nations on the planet. Columbia's president receives compensation ten times that of the President of the United States. It is scandalous that Columbia pays some of its workers so little that they go hungry and gives low-income students so little in financial assistance that they go hungry. Institutions that wealthy should be shamed into immediately using their massive resources to end hunger for both their students and workers.

3. **The State should implement a state-level H.O.P.E. pilot project, as detailed above, to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally.**
4. **The Legislature should end the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers and make overall minimum wages automatic as the cost-of-living increases.**
5. **The Legislature should increase funding for both the NOEP SNAP outreach program and the HPNAP Program, which funds food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries.**
6. **If the Trump Administration does restrict SNAP access for immigrants and/or ABAWDs, the Legislature should authorize and fund a State program to provide grocery funding for such excluded people through EBT cards.**
7. **The State should advocate for all the federal policy steps proposed above.**

Proposed New York City Public Policy Steps

- 1) **NYC DOE should aggressively and universally implement the new law requiring that all high-needs schools in the state serve breakfast in the classroom.**

Last year, when DOE School Food briefed us on the progress of in-classroom breakfast roll-out, we were concerned that they were giving so many schools and classes exemptions from in-classroom breakfasts that they were not meeting Mayor Bill de Blasio's commitment to ensure breakfast in the classroom for all elementary school kids and to start rolling it out in middle schools.

A new report by the Food Research and Action Center – “School Breakfast: Making it Work in Large School Districts, 2017--2018 School Year” (<http://www.frac.org/wp-content/uploads/school-breakfast-large-school-districts-sy-2017-2018.pdf>) confirms our concerns.

According to the report, in the 2017-2018 school year, even though all breakfasts are federally-funded, only 44.6 percent of NYC DOE kids who received school lunches also got school breakfasts, the same low ratio as in the 2016-2017 school year. NYC is in 68th place out of 76 large school districts in terms of breakfast participation. It's bad enough when we lose to Boston or Philadelphia in sports; it's truly unforgivable when we lose to them in feeding our hungry children.

Now that DOE has new leadership and now that state law mandates in-classroom breakfasts in high-needs schools, we are hopeful that significant progress on breakfast can be achieved rapidly in New York City.

2) NYC DOE should serve school lunches at appropriate lunch hours.

City Limits recently reported: “Throughout the city, public schools stretch the concept of ‘lunch,’ sending students to the cafeteria as early as 9 a.m. The extremely early lunches trouble staff, parents and advocates and seem to disproportionately occur at schools in low-income communities.”

When lunch hours are so off, students are far less likely to eat a healthy breakfast.

3) The City should implement a city-level H.O.P.E. pilot project, as detailed above, to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally.

4) The Mayor and Council should increase funding to nonprofits for SNAP outreach, EFAP, and other vital anti-hunger and anti-poverty tasks.

Such SNAP outreach money is matched by the federal government. Funding should be prioritized for efforts that aid ABAWDS, older New Yorkers, immigrants, working families, and post-secondary students.

5) The Mayor and Council should fund a pilot project to pay for meals for parents at summer meals sites at which the federal government pays for meals for children.

6) As detailed above, CUNY should better direct work-study slots to make more students eligible for SNAP.

7) The City Council should advocate for all the federal and state policy steps proposed above.

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Testimony: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
Dr. Maggie Dickinson, Guttman Community College, CUNY

I am here today to talk about the impact of food insecurity on college students at CUNY. The Healthy CUNY initiative has been keeping data on food insecurity at CUNY since 2011. Based on this data, we know that:

- 60,000 of our students (about 1 in 4) experience food insecurity
- Food insecurity is more common for community college students, students from low-income households, and our Black and Latino students
- Food insecurity is a debilitating symptom of poverty – one that makes it hard for students to reach their academic potential

My hope is that policy makers and CUNY students, faculty, staff and administration can work together to end food insecurity among CUNY students by 2023. Doing so will require coordinated efforts to address our students' basic needs. Along with a group of colleagues at the CUNY Food Policy Institute, I co-authored a guide for faculty and staff to end food insecurity (available at <http://www.cunyurbanfoodpolicy.org/publications/>), but our efforts alone will not be enough.

One important area of collaboration are efforts to make SNAP and other forms of assistance more easily accessible for CUNY students and their families. We do not have data on the percentage of CUNY students who are eligible for SNAP or on how many of those eligible students are enrolled in the program. However, national studies and our own data indicate that the number of food insecure college students who access SNAP and other forms of food assistance is very low.

A recent GAO report estimated that almost 2 million at-risk students who were potentially eligible for SNAP (Food Stamps) were not currently receiving benefits[1]. One study estimated that 18% of college students are eligible for SNAP nationally, but only 3% are enrolled [2]. Other studies have estimated that less than 30 percent of food-insecure community college students receive food stamps and only 4 percent received cash assistance [3]. Healthy CUNY's data shows that only 17% of food insecure CUNY students accessed any kind of food assistance, including SNAP. We can do better than this.

We need close partnerships between CUNY's Single Stop offices and HRA to determine the barriers to enrollment in SNAP for CUNY students. We also need to make it easier for students to access cash assistance and to allow their participation in college to count for their federal work requirements. I understand the enormous cultural shift that is required to make HRA offices more welcoming to our students and to all New Yorkers in need of assistance. Low income New Yorkers encounter an entrenched culture of distrust and dismissal when they apply for benefits. But when our students do not apply for SNAP or other forms of assistance because of the bureaucratic obstacles or the expectation of poor treatment, we undermine our investment in their education. Students need economic support to meet their living expenses while they are in school and we need to maximize our use of the resources available to do so.

We also know that increasing SNAP enrollment will not solve the issue of food insecurity on our campuses. Many students are ineligible for SNAP because they are undocumented or they live in households whose incomes are too high to qualify for food assistance, but too low to afford food, rent, books and transportation. To fully address food insecurity at CUNY, we need to invest in making healthy, affordable meals available on campus. We imagine campuses where all students have access to a healthy, filling meal at a nominal cost in order to support their learning. CUNY could be a national leader in addressing campus food insecurity by working with campus food services to expand access to affordable meals on campus. Students who cannot afford the nominal fee should be subsidized through student support services.

Eradicating food insecurity on our campuses is about making a real commitment to student success. As an Assistant Professor at CUNY's Guttman Community College, I see students drop out or fall behind because of food and housing insecurity every semester. These are students who are smart, motivated and represent the very best New York has to offer. But their economic situations often mean they are working multiple jobs, attending school full time and taking care of children or other family members. My students are extraordinary. But they shouldn't have to be. They should not have to struggle so hard to obtain an education and to succeed despite the many hardships they face.

We need to invest in CUNY to address our students' basic needs. I want my students to be able to study and learn without the worry of where their next meal is coming from or what they will do if they lose their housing. Food security is a good place to start. Eradicating food insecurity on our campuses by 2023 is an achievable goal and a worthy one. Our students deserve a system that is designed for them to succeed.

1. GAO. Food Insecurity: Better Information Could Help Eligible College Students Access Federal Food Assistance Benefits. Washington, D.C.: United States Government Accountability Office, 2019.
2. Allison T. Rethinking SNAP Benefits for College Students: Young Invincibles, 2018.
3. Goldrick-Rab S, Richardson J, Hernandez A. Hungry and Homeless in College: Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017.



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**Testimony of John Krinsky, Professor of Political Science, to the Joint Hearing on
Food Insecurity of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees, New
York City Council, February 14, 2019**

Good morning members of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees. My name is John Krinsky, and I'm a professor of political science at the City College of New York and the CUNY Graduate Center. Thank you for holding this hearing today.

My testimony this morning is a brief summary of research we did in an introductory methods class I taught last semester. We did a survey of City College students that focused on housing and food insecurity. Our findings largely mirror those found by Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab of Rutgers and Dr. Nicholas Freudenberg of the CUNY Graduate Center, who have done CUNY-wide studies of the same issues.

My class surveyed 516 students over the course of a week. The survey was a random-encounter survey, administered in-person, at strategic points of gathering at CCNY. According to standard statistical methods, our sample size allows us to draw conclusions at the 95 percent confidence level to within five percentage points on either side of our findings. Our sample was stratified well, which means that it was within these limits in comparison to other data compiled by the CCNY Office of Institutional Research; we only significantly oversampled New York City residents among the student body.

Briefly, we had several key findings:

46.6 percent reported skipping meals or cutting back on food for lack of money during their college careers; again, this means that we're 95 percent certain that between 41.6 and 51.6 percent of CCNY students cut back on food or skip meals because of lack of funds. Translated into actual people, this is between 6,864 and 8,514 City College students alone who are food insecure.

24.8 percent reported choosing between food and paying bills during their college careers, which discounts those who either have had no choice about the matter or who don't pay other bills.

As a professor, it's sobering to know that up to half of any class may be coming to class hungry or making the choice between keeping the lights on and eating. Certainly, students often feel as if these issues—and the housing issues I will describe in a moment—affect their grades and ability to be *good students*. If we are interested in making CUNY the world-class institution it can and should be, we cannot ignore this. This, of course, is also a message that needs to be heard in Albany.

On housing, we found that 28.4 percent of our total number of respondents reported having had one of the following four conditions during college:

- Have you moved more than twice in a month during your academic career? 82/511
- Have you crashed with a friend or family member for lack of a place to go? 68/512
- Have you stayed overnight at college (not in a dorm) for lack of a place to go? 73/511
- Have you stayed in a homeless shelter while you were in college? 9/512

These are important markers of being homeless, with only the most obvious—staying in shelter—registering with official statistics as “homeless.” It gives a measure of the depth of the problem we face, even net of the current population of our shelters.

