

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

February 14, 2019  
Start: 10:05 a.m.  
Recess: 2:18 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway-Committee Rm, 16<sup>th</sup> Fl.

B E F O R E: STEPHEN T. LEVIN  
Chairperson

INEZ D. BARRON  
Co-Chair

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

ADRIENNE E. ADAMS  
DIANA AYALA  
LAURIE BECK CUMBO  
VANESSA L. GIBSON  
MARK GJONAJ  
BARRY S. GRODENCHIK  
ROBERT F. HOLDEN  
BEN KALLOS  
BRAD S. LANDER  
ANTONIO REYNOSO  
YDANIS A. RODRIGUEZ  
RAFAEL SALAMANCA, JR.  
RITCHIE J. TORRES  
MARK TREYGER

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

Grace Bonilla  
Administrator of the New York City Human  
Resources Administration, HRA

Jill Berry  
Executive Deputy Commissioner of the New York  
City Human Resources Administration, HRA

Annette Holm  
Chief Special Services Officer of the New York  
City Human Resources Administration, HRA

Chris Rosa  
Interim Vice Chancellor at CUNY for Student  
Affairs

Deborah Harte  
Founding Director of Single Stop at the Borough  
Of Manhattan Community College

Dr. Charles Platkin  
Executive Director of the Hunter College New York  
City Food Policy Center

Bill Busk  
SNAP Benefit Recipient, Resident of Supportive  
Housing in Tremont Section of the Bronx

Hercules Reid  
Legislative Director for CUNY's University  
Student Senate, USS

Latasha Lee  
Psychology Major at CUNY, Parent, Student Leader

Gabriel Jamison  
Medgar Evers College Student

Eiysha George  
Recent Bronx Community College, BCC Graduate,  
Current Student at Lehman College

Anelle Morales-Rojas  
Tenant and Benefits Advocate for the Safety Net  
Project at the Urban Justice Center

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

Nick Freudenberg  
Professor of Public Health at the City University  
Of New York, Graduate School of Public Health,  
Director of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute

Tanzina Ahmed  
Assistant Professor at CUNY Kingsborough  
Community College

Karla Ignacio  
Food Security Advocate from HOSTOS Community  
College

Maggie Dickinson  
Assistant Professor at Guttman Community College

John Krinsky  
Professor of Political Science at the City  
College of New York and the CUNY Graduate Center

Mikota De Roo  
Vice President of Public Affairs at Food Bank for  
New York

Joel Berg  
Chief Executive Officer of Hunger Free America

Rebecca Glass  
Agency Operations Manager of City Harvest

Ariel Savransky  
Policy and Advocacy Advisor at UJA Federation

Rachel Sabella  
Director of No Kid Hungry New York

Wendy O'Shields  
New York City Welfare and Homeless Rights  
Advocate with the Urban Justice Center Safety Net  
Project and Activists

Michael Higgins  
Co-Founder and Chair of the Food Pantry at  
Columbia

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

Medhat Garas  
Low Income Member of Hunger Free New York City's  
Food Actions Board

Loresa Wright  
Director of Crisis and Housing Supports at United  
Way of New York City

Zamir Hassan  
CEO and Founder of Muslims Against Hunger and  
Hunger Van

Robert Ennis Jackson  
Representing Brooklyn Rescue Mission Urban  
Harvest Center

Jill Berry  
Executive Deputy Commissioner at the New York  
City Human Resources Administration, HRA

Judy Secon  
Senior Director of Programs and Operations for  
New York Common Pantry

Amy Blumsack  
Director of Organizing and Policy for Neighbors  
Together

Jason Hilliard  
Chief of Staff at the Community Food Advocates,  
CFA

Laurie Beck  
University Director for Assessment and Strategic  
Initiatives at Student Affairs

Carina Santos Taveras  
Student at Hunter College, Welfare Rights  
Initiative, WRI

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[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning

everybody. I'm Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the Council's Committee on General Welfare. I want to thank you all for coming to our hearing on reducing food insecurity in New York City. Today we will also be focusing our attention on food insecurity among college students and I want to thank my colleague, Council Member Inez Barron, Chair of the Higher Education Committee for joining me today and for bringing attention to this important issue. I also want to thank the food justice advocates and emergency food providers who work very hard every day to ensure that every New Yorker in need has access to sufficient... to a sufficient amount of nutritious food. According to the USDA, an estimated 1.2 million New York City residents were food insecure in 2016 and while this is a decrease from previous years, food insecurity in New York City is still 12 percent higher than the national rate. In New York City 1.57 million people rely on SNAP benefits to meet their basic nutritional needs and while SNAP is crucial in our fight against hunger, families often cannot stretch their benefits to the end of the month and

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must turn to our network of food pantries and soup  
kitchens to fill the gap. This fact is painfully  
obvious at this time because the government shut down  
last month resulted in SNAP recipients receiving  
their February benefits in mid-January and are trying  
to make that stretch until March. Those February  
benefits are likely long gone as we approach the  
public-school winter break and children are losing  
free school meals. Additionally, on February 1<sup>st</sup>,  
2019, the USDA posted a proposed rule to limit the  
waivers that states had been receiving for able, able  
body adults without dependents otherwise known as  
ABAWDs. Federal law imposes a time limit for able  
body adults without dependents to receive SNAP  
benefits for three months and three years if they do  
not meet certain work requirements. States have been  
permitted to apply for waivers to areas of high... for  
areas of high unemployment but the proposed rule  
seeks to put so many restrictions on these waivers  
that the current areas covered by the waiver would be  
reduced by 75 percent. I urge everybody here to  
submit a comment expressing their strong opposition  
to the proposed rule during the 60-day public comment  
period that ends on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019. One easy way to

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do that is to go to the Food Research and Action Center, otherwise known as FRAC website, there you will find a link about this proposed rule, plenty of information, great talking points and a form to submit comments right on their page. As federal policies continue to have negative impacts on our city, I want to thank the food pantries and soup kitchens that have continued to fill the gaps especially since the great recession. Anti-hunger initiatives are a core component of the social safety net. An estimated 1.4 million New York City residents rely on urgent... emergency food programs each year and pantries and kitchens are continuing to see an increase in demand every year despite an improving economy. According to a food bank survey last year, over half of soup kitchens and food pantries reported running out of food and 29 percent reported turning people away because of the lack of food. In last year's budget my colleagues and I successfully negotiated an 8.7-million-dollar baseline increase in the emergency food assistance program otherwise known as EFAP from the city for a total baseline amount of 18.1 million dollars and I want to thank my colleague on the Committee, Barry Grodenchik for his unwavering

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advocacy for this. And I'm proud of the Council's  
commitment to securing our enhanced city's safety net  
programs and I also want to thank our Speaker Corey  
Johnson for making this a top priority in his budget  
negotiations with the Mayor. However, we must do more  
to ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry. I want to  
acknowledge the administration's efforts to increase  
food access across the city through various programs  
including Access NYC, which I think we'll see a  
demonstration of where applicants can apply for SNAP  
online, client initiated scheduling for SNAP  
interviews on demand and the food assistance  
collaborative aimed to build and expand the capacity  
of food pantries across New York City. We can... need  
to continue to work together to ensure... to ensure  
that no New Yorker misses a meal. At this time, I'd  
like to acknowledge my colleagues who are here today;  
we are joined by Council Member Barry Grodenchik of  
Queens, Council Member Bob Holden of Queens, Council  
Member Adrienne Adams of Queens as well, of course my  
colleague and Co-Chair Inez Barron of Brooklyn and we  
expect to be joined by more Council Members as the  
hearing goes on. Lastly, I'd like to thank the staff  
of the General Welfare Committee Aminta Kilawan,



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2 Senior Counsel; Tonya Cyrus and Crystal Ponds, Senior  
3 Policy Analysists and Julia Haramis, Finance  
4 Analysist for putting this hearing together. I'd also  
5 like to thank my Chief of Staff Jonathon Bouchet and  
6 my legislative Director Elizabeth Adams and now I'm  
7 pleased to turn it over to my Co-Chair for this  
8 hearing, Co.. Chair of the Higher Education Committee  
9 Inez Barron.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you Chair  
11 Levin, thank you so much. I'd like to wish everyone a  
12 good morning and for those of you who celebrate  
13 Valentines Day, a happy Valentines Day. I'm Council  
14 Member Inez Barron and I'm the Chair of the Committee  
15 on Higher Education and we are joining the Committee  
16 on General Welfare to hold this oversight hearing on  
17 reducing food insecurity in New York City including  
18 perspectives on this issue as it relates to college  
19 students. But first I want to say we are midway in  
20 the month known as black history month. It was a  
21 tribute that was started by Carter G. Woodson to  
22 acknowledge the contributions of blacks. The noted  
23 black historian, Dr. John Henrik Clarke said quote,  
24 "history is a clack that tells... that people use to  
25 tell their political and cultural time of day". Dr.

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Clarke reminds us quote, "the first light of human consciousness and the world's first civilization were in Africa, the country with the highest concentration of mineral wealth which contributed to it's being targeted by greedy capitalist nations". For nearly 600 years, Africa was robbed of its greatest resources, it's people, hundreds of millions were kidnaped forced into human trafficking and conscripted into uncompensated labor. Africans were stolen from the lush, lush, rich vegetation of the motherland where they had access to fufu to yams to goobers which are peanuts, rice and other gross... and other grains and they were transported here and constrained to frugal, bare subsistent diets of the ears, pigs and end entrails of pigs, the ears, feet and entrails of pigs yet they built the economy of this nation that denied them the benefits of their labor. So, today as we examine the situation of hunger, which now has a euphemistic title that we're looking at, food insecurity but hunger particularly in New York City and at the CUNY... and the CUNY system, we will explore how New York City can adopt measures to ensure that as we claim our title of progressiveness and humanitarianism and concern for

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all people that we can point to a particular specific programs that are addressed... that address the issue. Back to my other comments. There is certain irony in today being Valentines Day for today is synonymous with love, flowers, candy and nice meals but for others today is just another day of making tough choices between eating or paying the rent or eating and purchasing a metro card to get to work or school. Indeed, hunger and food insecurity is something that for far too many New Yorkers they endure on a regular basis including some of you who bravely came here today to testify, and I want to especially thank you for your willingness to share your perspectives with us. The City University of New York of which I am a proud alum has legislatively mandated mission to serve as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantage of the city of New York. CUNY's student body very much reflects this mission, 42 percent of CUNY students come from families with incomes lower than 20 percent annually, 45 percent are first generation college students, 12 percent are supporting students of... and of these many are single parents. A quarter of the student body is black and a third is Latino and we do want to acknowledge that we

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knew how... we have a new Chancellor after a year of not having one and we want to welcome him to his responsibility, the President... former President Queens College, Felix Matos Rodriguez. Even though we all live here today in one of the richest cities in the world and attend the country's largest public urban university, there is an abundance of research that these factors collide to create an unacceptably high risk of food insecurity and hunger. People should never go hungry and hunger should never affect one's academic attainment. The risk for food insecurity is even greater among community colleges where many low-income first-generation students of color begin their paths towards a degree. Food insecurity can drastically impact student's academic performance and lower grade point averages, poor class attendance and lower graduation rates, that is if they graduate at all. And sadly, we've seen that CUNY's graduation rates particularly among its community colleges are dismal. Only 19.2 percent of students who enter associate degree programs at CUNY earn a degree in three years. If CUNY truly wishes to fulfill its mission of uplifting disadvantaged students, then it also has an obligation to help

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these students address food needs that have a real and lasting impact on their success. I want to acknowledge that CUNY has food pantries for needy students at all of its community colleges and at the majority of its senior colleges. CUNY also has a single stop program at all of its community colleges. For those of you who are unfamiliar with it, single stop is an essential program that provides campus-based assistance for students to access benefits such as food assistance through the federal supplemental nutrition assistance program or SNAP. Although only one of CUNY's senior colleges has a single stop program, in its draft 2019/2020 operating budget request and four year financial plan CUNY requested an additional 2.4 million dollars to expand single stop to more senior colleges and an additional 7.8 million dollars to develop a pilot program to provide swipe cards to be used at university cafeterias by needy students throughout the year. These are very important steps but is it enough? I'm not referring to the financial ask although that is certainly important but is CUNY informing its students about the food resource it currently has. The students know where to go for assistance and what if anything is

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CUNY doing to help alleviate any stigma that may be attached to seeking assistance. We are also interested in obtaining a review... obtaining an overview of the relationship between HRA and local colleges and universities with regard to hunger. New York City is a quinton central college town but the problem of food insecurity impacts students at many campuses across the city. Specifically, we are interested in learning about how the city is working to address the issue of hunger among college students who are in need of support but who sadly may be overlooked. My hope is that at this hearing we will all be listening to and learning about what more we can do to address this problem. We've acknowledged the members of the Committee who are here, and I do want to also acknowledge Joy Simmons my Chief of Staff, Indigo Washington my legislative Liaison and CUNY... Legislative Director and CUNY Liaison, Chloe Rivera the Policy Analysist, Paul Sinegal the Counsel and welcome Michele Peregrin the Committees new Financial Analyst, thank you Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Madame

Chair. Before we hear from the administration Council

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2 Member Grodenchik wanted to make a brief opening  
3 remark as well.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: Thank you Mr.  
5 Chair, thank you Madame Chair for indulging me. I, I  
6 couldn't let this moment pass because we did have a  
7 wonderful budget last year and I got to this Council  
8 just over three years ago when and one of the very  
9 first hearings that I went to was the annual hearing  
10 on food insecurity and I have to tell you in, in all  
11 frankness I didn't know how much one meeting could  
12 change my life. I was raised by two parents in public  
13 housing and everybody who came had to eat something.  
14 I'm sure that many of you had a similar experience  
15 with your parents and my parents if, if you didn't  
16 take food their... like their, their day was ruined so  
17 I learned from an early age that we... everybody must  
18 be fed and I just want to say in a few words, I want  
19 to say to the people who are here thank you because  
20 you've made a difference and when people say that,  
21 you know what, what does it matter, it does matter,  
22 it really matters, it matters because I have a chair  
23 in Steve Levin who really cares, we have a Speaker in  
24 Corey Johnson who made this a top priority, it was  
25 the number one priority in the budget last year to

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end the budget dance on emergency food. We have

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members of this Committee and really all 51 members

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of the Council were on board, so it does matter, it

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does matter. I want to say that not just to the

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people in this room but whoever may be watching this,

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it matters when you get up and you put your clothes

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on and you put your shoes on and you come to hearings

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and make a difference. As we have heard this morning,

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the fights not over, we did manage to more than

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double the baseline for emergency food last year but

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there is still over a million New Yorkers who are

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going hungry and in this great city of ours nobody,

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nobody should go hungry, we have the food, we have

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the logistics, we have the people willing to do the

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work mostly volunteers, over 500 food pantries, we

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even manage with our emergency food to, to feel

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furloughed federal workers including members of the

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United States Coast Guard who had nothing to eat but

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were fed by food pantries in this city. I want to say

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that I pledge myself, that I will continue to

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legislate to advocate, to gyrate to do whatever I got

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to do to make sure that no New Yorker goes hungry. I

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want to say on a local note because, you know all

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politics are local, I'm happy to see my constituent



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here, the administrator of HRA Grace Bonilla. Echoing

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the sentiments of Chair Barron I want to wish all who

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are celebrating a happy Valentine's Day, I tried that

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once and 27 years later I'm still married so it

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worked out and I just want to say again thank you,

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you've made a difference in the lives of many, many

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people who will never know who you are, who owe you

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their thanks and they are having a better life

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because of the work that you've done. Thank you for

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indulging me Mr. Chairman and Madam Chair.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Council

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Member Grodenchik and thank you for all your

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advocacy. The Counsel to the Committee Aminta Kilawan

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will swear you in, if you can all raise your right

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hands please?

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COMMITTEE CLERK: Do you affirm to tell

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the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth

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in your testimony before this Committee and to

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respond honestly to Council Member questions? Thank

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you, you may begin.

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GRACE BONILLA: Good morning Chair Barron

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and Madam Chair, we would like to start first with a

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video that really illustrates the many steps that we

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are taking to make sure that we're making the message

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2 of using SNAP when needed accessible so I... we will  
3 start with that before we go into our testimony.

4 [video] Life can get busy, there's  
5 always somewhere you have to be or something you need  
6 to do whether it's an unexpected storm or a bus that  
7 pulls away as you get to the stop, one thing you can  
8 always count on is, life is unpredictable which means  
9 when you're in a jam you need some help to your life  
10 simpler not more complicated, introducing the ACCESS  
11 HRA website and mobile app. With these tools applying  
12 for and keeping track of your benefits like SNAP are  
13 well a snap, using the ACCESS HRA app you can view  
14 the status of your SNAP case, get important notices  
15 about your case and even view your SNAP EBT card  
16 balance making planning your family's next meal a  
17 snap. Need to submit documents but don't have time to  
18 visit an HRA office, let the ACCESS HRA app help you,  
19 using the camera on your mobile device you can take  
20 pictures of your documents and upload them through  
21 the app making getting your information to us a snap  
22 and if you do need to come into our offices the  
23 ACCESS HRA app makes getting information about your  
24 upcoming appointments a snap. The ACCESS HRA website  
25 can help you do even more, there you can apply for or

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recertify your SNAP benefits and check information about your case with just a few clicks, you can also recertify for cash assistance, submit your SNAP periodic report and print a Medicaid renewal form. Soon we'll be adding even more improvements to the ACCESS HRA website and app to make applying for benefits and managing your case even easier. We know your benefits and your personal information are important to you which is why we've built in state-of-the-art security to keep your information safe and secure. Our tools give you all the information you need to have peace of mind about your benefits. Download the ACCESS HRA app or visit NYC dot gov slash ACCESS HRA to get started today, simple, paperless, painless, and the easiest way to help manage your benefits.

GRACE BONILLA: Well thank you for

indulging us, that video is going far and wide on social media as well as being played in our centers so that we can send the word out that people don't necessarily have to come in to do business with HRA. And now I will turn to my testimony. Good morning Chairperson Levin, Chairperson Barron and members of the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees.

