

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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June 25, 2013
Start: 1:07 p.m.
Recess: 1:28 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway
Committee Rm, 14th Fl.

B E F O R E:
ANNABEL PALMA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Council Member Maria Del Carmen Arroyo
Council Member Gale A. Brewer
Council Member Brad S. Lander
Council Member Ydanis A. Rodriguez
Council Member James G. Van Bramer
Council Member Ruben Wills
Council Member Domenic Recchia
Council Member Diana Reyna

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Torrada Stampas

Lisa Levy

Policy - - Organizing Director

New York City Coalition Against Hunger

Kevin Pin

Committee Clerk

New York City Council

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Good afternoon,
3 everyone and welcome to the General Welfare
4 Committee hearing of June 25th, 2013. I'm Annabel
5 Palma and I Chair the General Welfare Committee.
6 We are here today to vote on two important
7 resolutions, the first vote is on proposed
8 resolution 543-A calling on the United States
9 House of Representatives and the United States to
10 pass, and the President to sign a farm bill that
11 preserves funding for the supplemental nutritional
12 assistance program. I would like to thank Council
13 Member Recchia for sponsoring this resolution. I
14 would also like to thank the General Welfare
15 Committee Staff that prepared today's hearing,
16 Andrea Vasquez and Elizabeth Hoffman. The farm
17 bill is currently being debated in the House of
18 Representatives and the Senate Agriculture
19 Committees. On June 10th, 2013 the Senate approved
20 - - farm bill, which will cut \$4.1 billion in the
21 SNAP funding over the next ten years and on June
22 20th, 2013 the US House of Representatives rejected
23 a new farm bill with \$2- billion in cuts and SNAP
24 funding over the next ten years. IF passed, this
25 will be devastating cuts for people receiving SNAP

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2 benefits and would affect almost two million
3 people in the City of New York. Cuts in SNAP
4 benefits also hurt the local economy since they
5 are redeemed in grocery stores and food markets
6 around this city. According to Moody's Analytics,
7 each dollar spent on food stamps in a depressed
8 economy raises gross domestic product by \$1.70.
9 according to the Food Research and Action Center,
10 SNAP participation has been continuing to increase
11 since the economic downturn in 2008. Due to high
12 levels of unemployment, under employment and
13 poverty with one in five Americans struggling with
14 food hardships since 2012. Cuts to SNAP benefits
15 in the midst of challenging economic conditions
16 will hinder families ability to rise out of
17 poverty as well as efforts to stimulate this
18 economy. Therefore, the New York City Council is
19 calling on the Federal Government to preserve
20 funding for SNAP in the current farm bill. We've
21 been joined by my colleagues Council Member Gale
22 Brewer from Manhattan, Council Member Rubin Wills
23 from Queens, Council Member Jimmy Van Bramer from
24 Queens, Council Member Diana Reyna from Brooklyn
25 and Queens, Council Member Domenic Recchia and the

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2 lead sponsor of this bill and he's from Brooklyn
3 and Council Member Brad Landers from Brooklyn.

4 Council Member Recchia has an opening statement.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: Thank you.

6 Dear colleagues, today I'm here to speak to you on
7 a critical issue facing the City of New York and
8 in support of a resolution that calls on the
9 United States Congress to prevent what would be an
10 enormous setback to the most vulnerable in our
11 city. I am here to speak with you today about the
12 proposed cuts to the supplemental nutrition
13 assistance program commonly known as the SNAP
14 program in Congress farm bill. Before I go any
15 further let me first thank the wonderful Chair of
16 the Committee, Council Member Annabel Palma for
17 bringing this important resolution before the
18 Committee for discussion. And I also want to
19 recognize we're lucky to have her husband Felix
20 here. I want to also thank Speaker Quinn who has
21 been a strong advocate on this issue from day one
22 and all my colleagues who are currently supporting
23 this resolution. One of the largest recipients of
24 Federal food aid in the country it is so important
25 that New York City's voice be heard and that we

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2 provide a united front on this fundamental issue
3 of whether or not the people in this city can
4 afford to put food on their tables. Allow me to
5 offer some brief context of this resolution and
6 it's important at this particular time.

7 Currently, the leading proposals for the farm bill
8 in Congress would severally cut funding to the
9 SNAP program. Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP
10 provide those living with food insecurity with the
11 means to acquire healthy, sustaining meals.