If we add to these numbers students who report either having had trouble paying rent or having been forced out of their housing due to personal conflicts, domestic violence, or other causes, we arrive at a figure of over 42.7 percent or 221 of 516 students who report significant housing insecurity. This is nearly the same figure as Prof. Freudenberg of CUNY found CUNY-wide. When we asked not about trouble paying rent but rather, how much of their income students spend on rent, we found that 60 percent paid more than 30 percent of their incomes on rent (105 of the 175 students who did not answer that the amount they paid was not applicable or left the question blank).

It is important to emphasize, as well, three things. First, that CCNY has a fund for eviction prevention that students may access once. Second, that CCNY has a food pantry, thanks to the current administration and the CCNY chapter of NYPIRG. Both resources are, compared to the need, evidently significantly underutilized. At the same time, it is doubtful that were they used at the level of need they would be anything close to adequate; they are necessary band-aids but band-aids, nonetheless, on a much deeper wound.

Second, our students come from *all over the city* and experience food and housing insecurity *all over the city*. Indeed, students who lived in West Queens and Hunts Point ZIP codes had the *highest* rate of homelessness episodes in our sample – nearly two-thirds did – while nearly half the student respondents from Central Harlem, North Queens, Southeast Queens and Jamaica ZIP codes did (though the numbers are too small to draw firm conclusions).

Third, the majority of our students—nearly 2/3—work, mostly part-time, and another 20 percent are unemployed and looking for work. 78 percent of our respondents lived with their parents. It is clear that neither work nor living with parents had a significant protective effect against food and housing insecurity. 113, or 76 percent of the students experiencing homelessness episodes lived with their parents. The same proportion of students who live with their parents as those who do not experienced homelessness episodes.

Overall, the unduplicated count of students experiencing housing *or* food insecurity is 318/516 (61.5 percent)

Testimony of the CUNY Food Security Advocates and CUNY students before
The Committees on Higher Education jointly with the Committee on General Welfare
Food Insecurity among College Students at the City University of New York
February 14, 2019

Good morning, Council Members of the Committee on Higher Education and the Committee on General Welfare. I am thankful for your time and attention to this matter today, and I look forward to working with you in addressing this.

My name is Karla Ignacio, and I am a Food Security Advocate from Hostos Community College. Last year, I worked with the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute on an initiative called the CUNY Food Security Advocates Project that empowered me to share resources available to combat food insecurity at my campus with other students. Before I joined this project, I had been working at Single Stop, a program that addresses food insecurity by providing students with many resources on and off-campus. Single Stop helps hungry students by providing a direct line to apply for SNAP, also known as food stamps, and at Hostos our Single Stop office also provides access to the campus food pantry and food pantries off campus. This is done on campus to help students succeed.

Together, with other student food security advocates, we designed campaigns to help other students to know the importance of having food security and let them know about the resources available on campus. In partnership with the Food Studies Program at Hostos, we grew our own vegetables using hydroponic towers and gave the produce to the students at no cost. In the South Bronx, we are fortunate to have a farmers market near our campus, and with the help of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene we created and implemented farmers market tours and distributed Health Bucks, which are \$2 coupons that can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at all NYC farmers markets. I was able to do this in the summer, and Food Studies students kept both of these activities going through the fall. Through my work on this project, students were able to access healthy alternatives to the processed foods that saturate my campus community and our neighborhoods.

During my time at Hostos, I never experienced hunger. I was part of multiple clubs, knew many people on campus, and I did a work-study program that allowed me to work during the times that I did not have class. On a regular day, I was offered food at least 4 times. I was involved in organizing events on campus where food was available, people brought food to my work-space, and my friends invited me to lunch. On top of that, I worked at Single Stop with a food pantry at my disposition in case I had an emergency and needed a snack. However, I know that my experience with food at Hostos is not the same as most CUNY students. Because of my network, I was able to feel food secure. Your typical CUNY student usually does not have that, and is more likely to experience food insecurity as a result.

One student writes:

“At school, healthy options are non-existent. If I have not had the opportunity to go grocery shopping and bring my own food from home, finding food to eat throughout the day is a challenge. More often than not, I only eat once a day, either in the beginning at morning time, or



late in the evening after I finish work. Even though I am able to carry on throughout the day and accomplish what needs to be done, I can often get irritable and cranky because I am running on an empty stomach. It should not be that huge of a challenge to have access to healthy and affordable options on campus or in the Bronx.”

There is a lack of healthy food access in our neighborhood, Mott Haven, where Hostos is located. Fast food outlets surround us, where the cheap options are often unhealthy foods. Our school has over 7,000 students on campus each semester, and many do not have the financial resources needed to purchase healthy food, have the time to prepare it, or the luxury of a break to run out and get food between classes. Students in a rush to get to class often eat these foods because they are what is most available, and increase the possibility of having poor health later on in life.

In 2011, a report titled “Food Insecurity at CUNY: Results from a Survey of CUNY Undergraduate Students,” found that 2 in 5 CUNY students or 39.2% had experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months. The same study also found a correlation between health problems and food insecurity, finding that students who reported their health as “fair or poor” were 1.5 times more likely to experience food insecurity than their peers who reported good health. Although a large percentage of students were found to be food insecure, only a small percentage utilize public assistance programs. Only 7.2% of the surveyed students had utilized a food assistance program in the last 12 month, and only 6.4% of them received SNAP. A 2018 survey found that food insecurity was now experienced by 1 in 5 students, a significant drop. But that’s still too many college students to be hungry.

We would like to point out that food insecurity is not unique to CUNY campuses. The Wisconsin HOPE Lab has published several studies, one as recently as 2018 called “Still Hungry and Homeless,” which reported 42% of community college students are food insecure across 66 community colleges. A 2016 study titled “Hunger on Campus” published by a joint efforts of 4 campus-based organizations found food insecurity among college students at a rate of 48%, similar to CUNY’s slightly smaller 39% of students. Nationally, it is reported that 25% of food insecure students in report using SNAP (Hunger on Campus), only 6% of food insecure **CUNY** students use SNAP.

Nationally, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is a federal program that helps supplement the diets of low-income Americans, including elderly people, by providing them with emergency food assistance at no cost. Many CUNY campus pantries are eligible to apply for TEFAP assistance. We also have the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), a program that provides money to hungry families for the purchase of food. SNAP registration through Single Stop is available on only 8 of CUNY’s 25 campuses.

In New York State Governor Cuomo established the “No Student Goes Hungry,” program, a five-point plan to address food insecurity among public school students in New York State, from K-12 to college students. The fifth point addressed food insecurity among students in New York’s public colleges, requiring both CUNY and SUNY Schools to provide either a food pantry on campus, or an alternative, shame-free form of food distribution. While all these initiatives take important steps forward, a few



challenges remain. Governor Cuomo proposed allocating one million dollars to launch New York's anti-hunger campaign—but experts predict that more is needed and that estimate could be closer to \$55 million annually.

To effectively reduce the food insecurity of college students in NYC, the CUNY Food Security Advocates and the Food Studies students at Hostos drafted the following recommendations:

- Establish Single Stop centers on all CUNY campuses, and strengthen Single Stop in CUNY community college schools, through more funding and support for promotion of the program.
- Provide classes and workshops about food insecurity around CUNY Campuses and non-food related classes.
- Provide Health Bucks at the Student Health Centers or use them as an incentive to get more students to come to Single Stop.
- Provide a substantial amount of meal vouchers for students in extreme food insecurity.
- Revamp the criteria for food available across CUNY schools and require the school's cafeteria to provide more healthy options, low cost meals and options to accommodate students' food restrictions, such as veganism and gluten allergies.

We, therefore, ask that City Council and the Committees on Higher Education and General Welfare consider:

- Putting more financial resources into Single Stop. We think this will directly increase CUNY student SNAP registration.
- Providing tuition packages with meal plans included for CUNY students.
- Creating service-based jobs or activities where students could help the campus, and in turn, earn free meals on campus through campus dining.
- Supporting CUNY schools that want to start or expand garden or farming programs to grow food on campus. At Hostos, our hydroponic towers get the whole campus excited about eating fresh food. We think this would help every campus support the health of all CUNY students.

Thank you all for your time and attention today.



2018 FOOD SECURITY RESOURCES

Single Stop

Single Stop provides students a "one stop shop" center to access free resources such as SNAP benefits, financial counseling, legal and tax services.



Food Pantries

Food pantries provide enrolled students and their families access to free nutritional food items conveniently located on campus.



Campus Counseling

Counseling centers provide students with confidential one-on-one support sessions with professionally trained staff members.



Fresh Food On Campus

Fresh Food Box or Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs provide students with affordable, healthy organic produce.



Cafeteria Vouchers

Vouchers offer eligible students the food assistance they need by subsidizing their daily meals.



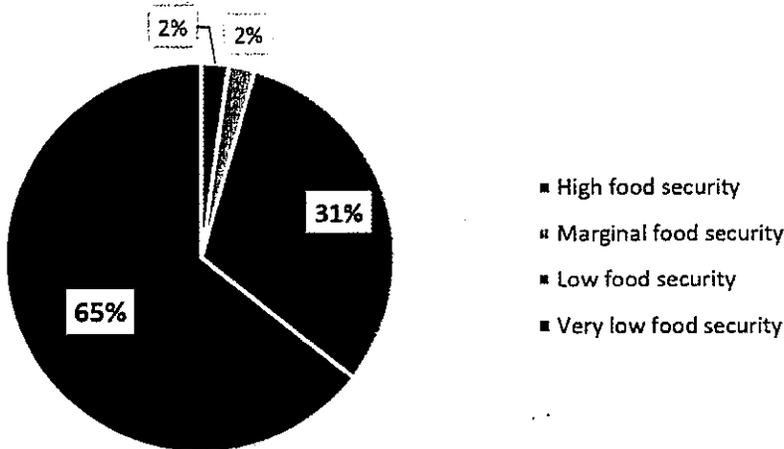
Testimony of Dr. Tanzina Ahmed (CUNY Kingsborough Community College)

New York City Council on Oversight: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City (2/14/19)
Held by the Committees of General Welfare & Higher Education

I am Dr. Tanzina Ahmed of CUNY Kingsborough Community College. With the support of my colleagues, including Dr. Rositsa Ilieva of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute and Anita Yan of CUNY Brooklyn College, I will testify today on how food insecurity impacts community college students in New York City. I thank the Committees on General Welfare and on Higher Education for giving me the opportunity to highlight this important issue.