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Thank you for the 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, I am the Administrator of the New York City Human Resources Administration. 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, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the New York City Housing Authority, 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

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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. 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, include 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 dollars for employers with more than 10 employees, and the recent enhancement to paid sick leave by allowing employees

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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 children and 300 and... 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 quality.. and, 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

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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 City FHEPS. This change will reduce... this change will reduce the need to check a client's eligibility for multiple programs; making 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

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rental assistance programs. 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... 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... 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, facing evictions and displacement. As of June 2018, the City has provided nearly a quarter million New Yorkers with legal representation,



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advice, or assistance in eviction and other housing-related matters through a tenant legal services program administered by HRA. The, 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... in their effect. Last year, the U.S. Office of Citizenship and Immigration Services, USCIS, issued a proposed rule change... 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. Most recently, we endured a 35-day federal shutdown, the longest federal government shutdown in history. Under the direction of the US

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Department of Agriculture and working in concert with  
New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability  
Assistance, 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... 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 agents... 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 the SNAP benefits in  
this unconventional circumstance so, so... 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 7<sup>th</sup>, to limit the

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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 direct... impact... 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 a... who do not... 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, New York City 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 these New Yorkers retain those benefits. As studies regularly conclude, improvements in the economy generally correlates to a reduction in participation in SNAP... in the SNAP program. Not surprisingly, as the local economy continues to

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improve, the SNAP participation rate in New York City declines, it decreased from 77 percent in 2013 to 72 percent in 2016 to 70 percent in 2017. In line with our prior testimony, we believe HRA's SNAP participation rates should not be compared to the state and national participation rates released by 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 New York City PAI was 85 percent, compared to 73 percent in the U.S., and 81 percent in New York State overall. We have taken significant steps to ensure that all eligible New Yorkers have unencumbered.. 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

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improve and streamlining the benefits delivery process. 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 or 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 qualified for an exemption or, 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 that 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, and community... and effective January 1<sup>st</sup> Community District 10. As I... 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

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would restrict waivers to areas where the unemployment rate is higher than seven percent compared to the current unemployment rate, rate threshold of 10 percent. This attack on low-income single adults was... would exacerbate, exacerbate food insecurity, forcing many New Yorkers to lose their SNAP benefits by not meeting the proposed ABAWD work requirement rules. In January of 2012, the 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, optimizing operational efficiencies, 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 been real... we, we have seen real results that reflect a changed client experience at HRA SNAP centers. For example, the percent of SNAP

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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 two 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, 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

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2 access to over 100 case-specific points of  
3 information in real-time, including application and  
4 case statuses, upcoming appointments, account  
5 balances, and documents requested for eligibility  
6 determinations. Additionally, clients can make  
7 changes to contract... contact information, view  
8 eligibility notices electronically, request a budget  
9 letter, and opt into text message and email alerts.  
10 We continue to improve this tool to add new  
11 functionality and now clients can submit their SNAP  
12 Periodic Report online using ACCESS HRA. This new  
13 feature allows clients to report changes in household  
14 composition, income and other circumstances. Another,  
15 another component of our modernization efforts was to  
16 the rollout of the ACCESS... of the HRA Mobile App, a  
17 self-service mobile app to give clients the ability  
18 to use their mobile device to better manage their  
19 cases by having immediate access to case details and  
20 the ability to submit required documents from their  
21 smartphones. Using ACCESS HRA is now as user-friendly  
22 on a mobile device as it has... could be on a PC. This  
23 redesign will make transactions such as recertifying  
24 for SNAP even easier for clients who access the site  
25 from a mobile device because of the seamless



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2 integration between the ACCESS HRA mobile app to the  
3 ACCESS HRA Client Portal. Since the application's  
4 launch in March 2017, clients have uploaded nearly  
5 four million images and the app has scored a 4.6 App  
6 Store user rating. In addition, we've modernized our  
7 SNAP centers by providing on-site self-services. For  
8 clients who prefer to access our services inside one  
9 of our centers, we now have a suite of self-service  
10 tools, which includes self-service check-in kiosks  
11 and PC Banks to utilize ACCESS HRA and self-service  
12 scanning of documents. Overall, by providing an  
13 enhanced client experience in SNAP centers, these  
14 low-touch service models free up our eligibility  
15 workers' time so they can focus on those clients who  
16 need more support and assistance. These successes in  
17 integrating technological improvements to modernize  
18 our SNAP systems are only one part of the equation.  
19 We are also actively continuing our efforts to enroll  
20 low-income New Yorkers by reaching out to New York  
21 City's universe of direct service providers to  
22 familiarize them with the user-friendly features of  
23 ACCESS HRA and develop partnerships with many sites  
24 that utilize the ACCESS HRA Provider Portal, an  
25 online tool designed for CBOs to connect with the

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2 clients they serve. Through the ACCESS HRA Provider  
3 Portal, organizations can view real-time benefit  
4 information for their clients and help them manage  
5 their cases, a service that reduces the possibility  
6 of benefits being lost due to a lapse in  
7 recertification, for example. Since the launch of the  
8 Provider Portal tool in September 2017, 230  
9 organizations have signed up to utilize this tool.  
10 Our Office of Advocacy and Outreach provides ACCESS  
11 HRA trainings for community-based organization staff  
12 who provide SNAP enrollment and case management  
13 services to their constituents. Specifically designed  
14 for CBO staff and case workers, these trainings  
15 provide in-depth instruction in the use and benefits  
16 of the ACCESS HRA Client Portal, Provider Portal...  
17 Provider Portal, and the mobile app. Since July 2017,  
18 the Office of Advocacy and Outreach has conducted 170  
19 ACCESS HRA trainings. In spite of HRA's technology  
20 improvements and progress in benefits reengineering,  
21 we recognize that many vulnerable New Yorkers are not  
22 receiving help and are susceptible to food  
23 insecurity. HRA's SNAP Support Services Unit  
24 dedicates itself to educating the public about SNAP  
25 benefits and eligibility guidelines. In addition, the

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staff prescreens clients to determine eligibility,  
and assists applicants with the application process.  
In Fiscal Year '18, SNAP Support Services provided  
services at 1,758 individual events at 380 individual  
community site 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 low...  
local residents with SNAP prescreening and  
application help. The HRA outreach staff regularly  
attend resource fairs, farmers' markets, and other

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community events, as well as speaking 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 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. In Fiscal Year '19, the HRA Emergency Food Assistance Program's 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 Fiscal Year '19. 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 Fiscal Year '18, 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

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reported serving more than 13.6 million people. EFAP provides over 40 food items and, 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 foods, food items are packaged differently. The actual purchase of these items is based on an analysis of the needs and trends of the emergency food network. We welcome the discussion on the prevalence of food insecurity among college students, vulnerable populations normally overlooked. In of time where real wages are steadily declining and he cost of rent and food are increasing, 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, 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

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2 community college students experience food  
3 insecurity. The severity of this issue is clear to  
4 see in New York City. Approximately 15 percent of  
5 students in the CUNY school system have reported  
6 going hungry because they lacked resources to buy  
7 food and one-quarter of students had to skip a meal  
8 because they could not afford food. The inability to  
9 have consistent, healthy meals results in more than  
10 discomfort; it can lead to a higher predisposition to  
11 serious disease; it makes it difficult for students  
12 to concentrate during or complete their classes and  
13 can lead to higher levels of stress. To alleviate  
14 this serious issue, New York State launched an  
15 initiative for all SUNY and CUNY campuses to have a  
16 food pantry on site, a great step in ensuring  
17 affordable access to healthy food for many college  
18 students. The Excelsior Scholarship Program launched  
19 in 2017 will also greatly assist many college  
20 students with the availability of free tuition for  
21 CUNY and SUNY schools. By eliminating this  
22 substantial expense for low- and middle-income  
23 families and individuals, students can pursue and aim  
24 to complete their college education and free up cash  
25 for purchase... for purchase of food, medication, and

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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 dictated SNAP... 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

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2 students. SNAP and the Emergency Food Assistance  
3 Program, as well as other initiatives detailed in  
4 this testimony, will continue to provide necessary  
5 nutrition assistance to New Yorkers in need. But more  
6 remains to be done to ensure that no New Yorkers... New  
7 Yorker go... and New... no New Yorker goes hungry as a  
8 result of an inability to afford and purchase food.  
9 We are proud of our work to expand access and remove  
10 barriers to these essential benefits and services.  
11 For clients, it has resulted in shorter wait times  
12 and a better client experience. We are also working  
13 to protect, protect against any proposed federal cut  
14 that threatens the SNAP program or the nation's other  
15 safety net programs, as well as policies that may  
16 harm our immigrant communities. Not only would cuts  
17 to SNAP be devastating to those New Yorkers who rely  
18 on this crucial benefit, they would also harm the  
19 local economy. We look forward to continued,  
20 continued collaboration as we work with this Council  
21 and advocates to protect the enormous gains, we have  
22 made in recent years under the de Blasio  
23 Administration and to fight back against any proposed  
24 budget cuts or policies and regulations that harm  
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2 low-income New Yorkers. We welcome your questions.  
3 Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I want to thank  
5 your testimony, it was quite comprehensive, and we  
6 thank you for that. I do want to acknowledge that  
7 we've been joined by Council Members Ayala, Council  
8 Member Reynoso and Council Member Brad Lander. Thank  
9 you for your testimony. Now in the portion of your  
10 testimony where you talk about the impact or the  
11 requirements that students work at least 20 hours in  
12 order... or receive a federal work study grant in order  
13 to be eligible, do we have an idea of how many  
14 students are actually receiving SNAP, do we have that  
15 number, can we get the number, do we know that?

16 GRACE BONILLA: I... do we have that  
17 number? We don't have that number today, I could... we  
18 could absolutely make that available to you after the  
19 hearing.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay and  
21 certainly we understand that if students are working  
22 20 hours a week that certainly has a negative impact  
23 on their being able to take a full load of... although  
24 there are many students who do that and we may hear  
25 from them here today but it certainly has an impact

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on their ability to take classes as well as an impact

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on their grade point average which you talked about

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earlier. In general, you talked about the portal, the

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ACCESS HRA tool, can you tell us quantitatively how

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that system has reduced the time for an application

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to be processed from what it was previously?

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GRACE BONILLA: So, the... we, we have seen

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a reduction in the time that it takes to process

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applications mainly because we are able to get

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documents much faster from clients who before would

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go back and forth with us in order to hand in

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documents or not but do we have a, a number on that?

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We're... [cross-talk]

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: How long did it

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take previously as compared to the average length of

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time that it takes now that you have this tool?

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GRACE BONILLA: We're required to process

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all applications within 30 days and, and we are

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meeting the 30-day time frame.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: But you don't

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have a definitive number as to how, how much... [cross-

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talk]

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GRACE BONILLA: No, part of that is to

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allow the client sufficient time to return documents

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to us and for us to ensure that they have.. to

3

communicate back to clients when they haven't

4

submitted sufficient documents so that 30-day period

5

gives them the full time.. [cross-talk]

6

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, it's still 30

7

days and my question is I'm trying to figure.. I'm

8

trying to get an idea of how much less time it is

9

that now, now that you have the online tool, is it

10

now 28 days rather than the full 30 or do you just

11

wait the 30 days regardless to close the case out?

12

I'm trying to get a quantitative definitive answer.

13

GRACE BONILLA: So, Council Member one of

14

the things that has been great about ACCESS HRA is

15

that we really have worked to streamline the frontend

16

of the app, we are still as part of the modernization

17

working on modernizing the backend of how we process

18

cases. So, that is still a work in progress.. [cross-

19

talk]

20

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay.. [cross-

21

talk]

22

GRACE BONILLA: ...and once we are able to

23

fully modernize the frontend and backend, we.. that's

24

when we will start seeing the results of those days

25

going down.

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
1 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay and I had a  
3 question which you perhaps gave some information on,  
4 I had previously asked about the able bodied adults  
5 without dependents and my question was and I think  
6 it's part of your testimony, that it does apply to  
7 those who live in Brooklyn because at some point I  
8 had seen that it didn't, didn't seem so bad.. [cross-  
9 talk]

10 GRACE BONILLA: Right, so Brooklyn is  
11 part of... currently part of the city that is able to  
12 take advantage of this waiver, there are other parts  
13 like I said in my testimony and in Queens and  
14 Manhattan where we don't have that luxury.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Is it a  
16 requirement of someone to make an application to be  
17 included or is it just done automatically?

18 GRACE BONILLA: It's, it's automatic  
19 depend, dependent on where you live, as long as you  
20 live in, in Brooklyn you are not subject to ABAWD  
21 requirements, you are waived.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, it doesn't  
23 require a community or a zip code or anything just as  
24 long as you live Brooklyn?

25 GRACE BONILLA: Correct.

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Anyone in  
3 Brooklyn, okay, okay. Good, thank you, thank you Mr.  
4 Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Chair  
6 Barron. So, is anyone from CUNY wishing to, to  
7 testify or... [cross-talk]

8 GRACE BONILLA: I believe that's the next  
9 panel...

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The next... okay, on a  
11 separate panel, okay. So, I want to just maybe follow  
12 up a little bit on Council Member Barron's questions  
13 around, around ACCESS HRA. So, the number of... the,  
14 the, the percentage... the one, one metric that struck  
15 me in your testimony was the, the number or  
16 percentage of cases that were... have been submitted  
17 online going up from 23 percent to 87 percent in five  
18 years which is remarkable, was there... was there... now  
19 the ones that were done before how were they done,  
20 was it... was it prior to... because ACCESS HRA was... did...  
21 you know you guys created it, right?

22 GRACE BONILLA: Right, we did create it.  
23 So, this process has been really a five year process,  
24 it's not a flipping of the switch, right, so I  
25 believe that when we were before you last year we

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were still finalizing moving all of the city into  
app... being able to apply on demand, if, if that... if I  
have the time incorrect, right, so as we have phased  
in this approach of being able to do things on demand  
we have seen an increase of folks really taking  
advantage of it so that's what really led to the  
spike, 2018 was really when we focused in ensuring  
that the rest of the city borough by borough was able  
to not just recertify through the... through the app  
but also apply.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Has there been a, a  
correlating increase in our PAI, the, the program  
access index?

GRACE BONILLA: That's a good question,  
we know that we are definitely hitting more  
neighborhoods than we did before, I don't know if  
today we can make the correlation between the number  
of people using the app and the, the very good...

[cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The overall number...

[cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, PAI number that we  
do have.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Excuse me, are there  
3 any other... you know I mean you, you mentioned New  
4 York State as a whole and the United States as a  
5 whole, are there any other jurisdictions that... I mean  
6 are we the highest at 85 percent or are there other  
7 jurisdictions that, that achieve higher numbers on  
8 that... [cross-talk]

9 GRACE BONILLA: I don't have that number  
10 currently, but I know that we are a leader nationally  
11 in the way that we accept SNAP applications. I  
12 believe about a year or so ago we were also asked to  
13 testify in congress about our efforts, so I know that  
14 nationally we are a leader in the space.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do we need special  
16 approvals from OTDA or USDA to, to configure ACCESS  
17 HRA the, the way you wished and so... [cross-talk]

18 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...how... what were those  
20 ways... [cross-talk]

21 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely, we... as, as  
22 you all know SNAP is a benefit that is administered  
23 by the federal government through OTDA so the  
24 partnership with OTDA and the federal government at  
25

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the time that we applied for the waivers was critical

3

to move us in this direction.

4

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay and so

5

specifically what kind of waivers did you... did you

6

request from... [cross-talk]

7

GRACE BONILLA: So, for, for example one

8

of the things that was a requirement of applying for

9

SNAP is that you also had to do a face to face in

10

SNAP, right if you, you go back five years ago, one

11

of the waivers we received was the ability to have

12

that appointment over the phone which opened up the

13

possibility of creating what we have... what we call

14

now TIP centers so now people can call at their

15

convenience to verify the information that's handed

16

in.

17

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if somebody is

18

able to use the app and is proficient to use the app

19

and that it works out properly to have an on-demand

20

interview on the phone, does, does every... is there an

21

instance where someone does not have to come in at

22

all... [cross-talk]

23

GRACE BONILLA: That person should not

24

have to come in at all.

25

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not once?



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2 GRACE BONILLA: Not once.

3 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And yet there are  
4 still people that come in so what... why, why do we...  
5 why are people still deciding to come in?

6 GRACE BONILLA: Sure so, for... [cross-  
7 talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What drives that  
9 decision?

10 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, for the most part  
11 it's, it's multipronged, one of the reasons that  
12 people come in is because they still want to see  
13 someone face to face and have the conversation,  
14 right, that's... and, and we see that and sometimes  
15 folks who are English limited or are older adults who  
16 just don't trust these devices, right and, and that's  
17 why we're still there. The other piece of it is that  
18 we really have to make sure that everyone knows about  
19 the app, we've had instances where our staff will go  
20 out into the waiting room to just survey the, the  
21 waiting room to see why people are there and  
22 sometimes someone will say oh I just want to hand in  
23 this document and they're like well did you know and,  
24 and they're there really to help them download the  
25 app and did you know that you could do this and then

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people are like I had no idea and they'll leave or

3

hand, hand it in and... but not come back the next time

4

so the reasons vary, it's one of the... but that

5

particular reason not knowing has come up over and

6

over and over again which is why we're launching a

7

campaign in March to really just drive the point home

8

that not just SNAP recipients but also someone who's

9

already on cash assistance can open up an ACCESS HRA

10

account, upload documents and reduce the number of

11

visits they have to make to an HRA location.

12

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright, because the...

13

because the... the... you said the, the number of visits

14

has gone down 30 percent but the increase in the

15

number of people using, using the app... using ACCESS

16

HRA has... oh, no, sorry, ACCESS HRA has gone up so

17

significantly so, so... [cross-talk]

18

GRACE BONILLA: No... [cross-talk]

19

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...from 27 to 80 some

20

odd percent so... [cross-talk]

21

GRACE BONILLA: That's correct.

22

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: That's... so, so we're

23

seeing this huge increase but, but you know a

24

slightly... you know or smaller decrease in the number

25

of, of... in the amount of foot traffic and so I'm

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wondering kind of how many.. how many downloads of the

3

app are there?

4

GRACE BONILLA: That's a great question,

5

I don't know that, we, we don't have that readily

6

available.

7

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, we should.. we

8

should find out... [cross-talk]

9

GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

10

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I mean.. and how long..

11

it's only been up for less than a year, right, yeah?

12

GRACE BONILLA: No, the app has been

13

around for a couple of years... [cross-talk]

14

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

15

GRACE BONILLA: ...we have made

16

improvements to the mobile upload that has, has made

17

it more attractive so that we've seen an increase in

18

utilization on, on that side.

19

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. But there are

20

two million ACCESS HRA online accounts?

21

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh.

22

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So that exceeds...

23

[cross-talk]

24

GRACE BONILLA: Correct... [cross-talk]

25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
1 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the number of, of...  
3 that exceeds the number of SNAP recipients, and PA  
4 recipients combined?

5 GRACE BONILLA: So... correct, what drives  
6 that is that as you can imagine for all of who have  
7 online accounts everywhere, you forget your password,  
8 you... there are a number of reasons why you would  
9 have... someone has more than one account.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Does that create any,  
11 you know logistical backlogs for HRA?