12 Throughout the country millions of Americans rely
13 on SNAP to survive. The vast majority of these
14 recipients, over 83 percent are the most
15 vulnerable on our society. Seniors and the
16 disabled, in our city alone 1.8 million New
17 Yorkers depend on SNAP to put food on the table.

18 The version of the farm bill that passed the
19 United States Senate two weeks ago would require
20 cuts to SNAP totaling \$4.1 billion over the next
21 ten years, or as much as \$130 per household each
22 month. Last week, the House of Representatives
23 failed to pass a farm bill that would slash SNAP
24 by more than \$20 billion over the same period. To
25 paint the pictures of just how large an impact

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2 this would have on New York City, if the entire
3 population of Staten Island went nine months
4 without eating, it would still fall short of the
5 meals lost under the House bill. Ironically, the
6 House version of farm bill failed to pass last
7 week because there were actually Republican
8 members who thought that the cuts didn't go far
9 enough. That's why it's so important for this
10 City Council to act now and lend our voice of
11 support for SNAP. If these cuts are to make it
12 into the farm bill they will have a devastating
13 impact on our citizens and are already strained
14 emergency food services. In addition to the
15 devastating human impact, these cuts will have a
16 measurable economic effect too. According to a
17 policy brief prepared by the food bank from New
18 York City, city food retailers stand to lose as
19 much as \$15 billion each month if these cuts are
20 enacted. Leaving these programs untouched will
21 help get our economy back on track. Every dollar
22 spent on SNAP returns about #1.73 to the economy.
23 This is the most effective form of stimulus
24 spending and it is about to be cut dramatically.
25 Our representatives in Congress must recognize and

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2 address the injustice and shortsightedness of
3 these proposals. By standing together to pass
4 this resolution we will send a strong message to
5 Congress that they must act now to prevent these
6 cuts. Thank you very much.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We've also been
8 joined by Ydanis Rodriguez, Council Member from
9 Manhattan and before we, we're going to vote on
10 two resolutions so I want to hear two brief
11 testimonies that we have from representatives from
12 the food bank and the New York City Coalition
13 against Hunger, Torrada Stampas [phonetic] and
14 Lisa Levy [phonetic] and then I will, and then
15 after their testimony we'll vote on the
16 resolutions.

17 MS. TORRADA STAMPAS: Good
18 afternoon. Thank you, Chair Woman Palma, Members
19 of the General Welfare Committee and Council
20 Member Recchia for sponsoring and leading this
21 resolution. I'm here to say really two simple
22 things. One, thank you and two, keep it up. This
23 City Council when it takes actions like this
24 resolution becomes a model and an example for
25 local legislatures across the country. The

1 letters of support that you have done, the
2 previous resolutions passed through deficit
3 reduction, sequestration and so on and so forth
4 have been used by advocates across the country to
5 encourage other State and Local Legislatures to
6 take similar action. And since we're talking
7 about Federal legislation, that is incredibly
8 important. And I say keep it up because the farm
9 bill just had a setback, the House failed to pass
10 the more extreme and draconian cuts that were put
11 out in their bill and that puts a pause in the
12 process and that allows us to build on the
13 momentum of almost every single Democratic member
14 of the House of Representatives voting against
15 this bill because of the deep, deep cuts to SNAP.
16 Several Republican members as well and it also
17 gives us a little time to do the work we have to
18 do here in New York City. While every single
19 member of our Congressional delegation voted for
20 an amendment to fully restore SNAP funding that
21 amendment failed and when the final bill came onto
22 the House floor with more than \$20 billion in SNAP
23 cuts, every member of Congressional delegation but
24 one, and that was Congressman Michael Grimm
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2 [phonetic] voted against it. And he voted for it,
3 so we clearly still have a bit of work here to do
4 in New York City and statements such as what, the
5 one coming from this body will help us do that
6 work and help us in our advocacy and help us
7 hopefully educate the Members of Congress who
8 should be voting in the interest of New York City
9 and New York City's prime interest in the farm
10 bill is the food stamp program. Thank you.