Community colleges are unique institutions that allow many underprivileged, first-generation, and minority students a gateway to higher education. However, students in community college are vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity – that is, they often find it difficult to get access to healthy, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. One recent study (Goldrick-Rab and colleagues, 2018) surveyed 33,000 community college students nationwide and found that two out of three students had trouble finding appropriate food on a regular basis. These numbers may be even higher for students attending community colleges in New York City.

Student Participants Who Are Food Insecure



In 2017, we examined a CUNY community college in the Bronx. We surveyed 278 predominantly minority and low-income students and found that over 80% reported being food insecure on a regular or semi-regular basis – an epidemic of hunger that may damage students’ ability to excel in their classes and even stay enrolled in college, thus reducing their chances of upward mobility.

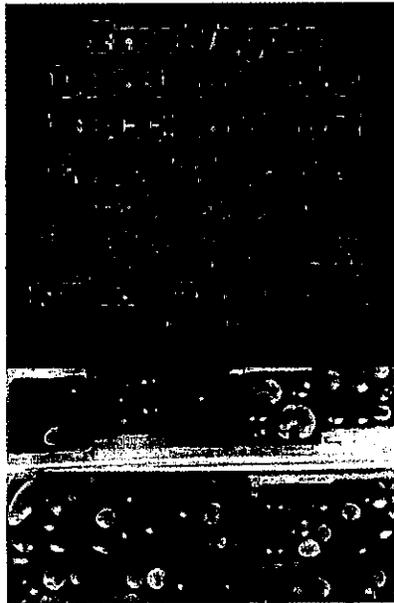
(See chart on left for illustrative figure based on a sub-sample of 50 students).

Additionally, students’ high levels of food insecurity affected their academic progress in community college. Correlation analyses revealed that the more food insecure students were, the more likely they were to experience academic difficulties during a class or exam. Thus, campus food policies that offer unaffordable meals to poor students hurt students’ academic success. Hungry bodies lead to hungry minds and both can undermine CUNY’s mission to educate the whole people of New York City.

Thankfully, several CUNY campuses have been hard at work on nourishing students’ bodies *and* minds. For instance, the Bronx community college featured within our study opened up a food pantry in 2016 that has supplied thousands of healthy meals and food items to hungry students and their families. Although it still struggles with funding, it recently helped even more students by offering packed lunches that students could immediately eat on campus or take home for later. Students can thus be nourished by campus resources.

My own institution, CUNY Kingsborough Community College, has been a leader in advocating for students' food security. We were the first CUNY institution to open a Single Stop on-campus food pantry, which provides meals, ingredients, and Grab & Go snack boxes to thousands of hungry students every semester. We are sometimes able to give gift-cards that students can use to buy food at supermarkets throughout New York City.

Our Urban Farm teaches students how to grow produce and distributes fresh fruits and vegetables to thousands of students for free. Our farm also runs the Bring It Home program, which offers students cooking classes that use ingredients within our food pantry and farm. Finally, we host an annual Food Day conference that teaches students about food systems across New York City. All of these programs and opportunities make a difference in students' lives – both in terms of teaching them nutritional skills and in giving them support that keeps them enrolled in college.



Summer Distribution Schedule

June 7- Single Stop Office

June 14- **CLOSED**

June 21- KCC Urban Farm

June 28- Single Stop Office

July 5- KCC Urban Farm

July 12- Single Stop Office

July 19- KCC Urban Farm

July 25- Single Stop Office

August 1- KCC Urban Farm



OFFICE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND STRATEGIC COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

(The poster above advertises the Kingsborough Urban Farm's vegetable distribution days. In the 2018 season, about 1,147 students attended vegetable distribution days on a weekly basis).

However, all of these programs require more consistent sources of funding. Kingsborough Community College's Single Stop food pantry and Urban Farm receive support from the college's general fund, as well as donations from organizations such as BJ's, Stop & Shop, and the Petrie Foundation. However, these funding streams are difficult to rely on. For instance, the Kingsborough Urban Farm has run out of grant funding for the Bring It Home nutrition program. Currently, farm staffers are looking for funding that will cover the costs of the personnel and materials needed to support students' nutritional learning. Thus, I ask the New York City Council to please directly fund Single Stop offices and programs such as Bring It Home in every CUNY community college.

Ultimately, campus food programs such as the Single Stop on-campus food pantry and the urban farm do more than "just" feed low-income students. They support students' health and development in the long term, help students stay focused in their classes, and give students the chance to achieve academic success. However, campus food programs need more consistent sources of funding and support from New York City and State in order to fill those functions and support students throughout their college journey.

Testimony of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute before
The Committees on Higher Education jointly with the Committee on General Welfare
Food Insecurity among College Students at the City University of New York
February 14, 2019

Good afternoon. I am Nicholas Freudenberg, Distinguished Professor of Public Health at the City University of New York Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy and the Director of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute. Our Institute provides evidence, policy analysis and advocacy and assistance to organizations that seek to solve urban food problems. I also direct Healthy CUNY, a university-wide initiative sponsored by the CUNY Chancellor's Office and the CUNY School of Public Health that for 10 years has assisted CUNY's more than 270,000 degree students to overcome health problems that interfere with academic success, problems such as food insecurity, depression, anxiety, and lack of access to health care. (Read more [here](#).) I am honored to testify at this hearing of the Committees on Higher Education and General Welfare.

Since 2010, I have conducted three surveys – in 2010, 2015 and 2018 – of representative samples of CUNY students at our community college and four year campuses to determine the prevalence of food insecurity and to assess the efficacy of campus food security services. Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as having limited access to adequate food due to a lack of money or other resources. Hunger is the most serious short-term consequence of food insecurity. I'll briefly summarize our findings, then suggest several actions that CUNY, New York City and New York State can take to reduce the rate and the adverse impact of food insecurity on our students.

Why should we care about food insecurity among college students? Recent studies show that students experiencing food insecurity have lower grades than their food secure peers and more trouble finishing school. For universities that want to help every student graduate, ending food insecurity is an important step for promoting academic success. Our 2015 survey found that food insecure students had lower Grade Point Averages than their food secure peers and were more likely to take a leave of absence. Food insecurity is also associated with health problems such as depression and diabetes. These conditions impose suffering on those with these diagnoses, huge burdens on New York City's health care system, and widen the gaps in health and longevity between those of different income and racial/ethnic groups.

Our first survey found 39% of CUNY undergraduates were food insecure in 2010, at the peak of the 2008 financial crisis. By 2015, the rate had dropped to 22% and in early 2018 to 20%. To put faces on the numbers, an estimated 82,000 CUNY graduates were food insecure in 2010, almost 55,000 in 2015 and "only" 50,000 in 2018. In 2010, almost 48,000 CUNY undergraduates reported the most serious form of food insecurity, that they were often or sometimes hungry in the last 12 months. By 2018, that number had fallen to about 32,000.

This decline in the number of hungry students at CUNY is a significant accomplishment. Several factors account for the drop: new city, state and federal policies made it easier to enroll in SNAP, the food stamps program. CUNY has now created 13 food pantries on its 24 campuses. It also established Single Stop benefit enrollment programs on 7 CUNY campuses and will expand the

number in coming years. In addition, CUNY has extended food security outreach and education programs. Last year, the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute sponsored a program that trained students at Hostos Community College and John Jay College to serve as food security advocates. These students conducted outreach and education to food insecure peers on their campuses and created campaigns to combat the stigma of using food security programs. Read more [here](#).

Despite the progress, more work needs to be done. In 2018, about 8% of undergraduates reported using any campus food assistance program, a modest increase from the 7% in 2010. This increase suggests that about 4,000 more CUNY students got help for food security on their campus in 2018 than in 2010. Our 2018 survey also found that almost 9% of CUNY students—more than 21,000 individuals -- reported that hunger or lack of food has interfered with their school work in the last 12 months.

Healthy CUNY, the university-wide initiative to promote student health for academic success, has proposed that CUNY, New York City and New York State commit to ending food insecurity among CUNY students in the next five years, by 2023, a goal that we believe is ambitious but achievable. To realize that goal, we propose:

1. CUNY should develop a comprehensive plan to increase the number of Single Stop programs and food pantries, expand education and outreach programs, and enlist the food service vendors at CUNY in increasing access to healthy affordable food for all CUNY students. Every campus should prepare students to serve as food security advocates.
2. New York City and State should provide the funding needed to ensure that these programs can serve all students in need. New York State should provide the resources needed to achieve the goal the Governor articulated in his 2018 State of the State speech that no college student in New York state should be hungry.
3. New York State should follow the lead of other states such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois and New Jersey to modify federal rules to extend the opportunity to enroll in SNAP to college students who work less than 20 hours a week or go to school part-time and to count college enrollment itself and work-study hours as meeting the requirement for job training.