12 GRACE BONILLA: Not really, on the  
13 backend we have access to their... to their information  
14 regardless of what... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

16 GRACE BONILLA: ...the frontend looks like,  
17 so we don't have that problem thank goodness but it's  
18 really making sure that people have access to their  
19 documents so that's another conversation that we  
20 constantly have to make sure that they're, they're  
21 leaving their password in a place that's accessible.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What's... what right  
23 now does, does the, the team that built it and I just  
24 want to give, you know kudos to the team that, that

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built this out because I know that they worked very hard on that... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...by the way I encourage... you do the demonstration for ACCESS HRA, so I encourage everybody that works at a not for profit or an elected official's office to go and do the demonstration on Fridays in Brooklyn, is that right?

GRACE BONILLA: That's right... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You'll do it?

GRACE BONILLA: That's right, we have specific dates, please contact us, we are eagerly wanting to make sure that people are not just using ACCESS HRA with... for CBOs, the provider portal is also a huge asset to your case management methodology.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: What are the kind of challenges right now that you're looking at with ACCESS HRA in terms of how to make it better or more effective, reach more people or iron out any kinks that are there right now?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: Well... so, more recently...  
3 I, I could give you one from the past that we've been  
4 able to fix, more recently one of the criticisms was  
5 the clarity of documents when people were uploading  
6 them, we were able to make sure that we fixed that  
7 really very quickly and, and the... one of the latest  
8 releases that we had. Jill do you have anything that  
9 we've been working on that you want to point to?

10 JILL BERRY: Sure, some of the, the  
11 things we did very recently was to make it more  
12 mobile friendly so that it is easier to use the app  
13 on a mobile device. We also... we released the, the  
14 application and made it easier to specifically in our  
15 centers toggle back and forth between English and  
16 other languages so it's easier for our staff to  
17 assist clients who are coming into our centers who  
18 are limited English, who may not be comfortable using  
19 at home but we're able to help them navigate it in  
20 the center by being able to toggle back and forth  
21 between the two languages so hopefully they'll then  
22 be more comfortable using the app at home in the  
23 future.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: How has this effected  
25 your workforce by the way, your SNAP workforce

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because I know that the center on Dekalb Avenue is closed... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...the staff had been relocated so how is... how, how has this impacted staff?

GRACE BONILLA: So, the impact on staff is that we really from a frontend perspective can really focus in on the, the cohort of clients that are never going to use the app, right and have critical needs so that has been a plus from a frontline perspective and from a front facing perspective. On the backend like I said we are... this is something that is iterative and its evolving and we're still working on making sure that the experience for the staff on the backend is as seamless as possible. The... but I do want to clarify the closing of Dekalb was because we lost the lease, but it also provided us an incredible opportunity. When we saw the decrease of foot traffic it really provided an opportunity for us to bring staff together and address other workload issues that may not be addressed with the staff in multiple centers.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then my last  
3 question on ACCESS HRA, is there... is there... are you  
4 looking at expanding provisions of ACCESS HRA to cash  
5 assistance, I mean I imagine that you might need some  
6 federal waivers for that, I mean you know...

7 GRACE BONILLA: So, I, I just really want  
8 to drive this point home and I'm hoping our campaign  
9 in March can help us do that in a more articulate way  
10 that I could do it today, if you are a cash client  
11 you can have an ACCESS HRA account, right, you can  
12 still upload your documents, you can see what your  
13 balance is or you can see what notices are coming in.  
14 Where the limitations are on the cash side and you're  
15 absolutely right Council Member, we would need  
16 waivers is that you still have to come in to do a  
17 face to face, right so... [cross-talk]

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Fingerprinting...

19 GRACE BONILLA: I'm sorry?

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Fingerprinting is  
21 one... [cross-talk]

22 GRACE BONILLA: Yes, that... you still have  
23 to come in to do that and because cash is a state and  
24 federally managed program that we administer we do  
25 absolutely need the support of our state and federal



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partners to remove those barriers so that our cash

3

clients don't have to come in.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So, if we could see

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the percentage of cash recipients using online go

6

from whatever percentage to 87 percent that would be...

7

[cross-talk]

8

GRACE BONILLA: That would be amazing,

9

yes.

10

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, I'm going to

11

just move over quickly here to some EFAP questions,

12

they're kind of... you know broader pantry questions.

13

So, there's the... New York City Food Assistance

14

Collaborative has... we, we... there was a partnership

15

for it in 2015, HRA, Chair... Helmsley Charitable

16

Trust, Redstone Strategy Group, New York State HPNAP

17

and the Director of Food Policy and the Mayor's

18

Office and key, key emergency food providers, how is

19

that going and how is that... how is that partnership

20

or that collaborative... was, was... what are the

21

outcomes of that in terms of increasing capacity in...

22

particularly in, in underserved neighborhoods that

23

have been... there were six identified neighborhoods...

24

[cross-talk]

25

GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...that, that were seen  
3 as being... having the potential to be increased in  
4 terms of access to food?

5 GRACE BONILLA: So, we were really  
6 fortunate to have that partnership take place almost...  
7 the synergy of that partnership prior to being able  
8 to increase the baseline on EFAP really informed what  
9 we could do with the additional funds so, you're  
10 absolutely right, through that partnership we were  
11 able to identify food deserts. One of the things that  
12 came out of it for example, was that even though  
13 there was a food desert there wasn't appropriate  
14 brick and mortar in certain neighborhoods so that we  
15 could create a, a SNAP... I'm sorry, an EFAP location  
16 or a pantry location it's what led to the mobile  
17 pantry system that I was... I was lucky enough to see  
18 in Staten Island... [cross-talk]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: ...where it's a predictable  
21 time, trucks are coming in with goods and commodities  
22 and, and folks understand that that's a time they can  
23 get food so that's one of the things that we were  
24 able to discover through the collaborative. The other  
25 portion of, of the collaborative was really in other

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food deserts where there was brick and mortar it gave

3

us an opportunity to have the conversation of well

4

how do we increase pantries and soup kitchens in

5

particular neighborhoods. The... another thing that I

6

don't want to fail to mention is the plentiful app,

7

right, the plentiful app that came out of that

8

partnership has made... has made it possible for folks

9

that do utilize pantries to do it in a dignified way,

10

they can... like many... very much like ACCESS HRA they

11

can have an account, they can put in their order

12

before going into a pantry for the... for the pantries

13

that use... do use the plentiful app and they can come

14

and pick up their food so it's been a collaboration

15

that's really elucidated for us all the... of the

16

different ways that we can get creative with the

17

funds that we have and neighborhoods that we really

18

need to focus on.

19

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that could be for

20

HPNAP and EFAP and kind of... in terms of what's on, on

21

the plentiful app, and selecting your food is, is, is

22

a... it can be the, the range or sources?

23

GRACE BONILLA: I believe that's right,

24

yeah, I believe that... we can... we can confirm.

25

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1 COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And... are... how many...  
3 what, what percentage of our pantry network is, is  
4 using or EFAP network... pantries that participate in  
5 EFAP are using the plentiful app?

6 GRACE BONILLA: That's a great question,  
7 I would have to get back to you on that but I do want  
8 to point out that since that collaboration and the  
9 additional investment we were able to increase by 43  
10 new pantries and 51... and 51 in... 51 have increased  
11 their allocation because of the investment made by  
12 the city with this... support of the... of the Council.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is the collaborative  
14 still, still going?

15 GRACE BONILLA: It's... their work will  
16 come to a close at... I believe at the beginning of  
17 June and I do have a number, 232 pantries are now  
18 using plentiful.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, out of how many  
20 in the network, do you know?

21 GRACE BONILLA: So, in the EFAP network  
22 we have 558... [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]  
24  
25

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2 GRACE BONILLA: ...pantries that doesn't  
3 account for pantries that receive funding on their  
4 own so... [cross-talk]

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

6 GRACE BONILLA: ...I, I could tell you what  
7 we have in the EFAP network.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right, so  
9 about half of the... is, is that right so half of the...  
10 are all of the 200 or... [cross-talk]

11 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...so that are using it  
13 EFAP providers?

14 GRACE BONILLA: Not necessarily.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not necessarily.

16 GRACE BONILLA: Not necessarily, yeah.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, but if it's  
18 any... if it's around half that's a decent start and  
19 obviously... I mean it would be interesting to know  
20 from them those that don't... aren't using it why  
21 they're not using it, if it's a... if it's a... if it's a  
22 good recourse for a pantry, you know everyone should...  
23 [cross-talk]

24 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah... [cross-talk]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...probably want to  
3 use... [cross-talk]

4 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, that is something  
5 we could absolutely look into, I think the general  
6 response is that when a pantry is managed mainly by  
7 volunteers... [cross-talk]

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

9 GRACE BONILLA: ...it's, it's more  
10 challenging to maintain that type of system.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then I'll turn it  
12 over to my colleagues but I have one more question  
13 about EFAP, is there... how, how is the increase in  
14 allocation working or you know the increase in funds  
15 baselined working at EFAP because I, I did hear from  
16 one provider and I'm paraphrasing this person...  
17 [cross-talk]

18 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...who said that it's  
20 great because we're seeing this, this increase but as  
21 a result now we're relying even more on EFAP... [cross-  
22 talk]

23 GRACE BONILLA: Right... [cross-talk]

24  
25

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...this is... pantries  
3 are because it, it now makes up a greater percentage...  
4 [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...of their overall  
7 food and there's I think some concerns about kind of  
8 the timeliness of the food getting there and so how  
9 are we measuring that and ensuring that pantries are  
10 getting the EFAP provisions in a timely way?

11 GRACE BONILLA: That's a great question,  
12 I, I want to preface my response by saying that every  
13 single pantry has a contact at... within our EFAP  
14 program where they can get in touch with us if they  
15 have any challenges with food, supply, anything and  
16 in anticipation of this question I asked the team if  
17 we have had... received any complaints on timeliness  
18 and we haven't so the... one, one of the challenges of  
19 the food world, emergency food world is that the  
20 funding comes from a number of places, right, so we  
21 have been tracking as you can imagine with this new  
22 investment the rate at which we are meeting our  
23 delivery timelines and I'm happy to report we have  
24 met our delivery timelines. However, if a pantry is  
25 receiving food that is funded through the state or

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federal government while they're receiving that food or not receiving that food they don't know where the funding is coming from, right... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

GRACE BONILLA: ...and because of the incredible investment that the city has made I think it... we automatically go to EFAP as the challenge, but we have not seen that.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you, I'll turn it over to my colleagues for questions. Council... sorry, Council Member Adams.

COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Thank you Mr. Chair and thank you Madame Chair for this important hearing today and welcome, good to see you all again, I remember sitting here last year going over some of the same things that we're going over only we've increased it since then so we're really, really happy to do that. I am really thrilled about the app, I think that it's going to take you very, very far and I know that a lot of people are going to be helped and a lot of relief is going to happen because of the use of the app so we'll do our part to help spread the word to get this information out to folks, particularly that have been waiting on phones and



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2 everything else to get some information, I just think  
3 this app is, is a number one so... [cross-talk]

4 GRACE BONILLA: Thank you... [cross-talk]

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: ...thank you for  
6 that. Also really happy to hear about the plentiful  
7 app, that's something that we've got to spread the  
8 word on also and I was going to ask the same question  
9 that my colleague asked as far as the breadth of the  
10 plentiful app and why it would or would not be  
11 utilized more often and that answer made a lot of  
12 sense to me in the fact that there are so many  
13 volunteers out there that it would really stress  
14 them, I know particularly in my districts it would  
15 really stress them even though I would love to have  
16 them on board with this app as well. So, with that  
17 said I really just have one question and it's just  
18 for, for clarity on my part so if you'll just indulge  
19 me. Along the lines of what Council Member Barron was  
20 asking about, the ABAWD waiver for... I, I noticed the  
21 information impacts my district 28 because it  
22 references the community boards 10 and 12 in Queens  
23 so if you could just clarify for me whether or not  
24 the waiver itself impacts more who don't qualify or  
25 more who do qualify for the waiver just so that I can

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2 understand it, its... there's an exemption with the  
3 exception of residents in community board district 12  
4 and community board district 10, the exception would  
5 be for more folks to be on the waiver or more folks  
6 to be exempt from the waiver?

7 JILL BERRY: Those who live in Queens  
8 that are not in those two community districts are not  
9 eligible for the waiver.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Okay.

11 JILL BERRY: So, they are subject to the  
12 ABAWD requirements.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ADAMS: Right, that's,  
14 that's what I thought, alright, I just wanted to, to  
15 have a clarity in my mind, that is my final question,  
16 thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I just want to say  
18 that we've been joined by Council Member Mark Gjonaj  
19 from the Bronx, Council Member... and we'll turn it  
20 over to Council Member Gjonaj for questions.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you Chairs  
22 and let me just begin by wishing everyone a happy  
23 Valentines Day, it's remarkable to see that 34  
24 percent of our food pantries and kitchens are turn...  
25 forced to turn people away or cut the hours of

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2 operation as well as the portions of food that  
3 they're giving out. Something that I've been working  
4 on for a number of years and I'm hopeful that you'll  
5 not only embrace but be a bit supportive of is the  
6 amount of food that gets thrown out on a daily basis  
7 from our large catering halls. This is perfectly good  
8 food, edible, most of us dine out, we take home our  
9 leftovers, it's perfectly fine, the liability  
10 associated with that food being turned over to a...  
11 [cross-talk]

12 GRACE BONILLA: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: ...kitchen, on many  
14 of our restaurateurs are unwilling to subject  
15 themselves to that liability for various reasons and  
16 it's just shameful to think that people are going to  
17 be hungry and on the other hand so much food is  
18 being discarded. I have a large number of these  
19 catering halls in my district, I've communicated to  
20 them and we're going to start a pilot program that I  
21 really need your help on. We just have to create the  
22 vessel and the vehicle by which we relieve the  
23 liability from those restaurateurs and whether it be  
24 an NGO, a non for profit or directly with the food  
25 pantry. I've allocated some of my own discretionary

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2 funding toward a truck that would keep this food  
3 refrigerated from point A to point B this way it can  
4 be served. Just your thoughts on this matter?

5 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely and I, I can  
6 sympathize with the sentiment. We are very lucky in  
7 this city to have a City Harvest. City Harvest is one  
8 of the, the largest providers of food and what their  
9 business is, is exactly what you're talking about,  
10 food rescue so they take food that... from... that would  
11 otherwise go to waste and provide it to pantries that  
12 have the capacity to distribute it, I'm happy to have  
13 a conversation with you after the hearing to see what  
14 we can do to assist.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: In that regard,  
16 does City Harvest accept the liability associated  
17 with the transporting of the food?

18 GRACE BONILLA: That's a great question,  
19 unfortunately I don't have an answer for that, we'd  
20 probably have to talk to some other of our city's  
21 sister agencies to figure that piece out.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: And as far as you  
23 know are, they offering any type of credit to these  
24 restaurants that participate?

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2 GRACE BONILLA: Again, another question  
3 that would be best... if we could have it offline with  
4 City Harvest.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: That would be  
6 great.

7 GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, happy... [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you...  
9 [cross-talk]

10 GRACE BONILLA: ...happy to... happy to  
11 support it and I... and they may even be in the room or  
12 they're here.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Is City Harvest  
14 here? Okay, great.

15 [off mic dialogue]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I think we have...  
17 [cross-talk]

18 [off mic dialogue]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, we'll, we'll...  
20 yeah, so... we can talk offline and... or when you  
21 testify. Okay, do, do any other Council Members have  
22 questions, Bob do you have questions? Council Member  
23 Robert Holden, yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you and  
25 thank you for your great testimony, its very

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2 encouraging to, to hear this. On the... you said that...  
3 I just have one question, you, you said that you're  
4 launching the campaign, ACCESS HRA for the app in  
5 March?

6 GRACE BONILLA: That's correct.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's correct,  
8 how do you plan to reach your target audience? What...  
9 [cross-talk]

10 GRACE BONILLA: So, it's a... it's  
11 basically PSA, right, we are going to be involved in  
12 social media, we are using and correct me if I'm  
13 wrong anyone in the room, subway ads, we're... print,  
14 social media and transportation hubs is how we're  
15 hoping to do this.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah what about  
17 shelters and in, in target neighborhoods where...  
18 [cross-talk]

19 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: That's great...  
21 [cross-talk]

22 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah.

24 GRACE BONILLA: It's very much what we  
25 did when the shutdown was, was happening we depended

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2 very much on our CBOs, we're going to get the word  
3 out, we're definitely making a larger investment in  
4 March by using transportation hubs and social media  
5 and print...

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Yeah and I'm sure  
7 the City Council can help get the message out like  
8 other Council Members have mentioned putting it on,  
9 on newsletters and... but I... but I think it's so  
10 important on bus, shelters especially where... [cross-  
11 talk]

12 GRACE BONILLA: Correct... [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: ...people in those  
14 neighborhoods can actually see it, very large and,  
15 and access the, the app which sounds terrific, thank  
16 you...

17 GRACE BONILLA: And just to... [cross-talk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: ...very much, thank  
19 you... [cross-talk]

20 GRACE BONILLA: ...clarify my answer, we  
21 will also... we will have digital print outdoor, and  
22 radio media in, in multiple languages.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Terrific, thank  
24 you very much.

25 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Council Member Ayala.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Sorry, Council  
3 Member Ayala is thawing out, it's freezing in here  
4 so, sorry guys I swear you can't make it up but I  
5 have a question, I... just out of curiosity because  
6 we've been having some public charge in full sessions  
7 throughout the district and I wonder has there been  
8 any impact since the president announced potential  
9 changes to the rule?

10 GRACE BONILLA: So, we have not seen and  
11 just to go back we saw the public charge proposal  
12 come out in October, there was a, a period for  
13 comments, the De Blasio Administration, HRA, DOHMH, I  
14 mean all of us I think were involved and having info  
15 sessions in a number of communities. Since the  
16 deadline of the comments were put in and I believe  
17 there were like thousands and thousands of comments,  
18 there's an obligation on the federal side to review  
19 those comments, we have not heard anything from the  
20 federal government so it's critically important that  
21 I, I just underscore nothing has changed; eligibility  
22 climates haven't changed, we have not seen any  
23 updates on this so people should feel free to come  
24 and use... [cross-talk]



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2 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: You haven't seen a  
3 decrease either and in enrollment or... [cross-talk]

4 GRACE BONILLA: ...we have not seen...  
5 [cross-talk]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: ...people that have  
7 disenrolled because they're afraid?

8 GRACE BONILLA: We have not seen a  
9 decrease... [cross-talk]

10 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay... [cross-talk]

11 GRACE BONILLA: ...for that particular  
12 reason... [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Okay... [cross-talk]

14 GRACE BONILLA: Like I said in my  
15 testimony the... we can... we can very clearly attribute  
16 a decrease to the improvement of the economy but not  
17 for this reason.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Understood and  
19 then the able bodied, my final question is about the  
20 able-bodied requirement. So, I'm always afraid that  
21 certain individuals' kind of get left behind, right,  
22 I think my district, zip actually has the exception,  
23 but I'm always concerned about individuals with  
24 severe mental illness, right, that wouldn't  
25 necessarily are not connected so for instance I'll

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give you a case, my... I have... I have an individual in

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my family who suffers from mental illness and

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doesn't... he hasn't been able to access services

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because he's in an adult so thereby he's responsible

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for accessing these services on his own, but he

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wouldn't necessarily know how to navigate them

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because he's mentally ill. If he applied because he

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does, however, get hungry and I'm sure will apply for

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food stamps because that's something that's kind of

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instinctive he will probably be considered ineligible

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because he's an able-bodied young adult. Is there

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like a way to kind of capture when a person... when an

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individual is suffering from, you know some sort of

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mental disability?