11 MS. LISA LEVY: Thank you. Good
12 Afternoon. I'm Lisa Levy, the Policy - - and
13 Organizing Director for the New York City
14 Coalition Against Hunger. My testimony today is
15 on behalf of the 1,100 soup kitchens and food
16 pantries in New York City and the more than 1.4
17 million New York City residents who live in homes
18 who can't afford sufficient food. The New York
19 City coalition against hunger endorses the
20 proposed resolution, 543-A, supporting sufficient
21 funding for civil, mental, and nutritional
22 assistance program and thanks the New York City
23 Council Members, Speaker, and this committee for
24 their continued attention to this important issue.
25 According to Federal food insecurity data, in 2009

1 through 2011 an estimated average of 1.42 million
2 or approximately 17 percent of New Yorkers were
3 food insecure. Which means that they either go
4 hungry or struggle to ration food. That number
5 which represents one in six New Yorkers also
6 includes children and seniors over the age of 60.
7 This number is a 300,000 person increase, 27
8 percent, from 2006 through 2008 when there were
9 approximately 1.12 million food insecure New
10 Yorkers. In 2009 through 2011 nearly 474,000
11 children in New York City lived in food insecure
12 households, households that did not have an
13 adequate food supply throughout the year. This
14 number represents 25 percent, or one in four of
15 the City's children and is a 31 percent increase
16 from 2006 to 2008, when 363,000 or one in five New
17 York City children lived in food insecure homes.
18 Without the reauthorization of the 2009 Federal
19 Recovery Act, SNAP beneficiaries in New York will
20 lose another 60 million meals as of November 1st,
21 2013, a so called hunger cliff. While State
22 funding for pantries and kitchens increased
23 slightly this year it did not come close to making
24 up for the Federal cuts and City funding stayed
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1 flat. As a result, fully 63 percent of the City's
2 pantries and kitchens lacked enough food to meet
3 the growing demand. 56 percent were forced to
4 ration food by reducing portion size, eliminating
5 their hours of operation and/or by turning away
6 hungry New Yorkers. These cuts are in addition to
7 sequestration, which has also taken a toll on New
8 Yorkers who have lost funding for programs
9 including Meals on Wheels, Head Start, funding for
10 rental assistance and AmeriCorps, which provides
11 vital assistance to soup kitchens and pantries as
12 well as my organization, New York City Coalition
13 Against Hunger. If cuts to SNAP similar to those
14 defeated in the House are successfully passed New
15 Yorkers could lose as many as 132 million meals.
16 Even without these cuts, 50 million Americans,
17 including 17 million children already live in
18 households defined by the Federal Government as
19 food insecure. It should surprise nobody that
20 more Americans need Federal assistance now more
21 than ever. In some parts of this country we have
22 situations of drought and wildfire but nowhere do
23 you have anyone arguing to withhold funding to
24 fight fires, especially when these fires threaten
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2 some homes in some of the most conservative
3 districts. Similarly, we must fight, provide
4 funding during this economic downturn when many
5 look to the government to assist them I their hour
6 of need by providing Federal aid to fight hunger,
7 especially as this problem persists in every
8 Congressional district. The Senate has passed a
9 farm bill proposing \$4.1 billion in cuts from SNAP
10 while the House recently voted down their version
11 with far greater cuts. While many voted against
12 these bills because the cuts were too high, far
13 too many did not support them claiming that the
14 cuts did not go far enough, giving the false
15 impression that they were merely reducing waste,
16 fraud and abuse. That's simply not true. These
17 cuts from SNAP are taking food away from hungry
18 working parents, seniors and children. They are
19 slashing programs that if expanded could end
20 hunger in America. Not only will tens of millions
21 of Americans suffer from these reductions but the
22 cuts will imperil the country's overall economic
23 and national security. No super power in the
24 history of the world has remained such if it
25 failed to feed its own people. The time is long

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2 overdue for all Americans to have access to
3 nutrition's affordable food. The stakes are too
4 high for continued political grandstanding. The
5 hunger games must stop. Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you both
7 for your testimony. You know that this Committee
8 is very supportive of making sure that these cuts
9 don't go any further. We've been joined by
10 Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo from the
11 Bronx and we are also going to vote on a
12 resolution which will authorize the Speaker to
13 intervene, file an amicus brief or join an amicus
14 brief on behalf of the Council in litigation,
15 Pelegrin versus New York City Human Resource
16 Administration. This class action lawsuit was
17 brought by the Legal Aid Society against HRA and
18 Commissioner Door [phonetic] due to HRA's
19 implementation of a policy which seeks to collect
20 from the sponsors of legal immigrants the cost of
21 any means tested, public assistance benefits
22 provided to sponsor immigrants. As of April 2013
23 HRA has mailed 470 letters to sponsors and
24 collected \$315,604. Although HRA has been
25 authorized on the Federal Law to collect these