Research shows that CUNY moves more people into the middle class than all the Ivy League schools combined. While CUNY has made progress in reducing food insecurity, in my view, it is shameful that in the wealthiest city in the world so many of our students are still hungry. As someone who has taught at CUNY for almost 40 years, I know how hard our students work to succeed at school and life. I also know for many of our food insecure students, it is the fact that they are in school that puts them at risk of food insecurity and hunger—of spending money on books, tuition or subway fare rather than food. This is a burden no decent society should impose on its young people. These students are hungry *because* they are seeking an education. New York City and State could make no better investment in our city's health and economic future than to end food insecurity on our college campuses. We look forward to working with the City Council and CUNY to achieve this goal by 2023.

Nicholas Freudenberg is Distinguished Professor of Public Health and Director of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute based at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. Nick.Freudenberg@sph.cuny.edu



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE**

JOINT PUBLIC HEARING

REDUCING FOOD INSECURITY IN NEW YORK CITY

FEBRUARY 14, 2019

JOINT TESTIMONY: HERCULES E. REID AND LATASHA LEE

Greetings Honorable Committee Chairperson Barron, Levin and Honorable Councilmembers,

My name is Hercules Reid and I am here with a CUNY student Latasha Lee. Serving in different forms of leadership, together we represent the City University of New York University Student Senate, also known as CUNY USS. As you may have heard before, USS is the student governance organization responsible for representing the interests of the nearly 500,000 students that attend CUNY each academic year.

“One of the saddest moments that I have experienced....when some presidents indicated to me....that more and more students appear on their campuses are hungry. They have not had breakfast or may have missed a meal the night before. In light of the difficult economic times facing very low income students, I have asked the Office of Student Affairs to develop ... programs to focus on issues of hunger, nutrition and homelessness.” - Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, CUNY Board of Trustees Meeting, April 27, 2009.

Food insecurity is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) as having —limited or uncertain access to nutritious, safe foods necessary to lead a healthy lifestyle. || The USDA notes that —households that experience food insecurity have reduced quality or variety of meals and may have irregular food intake.¹ In 2016, 25,242 undergraduate students 60% of which came from a household that made less than 30k/yr participated in an experience survey of CUNY. More than 2/3 of CUNY students fully or partially rely on their parents for financial support. Over half of the students worked for pay and over a third of those who work, believe that employment negatively impacts their academic performance and primarily work to pay for living expenses(79%) and tuition (55%).²

¹https://www.gc.cuny.edu/CUNY_GC/media/CUNY-Graduate-Center/PDF/Centers/Center%20for%20Human%20Environments/cunyfoodinsecurity.pdf

²http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/surveys/2016_SES_Highlights_Updated_10112016.pdf



In 2011 a report from: The Campaign for a Healthy CUNY released a report on food insecurity. The information was gathered from 17 CUNY campuses. The participating campuses included, Baruch College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Bronx CC, Brooklyn College, City College, College of Staten Island, Hostos CC, Hunter College, John Jay College, Kingborough CC, LaGuardia CC, Medgar Evers College, City Tech, Queens College, Queensborough CC, and York College.

The students were asked,

1. How often did you worry that you would not have enough money for food
2. How often did you cut or skip a meal because you didn't have enough money to buy Food?
3. How often were you unable to eat balanced or nutritious meals because of a lack of Money?
4. How often did you go hungry because of a lack of money?

The survey was in the Spring and Fall of 2010. Two of every five CUNY students in the sample reported that they experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months. That would translate to almost 100,000 of the 250,000 students CUNY experience some level of food insecurity within a year.

45.1% of students reported they worried about not have enough money for food and often went hungry because of a lack of funds (22.7%), suggesting that the highest level of food insecurity (hunger) is less common than lower levels.

Black and Latino CUNY students are known to have higher rates of food insecurity than others. For example, in the survey that population was 1.5 times more likely to report food insecurity than White and Asian students. Students who support themselves financially were 1.6 times as likely to report food insecurity. Students working more than 20 hours per week had a higher rate of food insecurity than those who did not work. Students who said common symptoms of depression were more than 2 times as likely to report food insecurity as those without such symptoms. Almost a quarter (24.3 %) reported both food insecurity and housing instability.

My name is Latasha Lee. I'm a psychology major at Bronx Community College (BCC). I am amongst the students in CUNY who is a parent and a student. I became a mom of two beautiful little boys ages five and six before making the decision to pursue higher education. It's for that reason, that I decided to come here and speak to you guys today.



As a student leaders and a mother, I've been able to experience how lack of food affects an individual firsthand and I've also experienced the outcome of what happens to my own children when they eat late. As a student leader, I've worked directly with students who suffer from food insecurity.

Although my children are very young and have yet to experience college, there have been times when were running extremely behind schedule and simply don't have time for breakfast. Almost every single time that this happens I'm told by one of their teachers that they've "had a difficult morning." It didn't take me long to see the correlation. I understood that missing a meal (even one) is enough to make them misbehave. I took this issue so seriously because their education is essential to me. Now I don't ever let them leave out without breakfast regardless of how late we're running. Unfortunately, I'm less dedicated to my own well being. There are times I don't eat breakfast or lunch because I simply don't have time. I'm sure you guys can understand.

As a full-time student and an active leader on my campus and for the university, eating can sometimes be an additional task. Oftentimes I miss a meal and I don't operate to the best of my ability. It becomes difficult for me to focus in class and on exams. Not only that, my mental health becomes easily impacted. The truth is that I'm less pleasant when I haven't eaten. To be completely honest there have been instances when I truly believed that pursuing higher education was a mistake. Then I eat and I'm in a completely different mindset and this is not unique to me.

Imagine having to constantly worry about where your next meal is coming from. When I'm advertising events on my campus I'm consistently being asked whether or not there'll be food. You have no idea how many times I've had students tell me they weren't interested in a workshop then change their mind at the mention of free refreshments. It has become so apparent that now when creating flyer I put "free refreshments/ food" on it and I have seen a significant increase in attendance.

One time one of my friends was laying down in a lounge area during a time when he had class. I asked him why he hadn't attended and he told me that he's "too hungry to be thinking" and that it "would be easier to just sleep." When our students are forced to sleep so they don't have to deal with intense hunger pains then we have to ask ourselves whether or not we are doing all we can to combat food insecurity.

At BCC we are fortunate enough to have the single stop program. This is extremely beneficial to our students who face food insecurity. However, without adequate funding this program does not



function as best it could. For many of our students single stop is their only option for food. The problem with this is that single stop literally only allows a single stop per individual a month. That means that the students who rely on this program must seek other options the other 29-30 days. Could you, without guilt, ask anyone to sustain by eating once a month? Another issue is that we provide uncooked food and a lot of our students are homeless. What good is a frozen chicken to someone without a stove? The worst part of that is BCC is actually a lot better off than some schools regarding food insecurity. Some schools don't have single stop. We advocate on these students behalf and believe that the city can do more to provide support to those students in need. In regards to food insecurity, we ask you to provide funding for pantry supplies.

We are here today because there is a growing understanding that food insecurity presents a serious challenge for today's college students. At both senior and community colleges, there is a lack of reliable access to sufficient affordable and nutritious food and this is common throughout the nation. Food insecurity is known to be more prevalent first-generation students and students of color. One could assume students experiencing food insecurity often also suffer from housing insecurity, such as difficulty paying the rent, mortgage, or utility bills. Food insecurity has even caused students to not buy a required textbook, would miss a class, or even dropping a class.³

According to USDA, between 2006 and 2008, an average of 1.4 million New York City residents lived in food insecure households, about 17% of the city's population. This suggests that the prevalence of food insecurity among CUNY students (39%) is substantially higher than among US and NYC households and adults. In its 2010 annual poll of a sample of New York City residents, the Food Bank of New York City found that 37 percent reported difficulty affording food, a rate comparable to the CUNY finding.⁴

We believe the city should find creative ways to address food insecurity in CUNY, the creation of things like campus food pantries, campus community gardens, food programs, and benefit access programs, would create extreme change. We even implore you to help expand the SNAP eligibility requirements for college students. We call on the legislature to take steps to help lessen student food insecurity and provide funding for pantry supplies to help reduce the threat to educational quality and student success in the City University of New York.

³ <https://studentsagainsthunger.org/hunger-on-campus/>

⁴ <https://www.foodbanknyc.org/research-reports/>



**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMITTEE ON GENERAL
WELFARE**

**JOINT PUBLIC HEARING
REDUCING FOOD INSECURITY IN NEW YORK CITY**

FEBRUARY 14, 2019

TESTIMONY: SADAT RAHMAN

Greetings Honorable Committee Chairperson Barron, Levin and Honorable Councilmembers,

My name is Sadat Rahman and I serve as a member of the City University of New York University Student Senate, also known as CUNY USS. USS is the student governance organization responsible for representing the interests of the nearly 500,000 students that attend CUNY each academic year. I also have the distinct honor to serve as a student leader at York College.

Hi everyone, I am currently in my last semester at York College, I am thrilled and excited that I will be graduating at the end of this semester. I remember those days in middle school, high school and during my college years when food insecurity was always the biggest issue we students were facing. When I was first running for Student Government, one of the main problems I really focused on was making sure we are mindful of healthy food options but also paying attention to people's dietary restrictions like for many Muslim and Jewish students who are only allowed to eat halal or kosher food as apart of their religion. If many of our CUNY and SUNY schools are all for having diverse background populations in their schools, then why should they be able to limit restrictions in the types of foods everyone should or should not eat. I am also very excited to announce, after working so hard last semester to push for halal and vegetarian options for my campus, it finally got done. From now on we are officially serving halal and



vegetarian food options as well in my school cafeteria. I would like to thank everyone for taking the time to listen to my testimony.

In closing, this is our ask.