16

GRACE BONILLA: Yeah, anybody who suffers

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from any physical or mental disability is not

18

actually considered an ABAWD they are excluded from

19

ABAWD requirements and that doesn't even count

20

against the limited exemptions that we get from the

21

federal government, they're not considered able

22

bodied for this purpose.

23

COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: But if he's not

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receiving social security or, or SSI or disability

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benefits but has been institutionalized and I'm just

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2 saying in, in this case, I'm using him as an example  
3 but an individual that has been in and out of the  
4 hospital how do you capture that, right because you  
5 have to prove it?

6 GRACE BONILLA: Well so thankfully the  
7 federal government does not actually require there to  
8 be documentation of this, it's sufficient for an  
9 eligibility worker to observe that a person is  
10 physically or mentally disabled or for a client to  
11 disclose that to us and that is sufficient document...  
12 [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: How do you do that  
14 when we're seeing more and more clients apply  
15 electronically?

16 GRACE BONILLA: Right, so... and that is  
17 absolutely a challenge. We do send an outreach letter  
18 to every single person who is coded as an ABAWD so  
19 those we might not realize have a mental or physical  
20 disability, every single month, we encourage them to  
21 come into our vendors locations they can either  
22 assist somebody with getting employment or they can  
23 take the documentation or make an observation of  
24 those who are not physically or mentally able to work  
25 and code that exclusion on that person. But I also

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just want to preface that we do have other services at HRA, right, if someone needs to apply and they cannot come in we will send someone out to take that application. If someone is unable to take care of themselves, we have adult protective services so, the, the beauty of having all of these resources within one agency is that our executive deputy commissioners or deputy commissioners, our staff work together to address those needs when they're brought to our attention.

COUNCIL MEMBER AYALA: Understood, thank

you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much

Council Member Ayala. I just want to ask a little bit about the, the proposed rule on, on... the proposed rule from this fall on... I'm blanking on the, the terminology, the... on public charge, can you... can you share with us what, what the status is, have you heard anything from the federal government about whether they are going to move forward on implementation of this or how they're considering the public comments?

GRACE BONILLA: Sure, we are tracking

this incredibly closely as you know Council Member

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1  
2 this was an effort that included multiple cities  
3 across the country to make sure that we sent in as  
4 many comments as possible, since the submission of  
5 the comments we have not heard anything from the  
6 federal government one way or the other but we are...  
7 we are tracking this.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: No indication as to  
9 when they will be trying... going towards making a  
10 decision whether there will be a reopening of the  
11 conversation or how they are looking to... maybe you  
12 could speak a little bit to the process of, of what  
13 is... do you know how the process would move forward  
14 kind of as of... as of course from this point in terms  
15 of they've received comments then they... then they  
16 might incorporate those comments into a new proposed  
17 rule, does that open up for another set of comments  
18 or is... or is the comment period just that one time?

19 GRACE BONILLA: My understanding is that  
20 they have a... an obligation to review all the  
21 comments, the more nuance the comment the longer  
22 they, they're going to take to review them... [cross-  
23 talk]

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]  
25

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2 GRACE BONILLA: ...they may or may not  
3 incorporate those comments into their final rule,  
4 they will publish the final rule when, when they  
5 decide, and I believe it's 60 day after the  
6 publication it will become final.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And, and does  
8 congress have any say in, in, in a rule like this, is  
9 it exclusively an executive agency decision or is  
10 there... [cross-talk]

11 GRACE BONILLA: It's exclusively an  
12 executive agency decision, very much like OTDA may  
13 put a regulation together and it wouldn't go to the  
14 assembly or the state senate. It's a... it's an  
15 interpretation of an existing statute so it's very  
16 much in the executive branch.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is New York City  
18 examining whether to file for an injunction if the  
19 rule were to go forward?

20 GRACE BONILLA: These are conversations  
21 that we... are actively happening to see what our, our  
22 recourse would be. It's larger than the city, we're...  
23 as I said we're talking to partners across the  
24 country to strategize in ways that we can just push  
25 this back in have it not happens in this city.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And HRA's message..  
3 have you seen an impasse on enrollment to SNAP  
4 because of this so now that we have four or five  
5 months of data?

6 GRACE BONILLA: We have not seen a direct  
7 correlation in our immigrant population with the  
8 public charge and enrollment.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Do you get a  
10 lot of inquiries from communities?

11 GRACE BONILLA: It depends on when it  
12 makes it into the press, if it makes it to the press,  
13 we will get more inquiries.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay... [cross-talk]

15 GRACE BONILLA: But we... our, our, our  
16 message has been consistent, we are open for  
17 business.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh. Okay and so  
19 that message has gotten, gotten out there. With that  
20 said if this does move forward it could have  
21 potentially devastating effects as... [cross-talk]

22 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely... [cross-talk]

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...proposed, alright...

24 GRACE BONILLA: Absolutely.  
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, thank you very  
3 much for your time. Do any of my colleagues have any  
4 further questions? Okay... [cross-talk]

5 GRACE BONILLA: Thank you... [cross-talk]

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.  
7 So, we will now hear from representatives from CUNY.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: The next panel  
9 will be Vice Chancellor Chris Rosa from CUNY; Miss  
10 Deborah Harte from BMCC Food Pantry of CUNY and Dr.  
11 Charles Platkin from Hunter Food Policy Institute. Do  
12 you want to give him some assistance making some  
13 space? Move the table so he can get through. Thank  
14 you.

15 [off mic dialogue]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, I'm  
17 going to ask the Counsel to administer the oath.

18 COMMITTEE CLERK: Would you all... [cross-  
19 talk]

20 CHRIS ROSA: Good morning... [cross-talk]

21 COMMITTEE CLERK: ...please raise your  
22 right hand? Do you affirm to tell the truth, the  
23 whole truth and nothing but the truth in your  
24 testimony before this Committee and to respond  
25 honestly to Council Member questions?



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2 CHRIS ROSA: I do.

3 DEBORAH HARTE: I do.

4 COMMITTEE CLERK: Thank you, you may  
5 begin.

6 CHRIS ROSA: Thank you. Good morning  
7 Chair Barron, Chair Levin, honorable members of the  
8 Higher Education and General Welfare Committees. I'd  
9 like to begin my testimony today by thanking you for  
10 your ongoing support of the City University of New  
11 York and for your enduring commitment to the health,  
12 wellness, safety and academic success of CUNY  
13 students. My name is Chris Rosa and I proudly serve  
14 as CUNY's Interim Vice Chancellor for Student  
15 Affairs. I'd like to introduce my colleagues. I am  
16 joined today by Deborah Harte, the Founding Director  
17 of Single Stop at the Borough of Manhattan Community  
18 College, who will provide detailed information about  
19 Single Stop's contribution to eliminating food  
20 insecurity at CUNY. Sitting next to Deborah is Dr.  
21 Charles Platkin, Executive Director of the Hunter  
22 College New York City Food Policy Center, who will  
23 speak about the impact of food insecurity on hunger  
24 and academic performance and success. He will also  
25 identify strategies to address this issue. Also

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joining us for the question and answer portion are my colleagues from the Central Office of Student Affairs at CUNY, Laurie Beck and Shirley De Pena who are content experts in our efforts to address food insecurity at CUNY. As you all know, all students attending a New York City Department of Education school are 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 freshman come from the New York City Department of Education and 42 percent of all first-time freshman come from households with annual incomes of 20,000 dollars or less. Purchasing meals can be a hardship for many students and may I add that presently these students lose free transportation when they move from New York City public schools to CUNY and bear the additional cost of metro cards and we are very hopeful that the Fair Fares program will lessen the burden for many CUNY students. Research conducted by Healthy CUNY and the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute found that 15 percent of CUNY undergraduates under the age of 30 or approximately 36,000 CUNY students reported that they had gone hungry often or sometimes in the past 12

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2 months. Researchers also found that food insecure  
3 students had, on average, lower GPAs than food secure  
4 students and were 16 percent more likely than their  
5 food secure peers to take a leave of absence. In  
6 2018, Governor Cuomo's State of the State address  
7 included the No Student Goes Hungry proposal that  
8 contained five elements, including a requirement that  
9 all CUNY and SUNY schools have food pantries and or a  
10 food voucher program. Furthermore, in late August  
11 2018, Governor Cuomo announced 100 percent of New  
12 York State public colleges at SUNY and CUNY will have  
13 a food pantry or stigma fee... of free food access for  
14 students in need by the end of the fall semester.  
15 Consistent with the intent of the Governor's  
16 proposals, CUNY has implemented programs and services  
17 in the effort to make sure that no CUNY student goes  
18 hungry. We know that it is in the best interest of  
19 all our food insecure students to have access to  
20 nutritious, healthy food. All 18 undergraduate  
21 institutions have at least a food pantry or on campus  
22 food voucher program and many have both.  
23 Additionally, several colleges have adopted Grab-N-Go  
24 takeaway bags containing nonperishable, nutritious  
25 food items that can be consumed at school or at home.

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2 A few community colleges provide students access to  
3 enough food to feed themselves and their families.  
4 For example, LaGuardia Community College serves  
5 students Monday through Friday on a walk-in basis.  
6 Food items are student selected and dispersed in  
7 quantities that accommodate an individual or family  
8 for seven days at three meals per day. Lehman College  
9 features the Dining Dollars Initiative. Students who  
10 are identified through an application process are  
11 provided with a financial allocation that is added to  
12 their student ID account. Each student awarded is  
13 provided dining dollars that can be utilized at on  
14 campus facilities. John Jay College for Criminal  
15 Justice implemented the Comfort Station, which  
16 provides nutritious breakfast, lunch and snack items,  
17 including sandwiches, bagels, cream cheese, eggs,  
18 oatmeal, mac-and-cheese and soups to accommodate  
19 students' busy schedules. At CUNY's smaller schools,  
20 it's graduate and professional schools, as well as  
21 the School of Professional Studies at which most  
22 students are online students where a pantry is not  
23 feasible, there must be at least one staff member who  
24 is responsible for assisting students who are food  
25 insecure. The colleges are obligated to make sure

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students know who these staff members are. A few colleges are facing serious space constraints which have made establishing pantries very difficult. All of these colleges however have come up with other innovative work around solutions, including on campus food vouchers and Grab-N-Go take away bags. More than ten of our colleges work closely with the Food Bank of New York City and this is a partnership we greatly 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 especially. 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. Food boxes cost 14 dollars per box but with a generous grant from the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation, CUNY 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 critical... a critical component to addressing food insecurity in

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2 a meaningful way. We find that colleges with newer  
3 pantries have more of a challenge as students must be  
4 educated about the resource. Several of our campuses  
5 are doing a superb job in regard to outreach and are  
6 able to provide technical assistance. Funding for  
7 these programs and services come from a variety of  
8 sources, including student groups and clubs,  
9 dedicated student fees, campus investments and  
10 private foundations. We are especially grateful to  
11 the Carroll and Milton Petrie Foundation which during  
12 the 2018/2019 academic year awarded 20,000-dollar  
13 grants to each undergraduate institution to address  
14 student hunger. We have just learned that the Petrie  
15 Foundation will be supporting these efforts again for  
16 2019 and 2020 and for that we're very, very grateful.  
17 Furthermore, CUNY's Single Stop Program, now at all  
18 community colleges and one senior college, John Jay,  
19 has provided students with access to food and has  
20 screened for SNAP eligibility for almost eight years.  
21 In fact, food pantries at the community colleges are  
22 maintained by Single Stop. Deborah Harte, my friend  
23 and colleague, the Founding Director of Single Stop  
24 at the Borough of Manhattan Community College is here  
25 today to provide more detailed information about

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1  
2 Single Stop's contribution to eliminating food  
3 insecurity at CUNY. She will also describe BMCC's  
4 model outreach program. An innovative program is  
5 Healthy CUNY's Food Security Advocates Project that  
6 empowers students to educate their peers about  
7 programs such as SNAP, WIC and connect students to  
8 food pantries and Single Stop Centers. According to  
9 the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability  
10 Assistance, the general rule for most college  
11 students' eligibility for SNAP is, most able-bodied  
12 students ages 18 through 49 who are enrolled at least  
13 half time in college or other institution of higher  
14 education are not eligible for SNAP. However, there  
15 are several exceptions to this rule. That said, we  
16 know that there are still students who satisfy one or  
17 more of these exemptions and SNAP outreach and  
18 screening remain an important strategy for combatting  
19 food insecurity. Please note that this rule of course  
20 is a function of federal law and not state law. And  
21 in closing, on behalf of the City University of New  
22 York, I would like to express our... a sincere  
23 appreciation to the Council for shining a light on  
24 this serious issue. As always, we look forward to  
25 partnering with the Council to address student food

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1  
2 insecurity and its impact on student wellness and  
3 success and again we most sincerely thank you. I  
4 would now like to yield to my colleague Deborah  
5 Harte.

6 DEBORAH HARTE: Thank you, it's now  
7 after... good, good afternoon... oh, I'm sorry, thank  
8 you. Thank you. Good afternoon honorable Chairs  
9 Barron and Levin and honorable Committee members. I  
10 am Deborah Harte, the Director of the Single Stop  
11 Program at the Borough of Manhattan Community  
12 College. It is an honor to be... for me to be here  
13 today representing the students of CUNY who  
14 experience food insecurity. Thank you for your time.  
15 As a child growing up in Guyana, South America, I  
16 hated weekends for a good portion of my young life.  
17 The reason that I was not a fan of weekends is  
18 because I knew that there would either be no food or  
19 very little food in my home. My parents did their  
20 best to provide their 16 children, but it was not  
21 always easy. I recall days of having to drink sugar  
22 water. Literally, water mixed with sugar. Or other  
23 times that my Aunt who worked at a hospital bringing  
24 the leftover food so that we can have some solid  
25 food. My favorite part of the week were weekdays. I



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not only loved school, but I loved learning and I loved that there would be, at the very least, two meals that would be able to eat. I enjoyed the milk and cheese biscuit sandwiches but most 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, Office are often 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 had.. who has not eaten in days because there was either no food 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 voucher, or a supermarket gift card or access to our food pantry. We are fortunate to have funding to provide this emergency assistance. But in spite of our response, the need is much greater. As an example, from the time we open the Panther Pantry at BMCC in April of 2018 through January of this year, we have provided over 340 families with over two tons of food. However, during the same period we were unable to serve over 430

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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 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 the student... to the Single Stop for... Pantry... Panther Pantry bags. Furthermore, Single Stop staff members conduct orientation and classroom presentations to highlight services available for students, including the, 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

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emergencies that qualify for food assistance. The

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Single Stop Office also continues to promote the, the

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Panther Pantry website to further publicize the

5

availability of the pantry to the student body. These

6

outreach strategies... outreach strategies are working.

7

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to

8

bring to your attention, the crisis that our students

9

are facing on a daily basis in relation to food

10

insecurity. Thank you.

11

CHARLES PLATKIN: Thank you. Good morning

12

and thank you Chair Levin and the members of the

13

Committee on General Welfare and Chair Barron on the...

14

and the members of the Committee on Higher Education.

15

We appreciate the opportunity to written and

16

abbreviated oral testimony regarding a reduction of

17

food insecurity in New York City and specifically the

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City University of New York. I'm providing this test...

19

I'm providing this testimony on behalf of Hunter

20

College, New York City Food Policy Center of which

21

I'm the Executive Director. The Center works with

22

policy makers, community organizations, advocates and

23

the public to create healthier, more sustainable food

24

environments. We thank the City Council and the

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Speaker's Office for their support. Food insecurity

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1  
2 is a public health crisis in America and college  
3 students are no exception and while the GAO review of  
4 food insecurity studies amongst college students was  
5 not revealing, an educated estimate shows that 35 to  
6 48 percent of college students in the US experience  
7 food insecurity, a higher percentage than that of the  
8 general population. Among the many possible reasons  
9 for this disparity the fact that students are faced  
10 with competing financial obligations, including  
11 tuition, housing, text books, computers and of course  
12 food. unfortunately, some students are forced to  
13 choose which of these expenses are most important,  
14 the need to make these choices disproportionately  
15 impacts low- and middle-class students as well as  
16 people of color. According to a recent survey 60,  
17 60,000 CUNY undergraduates or 25 percent experience  
18 food insecurity and a food report by my CUNY  
19 colleagues revealed that approximately 15 percent of  
20 our students reported that they had sometimes or  
21 often gone hungry in the past year because they  
22 lacked resources to buy food, 25 percent had to skip  
23 a meal because they could not afford food and 30  
24 percent were sometimes or often unable to access  
25 balanced or nutritious food. It should be noted that

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regardless of whether or not they are food insecure college students generally have poor eating habits. In fact, nearly 96 percent do not eat the recommended five or more servings of fruits and vegetables per day. Food insecurity especially when combined with poor eating habits can lead to malnutrition and obesity. Food insecurity also impacts mental health, including increased feelings of shame and powerlessness all leading to stress, anxiety and possibly depression. Additionally, food insecurity may adversely impact academic performance, behavior, attention, attendance and rates of graduation. While these facts and statistics apply to colleges and universities across the country, CUNY, CUNY students have a profile that exacerbates many of these issues and concerns. Finally, research has documented that the habits formed during the college years last a lifetime thus making the need to resolve student's food security and help them establish healthy eating behaviors all the more crucial. The recent initiatives to create on campus food pantries are encouraging and important and a step towards improving food security among our students. However, we as public health advocates have learned that

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simply increasing food access does not necessarily improve healthy eating and or lead to increased consumption of food. For the reasons previously mentioned and building upon the innovative and incredible programming already in place at CUNY we recommend a few of the following strategies. Number one, provide additional education and promotion about on campus and local area food pantries; SNAP, WIC and Single Stop Centers. Promotion should include but not be limited to in class announcements; physical marketing materials as well as a strong presence on social media. Two, increase food policy awareness by offering, we have... we have set a newly created online multimedia food policy course which is free of charge to all CUNY students, faculty and staff; develop a smartphone tool that can quickly determine a college student's eligibility for SNAP which you have seen in your briefing report as somewhat complicated. This is particularly important because nearly 60 percent of eligible college students did not receive the benefits in 2016. Four, a 24/7 smart pantry vending machine. The center has partnered with the Founder of Share Meals to develop a technology that will convert a vending... a vending machine into a 24/7 pantry with

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free healthy food which includes fruits and  
vegetables. The goal is to pilot this first smart  
pantry within the next eight months to a year. Five,  
expand the current Hunter College and GrowNYC fresh  
food box program to all CUNY campuses allowing  
students to receive a week of local produce at the  
reduced and subsidized cost of just 14 dollars with  
the addition of adding those, those vouchers for the  
food insecure. Six, create a practical and manageable  
usable guidelines and recommendations for food  
service on CUNY campuses while incorporating healthy  
food, sustainability and food rescue. Seven, develop  
hydroponic and other outdoor production gardens  
across CUNY campuses and eight, increase nutrition  
and food policy training for all policy managers and  
staffers. We at the Hunter College New York City Food  
Policy Center and the City University of New York are  
eager to implement programs and build upon existing  
partnerships to combat food insecurity, improve  
healthy eating and promote food justice. The bottom  
line is we believe that healthy food should be a  
basic human right. Thank you again for the  
opportunity to provide this testimony.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you to the  
3 panel for coming and I do have a few questions and my  
4 colleague will also offer questions to you. You talk  
5 about the Panther Pantry; how did you get the name?