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2 costs for 15 years, it's only began doing so in
3 2012 and initiated the policy through an internal
4 public bulletin uncovered by Legal Aid through a
5 standing of the Freedom of Information Law
6 Requests. And so we're also going to be voting
7 this resolution which, you know, I'm a sponsor of
8 out of this Committee today. And I will, unless
9 any of my colleagues have any statements or
10 questions? [off mic] Okay, Gale?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, my
12 question is, having listened to the, read the
13 papers you know a lot more than I do that what's
14 in the papers regarding passage. So, what's the
15 strategy to curtail insanity that the Republicans,
16 but they're also hurting their own farmers, I
17 would assume. So, what's the strategy to get a
18 bill that we want?

19 MS. STAMPAS: You know, I think
20 it's very good question. And honestly, it's
21 anyone's guess, really, what the path forward on
22 the farm bill is going to be. There are a number
23 of different scenarios, unfortunately, not many of
24 them include completely avoiding cuts to SNAP.
25 The \$4.1 billion cut that was passed in the Senate

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2 bill, which disproportionately, to a really
3 shocking level, impacts New York City. 40 percent
4 of the households impacted by this cut will be in
5 New York City, 40 percent nationally. That is
6 being seen right now both, including by Senate
7 leadership and by the White House as an acceptable
8 starting point for farm bill negotiations. So,
9 like I said, the take down of the House bill was
10 something that took everybody by surprise. It
11 would not have been brought to the floor if House
12 leadership thought that it was going to fail and
13 fail spectacularly as it did by a 45 vote margin.
14 So, there is momentum that that created for, kind
15 of, stopping the cuts and certainly stopping the
16 worst of them. So, things could, the political
17 dynamics behind this could shift, could change
18 over the coming months. It's unlikely that the
19 farm bill is going to be taken up again quickly
20 but Congress does have only until September 30th to
21 take action before they either extend the current
22 provisions or pass the new bills. So, you may see
23 some changes taking place over the course of the
24 summer and come into a different environment in
25 September but really it's anyone's guess at this

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point.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I should know this but if there's a CR or some kind of Committee Resolution, how does that, God help us, impact time wise this horrific 44 percent or hopefully when would we see any change, status quo or horrible?

MS. LEVY: We're going to see change in November if nothing happens with this hunger cliff. And so far nobody's really been mentioning that. So, I mean, that's actually the, an earlier deadline. The White House had promised to do something about that but so far, that, the farm bill has overshadowed that. And that's going to hurt New Yorkers just the same.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you. If that's all the questions I'm going to ask the Clerk to please call the roll.

MR. KEVIN PIN: Kevin Pin, Committee Clerk, roll call on the committee on General Welfare, Council Member Palma?

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I vote aye.

MR. PIN: Brewer?

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Aye.

MR. PIN: Arroyo?

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Aye.

MR. PIN: Rodriguez?

COUNCIL MEMBER RODRIGUEZ: Aye.

MR. PIN: Lander?

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Aye.

MR. PIN: Van Bramer?

COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: First

of all, congratulations to my constituent, Torrada Stampas on a great job here testifying, Pride of Woodside, and I vote aye and request to be added to both resolutions.

MR. PIN: Wills?

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: I vote aye.

I also request to be added to both resolutions.

MR. PIN: By a vote of seven in the affirmative, zero in the negative, no abstentions, all items have been adopted. Members, please sign the Committee Report.

COUNCIL MEMBER RECCHIA: I'd like to thank all my colleagues for making, for voting on to pass this resolution. I'd also like to thank the advocates for coming here today to take

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2 time out. This is the beginning of our fight.

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Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,

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Domenic, for sponsoring the resolution and I also

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want to thank Council Member Dromm for sponsoring

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the resolution that would allow the Speaker to

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file the amicus brief. And I will now adjourn the

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General Welfare Committee Hearing of June 25th,


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2013. [off mic]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Tara Juhl certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tara Juhl".

Date 7/17/13