- I would like to say that it is essential that we all pay attention to this critical matter to make sure everyone gets a choice despite religious dietary restrictions in what foods they can or not eat. We ask for partnerships with food companies to provide discounts and improved availability of healthy and affordable food options to CUNY students.
- Increased connection between New York City's many food assistance programs on CUNY campuses
- Assist in creating more on-site food pantries and food assistance programs

Thanks, for giving me the time to speak.

Testimony of Eiysha George (CUNY Student)

New York City Council on *Oversight: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City* (2/14/19)
Held by the Committees of General Welfare & Higher Education

Hello. My name is Eiysha George. I recently graduated from Bronx Community College with an Associate's Degree in Nutrition and Dietetics and currently attend Lehman College majoring in Community Health Education and Nutrition. Three years ago, I found myself working long and stressful hours as a restaurant office manager. Believing I was at a dead-end job, I decided to go back to school to grow beyond my then current academic and occupational endeavors. I quickly discovered, however, that I was unable to meet my basic expenses. With resources such as Single Stop, Bronx Community College's food and garden club and knowledge obtained during my curriculum courses, I am able to use these tools to satisfy my essential needs.

Attending classes at Bronx Community College, but behind in bills, I became aware of the financial counseling services at Single Stop. After my first counseling session, I realized I was at a deficit and got advised to apply for SNAP. I surprisingly qualified and began receiving benefits which equates to under \$48 per week. I started to search for ways to stretch this amount. One major way being the school's food pantry, which distributes once or twice per month.

In my curriculum courses, I studied exactly what foods groups I needed to stay healthy, full and focused throughout the day. I learned by choosing foods lower in the food chain that it could reduce cost drastically. I then applied this knowledge in the food and garden club where I was introduced to methods of preparation, planning and even growing plant-based items in cost effective and time saving ways. Eventually becoming the clubs president, I heard from my fellow clubmates on how much they learned and how they implemented these practices with their families.

Here I gained the confidence I needed to not only prepare my own food at home but grow them as well. The club also ignited my love for urban gardening and the fresh fruits and vegetables acquired from the process. From this I started regularly visiting my local farmers market where fresh local foods were sold at an affordable price.

It takes much determination and planning to sustain this period in my life as a student. Although I have become pretty good at budgeting and meal planning, life often gets in the way. Whether it be shortage of benefit funds or lack of time to prepare, I find myself having to purchase food from the schools cafeteria, where a 6oz cup of fruit can be almost \$5.00.

In closing, I ask that attention be brought to funding needed to properly sustain student resources such as Single Stop services like the food pantry, clubs similar to Bronx Community College's Food and Garden Club, in addition to high cost of cafeteria items. I would also like to see farmers markets on college campuses as well as extending farm share options to all CUNY campus'. Without resources from Bronx Community College's Single Stop and The Food and Garden club, I may likely not have been able to graduate on time, adding to overall cost and delayed achievements.

While these circumstances are not ideal, I do remain hopeful in the near future, where I am self-reliant. After obtaining my degree in Community Health Education and Nutrition, I will use the tools learned and this lived experience to guide members of my community to food security.



Testimony of Bill Busk

Re: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

Hon. Steven Levin

Committee on General Welfare

New York City Council

February 14th, 2019

My name is Bill Busk and I live in supportive housing in the Tremont section of the Bronx. I have been receiving SNAP benefits since 2009 after becoming homeless & later being disabled due to neurological damage.

I first met the Urban Justice Center several years ago when I had difficulty renewing my SNAP /Food Stamps benefits due to my disability, plus the fact that NYC's Human Resources Administration (HRA) did NOT follow their own policies regarding closing cases. My case was only reopened and previous, lost SNAP benefits restored after UJC represented me in a Fair Hearing case, during which my disability made it difficult for me to communicate that day. This shows the difficulties that anyone can encounter trying to open or renew a SNAP benefits case, besides people with language differences, those who are unfamiliar with the HRA system, or have other barriers or limitations.

After working for 37 years & paying taxes into the system, I never would have foreseen that I'd be needing SNAP / Food Stamps for the past 10 years, so anyone can find themselves in this situation. As a so-called "Supplemental" "Benefit", SNAP has never fully covered monthly food or "nutritional" expenses, and most people on SNAP, including myself, find themselves using their cash income to cover 1/4 to half of their grocery costs. Also, having earned a 4 year degree in business & almost 40-year business background, I noticed that over the past decade, that WHEN or IF there has been an annual increase in SNAP benefits, it rarely, if ever, matches annual inflation. This creates a situation where the "real dollar value" of SNAP benefits buys fewer & fewer groceries, year after year. Living in City Council District 15 in the Tremont section of the Bronx, which has an average annual income of below \$20,000 per year and one of New York City's densest concentrations of homeless shelters, street homeless, HASA housing & supportive housing, I cannot help noticing that the lines in front of the local pantries gets longer continually.

I appreciate HRA forwarding February 2019 SNAP benefits a month early in case the recent Federal shutdown continued. However the overall SNAP system still requires improvement. In particular, HRA must also improve its SNAP Centers because many people still need in-person assistance to file or renew so automated services do not help many users. SNAP also does not pay out enough for people to get by on and too many people "fall through the cracks", which is inexcusable, since when we are talking about food or nutrition, we are talking about lives.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Bill Busk; (347) 423 - 1582; bill.tremontave@gmail.com; william_michaels@hotmail.com

FOR THE RECORD



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 Jessica Chait and I am the Managing Director, Food Programs 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 FY18, Met Council aided more than 200,000 New Yorkers in their fight against poverty and hunger:

- We provided 7 million meals through emergency food
- We aided 6,000 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 thank the City Council support, that fortified Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) through a baseline increase in funding to 16.9 million for FY19. 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.



Testimony Prepared by **Judy Secon**

For the **Oversight Hearing on Reducing Food Insecurity in NYC**, February 14, 2019

On behalf of **New York Common Pantry**

Good afternoon. I am Judy Secon, Senior Director of Programs and Operations for New York Common Pantry (NYCP). Thank you to the City Council, General Welfare Chair Steve Levin, Committee on Higher Education Chair, Inez Barron, and to Speaker Corey Johnson for the opportunity to provide this testimony. We want to thank the full Council for your recent successful effort to increase EFAP and your continued support for reducing hunger in the city.

New York Common Pantry is a multi-service community organization that connects New Yorkers struggling with food insecurity to essential resources. We provide healthy groceries, hot meals, nutrition education, SNAP enrollments, tax return preparation and supplementary food for seniors. We are just starting on our second five-year plan to increase services across New York City through mobile and school pantries, and by providing an increased emphasis on healthy food choices to help reduce health factors exacerbated by little food or nutritionally poor food choices. The first such plan helped us extend our help throughout Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx from a single location in East Harlem. Support from the City of New York has been essential in that process, and meant we were able to serve close to half a million visitors, partner with over 120 sites across NYC, serve over 6 million meals, and assist residents in accessing over \$8.6 million in resources last year.

This support also meant that when 19% of the city's soup kitchens closed, we were ready to increase the number of hot meals we served by 30%. It also meant we were ready to serve furloughed Federal workers not receiving a paycheck, and worried about where their next meal was coming from, with bags of groceries for their entire families instantly. It meant we were ready to serve more Bronx residents, for whom food insecurity is always a pressing issue, and over a year increase our services by 50%. It meant we were ready for an 80% spike in the number of families served across both our pantries between the week of January 28 and the week of February 4th—just last week—as the SNAP benefits given out early due to the government shutdown began to run out. We have seen great empathy for the Federal Workers and SNAP beneficiaries who have just recently been affected by the government shutdown, but the people we serve day in and day out deserve the same empathy and committed responses as they struggle to get by in New York City.

In order that we and all the other emergency food providers in the city can remain ready to serve, we must be able to rely on not just EFAP but also the Council through its various funding lines, and call on the Mayor to increase those areas in his budget. EFAP provides us with a steady stream of food, which allows us to leverage other sources to create new service delivery systems – but we still are short of resources necessary to reach food insecure New Yorkers. We all grateful for your continued support and are eager to find new ways we can continue as your partners in the work we do.



Public Hearing: Oversight - Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

The Committee on General Welfare, jointly with the Committee on Higher Education will hold a hearing on **Thursday, February, 14th, 2019 at 10:00 a.m. at 250 – 16th Floor Committee Room, Broadway, NYC.**

Testimony submitted by:

Carina V. Santos Taveras, Intern
Welfare Rights Initiative
Hunter College 695 Park Avenue, Room HN302
NY NY 10065
212-772-4041

My name is Carina V. Santos Taveras, and I am a student at Hunter College. I also represent the Welfare Rights Initiative (WRI) a student activist and leadership training organization which supports CUNY students in crisis, provides community leadership training, and legal advocacy. I would like to express my concern regarding the food insecurity that many CUNY students such as myself are facing.

I have personally experienced food insecurity as a result of financial hardship and not being able to access a CUNY pantry at my home campus. Because not all CUNY Schools provide their students in need with food security resources such as food pantries and cafeteria vouchers, many students are forced to go without food for a day or more.

In 2017, I have personally gone to school hungry and as a result of my campus, Hunter College not having available food resources. In addition, I was not allowed to access CUNY food pantries and cafeteria vouchers programs on other campus. Many times, I was forced to rely on public food pantries. I would have to miss classes because the pantry schedule conflicted with my school schedule. To avoid hunger, I took many days off through the semester to show up at the opening time of the food pantry, and as a result my grades were impacted with my GPA lowering. This directly impacted my ability to receive college housing scholarships that are based on my GPA. Furthermore, I do not get any form of financial aid including Excelsior, Pell, and TAP. Because I am facing temporary homelessness and live in the Hunter College Dorms, the merit-based academic scholarships I have are what has covered my tuition and has allowed me to have a safe place to stay until my graduation that will take place May 2019.