6 DEBORAH HARTE: The Panther..

7 CHRIS ROSA: Just take the mic.

8 DEBORAH HARTE: Oh, I keep forgetting  
9 that I speak very loudly with my students. Panther is  
10 actually our, our mascot at BMCC but we, we real... we  
11 ran a competition and we received sort of many  
12 suggestions... [cross-talk]

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
14 talk]

15 DEBORAH HARTE: ...for what the names could  
16 be, one of them was something of feeding on the  
17 Hudson and there were various iterations of, of  
18 suggestions of, of pantry but the one that won out  
19 was Panther Pantry by a vote from the community at  
20 BMCC.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And how does it  
22 operate, what... when a student comes to the Panther  
23 Pantry, a little bit of a tongue twister... [cross-  
24 talk]

25 DEBORAH HARTE: Yeah... [cross-talk]



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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...what do they...  
3 like what do they get?

4 DEBORAH HARTE: For us too. So, one of  
5 the things that we work very, very hard to do is to  
6 ensure that our... when our students come to Single  
7 Stop period... [cross-talk]

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
9 talk]

10 DEBORAH HARTE: ...they're comfortable,  
11 they are... they, they feel safe and they, they know  
12 that they, they will be treated with the, the utmost  
13 level of respect and, and confidentiality. At the  
14 reception area students are greeted with really one  
15 basic question, have you ever visited our office  
16 before and the reason for that is just so that they  
17 can complete one, one page intake form and then a  
18 staff in the back of our office would be called  
19 forward for the student to then go back and speak  
20 with the student. The staff does a, a comprehensive  
21 assessment of whatever the student says to us that  
22 their needs are. For example, they may come in for a  
23 metro card and we may discover that food insecurity  
24 is, is occurring in the home, we may discover  
25 unemployment is occurring in the home so once we

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1  
2 discover whatever the issues are with this student  
3 then we... if they've come for the... for the pantry we  
4 offer them the opportunity of either coming to the  
5 pantry with, with us and choosing the food or we have  
6 a list of all the food items that are in the pantry  
7 in our offices and they have an opportunity to kind  
8 of check off according to the balanced bag, pantry  
9 bag to check off the items that they would like to  
10 have so we go and pack the bags and would bring them  
11 to the student.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay and in your  
13 testimony, it says that the Office of Student Affairs  
14 sends email notifications to students about the  
15 availability of the Panther Pantry..

16 DEBORAH HARTE: Yes... [cross-talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Do all students  
18 get that email notification?

19 DEBORAH HARTE: Yes, yes, it... the, the  
20 start of the semester each student receives the email  
21 blast indicating... [cross-talk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
23 talk]

24 DEBORAH HARTE: ...that the pantry is  
25 available, the hours its available, we happen to be

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available almost all week in the sense that we have

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to shut down a few hours to either receive food as we

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did.. [cross-talk]

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-

6

talk]

7

DEBORAH HARTE: ...yesterday or a few hours

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to do inventory because as IVC Rosa indicated we do

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get funding, so we have to keep very careful track of

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how the, the funds are being spent.

11

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Right, so how

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many students or how many offerings of food do you

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give, I know you said it's just starting but what's,

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what's been the number?

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DEBORAH HARTE: So, because of the

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funding, because we have to ensure that, you know

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we're, we're, we're reaching as many students as

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possible. Often times we can only limit the, the food

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to one person in the home, generally around the

20

holidays we try to increase that to three family

21

members which of course increases the number of items

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and food that the student can take. For example, in

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all of the five food groups if we increased the, the,

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the amount to three family members they're taking

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upward of about 20 food items, you know whether its

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cans or boxes or, or pans.. or, or bags of food with

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them. So, you know there's a consideration too for

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the students transporting the food so we talk with

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our students and encourage them to come at the end of

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their, their class sessions so that they're kind of

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leaving the campus when they have the food but, you

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know to the degree that we can provide a greater

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number in the family members with the food we do that

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but often times we've got to be very, very aware of

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the fact that our funding is.. really limits how many

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in the home that we can provide on a continuous

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basis.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Before I

15

continue, I do want to acknowledge that we were

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joined also by Council Member Kallos who had to leave

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and we still with us Council Member Torres. Is this

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pantry funded by the 20,000 dollars that you

19

received, this is.. [cross-talk]

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DEBORAH HARTE: Yeah... [cross-talk]

21

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...how you're using

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your 20,000 dollars?

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DEBORAH HARTE: Yes, yes, that's one of

24

the funding streams that, that we have.

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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay... [cross-  
3 talk]

4 DEBORAH HARTE: It is the... it is the  
5 Petrie Funding, BMCC Association has also provided  
6 some funding and I wrote a, a small proposal and, and  
7 was fortunate to get some funding from United Health  
8 Care who's been one of our tremendous partners on the  
9 campus providing enrollment for health care services  
10 and there are a few faculty that's actually donated  
11 some decent funds to the pantry so we're a little  
12 fortunate at this point but even with that... [cross-  
13 talk]

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
15 talk]

16 DEBORAH HARTE: ...the need is really so  
17 great that, you know we... and, and, and particularly  
18 as we move forward and the pantry becomes even more...  
19 or the students become even more aware of the pantry,  
20 the increase in... the, the numbers of students are  
21 increasing, this semester alone the numbers have  
22 increased tremendously for those who are using the  
23 pantry.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, thank you.  
25 Dr. Rosa in your testimony you talk about Governor

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2 Cuomo's no student goes hungry, is there funding from  
3 the Governor for funding this no student go hungry?

4 CHRIS ROSA: To date we have not received  
5 funding for... [cross-talk]

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, it's a  
7 mandate with no funding attached as of now?

8 CHRIS ROSA: Yeah, we've been able to  
9 fortunately through the... through the support of, of  
10 generous foundations like the Petrie Foundation...  
11 [cross-talk]

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Right... [cross-  
13 talk]

14 CHRIS ROSA: ...to meet that standard but,  
15 but we've, we've been able to, to self-fund that.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Right, well I  
17 think that we all need to send the Governor a message  
18 if he thinks this is such a great need and indeed it  
19 is he needs to make sure that the money is in the  
20 budget so... to ensure that no student goes hungry,  
21 it's easy to say but let's back up what we say with  
22 some money to make it happen. Also, in your testimony  
23 you said that LaGuardia College serves students  
24 Monday through Friday on a walk-in basis and food  
25 items are selected by the student and dispersed and

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2 at Lehman there's a dining dollars program, could you  
3 talk a little bit more about each of those programs?

4 CHRIS ROSA: Sure, I will... I will defer  
5 to my colleague Laurie Beck who is an expert on our  
6 food pantries... [cross-talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay... [cross-  
8 talk]

9 CHRIS ROSA: ...but there are two paradigms  
10 that we thought are excellent best practices in our  
11 campus's response to student insecurity, LaGuardia's  
12 commitment is, is similar to BMCC's commitment to  
13 having a very robust food pantry to meet the  
14 immediate needs of, of students on campus while  
15 Lehman because of, of space restrictions... [cross-  
16 talk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
18 talk]

19 CHRIS ROSA: ...has had difficulty  
20 dedicating the pantry space but there, their voucher  
21 program allows students to, to leverage existing food  
22 service resources on campus. Laurie could I ask you?

23 LAURIE BECK: Sure, sure... [cross-talk]

24 CHRIS ROSA: But could you step here to  
25 mic?

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Talk to the...

3 LAURIE BECK: Sorry...

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, we need to  
5 also swear you in.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes, you can have  
7 a seat. Welcome, okay.

8 COMMITTEE CLERK: Okay, would raise your  
9 right hand please? Do you affirm to tell the truth,  
10 the whole truth and nothing but the truth in your  
11 testimony and, and to respond honestly to Council  
12 Member's questions?

13 LAURIE BECK: Yes.

14 COMMITTEE CLERK: Please state your name  
15 for the record.

16 LAURIE BECK: My name is Laurie and my  
17 last name is Beck. Sorry. Hi, my name is Laurie and  
18 my last name is Beck, b e c k.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you, do you  
20 have testimony you want to provide?

21 LAURIE BECK: No, I'm just sort of  
22 supporting Chris's question...

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, so do you  
24 have further information about the programs?

25



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2 LAURIE BECK: The, the dining dollars..  
3 [cross-talk]

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Yes... [cross-talk]

5 LAURIE BECK: ...dining dollars initiative  
6 is very interesting. A number of our campuses allow  
7 you to use your ID to load money for the cafeteria, I  
8 mean food at the... on site so what you do is you  
9 purchase dollars that get loaded onto your card and  
10 then you swipe it when you go into the cafeteria so  
11 if my money comes let's say out of the Petrie  
12 Foundation because Student Affairs has added money to  
13 my card and you have your card and if you purchased  
14 with your own money there's no difference between you  
15 and me, I swipe and you swipe so it's a... it's a  
16 policy that really deals not only with hunger but  
17 also with the stigma issue and there are a number of  
18 campuses that are moving towards this and there are a  
19 number of campuses where dining dollars get loaded on  
20 IDs.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Can you  
22 supplement what's on your card on your own, can you  
23 add to it?

24 LAURIE BECK: Yes, yes and that's, that's  
25 pretty much how it's... how it's worked and... but with

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funding from Petrie we've been able to create

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opportunities to give students money, it gets added

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to the card and their dining dollars are the same as

5

anybody else's card.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: How much is on

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each card that a student gets, how do you determine

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the amount?

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LAURIE BECK: The... at Lehman to the best

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of my knowledge they do ask for an application and

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right now the individual grant is 80 dollars,

12

students can come back and make another application

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so it's not just that you're only entitled to that

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but the initial... but the... it's 80 dollars that gets

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loaded.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Do you get

17

refills or is it 80 dollars?

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LAURIE BECK: You, you can apply again,

19

and the Office of Student Affairs reviews it and if

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in fact there's a need there you can get another 80

21

dollars.

22

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Is there a cap on

23

how many times you can apply?

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2 LAURIE BECK: You know I don't know that...  
3 the answer to that question but I certainly can find  
4 out.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay and at  
6 LaGuardia College do we know how many students take  
7 advantage of the walk-in services?

8 LAURIE BECK: I do have the numbers  
9 unfortunately I don't have them with me so I can get  
10 it to you this afternoon.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay and you talk  
12 about... in the testimony it cites that the school for  
13 professional studies most of the students are online  
14 students, but a pantry is not feasible but there's a  
15 staff member, do we have any data on how many  
16 students avail themselves of the service?

17 LAURIE BECK: I don't, and I can... I can...  
18 I can speak specifically with that school and I can  
19 get you that information.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay. I do have a  
21 few more questions and my colleague I'm sure has  
22 questions as well. We know that it costs  
23 approximately 220,000 dollars to operate the Single  
24 Stop, how are those costs used in the... in the  
25 program's operation, how do those dollars work?

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2 CHRIS ROSA: May I... I'll begin in broad  
3 strokes, but I'll let a real expert tell you in its  
4 granularity. So, the cost of the 220,000 dollars per  
5 site funds the director's salary and assistant  
6 director's salary and pays for the legal services,  
7 the benefits referral services and the tax services  
8 in broader strokes but in terms of the granular  
9 details Deborah could you speak to that?

10 DEBORAH HARTE: Yes, I mean some of... some  
11 of the costs are also that, that are included in that  
12 would be the space for, for, for the operation, I  
13 mean much of, of the program services are in kind  
14 from CUNY and BMCC and the other programs but mostly  
15 I think it's, it's the, the, the staff and, and  
16 whatever OTPS that's associated with the operation of  
17 the program.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: And do we have a  
19 number of students that use the Single service?

20 DEBORAH HARTE: Well over the past...  
21 [cross-talk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Single... I'm  
23 sorry, Single... [cross-talk]

24 DEBORAH HARTE: Single Stop... [cross-talk]

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Stop... [cross-  
3 talk]

4 DEBORAH HARTE: ...Single Stop service.  
5 Over the past ten years BMCC alone has seen... almost  
6 ten years, about nine years, BMCC alone has seen  
7 close to 30,000 students have come through our  
8 offices, on average we see about 70, 80, 90 students  
9 a day, our, our program, the BMCC's Single Stop  
10 program is the largest of all of the programs in  
11 terms of staffing, there are five of us and... well, no  
12 I take it back, there's seven of us, we just got a  
13 few additions that our, our, our administrator was  
14 really able to kind of, you know figure out some  
15 creative ways to get us some additional support  
16 because of all of the services that come out of  
17 Single Stop at BMCC, we just don't only provide the  
18 four core services... [cross-talk]

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
20 talk]

21 DEBORAH HARTE: ...that Single Stop started  
22 providing; food, taxes and, and health care,  
23 financial counseling, legal counseling, SNAP, we now  
24 provide the, the, the emergency funds, we are the,  
25 the repository for the emergency funds that supply

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for to assist with rent for example and we have some additional other programs that, that we... or, or populations that we focus on, we focus on the foster care population to assist them in any which way that, you know they may need some additional supports so with that we, we're able to get some additional college assistance for example to assist with the... with the operation. So, most of our staff... well all of our staff are social workers, licensed social workers, we're all social workers with social service experience so it enables us to really work with this population in a... in identifying and helping to, to, to either refer or, or help them in building sustainable plans for, for the issues that they're dealing with so it's not only just addressing the immediate need, the immediate emergency its also helping to identify a longer term plan in, in helping them to stay in school.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: In terms of the

20,000 dollars from the Petrie Foundation is there a way to determine... I, I understand that it... did the... did the foundation indicate that each school should get the same exact amount, seeing that some schools are larger than others so I'm looking at the equity

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2 and they're equal, each school got an equal amount  
3 but I'm looking about the equity...

4 DEBORAH HARTE: Yeah...

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Do we have any...  
6 did they have any conditions in that or how did that  
7 come about?

8 CHRIS ROSA: So, if I... if I could ask  
9 Laurie who actually helped to coordinate... [cross-  
10 talk]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay... [cross-  
12 talk]

13 CHRIS ROSA: ...the proposal just to  
14 respond to the parameters of the, the grant.

15 LAURIE BECK: Each of the 18  
16 undergraduate institutions received the same amount  
17 regardless of the size of the institution.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, that was a  
19 decision that CUNY made?

20 LAURIE BECK: No... [cross-talk]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: No... [cross-talk]

22 LAURIE BECK: ...that was... the grantor made  
23 it.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Oh, that was the  
25 grantor, okay, that was my... [cross-talk]

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2 LAURIE BECK: Yes... [cross-talk]

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...question, okay...

4 [cross-talk]

5 LAURIE BECK: Yes, grantor made... [cross-  
6 talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...good... [cross-  
8 talk]

9 LAURIE BECK: ...that decision.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you. And in  
11 terms... I'm going to stop and ask my colleague to  
12 share his questions and then I'll come back, thank  
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you all for  
15 your testimony. I, I just had a question I guess to...  
16 go... for the whole panel but following up on, on Mr.  
17 Platkin's recommendations because there's a, a number  
18 of them, you know how many of these can CUNY do on  
19 their own and you know is there... is... I mean why, why,  
20 why not do them all right now? I guess is...

21 CHARLES PLATKIN: Yeah, I think that's a  
22 great... a great question, I... and we are in the works  
23 of doing many of these. For instance the smart  
24 vending... the smart pantry vending we're, we're  
25 working with the technology company right now to help



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with that, the smart phone tool for college students

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we, we're exploring that right now with, with a... with

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an engineer to, to do that inexpensively and the

5

increasing... the... you know we have the food policy

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online course that we're developing that we're going

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to promote to CUNY staff, faculty and students, we

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believe that by understanding food policy creates

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awareness around these issues and they'll be more...

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there will be more opportunity for them to understand

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food insecurity and hunger issues and then if they

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relate to that they can then apply so it would

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encourage applications since probably 50 percent are

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not applying when they, you know are at risk or, or

15

have a need to.

16

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

17

CHRIS ROSA: And just to add in terms of

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the healthy food options... [cross-talk]

19

CHARLES PLATKIN: Yeah... [cross-talk]

20

CHRIS ROSA: ...and campus dining that's

21

actually a feature of the RFP that is... that's been

22

issued by CUNY, vendors are responding to that RFP

23

and that's a dimension that will be part of the

24

evaluation criteria in the selection of a... of a food

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vendor.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well like for example  
3 number five, the recommendation on expanding to grow  
4 NYC Fresh Food box programs to all CUNY students and  
5 campuses, that's something that could... that CUNY as  
6 a... can make that policy decision, it might cost money  
7 but is that something that CUNY would look at doing?

8 CHARLES PLATKIN: Well I think we, we're...  
9 and, and Chris could answer that but, but I think  
10 that what we were... we're test piloting it at Hunter  
11 right now... [cross-talk]

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

13 CHARLES PLATKIN: ...on the logistics and  
14 it's also the capacity... [cross-talk]

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: To, to allow for  
16 every... Hunter... [cross-talk]

17 CHARLES PLATKIN: ...NYC has capacity...  
18 [cross-talk]

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...to do it for every...  
20 for every student, to be available to every student?

21 CHARLES PLATKIN: We're, we're make... it's  
22 available right now for every student, not every  
23 student has vouchers but it's available for every  
24 student so, you know the idea is to reduce stigmas so  
25 any student can sign up and pay the 14 dollars which

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2 is an already subsidized amount and get a week's  
3 worth of fruits and vegetables which I think is, is  
4 incredible...

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right...

6 CHARLES PLATKIN: And the... and you know  
7 testing the logistics of it on campus, delivering the  
8 boxes and, and, and bagging everything and so forth..  
9 [cross-talk]

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Uh-huh... [cross-talk]

11 CHARLES PLATKIN: ...so those things are  
12 all being worked out now and then as we report back  
13 to the... to the Chancellor's office I think that the  
14 idea would be to eventually and hopefully roll  
15 something like that out.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And, and where is the  
17 food coming from in those... is it like a CSA type  
18 thing?

19 CHARLES PLATKIN: Yes, it comes from Grow  
20 NYC's... their... from their... from their vendors, from  
21 local... from local vendors, yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Okay, I mean I  
23 would love to see, you know all of these  
24 recommendations, you know go CUNY wide and you know  
25 you certainly would have support in the Council in

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terms of if, you know these are asked to being made to the Mayor or the Governor in terms of budgetary asks, we... certainly something that, that we would be interested in, in supporting so please let us know don't be shy to... [cross-talk]

CHARLES PLATKIN: Thank you...

CHRIS ROSA: Thank you... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ...reach out for support, I mean one thing I would say and... is that you know one thing obviously that we could... that would make an impact on people's ability to have access to, to quality nutrition is to make CUNY free again so, I want to leave that out. I don't think that would obviously... [cross-talk]

CHARLES PLATKIN: And free food.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And, and... but, but we should always keep an eye on that tuition question so, I'll turn it back over to my Co-Chair.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: A man after my own heart. In your 19... 2019/2020 operating budget request you're requesting 7.8 million as a part of the strategic investment for... to address hunger for food insecurity, how is that pilot program coming along, what is it looking like and how many... what's

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the timeline for it and how many students are you trying to reach in that budget?

CHRIS ROSA: So, it's a... it's a comprehensive budget that would attempt to address, you know a, a very significant number of the 35,000 food insecure students that we've identified at CUNY. Part of... a key element of that would be leveraging this... the swipe card technology that we expect to cut... certainly exist on several of our campuses but we expect to be more widely available as a new food vendor comes on board and we... what we would hope to do is look to leverage that funding and also partnership with the food vendor in order to create access to food on campus using existing campus vending and for us that not only is... solves an, an access issue but it would absolutely address the stigma that, that is often associated with accessing food... healthy food on campus, it would remove that barrier and we would also in part we would look to in, invest in our infrastructure and the pantries themselves and we have a separate... as you referenced Chair Barron we have a separate Single Stop expansion request which would invest our... in our capacity for Single Stop.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: How does CUNY  
3 track food insecure students, I know you have the  
4 survey which you ask about income levels and familial  
5 status, have you considered adding a question that  
6 addresses food insecurity and whether they have  
7 services that they need to address that... how do you  
8 know who the students are, you said 35,000, how do  
9 you know who they are, is it just those that have  
10 made entrée into the system?

11 CHRIS ROSA: I, I mean to be quite honest  
12 I, I don't know that we... that we... that each and every  
13 one of them are individually identifiable to them,  
14 that, that number is, is based on research done by  
15 the CUNY school of public health by, by Healthy CUNY  
16 and our... my colleague Nick Freudenberg is here in, in  
17 the gallery today and his... he and his colleagues have  
18 done research which has resulted in, in that telling  
19 statistic.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: So, would it be...  
21 would it be feasible to add a question to the student  
22 survey that's completed to ask that, would that be  
23 something that we can do, is that a benefit to help  
24 us identify that population and how can we track  
25 students... [cross-talk]

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2 CHRIS ROSA: Sure... [cross-talk]

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...that are in  
4 fact... [cross-talk]

5 CHRIS ROSA: We could inquire with our  
6 office of institutional research... [cross-talk]

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay... [cross-  
8 talk]

9 CHRIS ROSA: ...and assessment.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you.

11 CHRIS ROSA: Sure.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: The vendors that  
13 are located on the various CUNY campuses do they  
14 contract individually with each school or does CUNY  
15 have a, a broader contract that they implement?

16 CHRIS ROSA: At this time, they are... they  
17 contract individually but the current RFP is a  
18 university wide contract which would among other  
19 things leverage our buying power to achieve certain  
20 priorities on behalf of our students and one of those  
21 fortunately for us would be addressing, helping them,  
22 engaging them as partners to address food insecurity  
23 on our campuses.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: At present each  
25 vendor on a campus has a contract?

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2 CHRIS ROSA: That's correct.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: When do you plan  
4 to institute the new university wide contract system,  
5 what's the timeline for that?

6 CHRIS ROSA: I will have to get back to  
7 you on that, we're, we're in the midst of the RFP now  
8 and we expect to complete the review of proposals  
9 and, and we expect to award the contract within the  
10 coming months. In terms of the, the phase in I would  
11 have to get back to you and I'm pleased to get back  
12 to you with the details.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I believe at one  
14 point there was some questions about the work  
15 conditions of the employees of these vendors.. [cross-  
16 talk]

17 CHRIS ROSA: That is.. [cross-talk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...what is the  
19 status now and.. [cross-talk]

20 CHRIS ROSA: Well, that, that.. [cross-  
21 talk]

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...what does an  
23 RFP.. how does that address that issue?

24 CHRIS ROSA: That is a prominent feature  
25 of our.. of our RFP that there.. that there are



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standards in terms of employee equity and, and the

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standards for the, the employees that are hired by

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the... by the vendor so that's a paramount

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consideration for us in evaluating proposals.

6

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, then

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finally in terms of your, your proposals of what can

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be done to improve that vending machines would they

9

also be able to be a part of the swipe and the

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vouchering systems student could do those and how are

11

we going to make sure that... is it going to be like

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the horn and hardart that we used to have years ago

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which had some great food, see nobody... you know...

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[cross-talk]

15

CHARLES PLATKIN: I actually remember...

16

[cross-talk]

17

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...that's beyond

18

your time... [cross-talk]

19

CHARLES PLATKIN: ...those, yep, I remember

20

those.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: You remember?

22

CHARLES PLATKIN: Yeah.

23

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: The deep-dish

24

beef pot pie...

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2 CHARLES PLATKIN: We'll skip that one, I...  
3 you know I think... the idea with this is it's still in  
4 development and a... and the concept is that these  
5 smart vending machines which will be adaptive  
6 technology that any vending machine can be converted  
7 though you'll use your phone and you'll take a needs  
8 test right on your phone, this is the concept right  
9 now that we're developing, they'll take a needs test  
10 right on your phone but any student regardless of  
11 whether they're food insecure will be able to buy so  
12 you won't know if someone's getting free food or  
13 they're paying for it and that's the concept here and  
14 we'll... certainly going to try to integrate and think  
15 about how we can use the, the loaded cards as well.

16 CHRIS ROSA: And just to build on that  
17 it... for... yesterday we actually had a demonstration of  
18 the technology at our Vice President for Student  
19 Affair's meeting just blocks from here at the borough  
20 of Manhattan Community College and... [cross-talk]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Uh-huh... [cross-  
22 talk]

23 CHRIS ROSA: ...it was encouraging to see  
24 the technology in action, to see how you could  
25 deliver fresh and healthy food to students at a

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2 reasonable price and one of the benefits of, of our  
3 size is that we have significant leverage in terms of  
4 our, our ability to negotiate a, a reasonable price  
5 for it and to your point Charles because it uses an  
6 app for payment it, it removes any stigma associated  
7 with acquiring it, students no matter what the source  
8 of funds on their app acquire the food the same way  
9 and there's no, no distinction about people who  
10 acquire that food through an app whose... the payment  
11 for which has been preloaded through, through CUNY or  
12 whether you had the means to do it yourself.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay. Thank you  
14 for your testimony, I'm going to turn it back to...  
15 yes... okay. Alright, thank you so much for your  
16 testimony... [cross-talk]

17 CHRIS ROSA: Thank you... [cross-talk]

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...and I look  
19 forward to getting the answers to the questions that  
20 I would like to have.

21 CHRIS ROSA: Thanks Chair Barron... [cross-  
22 talk]

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Thank you...  
24 [cross-talk]

25 CHRIS ROSA: Thank you Chair Levin.

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2 CHARLES PLATKIN: Thank you Chairs.

3 [off mic dialogue]

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so we have a, a  
5 number of people who have signed up to testify so we  
6 are going to ask people to keep their testimony to  
7 three minutes and we will have a clock running. First  
8 to testify Bill Busk, Urban Justice Center and Safety  
9 Net Activist.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: If your name has been  
11 called step up, thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Eiysha George, CUNY  
13 student; the CUNY University Student Senate and  
14 Anelle Morales-Rojas, Urban Justice Center; Gabriel  
15 Jamison from USS.

16 HERCULES REID: We have a joint  
17 statement.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

19 BILL BUSK: My name is Bill Busk and I  
20 live in supportive housing in the Tremont section of  
21 the Bronx. I have been receiving SNAP benefits since  
22 2009 after becoming homeless and later being disabled  
23 due to neurological damage. I first met the Urban  
24 Justice Center several years ago when I had  
25 difficulty renewing my SNAP food stamps benefits due

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to my disability plus the fact that the city's Human Resources Administration 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 difficulty.. 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 and I just want to add I had noticed the first party speaking.. talking about mental health barriers or physical. After working for, for 45 years and paying taxes into the system over 40, I never would have foreseen that I'd be needing SNAP food stamps for the past ten 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, using cash income to cover a quarter to half of their grocery cost. Also, having earn, earned a degree in business and almost 40-year business background, I've

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noticed that over the past decade using SNAP that when or if there has been an annual increase in SNAP benefits it rarely, if ever, matches inflation. This creates a situation where the real dollar value of SNAP benefits buys fewer and fewer groceries, year after year. I live in City Council district 15 in the Tremont section of the Bronx, which has an average annual income of below 20,000 dollars per year and one of New York City's densest concentrations of homeless shelters, street homeless, HASA and supportive housing. So, I cannot help noticing that the lines in front of the local pantries get longer continually. I do appreciate HRA forwarding February SNAP benefits a month early in the recent federal shut down anticipating if it 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 systems do not help many users. SNAP also does not pay enough for people to get by, too many people fall through the cracks which is inexcusable, since we're talking about food and nutrition, we're talking about lives. Thank you for... thank you for considering my testimony.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Bill. I  
just want to acknowledge we do have members of HRA  
who are here who stayed for the... who stayed for the  
testimony.

HERCULES REID: Greetings. On behalf of  
the University Student Senate we would like to  
present a joint testimony. We will encompass our  
three minutes each within that one testimony. Thank  
you. Greetings honorable Committee Chairperson Barron  
and Levin and honorable Council Members. My name is  
Hercules Reid and I serve as the Legislative Director  
for CUNY's University Student Senate. I'm here today  
with two student leaders from their various campuses  
Latasha Lee and Gabriel Jamison. As you may have  
heard and know USS is the governance organization  
responsible for representing the interest of 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  
that night before. In light of the difficult economic  
times facing very low-income students, I've asked the  
Office of Student Affairs to develop programs to

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focus on issues of hunger, nutrition and  
homelessness, this was a quote from Chancellor  
Matthew Goldstein back in April 27<sup>th</sup> of 2009. I would  
like to highlight that you have heard that Single  
Stop, food pantries and Petrie Funds exist on CUNY  
campuses, but I would like to remind you that these  
services do not exist on every campus and this  
conversation is about equity. Food insecurity is  
defined by the United States Department of  
Agriculture as having limited or uncertain access to  
nutritious, safe foods necessary to lead a healthy  
lifestyle. In 2016, a survey said that... by... done by  
25,242 undergraduate students, 60 percent of which  
came from households that made 30,000 or less, more  
than two thirds of these CUNY students are either  
fully or partially relying on their parents for  
financial support. Over half of the students worked  
for pay and over a third of those who do work believe  
that employment negatively impacts their academic  
performance and primarily to work... and, and they  
primarily work to either pay for living expenses or  
tuition which was mentioned earlier. In 2001 a  
campaign for a Healthy CUNY released a report on food  
insecurity. The information was gathered from 17



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campuses which you can read in the testimony, some of the questions that were asked were; how often did you worry that you were... did not have enough food from... have enough money for food, how often did you cut or skip a meal because you did not have enough money to buy food, how often were you unable to balance a nutritious meal because of the lack of money and how often did you go hungry because of a lack of money? The survey was conducted in the spring and fall of 2010. Two of every five CUNY students in this sample reported that they experienced food insecurity in the past 12 months. This would translate that almost 100,000 of the 25,000 experienced some form of food insecurity. Black and Latino CUNY students have... 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 more 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... who had common symptoms of

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depression were two times as likely to report food insecurity as those without symptoms.

LATASHA LEE: My name is Latasha Lee. I'm a psychology major at Bronx Community College. I'm amongst the students in CUNY who is a parent and student. I'm a mom of two beautiful little... I became a mom of two beautiful little boys before making a decision to pursue higher education. It is for that reason that I decided to come here and speak to you guys today. As a student leader and 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, they've been through... there have been times when we're running extremely behind schedule and simply don't have time for breakfast and almost every single time that this happens, I'm told by one of their teachers... 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

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misbehave. I took this issue so serious.. I take this issue so seriously because their education is essential to me. Now I don't let them leave the house without breakfast regardless of how late we're leaving. Unfortunately, I'm less dedicated to my own wellbeing. There are times when I don't eat breakfast or lunch simply because I don't have time and I'm sure you guys can understand that. As a full time, student and an active leader on my campus for the university, eating can sometimes be an additional task. Often times 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 and to be completely honest there have been instances where I truly believed that pursuing higher education was a mistake and then I eat and I'm completely.. and I'm in a completely different mindset and this is not unique to me. Imagine having to constantly worry where your next meal is coming from. When I'm advertising events on my campus I'm consistently being asked whether or not there will be food. You have no idea how many times I've had students tell me that they weren't

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interested in and then change their mind at the  
mention of free refreshments. It has been... it has  
become so apparent that now when I'm creating flyers,  
I put free refreshments or food and I've seen a  
significant increase in attendance. One time one of  
my friends was laying on the lounge... laying down in  
the lounge area at a time when he had class and I  
asked why he didn't go, and he told me that he was  
too hungry to be thinking and that it would be easier  
just to sleep. When our students are forced to sleep  
so that they don't have to deal with intense hunger  
pains then we have to ask ourselves whether or not  
we're doing all we can to combat food insecurity. At  
COMMITTEE CLERK we are fortunate enough to have the  
Single Stop program. This is extremely beneficial to  
our students who are food insecure. However, without  
adequate funding this program can't function to the  
best of its ability. To many of our students Single  
Stop is their only food option. The problem with that  
is that Single Stop literally only allows a single  
stop per individual a month. This means that students  
who rely on... solely on this program must seek other  
options the other 29 or 30 days. Could you, without  
guilt ask anyone to sustain by eating once a month?

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2 Another issue is that we provide uncooked food and a  
3 lot of our students are homeless. What good is a  
4 frozen chicken to someone without a stove? The worst  
5 part is that BCOMMITTEE CLERK is actually a lot  
6 better off than some schools regarding food  
7 insecurity. Some students... some schools don't have  
8 Single Stop. We advocate on these student's behalf  
9 and believe that the city can do more to provide  
10 support to these students in need. In regard to food  
11 insecurity we ask that you provide adequate funding  
12 for pantry supplies.

13 GABRIEL JAMISON: Hi everyone, my name is  
14 Gabriel Jamison, I'm a Medgar Evers College student.  
15 I'm here to talk about community and I'm here to talk  
16 about food, food security... insecurity. Coming, coming  
17 from a community like Brownsville east New York where  
18 27 percent of the population lived below poverty, the  
19 reason why it's that is because Brownsville east New  
20 York has no love, love stands for... today's  
21 Valentine's Day so I'm going to teach you all what  
22 love means. So, love means legacy, ownership,  
23 vocation and education so, while we're talking on the  
24 topic of education and the population... the population  
25 from my community only ten percent of them go to

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college and that's really sad, that's a... that's a low turnout, all of our students should be going to college but they're not going to college and then when they transition into college the other... a problem that we face when we transition they think it's going to be better but it has to get worse, it has to get worse. Going to a school like CUNY and CUNY is an affordable school that is good but now we're asking... we're forcing our students to make a decision between a text book and a hot meal, that's outrageous to me. The good news behind this, CUNY did a recent study, CUNY... we found out in CUNY that food insecurity students are 39 percent higher than adult in households among US and New York City, that's one... that's one data behind it. The other thing I would like to address today is the good news that CUNY has a lot of food pantries and that's good but the problem that we face in each food pantry is our student's activity fees are actually paying for the food pantry, to me that's outrageous and we should be ashamed of ourselves. That's like asking a homeless... a homeless person to pay for a shelter, that's sad, we shouldn't be having students paying for the tools that they need to be hungry, we should be solving

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2 these problems. I would like to thank the, the... I  
3 would like to thank the committee and I would like to  
4 say take the concept of what I just told you about  
5 love and love yourself, love your community and love  
6 your constituents and do the right thing by taking  
7 that same concept of love and allocating the funds  
8 into higher education pantry funding. Thank you  
9 everyone.

10 HERCULES REID: With the remainder...  
11 sorry, with the remainder of his time I just wanted  
12 to actually read another student's briefly...  
13 testimony, they couldn't make it, I just want to  
14 highlight some things. This student's name was... is  
15 Sadat Rahman and he's from York College. One of the  
16 many problems we are facing on... we face on our campus  
17 that I really focus on was making sure we are mindful  
18 of healthy food options but also paying attention to  
19 people's dietary restrictions like many Muslims and  
20 Jewish students who are... who are only allowed to eat  
21 halal or kosher food as a part of their religion. If  
22 many of our CUNY and SUNY, SUNY schools are all for  
23 having diverse background... diverse background  
24 populations in their schools then why should they be  
25 able to limit restrictions in the type of foods

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everyone should or should not eat. He also goes on to say I would like to say that it is essential that we pay... that we pay attention to this critical matter to make sure everyone gets a choice despite religious dietary restrictions in what food they can or cannot eat. He is requesting that an increase connection between city... New York City's many food assistance programs on CUNY campuses expand and there is an assisting in creating more on-site food pantries and food assistance programs. Thank you again for listening to us.

EIYSHA GEORGE: Hello everyone, thank you all for everything that you do, its greatly appreciated.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Pull the mic a little closer.