Taking time off from school and potentially running the risk of losing my funds to access public pantry is not an effective way to challenge food insecurity among college student especially single college students. Unlike CUNY pantry, public pantry sometimes does not distribute the same equal amount of food to single able-body people as they do with families. I believe that effective solutions to tackle food insecurity among CUNY students is to emulate programs such as cafeteria vouchers which only three CUNY schools currently have in place and CUNY pantries on all campuses verse a selective few.

In addition, to HRA expanding their definition of housing which would count college dorms as temporary housing allowing college students facing food insecurity and homelessness access to the \$250 housing allowance as there is no policy or rule that excludes college dorm from the requirements for the housing allowances.

WRI's experience is that families and individuals come to HRA in crisis: health issues, loss of a family member, and loss of job, housing or other loss. Once the family is stabilized, aiding people's employment prospects is an important next step. We cannot emphasize strongly enough "once the family is stabilized." Stabilized is not a family living in a shelter or a student who has no money for food. New York City's (NYC) best practices show that housing, health, and food security for its residents are critical for this city's total ability to thrive and prosper.

WRI offers our 25 years of expertise and experience with social services, CUNY and students to help implement the good policies that we know work. We envision such a partnership would allow more students to stay in school without jeopardizing the welfare of their families.

We thank the General Welfare Committee and the Higher Education Committee and staff for your service to NY City and its residents.

Thank you.
Carina V. Santos Taveras

Contact:

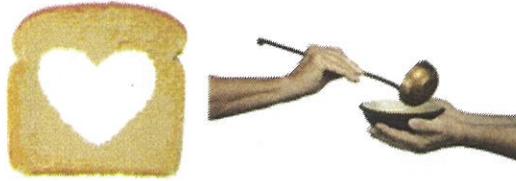
ZAMIR HASSAN

CEO & FOUNDER

Muslims Against Hunger | Hunger Van

917-371-2602 | zamir@muslimsagainsthunger.org

www.zamirhassan.org



MUSLIMS AGAINST HUNGER

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF
ZAMIR HASSAN – CEO & FOUNDER OF MUSLIMS AGAINST HUNGER &
HUNGER VAN**

**COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE AND THE COMMITTEE ON
HIGHER EDUCATION – JOINT OVERSIGHT HEARING ON REDUCING
FOOD INSECURITY IN NEW YORK CITY - T2019-3640**

FEBRUARY 14, 2019

Good morning all, my name is Zamir Hassan and I'm the CEO & Founder of Muslims against Hunger and Hunger Van. Muslims Against Hunger is a network of volunteer communities that has grown worldwide since the year 2000. We have over 5000 volunteers in North America, Haiti, India, Pakistan, Philippines, and Nigeria and are now located in over 30 plus cities in the United States. As an organization we have one simple goal and that is *'to feed the hungry'*. Our definition of hunger is simple, *'if a person does not know where his/her next meal is coming from, then he/she is considered hungry.'* I am here today to address the need to reduce food insecurity in New York City and talk about our efforts in the aforementioned.

In the year 2015, there were 1.25 million food-insecure New Yorkers with a meal gap of 224.8 million meals.¹ For the fiscal year of 2019 in New York City alone, there is a proposed budget cut for the "Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP²) of \$7.8 million – A loss of 6.8 million meals for the most vulnerable people in our neighborhoods."³

¹ Meal Gap: the meals missing from the homes of families and individuals struggling with food insecurity:

<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/2017-Food-Metrics-Report-Corrected.pdf>

² EFAP is a vital source of food for New Yorkers who rely on food pantries and soup kitchens, providing a year-round supply of a full complement of nutritious food.

<https://www.foodbanknyc.org/statement-nyc-preliminary-fy-2019-budget/>

³ Statement of NYC Executive Budget FY 2019:

<https://www.foodbanknyc.org/statement-nyc-preliminary-fy-2019-budget/>

In 2017, Hunger Van, our mobile soup kitchen that feeds the homeless, senior citizens and an often-neglected student population in our communities, started a street feeding program in New York City. In a year we fed over 60,000 hot meals to the homeless in Tompkins Square Park, Washington Square Park and around the NYU campus. Just to give you an idea about the student population – about one in four undergraduates, are food insecure⁴. As per a survey at CUNY School of Public Health & Health Policy in 2015, sixty thousand CUNY students were reported to be food insecure.

In conclusion, I'd like to emphasize that a lack of consistent access to food impacts many different communities and being the richest country in the world it is devastating to learn that over 38 million⁵ people are food insecure in the United States of America with 1.25 million in New York city alone, a population larger than San Francisco, CA.⁶ I urge the legislators and the panel today to address the issue of food insecurities in New York City specifically and realize that this isn't a single faceted issue nor does it exist in isolation⁷. I believe this to be due to a lack of grassroots effort to educate and engage the general population. Hunger isn't just a political emergency; it is a humanitarian one and needs to be dealt with by all.

I appreciate your time and thank you for working on improving the livelihood of New Yorkers.

⁴ "Sixty thousand CUNY students, about one in four undergraduates, are food insecure, according to a 2015 survey of a representative sample of CUNY undergraduates by Healthy CUNY." Ending Food insecurity at CUNY: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/572d0fcc2b8dde9e10ab59d4/t/5bb289050d92976e2ee79eca/1538427146487/SPH_Ending_Food_Insecurity_CUNY_Final3.pdf

⁵ Household Food Security in the United States in 2017: <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/90023/err-256.pdf?v=0>

⁶ City Harvest – Rescuing Food for New York's Hungry: <https://www.cityharvest.org/facts-about-hunger/>

⁷ "Low-income families are affected by multiple, overlapping issues like affordable housing, social isolation, health problems, medical costs, and low wages. Many do not have what they need to meet basic needs and these challenges increase a family's risk of food." Understanding Food Insecurity: <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/>

The Food Pantry at Columbia

582 Lerner Hall
Columbia University

Testimony of Michael Higgins, Co-Founder and Chair

The Food Pantry at Columbia

Hearing Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee

Oversight: Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City

February 14, 2019

I, Michael Higgins, Co-Founder and Chair of The Food Pantry at Columbia, am testifying on behalf of the approximately 35-40% of the students at Columbia University, as well as student across New York City, who go hungry every day. I want to thank Chairperson Levin for his work on behalf of New York City residents in need, as well as the General Welfare Committee for inviting me to testify here today.

HISTORY

The Food Pantry at Columbia was formed in May 2016 in a collaborative effort between the General Studies Student Council (GSSC) and the First-Generation, Low-Income Partnership (FLIP). Our mission is simple – relieve hunger on our campus through the acquisition and distribution of both perishable and non-perishable food to those Columbia affiliates who need it the most. During its development, GSSC and FLIP determined there was a hunger issue within the School of General Studies (GS) student population. As a small test pilot, GSSC allocated \$1,000 to purchase food, advertised on social media to the GS student body, and reserved space to distribute the food. Before the end of the first week of the test, we realized that hunger extends far beyond the border of the School; we were receiving requests for food from across the University. It was then that plans were set in motion to make the pilot a larger, more sustainable initiative.

Michael Higgins (Chair) • Open (Vice Chair of Communications) • Samantha Valente (Vice Chair of Development) • Matthew Linsky (Vice Chair of Events Coordination)
Open (Vice Chair of Finance) • Miguel Yepes (Vice Chair of FLIP Collaborations) • Madison Delaney (Vice Chair of Operations) • Sharanya Sivakumar (Vice Chair of Technology)

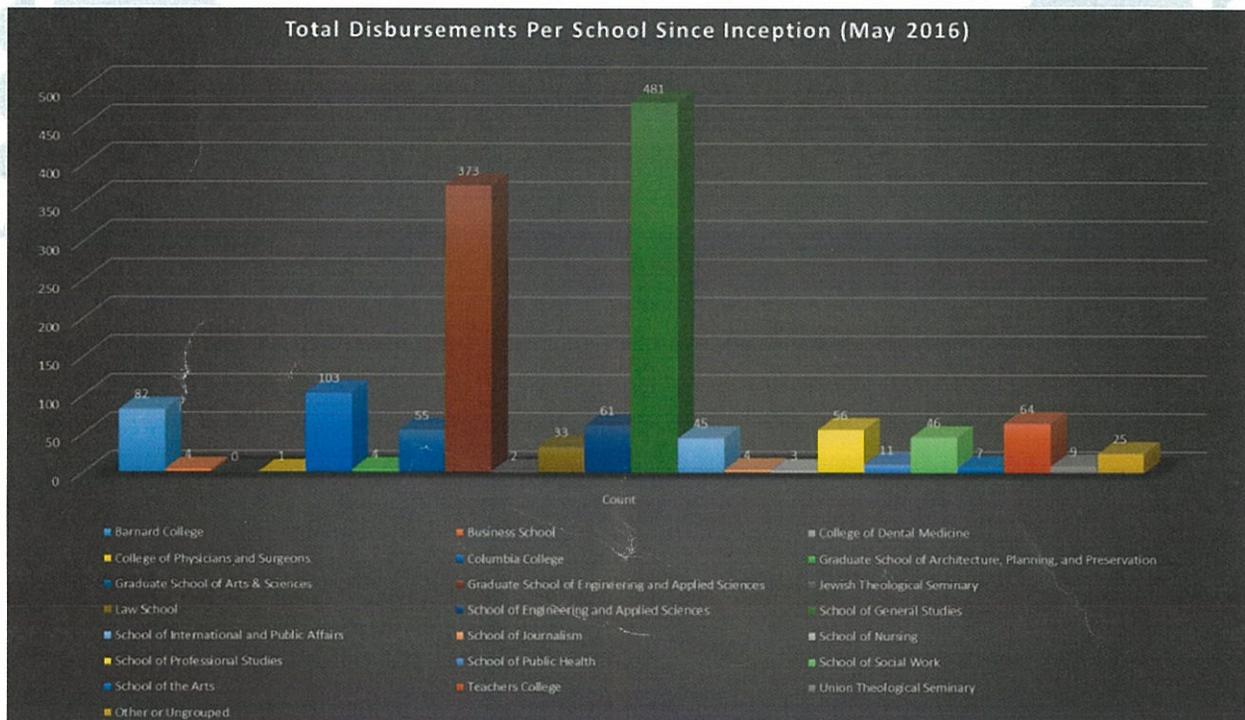
The Food Pantry at Columbia

582 Lerner Hall
Columbia University

Less than three year later, The Food Pantry at Columbia is a self-contained, University-recognized student group with an eight-person Board, seven committees, and an average of two hundred volunteers per year.