EIYSHA GEORGE: Hello, my name is Eiysha George. I recently graduated from Bronx Community College with an Associates 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



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back to school to grow beyond my then 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 from 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 that I was at a deficit and got advised to apply for SNAP. I surprisingly qualified and began receiving benefits which equates to under 48 dollars per week. I started search... I started to search for ways to stretch this amount. One major way was... one major way being the food... the school's food pantry, which distributes once or twice per month. In my curriculum courses, I studied exactly what food groups I needed to stay healthy, full and focused throughout the day. I learned... I learned by choosing... I learned by choosing foods lower in the food chain that it could reduce cost drastically. I then applied this knowledge to the food and garden club where I was introduced to methods of preparation, planning

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and even growing plant-based items in cost effective and time saving ways. Eventually becoming the club's president, I learned... I heard from my fellow class... clubmates on how much they learned and how they implemented these practices with their families. Here I gained the confidence I needed to prepare... to not only prepare my own food at home but to grow them as well. The club also ignited my love for urban gardening and the fresh fruits and vegetables acquired from this process. From this I started regularly visiting my local farmers market where fresh, fresh local foods were sold at an affordable price. It takes much, much determination and planning to sustain this period in my life as a student. Although I have become pretty good at budgeting and planning, life often gets in the way. Whether it be a shortage of benefit funds or lack of time to prepare, I find myself purchasing food from the school's cafeteria, where a six-ounce cup of fruit can be almost five dollars. In closing, I ask that the attention be brought to funding needed to properly sustain resources such as Single Stop service like food pantries, clubs similar to Bronx Community colleges, food and garden club, in addition to the

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high cost of cafeteria items. I would also like to see farmers markets on college campuses as well as extending farm share options to CUNY, CUNY campuses. Without resources from Bronx Community College's Single Stop and the Food and Garden Club, I may not likely 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 I health... in Community Health Education and Nutrition, I will use these tools to... I will use these tools and lived experiences to guide members of my community to food security. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I want to thank the panel for coming, we always benefit from hearing firsthand from the experiences of those who've been impacted by the situations that they face, we do thank you and congratulations for graduating on time.

EIYSHA GEORGE: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: All the best, thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much to this panel and thank you for your, your, your

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2 recommendations, we look forward to working with you  
3 to see them implemented.

4 EIYSHA GEORGE: Thank you.

5 HERCULES REID: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Oh, I just wanted to  
7 double check, Anelle Morales-Rojas?

8 ANELLE MORALES-ROJAS: Hi.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We'll have you join  
10 the next panel. Nicholas Freudenberg, Freudenberg,  
11 okay.. sorry, Nicholas, hello; Dr. Tanzina Ahmed;  
12 Maggie Dickinson; we have HOSTOS Food Security  
13 advocates and HOSTOS students and then John Krinsky.  
14 Sorry, it's a big panel. Sorry, but we might have to  
15 do some musical chairs. We've been joined by Council  
16 Member Mark Treyger. Okay, whoever wants to go next.

17 ANELLE MORALES-ROJAS: Okay, well my name  
18 is Anelle Morales-Rojas... Oh, I'm going to move this  
19 closer... so, my name is Anelle Morales-Rojas and I'm a  
20 Tenant and Benefits Advocate for the Safety Net  
21 Project at the Urban Justice Center. In discussing  
22 food insecurity, I would like to touch on the  
23 institutional factors that prevent full access to  
24 food assistance such as significant delays,  
25 documentation errors, barriers to SNAP, work

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efficacy, public charge, the closing of major  
Brooklyn Centers and the errors that arise from  
ABAWD. HRA provides a wide variety of supportive  
services, and it strides to fight income inequality  
and poverty. Nonetheless, the deterrent nature of  
social services compromises livelihood to New Yorkers  
as benefits regularly discontinue or delayed due to a  
variety of avoidable errors. With ongoing pressure  
from the current presidential administration and a  
racialized bootstrap mentality, more than ever have  
recipients of these benefits been unjustifiably  
stripped of their benefits. Significant factors  
contributing to inordinate food insecurity in New  
York City are delays and errors in SNAP processing.  
With outdated systems and the closing of major  
Brooklyn Centers, many cases are left in application  
pending status for much longer than the mandated 30-  
day period. Here we want to draw the Committee's  
attention to the detrimental impacts these processing  
delays have on applications. For privacy reasons they  
will be referred to as Ms. C. so, Ms. C, a resident  
of Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn applied for new  
ongoing SNAP benefits on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018 for  
themselves and their child. Three months later they

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still had not heard from the agency regarding their case. Without financial support from food stamps she was unable to pay her rent falling more and more behind on rent as the months went on. Benefits were finally issued 115 days later approximately four months after the initial center visit when the Urban Justice Center stepped in. Application delays forced this family to decide between food and shelter, a dilemma no person should face. We address this further in our written testimony as well as recommendations of what we believe would improve efficiency for HRA. But in this moment, I would like to focus on time, a common thread in the issues mentioned in the written system... written testimony and what I've said before you today. it is the loss of time when someone has to travel to most... further most corner of Brooklyn to then wait hours before being seen. It is not enough time existing when eligibility specialists are forced to process cases inaccurately to meet a farfetched quota. It is... the abuse of time when SNAP workers are not properly trained rather thrown into a sea of clients and emotionally traumatic situations. And finally, the essence of time. As mentioned earlier the receipt of

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food stamps could save a family from ever having to

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choose between going hungry and having a place to

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sleep. In summary, households should not be forced to

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go without food because of HRA's insufficient

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funding, technological problems or callousness

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towards its clients. Yet, in the violation of the

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city's legal obligations household, households

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regularly suffer due to the aforementioned issues.

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Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

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NICK FREUDENBERG: Good afternoon. I'm

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Nick Freudenberg, distinguished professor of Public

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Health at the City University of New York, Graduate

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School of Public Health and Director of the CUNY

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Urban Food Policy Institute. I also direct Healthy

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CUNY, the university wide initiative that helps CUNY

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students to overcome health problems that interfere

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with academic success. Since 2010, I have conducted

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three surveys, the surveys that my colleagues were

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talking about before, this was in 2010, 2015 and 2018

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of representative samples of CUNY students at our

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community college and four-year schools to

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demonstrate the prevalence of food insecurity and

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assess the efficacy of campus food security services.

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I'll briefly summarize our findings and then suggest several actions that CUNY, New York City and New York State can take to reduce the rate and adverse impact of food insecurity in our students. Our first survey in 2010 taken when the then Chancellor Matt Goldstein asked my group to look into what he was hearing from college presidents was an increased prevalence of food insecurity among our students at the height of the financial crisis. We found that 39 percent of CUNY undergraduates were food insecure. By 2015 this rate had dropped to 22 percent and in early 2018 when we did our third, third survey to 20 percent. To put a face on these numbers, an estimated 82,000 CUNY students were food insecure in 2010, 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, but they were often or sometimes hungry in the last 12 months and by 2018 that number has fallen to about 32,000 and this decline in the number of food insecure students at CUNY is a significant accomplishment and you heard about some of the reasons. I think one of the important reasons is the improved economic situation in New York after the recovery as well as the changes in SNAP programs that



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we heard from the HRA Administrator early on and the CUNY programs, the 13 food pantries and the Single Stop enrollment programs. In addition, CUNYs extended food security outreach and education but despite this progress more work is to be... needs to be done. According to our surveys, in 2018 almost... about eight percent of CUNY undergraduates reported using any food assistance programs and this was only an increase from seven percent, so we need to do much more. Most of our food insecure students are not getting help on our campuses according to our surveys. Our 2018 survey also found that about nine percent 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 and we believe from our data and this follows up on the GAO report that came out just a few weeks ago that a significant portion of CUNY students that should be eligible for SNAP are in fact not enrolled. And that brings me to my recommendations. 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

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next five years by 2023. That goal we believe is ambitious but achievable and we invite the City Council to work with us, CUNY and the state to achieve that goal and here's some recommendations and I'll focus on the ones that you haven't already heard. First, and you'll hear from one of our food security advocates that were trained to campaign against stigma and to acquaint students who worked at John Jay and HOSTOS College this last year, we believe every CUNY student should prepare students to provide outreach and education as surveys show that a significant proportion of CUNY students still don't know about the services that are available on their campus and we believe training students to provide that education could increase enrollment. And our second major recommendation is we believe HRA, CUNY and, and the city and state should do concentrated campaigns to enroll all eligible CUNY students in SNAP. We believe there's much more work that can be done and we would be happy to work with HRA to design that and we also believe and I hope others will later talk about this that New York State should be looking to follow the lead of other states such as Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Illinois and New Jersey

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to modify federal rules to extend the opportunity to

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enroll in SNAP for college students who don't meet

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the requirements. Other states have done it, New York

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could do it and we believe it would be a relatively

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simple step but the, the Governor and the State

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Legislature need to... be encouraged to take that step.

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I've taught at CUNY for 40 years, I've seen how hard

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our students work to succeed in school and succeed in

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life and I've seen how food insecurity sometimes

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makes that harder. As a city, as a country we should

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not be asking our students to choose between being

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hungry and being educated and we look forward to

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working with you to achieve that goal of ending that.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, I have one

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question following up. Those other states that got

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that waiver on SNAP did they... was that during the

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current administration or the prior administration?

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NICK FREUDENBERG: It's been relatively

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recent, New Jersey just implemented this and my

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colleague Joel Berg I think will be able to tell you

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a little more about that. It involves... if people are

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involved in a publicly funded educational job

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training program they aren't held to the same rules

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and by certifying the entire CUNY system as a

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publicly funded job training system New York might be

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able to do that. Just one other very poignant

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obstacle, the, the requirement that people work more

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than 20 hours a week most jobs at CUNY are 19 hours a

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week and most part time jobs are 19 hours or less and

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the reason for that is employers don't want to pay

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the added benefits when someone goes over 20 hours

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and again as my colleague, the CUNY students said we

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shouldn't be asking students to pay for their own

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food, you know if they're food insecure, we shouldn't

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be asking students to bear the burden of food

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insecurity because employers don't want to pay extra

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benefits.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great, thank you and

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Joey you're on the next panel so...

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TANZINA AHMED: Okay, hello... oops is this

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on? Okay, wonderful, that's a great start everyone. I

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really am establishing my authority right now. So, my

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name is Tanzina Ahmed and I'm an Assistant Professor

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at CUNY Kingsborough Community College and I

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especially want to talk about the needs of community

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college students who are somehow, it's almost

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improbable even poorer and more disadvantaged than

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the regular general college student population of

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CUNY. So, we have heard a great deal about how 40 percent of students, 20 percent of students at CUNY colleges are food insecure but when you narrow your focus down to especially looking at community colleges where the predominate majority of students come from low income minority populations the numbers of food insecure students are almost unbelievable. In 2017, with the support of Dr. Rositsa Ilieva of the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, I did a study at CUNY Bronx Community College where we found that 80 percent of the students were reporting either severe or some level of moderate food insecurity, 80 percent and unfortunately for these students they were in a campus that often contributed to their food insecurity, you know as my... as other students who've been to Bronx Community College can tell you it is a school that offers a wonderful level of support in some way, it is a school that opened up a food pantry in 2016 where they now offer grab and go boxes and that really helps students but at the same time it is a school where when you go to the student cafeteria your average sandwich costs seven dollars, your average salad costs eight dollars, how are students who are living at or below the poverty line going to

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afford meals? In fact, they do not eat, what they often do the majority of the time they go to vending machines and get candy bars and other snacks instead. So, I, I'm really grateful to hear today about all the testimony about people who look at how these programs, these awesome vouchers, these other issues are working to help alleviate the, the food insecurity of CUNY Community College students and other CUNY students but I do believe that there needs to be a greater emphasis also on understanding what about students who are not going to use these voucher programs, what about these students who are not going to go and get SNAP, SNAP through the Single Stop Office and we also have to think about how do we teach students to use and understand more about the food system. So, for instance, CUNY Kingsborough Community College my current and hopefully forever occupation home is a leader in advocating for student's food security, we have an amazing urban farm that supplies students... to thousands of students every single growing season and what happens is that we also run a bring it home program where we offer students cooking classes, we tell them come in and we will show you how to grow your food, we will show you

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how to take this produce that you may have never seen

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before and make healthy snacks and salads and all of

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these other wonderful things out of it but the

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problem is that we often do not get enough funding.

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There is Stop and Go funding, every semester we are

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frantically looking around for money with... like

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chickens with our heads cut off and because of that,

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you know it's hard to be able to accommodate all the

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students who are in need, even the students who come

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to us which is again, a minority of the student

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populations, its difficult to tell them you can only

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take one item today because otherwise we will run out

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of food. So, if we could please get more funding not

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only for Single Stop Offices which do amazing work

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but for also programs like Bring it Home, programs

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like the CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, we can

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empower students not only to feed themselves in the

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moment and do well in their classes in the moment but

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also to get nutritional learning that they can bring

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home to their families and their communities every

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day. Thank you very much.

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KARLA IGNACIO: So, good afternoon

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Council Members of the Committee on Higher Education

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and the Committee of General Welfare. My name is

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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 work... 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 them a direct link 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 farmer's  
market near our campus and with the help of the New



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York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene we created and implemented farmers market tours and distributed Health Bucks, which are two dollar coupons that can be used to purchase fresh food and vegetables at all New York City farmers markets. I was able to do this, this summer and the 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 saturates 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 did work study programs that allowed me to work during the times that I did not have class. On a regular basis, I was offered food at least four times. I was involved in organizing campus events 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 HOSTOS regarding food is not the same as most CUNY students. Because of my network, I was able to feel food secure. Your typical

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CUNY student usually does not have that and is more likely to experience food insecurity as a result. One student write; "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'm able to carry on throughout the day and, and accomplish what needs to be done, I can often get irritated and cranky because I'm running on an empty stomach". There is a lack of 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 foods, 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 get these foods because they are what's most available and increase the possibility of having poor health later in life. In 2011, a report titled "Food

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Insecurity at CUNY: Results from a Survey of CUNY

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Undergraduate Students," found that two in every five

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CUNY students or 39.2 percent had experienced food

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insecurity in the last 12 months. The same study also

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found a correlation between health problems and food

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insecurity, finding that students who reported their

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health as fair or poor were 1.5 times more likely to

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experience food insecurity than their peers who

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reported good health. Although a large percentage of

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students were found to be food insecure, only a small

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percentage utilize public assistance programs. Only

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7.2 percent of the surveyed students had utilized a

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food assistance program in the last 12 months and

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only 6.4 percent of them received SNAP. A 2018 survey

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found that food insecurity was now experienced by one

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in every five students, a significant drop. But

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that's still too many college students to be hungry.

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We would like to point out... [cross-talk]

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Miss Ignacio would I...

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could I ask you to maybe jump to the recommendations

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portion of your testimony... [cross-talk]

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KARLA IGNACIO: Oh, yeah, sure. Okay. To

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effectively reduce the food insecurity of college

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students in New York City, the CUNY Food Security

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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... at the Student Health Centers or use them as incentives to get more students to come to Single Stop. Provide a substantial amount of meal vouchers for students in extreme food insecurity. Revamp the cafeteria 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 with food restrictions. We, therefore, ask that the City Council and the Committee of Higher Education and General Welfare to consider; putting more financial resources into Single Stop. We think this will directly increase CUNY students 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

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meals on campus through campus dining. And lastly,

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supporting CUNY schools that want to start or expand

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garden or farming programs to grow food on campus. At

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HOSTOS, our hydroponic towers get the whole campus

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excited about eating fresh food. We think this would

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help every campus support the health of all CUNY

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students. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

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MAGGIE DICKINSON: Thanks so much to the

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Council for having this hearing today. I am not going

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to reiterate a lot of the data that you've heard that

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has been put together by colleagues at Healthy CUNY

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but I... and I also want to thank our students who

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testified earlier to really lay out the scope of the

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problem on campus. I'm Maggie Dickinson, I'm an

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Assistant Professor at Guttman Community College. So,

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what I want to do today is talk a little bit about a

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report that I worked on with my colleague, Nick

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Freudenberg that proposes ways of thinking about

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ending food insecurity at CUNY in the next five years

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and I just want to highlight some proposals that

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maybe have got... not gotten as much attention today.

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So, one of the things I want us to think about is

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that CUNY students are New Yorkers, the issues that

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New Yorkers face in accessing food are the same issues that CUNY students face in accessing food. We also know that among college students they enroll in SNAP at lower rates than the general population and it's unclear why. So, one of the things I'd like to propose is working with CUNY, with Single Stop, with faculty, students and staff and also with the city to get a better understanding of building a close relationship between HRA and Single Stop to understand why our college students aren't enrolling in, in SNAP at the same levels. These are questions that would be helpful to have answers to, to do a lot of the work that people have talked about in enrolling more of our students in SNAP. I also understand, you know the issues with barriers to enrollment at the HRA offices that.. I know that's a cultural shift and the city's been doing a lot of work on that and I think that's terrific but making our welfare offices a more welcoming place to minimize stigma, to make it easier for students and all New Yorkers to access benefits and also to maximize the.. one of the student populations who I see who struggle the most are my students who are parents who have young children and one of the things

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we haven't talked about much today is access to cash assistance and so I think that's another area where I have seen students struggle to maintain cash assistance cases to support themselves economically while they're in school and when they're not able to maintain those cases I, I lose those students and its heartbreaking. So, I think these are all areas where we could do better in your oversight is really important. The other thing I want to emphasize is this idea of, you know pantries are important and Single Stop does an amazing job but the other thing that we need to do at CUNY is to really think about how we're using our food service. One of the things that we imagine in the report that we wrote are food service providers honor campuses who are providing low cost, healthy meals to all of our students at a nominal cost. This would mean... right now CUNY sees food service as a revenue stream because we are all dealing with austerity budgets. What we need to do is to start to see food service as a retention effort and as a student support service. So, the stories that students were telling us before about food on campus being so expensive and especially Bronx Community College, you know there's not a lot of food

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options up there. Where I am in Midtown, Manhattan first of all Guttman does not have a cafeteria at all because we still need a permanent building but we're also in Midtown, our students can't afford to eat, we're on 40<sup>th</sup> Street across from Bryant Park, there aren't affordable options nearby for our students. So, I think making a commitment to affordable, low cost meals for all of our students is an institutional commitment that CUNY could make that would go a long way. We do this in elementary school and high schools, this happens in many countries, in Latin America there are low cost programs on college campuses to feed students to support their education and CUNY could really be a leader on this nationally.