DATA

To date, The Food Pantry at Columbia has distributed almost 1,500 non-perishable disbursements and, starting this semester, formed a partnership with the Riverside Farmshare to provide perishable food as well. As our data shows, while the largest usage of The Food Pantry at Columbia comes from the GS student body, all but one of the 21 School within the University have utilized the pantry since our inception.

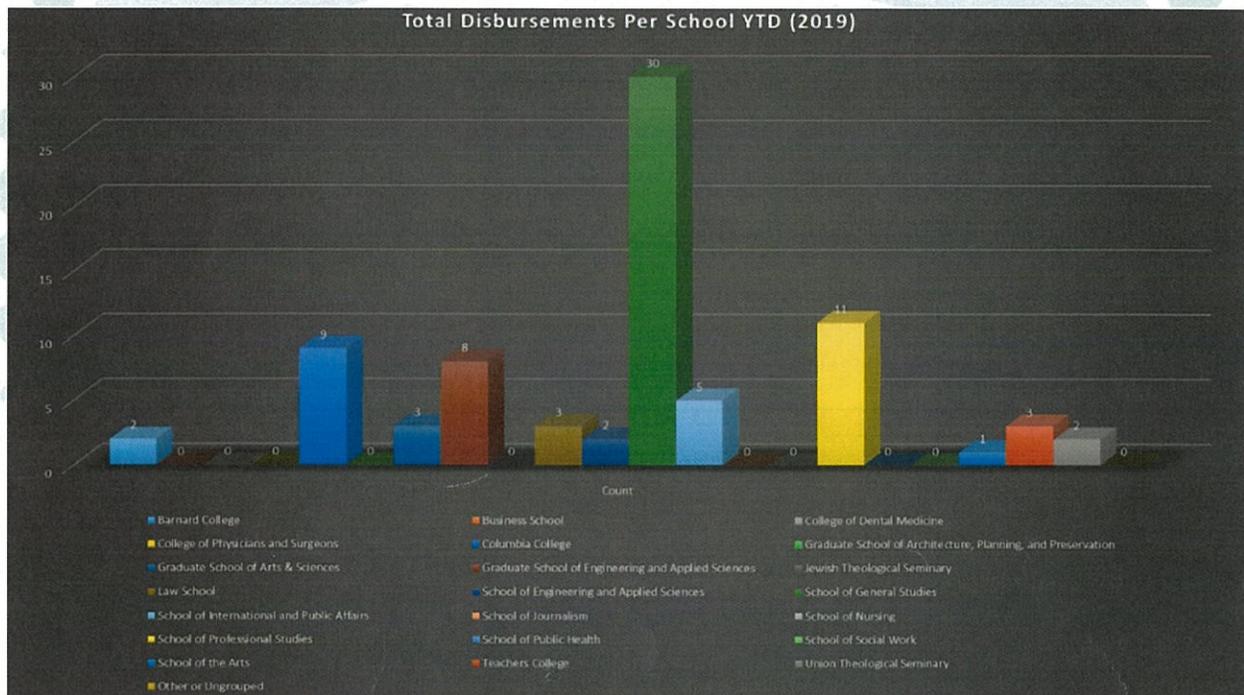


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What's even more telling is, as of the early start of this year, usage of The Food Pantry at Columbia is starting to spike across all four undergraduate schools, and a few graduate and professional schools as well.



This can be attributed not only to The Food Pantry at Columbia's staunch efforts to expand our University footprint, but also the recognition of both the various Schools within the University, and the University as a whole, that student hunger is real, and affects the entire University student population.

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The Food Pantry at Columbia

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WHAT IS HUNGER?

Hunger on college campuses is not a new phenomenon, nor is it unique to Columbia University. The stigma of hunger, and the embarrassment some people feel, overshadows the severity of this issue. The terms food insecurity and hunger may be interchangeable but the term food insecurity is a politicized term that softens the blow of what numerous studies and reports have ascertained over the years – hunger on college campus is real and should not be underscored by a politicized ideology.

The fact is that hunger manifests itself in various forms. A student who has a meal plan, but has to resort to bringing plastic containers into dining halls to stock up on food does so to counter the effects of hunger. A student who skips meals in order to afford other essentials such as healthcare, books, or household expenses does so to counter the effects of hunger. In addition, hunger does not necessarily equate to poverty. Based on our findings, there are some affiliates who may have the ability to pay for the food they need, but lack the understanding of how to properly source or prepare healthy food. Each of these scenarios illustrates a dissonance between what a student can afford and what a student is willing to forego. It is our mission to fill that gap by any means necessary. The Food Pantry at Columbia prides itself on thinking outside the box and creating pathways for other humanitarian student groups to follow.

HOW DO WE DO IT?

The Food Pantry at Columbia is fortunate enough to be a member of the Food Bank for New York City, which provides us with non-perishable food at a significantly reduced cost. This allows us to provide more food to those who need it, while keeping our costs low. Since the vast majority of our funding comes from student fees and monetary donations, The Food Pantry at Columbia relies heavily on the generosity of others to sustain our initiative.

WHAT DO WE NEED?

While discussions with the University continue as to how best to ensure the longevity and sustainability of The Food Pantry at Columbia, our next chapters will focus on providing University affiliates with access to federal resources such as SNAP. The Food Bank for New York City will be a vital partner in that discussion; however, governmental oversight and policy changes need to occur to allow students to qualify for SNAP. According to the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, most students are not eligible for SNAP unless they meet certain criteria. This may be adequate for those students who have dependents, but this policy excludes a gambit of students who would otherwise not have access to government subsidies at all.

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The Food Pantry at Columbia

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Columbia University

The Food Pantry at Columbia can appreciate the fact that changing policies ultimately mean increasing the pool of individuals eligible for SNAP. In addition, we can appreciate the fact that increasing said pool will cause a correlating increase in the amount of funding required, which may ultimately increase taxes. However, the benefit outweighs the cost.

CONCLUSION

The Food Pantry at Columbia is not the cure for hunger on our campus, and our model is not the cure for hunger on any campus. We understand that we are just a patch to larger problem. The Food Pantry at Columbia envisions a strategy that aligns our efforts with efforts of entities within and without the University. It is our hope that this hearing is the first step to an open discourse regarding hunger on college campuses throughout the city, and how governmental oversight and policy changes can help mitigate the effects of hunger.

Michael Higgins (Chair) • Open (Vice Chair of Communications) • Samantha Valente (Vice Chair of Development) • Matthew Linsky (Vice Chair of Events Coordination)
Open (Vice Chair of Finance) • Miguel Yepes (Vice Chair of FLIP Collaborations) • Madison Delaney (Vice Chair of Operations) • Sharanya Sivakumar (Vice Chair of Technology)

Testimony Presented by Christopher Rosa, Ph.D.
Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs
The City University of New York
before
New York City Council
Committees on Higher Education and General Welfare
Oversight Hearing - Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City
February 14, 2019

Good morning Chair Barron, Chair Levin, and Honorable Members of the Higher Education and General Welfare Committees.

I would like to begin my testimony today by thanking you for your on-going support of The City University of New York and for your enduring commitment to the health, safety and academic success of CUNY students. My name is Chris Rosa and I proudly serve as CUNY's Interim Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs.

I'd like to introduce my colleagues. I am joined today by Deborah Harte, the founding director of Single Stop at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, who will provide detailed information about Single Stop's contribution to eliminating food insecurity at CUNY. Sitting next to Deborah is Dr. Charles Platkin, Executive Director of the Hunter College New York City Food Policy Center who will speak about the impact of food insecurity and hunger on academic performance and success. He will also provide strategies to address this issue.

The Need

As you all know, all students attending a NYC DOE school all eligible to receive breakfast and lunch at no cost. Then, upon entering CUNY, students must pay in full for their meals. Almost 80 percent of CUNY's first-time freshmen come from the NYC Department of Education¹ and 42 percent of all first-time freshmen come from households with annual incomes of \$20,000 or less.² Purchasing meals can be a hardship for many students. (May I also add that these students lose free transportation and now bear the additional cost of MetroCards. We are very hopeful that the Fair Fares program will lessen the burden for many CUNY students.)

¹ CUNY Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, *A Profile of Undergraduates at CUNY Senior and Community Colleges: Fall 2017*. See: http://www2.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/data/current-student-data-book-by-subject/ug_student_profile_f17.pdf

² *Ibid.*

Research conducted by Healthy CUNY and the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute found that 15 percent of CUNY undergraduates under the age of 30 (approximately 36,000 students) reported that they had gone hungry often or sometimes in the past 12 months.³ The researchers also found that food insecure students had, on average, lower GPAs than food secure students and were more likely than their food secure peers to take a leave of absence (48% vs. 32%).⁴

CUNY Programs and Policies That Address Food Insecurity

In 2018, Governor Cuomo's State of the State address included the "No Student Goes Hungry" proposal that contained five elements, including a requirement that all CUNY and SUNY schools have food pantries and/or vouchers.

Furthermore, in late August 2018, Governor Cuomo announced: "...100 percent of all New York State public colleges at The State University of New York and The City University of New York will have a food pantry or stigma-free food access for students in need by the end of the fall semester."

Consistent with the intent of the Governor's proposals, CUNY has implemented programs and services to make sure that no CUNY student goes hungry. We know that it is in the best interests of all our food insecure students to have access to food.

All 18 undergraduate institutions have at least a food pantry or on-campus food vouchers – and many have both. Additionally, several colleges have adopted Grab-N-Go takeaway bags containing non-perishable, nutritious food items that can be consumed at school or at home. A few community colleges provide students access to enough food to feed themselves and their families. For example, LaGuardia Community College serves students Monday-Friday on a walk-in basis. Food items are student selected and disbursed in quantities that accommodate an individual or family for 7 days x 3 meals per day. At Lehman College there is the "Dining Dollars Initiative." Students who are identified through an application process are provided with a financial allocation that is added to their student ID account. Each student awarded is provided dining dollars that can be utilized at on-campus facilities. John Jay College for Criminal Justice implemented the "Comfort Station" which provides nutritious breakfasts, lunch and snack items, including sandwiches, bagels, cream cheese, eggs, oatmeal, macaroni and cheese, soups to accommodate students' busy schedules.

At CUNY's smaller schools (i.e., graduate and professional schools- as well as SPS where most students are online students) where a pantry is not feasible, there must be at least one staff member who is responsible for assisting students who are food insecure. The colleges are obligated to make sure students know who the staff members are.

³ Freudenberg, N., *Ending Food Insecurity and Housing Instability at CUNY*, Forum on Emergency Needs of CUNY Students, January 2018.

⁴ *Ibid.*

A few colleges are facing serious space constraints which have made establishing pantries difficult. All of these colleges however have come up with other innovative solutions, including on-campus food vouchers and Grab-N-Go takeaway bags.

More than 10 (and increasing) of our colleges work closely with the Food Bank of NYC – and this a partnership we encourage. There are many advantages to working with the Food Bank, including nutritional guidance, technical support, healthy food at a reduced price and delivery to the campus. A few campuses have relationships with local supermarkets that donate gift cards over the holidays. Some colleges are working with GrowNYC to provide students with fresh food boxes. The boxes are delivered to the campus where students can pick them up. The food boxes cost \$14/box but with a generous grant from the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation, students are able to receive the fresh food boxes at no cost.

In regard to outreach, while some colleges are doing a better job than others, all take outreach very seriously and understand that this is a critical component of addressing food insecurity. We find that colleges with newer pantries have more of a challenge as students must be educated about the resource. Several of our campuses are doing superb jobs in regard to outreach and are able to provide technical assistance.

Funding for these programs and services comes from a variety of sources, including student groups, dedicated student fees, campus investments and private foundations. We are especially grateful to the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation that for the 2018-19 academic year awarded \$20,000 grants to each undergraduate institution to address student hunger. Petrie has asked for the undergraduate colleges to submit renewal applications for the 2019-2020 academic year; renewal applications will be reviewed at the Petrie Foundation Board meeting in May.

Furthermore, CUNY's Single Stop Program, now at all community colleges and one senior college (John Jay) has provided students with access to food and has screened for SNAP-eligibility for almost eight years. In fact, food pantries at the community colleges are maintained by Single Stop. Deborah Harte, the founding director of Single Stop at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, is here today to provide more detailed information about Single Stop's contribution to eliminating food insecurity at CUNY. She will also describe BMCC's model outreach program.

An innovative program is Healthy CUNY's Food Security Advocates Project that trains students to educate their peers about programs such as SNAP and WIC and connect students to food pantries and Single Stop Centers.

College Students and SNAP-Eligibility

According to the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, the general rule for college students' eligibility for SNAP is: "Most able-bodied students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled

at least half-time in college or other institution of higher education are not eligible for SNAP.”⁵ (Emphasis added.) However, there are several exceptions to this rule.⁶ That said, we know that there are still students who satisfy one or more of these exemptions and SNAP outreach and screening remain an important strategy for combatting food insecurity. Note: this rule is a function of federal law, not state law.⁷

In closing, on behalf of the City University of New York, I would like to express our appreciation to the Council for shining a light on this serious issue. As always, we look forward to partnering with the Council to address student food insecurity. Thank you again.

⁵ NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program* at <http://otda.ny.gov/programs/snap/qanda.asp#students>

⁶ “Students may be able to get SNAP, if otherwise eligible, if they: Receive public assistance benefits under a Title IV-A program; or Take part in a state or federally-financed work study program; or Work on average 20 hours per week; or Are a single parent enrolled full time and taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12. Students also may be able to get SNAP, if otherwise eligible, if they are taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 6, or if they are taking care of a dependent household member age 6 through 11 and do not have adequate child care to enable them to work a minimum of 20 hours per week, or take part in a state or federally-financed work study program while attending school. Students who are assigned to or placed in college or certain other schools as part of certain job or employment training programs may also be eligible for SNAP.” *Ibid.*

⁷ See: United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, *Facts About SNAP* at <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/facts-about-snap>

**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: 02/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carina V. Santos Taveras

Address: _____

I represent: Welfare Rights Initiative

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL CUNY
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Laurie Beck

Address: Office of Student Affairs

I represent: CUNY

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: 2-14-2019

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bill Busk / Urban Justice Center Activists ^{Safety Net}

Address: Res. 465 East Tremont Ave Apt 2C Bronx, NY

I represent: Urban Justice Center Safety Net

Address: 123 William St, NYC Activists

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: 2/14/10

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ~~Hostos~~ Hostos Food Security Advocates & Students ^{Hostos}

Address: 500 Grand Concourse, Bronx 10541

I represent: Hostos Community College

Address: 500 Grand Concourse

**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: Jason M. Hilliard

Address: 110 Wall Street

I represent: Community Food Advocates Inc

Address: 110 Wall Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amy Blumsack

Address: 2074 Fulton St Brooklyn NY 11233

I represent: Neighbors Together

Address: see above

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Grace Bonilla

Address: HRA

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ Annette Holm

Address: HRA

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jill Berry

Address: HRA

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2.14.19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Higgins

Address: 218 Market Street #604

I represent: The Food Pantry at Columbia

Address: Columbia University

**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: Anelle Morales-Rojas

Address: 6201 A Spence Terrace Bronx NY 10471

I represent: Urban Justice Center

Address: 123 William Street NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN KRINSKY

Address: 309 W 104th St #4D

I represent: CCNY

Address: 160 Convent Ave 10030

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**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: Gabriel Samiec

Address: 461 Christopher Brooklyn

I represent: USS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Food Insecurity in favor in opposition

Date: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CUYV University student Senate

Address: _____

I represent: Students

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: Rachel Sabella

Address: No Kid Hungry

I represent: 29 Madison

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maggie Dickinsan

Address: 50 West 40th St.

I represent: Guttman Community College, CUNY

Address: 50 West 40th St. NYC

**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: Nicholas Frederbers

Address: 55 W 125th St

I represent: CUNY Food Policy Inobd.

Address: Same

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 02/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carina V. Santos Taveras

Address: 695 Park Avenue, Room HN 302 NY, NY

I represent: Welfare Rights Initiative Hunter College

Address: New York, NY 10065

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**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: Rachel Sherron

Address: _____

I represent: Citymeals on wheels

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: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MIKOLA DE ROO

Address: _____

I represent: FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

Address: 39 B'WAY, 10TH FL, NYC

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. T2019-3648 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Wendy O'Shields

Address: 123 William Street

I represent: Self Urban Justice Safety Net Project

Address: ACTIVISTS

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: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elysha George

Address: 860 Grand Concourse Bronx NY 10451

I represent: Cuny students

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: MS. DEBORA HARTE, BMCC

Address: FOOD PANTRY

I represent: _____

Address: CUNY

**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: DR. CHARLES PLATKIN

Address: HUNTER FOOD POLICY

I represent: INSTITUTE

Address: CUNY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: VICE CHANCELLOR CHRIS ROSA

Address: _____

I represent: CUNY

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: Marisa Wright

Address: 205 E. 42nd Street

I represent: United Way of NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ariel Savransky

Address: _____

I represent: WJA Federation

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rev Robert Curtis Jackson

Address: 235 Bainbridge St, Brooklyn NY

I represent: Brooklyn Rescue Mission Urban Harvest 11233

Address: 919 Gates Ave, Brooklyn NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Tanzina Ahmed

Address: 2355 Powell Avenue, Bronx NY 10462

I represent: CUNY Kingsborough Community College

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: Joel Berg

Address: 1 Plaza Street West 150 Brooklyn

I represent: Hunger Free America

Address: 50 Broad St, NY, NY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 2-14-19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ZAMIR HASSAN

Address: 370 8th Ave NYC

I represent: Muslims Against Hunger/Hunger

Address: 372 South Main St Philadelphia PA

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Judith Secor

Address: 8E 109th St. NY

I represent: New York Common Party

Address: 8E 109th St. NY NY 10029

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**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: 02/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MEDHAT GARAS

Address: 70 ELM ST STATEN ISLAND

I represent: Hunger Free NYC

Address: 50 Broadway New York

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: 2/14/19

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebecca Glass

Address: _____

I represent: City Harvest

Address: 67 E 32nd St New York

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