JOHN KRINSKY: Good morning members of

the General Welfare and Higher Education Committees and thank you very much for having this hearing. My name is John Krinsky and I'm a Professor of Political Science at CUNY College New York and the CUNY Graduate Center. My testimony this morning is a brief summary of research that I did with students in an introductory methods class last semester. We did a statistically robust survey of City College students that found... that focused on housing and food



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insecurity. Our findings largely mirrored those found in Dr., Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab of Rutgers and Dr... and Dr. Nicholas Freudenberg's research at CUNY, who have done CUNY wide studies of the same issues. Briefly we had three... we had several key findings. First, 46.6 percent of our students reported skipping meals or cutting back on food due to... 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 COMMITTEE CLERKNY students cut back on food or skip meals because of a lack of funds. Translating to actual numbers of people that's between 6,864 and 8,514 City College students alone who experience food insecurity. 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 can't ignore this, and you aren't clearly. This, of course, is also a message that needs to be heard in Albany. On housing and I'm... and... on housing, I think

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2 housing is important because of how much people spend  
3 on housing. We found that 28.4 percent of our total  
4 number of respondents reported having had one of the  
5 following four conditions during college: have you  
6 moved more than twice in a month during your academic  
7 career; have you crashed with a friend or family  
8 member for lack of a place to go; have you stayed  
9 overnight in college, not in a dorm, for lack of a  
10 place to go; and have you stayed in a homeless  
11 shelter while you were in college? That's 28.4  
12 percent of our respondents. These are important  
13 markers of being homeless with only the most obvious  
14 staying in shelter, registering with official  
15 statistics as homeless. It gives a measure of the  
16 depth of the problem we face, even net of the current  
17 population of our shelters. If we add to these  
18 numbers students who report either having had trouble  
19 paying rent or having been forced out of their  
20 housing due to personal conflicts, domestic violence  
21 or other causes, we arrive at a figure of over 42.7  
22 percent or 221 of 516 students who report significant  
23 housing insecurity and this is nearly the same figure  
24 overall as Professor Freudenberg found CUNY wide.  
25 It's... the, the majority of our students, nearly two

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thirds work, mostly part time and another 20 percent are unemployed or looking for work, 78 percent of our respondents lived with their parents. It's clear that neither work nor living with parents had a significant protective effect against food and housing insecurity. One hundred and thirteen or 76 percent of the students experiencing homelessness episodes lived with their parents. So, this is... this... what, what this points to again is this idea that actually CUNY students are just like other New Yorkers, just like their parents, they come from all over the city and, and it's important then therefore that the eviction prevention funds and the food pantries they, they... as important band aids as they are, are definitely band aids on a much, much larger wound and just finally and I, I'm trying to be mindful of the time, one of the things that I want to emphasize... two, two quick things that I want to emphasize is we didn't survey faculty at CUNY but the adjunct faculty at CUNY lives in... on sub poverty wages, they get paid roughly 3,500 dollars a course, usually that works out to no more than about 2,800... or 28,000 dollars a year so they're living in poverty and we didn't actually survey adjunct and, and I know

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my union probably should and we probably have figures

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on that I just don't know. The other thing is that I

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would urge the Council to really think holistically

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about this, so when you do rezonings and when you do

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other land use... you know land use dispositions where...

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that, that threaten low and moderate income people in

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neighborhoods all around New York with displacement,

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when people are displaced they tend to end up paying

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more money for their next lease and this effects

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people all over the city and it effects, I know

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firsthand from stories from my students, it effects

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CUNY students as well and spills right over into the

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food security issues that are... that are essential to

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the hearing today.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you

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very much to this panel, we greatly appreciate your

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testimony and we look forward to working with all of

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you, these are really important points that you've

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all raised, thank you. The next panel Ariel Savransky

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UJA Federation; Joel Berg, Hunger Free America;

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Mikola De Roo, Food Bank of New York; Rebecca Glass,

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City Harvest and Rachel Sabella from No Kid Hungry.

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Whoever wants to begin.

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MIKOLA DE ROO: Can you hear me? Great.  
Good afternoon Chairperson Levin, Chairperson Barron  
and members of the General Welfare and Higher  
Education Committees. My name is Mikola De Roo and  
I'm the Vice President of Public Affairs at Food Bank  
for New York City and I'm also joined here today by  
Nick Buess who I think is in the back there, our  
Community Mobilization Manager. I also know that the  
Council has worked with my predecessors Triada  
Stampas and Rachel Sabella who's also here today for  
many years on reducing food insecurity across New  
York City and I want to thank you for continuing to  
make anti-hunger programs a priority. Our written  
testimony provides you with a comprehensive summary  
of our most current reflections on and strategies for  
reducing hunger for all New Yorkers with a lot of  
supporting examples, details, statistics and  
recommendations so I won't read all that today here  
and now but I do want to spend these few minutes to  
highlight the essential investment New York City has  
made to the emergency food network as well as the  
emerging threats to low income New Yorkers which put  
in stark relief the need continue to fortify the  
network of food pantries and soup kitchens that serve

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2 as our city's backstop against hunger. First, a huge  
3 thank you to, to Speaker Johnson, Chairperson Levin,  
4 Council Member Grodenchik and the entire New York  
5 City Council who collectively fought for years to  
6 increase baseline food funding for New York City's  
7 emergency food assistance program or EFAP. As a major  
8 important source of food for our city's emergency  
9 food network, EFAP plays a crucial role in reducing  
10 hunger because it provides a steady, year-round  
11 supply of nutritious food for the approximately 500  
12 New York City food pantries and soup kitchens that  
13 participate. We applaud the City Council for its  
14 leadership in fighting to the best of our ability for our  
15 neighbors in greatest need with the fewest resources.  
16 Supporting the network of emergency food providers  
17 would not be possible without our partnership with  
18 the Human Resources Administration. We look forward  
19 to continued collaboration with HRA not just on  
20 emergency food distribution but on connecting New  
21 Yorkers to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance  
22 Program better known as SNAP which is the first line  
23 of defense against hunger. As we mark our progress  
24 and some of these victories and look ahead to the  
25 future, I want to underscore that we are in an

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1 exceptional moment in the fight against hunger.

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3 Within the past year there have been repeated  
4 explicit attacks on the food security of many of our  
5 most vulnerable neighbors. Two recent actions by the  
6 Trump Administration both of which were mentioned  
7 earlier by others here today threaten to push many of  
8 those New Yorkers deeper into food insecurity. As  
9 noted earlier proposed changes to the public charge  
10 test would force immigrants to choose between getting  
11 food they need and seeking legal, permanent  
12 residents. The administration is also attempting to  
13 subvert congress by punishing and stripping benefits  
14 access from unemployed and under employed adults  
15 without dependents who aren't able to document a  
16 disability. Congress already voted to reject this  
17 harmful ABAWD plan by removing it from the recently  
18 negotiated farm bill. As advocates have pushed  
19 against these actions, service providers have needed  
20 to step up and do more in the wake of the recent  
21 government shutdown. During the past few months,  
22 18,000 federal workers and additional contractors  
23 impacted in the city found themselves exposed to new  
24 vulnerabilities. By necessity to put, put food on the  
25 table, many furloughed workers who went without a

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paycheck for more than a month suddenly needed to do what was previously unthinkable, seek food assistance from community organizations and or learn how to access emergency SNAP benefits. Federal workers who were required to continue working without pay through the shutdown were limited to seeking help from charities that could accommodate their work schedules with some resorting to rationing food for themselves and their children and tapping into limited savings to cover other nonnegotiable like housing and transportation. The reopening of the government has not ended food insecurity or the strains on the charitable network and the many who rely on it. The emergency food network has continued to serve those impacted by the shutdown in addition to the millions of New Yorkers who already struggle every day to afford food even when the federal government is opening... open and functioning properly. During the shutdown 1.6 million low income New Yorkers who rely on SNAP received their February benefits early in mid-January. I think the intention there was a good one as noted earlier but an unintended effect is that because current SNAP benefits cover about two weeks' worth of food for most households, it has created a



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SNAP gap for recipients who are having to stretch that early disbursement over a much longer four to six-week time period. That gap is going to be most evident and intense during the imminent public-school mid-winter break that starts next week when children will lose access to up to two free meals per day in school. 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 especially in the face of the unprecedented serious threats from the federal government we urge the city to advance the budgetary and legislative supports needed to ensure that the city's crucial and already strained anti-hunger safety net remains intact for another fiscal year. The bottom line is that these federal attacks are hitting the New Yorkers who are already our most vulnerable the hardest by a bad federal policy coming at us from multiple fronts, threats to safety and resident status, sufficient consistent individual income, benefits eligibility and access, affordable health care and by extension two nonnegotiable like living... for living like food and housing. For the purposes of this hearing this means

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that more than ever we as New Yorkers must use the

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collective local power we have to do what we have

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always done historically, to work together in

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solidarity using our leadership and wisdom in

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government and in the charitable emergency food

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network to collaborate and strengthen the effective

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systems and initiatives that protect our neediest so

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that for our, our tired, our poor, our tempest tossed

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and our hungriest who are also like all of us, New

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Yorkers our city remains the reliable sanctuary it

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has always been.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

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JOEL BERG: Hi, I'm Joel Berg, CEO of

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Hunger Free America. I've submitted encyclopedic

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testimony for the record so I won't read it, but I

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will make a, a few key points in response to the

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other points made in the hearing. First, the question

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of liability for food donors, I'm sure our colleagues

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from City Harvest will discuss this but understand

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federal law and state law protect good faith donors

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against liability, that's a non-issue. Two, Chairman

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Leven you asked about whether congress can do

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something about the proposed public charge rule and

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the proposed ABAWD rule, they don't have to approve

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it, the Trump Administration can do without, without them but I want to say for the record like any other regulation congress does have the constitutional ability to oversee it... overrule it but I don't expect this current senate would do so but I would hope we'd push the house to do so and if the senate doesn't we should get a new senate. I want to make... in a nonpartisan way representing my nonpartisan organization and I, I just mentioned this to Councilman Treyger, but I hope they have separate hearings on this school breakfast in New York City. I know this has been a big issue of yours for a long time, there's a new report out by our colleagues and New York City is still dragging. The Mayor said that we were going to do in class room breakfast for all elementary schools, the reality is that's still not happening, and we're still not significantly expanded to middle schools. As of the 2017/2018 school year, 44.6 percent of the kids who got school lunch got school breakfast, less than half the kids in New York City who got school lunch got school breakfast, some, some cities now are above 100 percent. Now state law mandates that all high needs schools in New York City do it. We're going to follow up with the board of

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education and the Mayor's Office, but I hope the Council can really push them to get on the stick. We are losing federal funds while kids are going hungry, it makes no sense whatsoever. On college student hunger I want to follow up on what some of my colleagues have said, the least effective way to fight college student hunger are food pantries. It sort of grills me that... I don't know if that's a word in this context but that we're using the worst response first. The top response should be using federally funded nutrition assistance benefits. Just to clarify for the Governor to say that every community college in the state qualifies for the work requirement for SNAP does not require USDA to approve it or even review it, the Governor can just do it by administrative fiat through OTDA tomorrow. It would not cost the state a penny, other states have done it including states run by republican Governors and particularly with the current House of Representatives it's not like they're going to overrule this and I can go into details with staff later about how this needs to happen but they can do it overnight just by clarifying this. Secondly, we also need to better use work study requirements. If..

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we know that one hour of work study allows people to

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qualify for these programs for SNAP then if we have

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100 hours of work study instead of giving one student

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100 hours we should give 10 students 10 hours and

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make sure they all get SNAP and then we should fund

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feeding programs on campus through the feeding halls

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and pantries where kids have to... or students have to

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take food back, you know dozens of miles on public

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transportation back home taking food that someone

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else picked for them and lastly I'll see some

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colleagues from Columbia here, they're endowment is

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ten billion dollars, they're president earns four

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million dollars, four times the President of the

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United States, they can make sure their workers and

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their students don't go hungry, they should do it

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tomorrow without a penny or more of government funds,

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they should just make sure every private institution

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in New York with zillions of dollars should make sure

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that their students and workers don't go hungry by,

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by, by paying their workers enough and by making sure

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they have enough money on financial aid. Thank you.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks Joel.

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REBECCA GLASS: Hi, good afternoon. My

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name is Rebecca Glass, I work for City Harvest, I'm

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1  
2 an Agency Operations Manager and I would like to  
3 address the Chairperson's Barron and Levin and the  
4 Committees on General Welfare and Higher Education  
5 and thank you for this opportunity. So, you've heard  
6 a lot about hunger and food insecurity specifically  
7 around the SNAP issue. Two things that I want to  
8 point out that have not been mentioned this afternoon  
9 is that our agency programs have been seeing upwards  
10 of 30 percent of increasing clients and serving  
11 clients who have never had to access emergency food  
12 in the past specifically due to the shutdown and the  
13 formerly furloughed workers. Specifically, programs  
14 in Staten Island have seen an intake of 100 plus  
15 clients in one day given their proximity to the port  
16 and members of the coast guard. City Harvest has...  
17 response has been that the mobile markets that are in  
18 all five boroughs are open to the formerly furloughed  
19 and federal workers free of charge, they just need to  
20 show their IDs. We've packed numbers of bags of  
21 produce and nonperishable items distributed to TSA  
22 workers both in LaGuardia Airport and through a  
23 partner agency Holding Hands at the JFK Airport,  
24 we've provided additional produce to three of our  
25 agencies, two in Staten Island, one in Queens and

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we've received a small modest grant to help agencies

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in high need, high SNAP recipient neighborhoods to

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purchase food from one of our vendors but this is not

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enough as we've all heard this afternoon. So, here's

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our call to action. Number one, open feeding centers

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such as those available during the summer months to

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provide breakfast and lunches for New York City

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public school children next week. If there are

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centers available, then that information needs to be

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made public. Number two, to advocate for enhanced

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SNAP benefits and the call on the Council to, to

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comment on the ABAWD rule making process as we've

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heard this afternoon it's really untenable situation.

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To provide 15 million dollars for SNAP incentives

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specifically to help New Yorkers afford fresh fruits

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and vegetables by expanding such programs as health

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bucks. And work together with our network and other

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food funders to provide capital grants and food

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assistance to the network of community programs who

21

often operate on a shoe string budget with limited

22

infrastructure. Thank you again for your time.

23

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

24

ARIEL SAVRANSKY: Good afternoon, my name

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is Ariel Savransky, I'm a Policy and Advocacy Advisor

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1  
2 at UJA Federation. Thank you for the opportunity to  
3 testify as well as for your tireless advocacy for  
4 increased funding for food insecurity. So, I'm just  
5 going to summarize a few things from my testimony.  
6 First, we urge the city to continue to invest and  
7 expanding the anti-hunger safety net. By continuing  
8 to take steps to expand enrollment and programs such  
9 as SNAP, the Governor included in his executive  
10 budget announcement this year programs to make it  
11 easier for older adults to enroll in SNAP as well as  
12 to improve screening tools especially at physician's  
13 offices and also to enroll in an online pilot that  
14 would allow individuals to use their benefits... their  
15 SNAP benefits online. So, once these are rolled out  
16 if there is spending, we would urge the city to work  
17 with the state to make sure that these initiatives  
18 are publicized. Second, we would like to thank you  
19 for your advocacy related to the emergency food  
20 assistance programs specifically securing the 8.7  
21 million dollar increase last year. Obviously, the  
22 need is still there and so we hope you'll continue to  
23 advocate for increasing to this funding. Also, along  
24 those lines, it is essential that the city invest in  
25 resources to ensure that food pantries are equipped



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with enough food to serve their clients especially culturally competent foods such as halal and kosher meals. One thing I'll bring up that hasn't been discussed yet is that it is imperative that the city invest in agencies that run congregate or home delivered meal programs. So, come... congregate and home delivered meals are funded by the city currently at a rate of 20 percent less per meal than the national average. Additional investments are needed to increase the rate to be adequately on par with the national average which was... would allow agencies to provide culturally competent meals adequately fund staffing and address the unfunded cost of running senior center kitchens so that seniors can eat nutritious and culturally competent meals. We would also urge the city to think about ways to support UJA Federation's digital pantry system and hubs. These have been discussed in the past few years, our system is now being piloted at three pantries with a goal of expanding it to an additional 14 in the coming years. Through this system we have already begun to see the intended results, the number of people served has increased significantly especially among families of young children. One of our digital pantries has seen

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usage triple, wait times are down and pantries are able to stay open for longer hours making them more accessible. Furthermore, the amount of protein and fresh fruits and vegetables has also increased exponentially in our pantries. So, we urge the City Council to continue to think creatively about ways to increase access to this food and also explore 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. We are also very supportive of increased efforts to fight hunger on college campuses that was discussed extensively so I won't go into that here. So, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

RACHEL SABELLA: Hi, good afternoon, my name is Rachel Sabella and I'm the Director of No Kid Hungry New York, with Share our Strength. I want to be very brief today. I do have to say though when I walked into the lobby this morning and saw it completely full of people coming up here, listening to your remarks Chair Levin, listening to Chair... to Councilman Grodenchik's remarks we've come so far and I think it's something that we should all be very

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proud of. We still have a long way to go but due to your leadership and due to the united front of all these organizations when you see what we've been able to do to start breakfast in the classroom to expand universal school meals, to put the increase in EFAP, to be able to talk about what people need, to SNAP, SNAP and to go against the federal government and advocate for things we are very lucky and so we thank you for that and I know we will all continue to work that way. I have written remarks which I will pass around but for me I think the biggest thing today is as the Council goes through their budget season, as the Council looks at opportunities, we need to be supporting people and we need to be putting attention at these programs. For so many people these days and especially as we look at childhood hunger, there is so much fear so whether it's parents not taking advantage of school meal programs or parents not knowing about the existence of summer meal programs we need to put our energies into putting awareness out, helping people to take advantage of this. I think what Joel said about school breakfast, let's not leave money on the table, this is money that's out there. We know that when kids are in the

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classroom and eating and nobody's judging, nobody's

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saying you're poor and eating in the cafeteria the

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difference that it makes and I think especially now

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again as people are afraid, as people are fighting

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for their lives we need to do everything we can to

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ensure that they have food, that their children have

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food. We at Share our Strength stand at the ready to

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work with you in the Council and I thank you again

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for your leadership.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Rachel. So,

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I want to thank this entire panel for all the work

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that you continue to do. I know that your testimony

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has a lot of other recommendations and ideas that we

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look forward to incorporating and we... on the areas

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that we can... on the areas that we can... have an impact

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whether it's on the... some of the federal stuff or the

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state stuff the Council wants to be a partner in

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efficacy and, and so please let's, let's make sure

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over the coming months that we're working closely

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together and I'll do my part to ensure that my

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colleagues are informed and, and are taking the

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necessary advocacy roles as well and also

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communicating with the Speaker and, and making sure

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that, that where we need to, to go to the Mayor or go

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to the Governor, go to congress, go to our, our, our  
colleagues in the house we'll be able to do that. So,  
thank you so much, thank you for, for your time and  
for, for staying so long, we're, we're a proud...  
approaching almost hour four here so we really  
appreciate everybody's patience on this, thank you.  
Okay, we have two more panels. The next panel Wendy  
O'Shields from Safety Net Activists; Michael Higgins,  
the Food Pantry at Columbia; Medhat Garas from Hunger  
Free New York City; Zamir Hassan, Muslims Against  
Hunger, Hunger Van and then is it... is it Loresa  
Wright, United Way. Is Mr. Hassan, Zamir Hassan, he  
had to leave maybe, okay, Reverend Robert Ennis  
Jackson, okay and then if Mr. Hassan comes back,  
we'll make sure to put him on the next panel.

WENDY O'SHIELDS: Okay, my name is Wendy  
O'Shields, I am a New York City Welfare and Homeless  
Rights Advocate working with the Urban Justice Safety  
Net Project and Activists. I support Intro bill  
T2019-3640, oversight reducing food insecurity in New  
York City. New York City homeless no and low-income  
individuals and families, disabled, unemployed,  
underemployed, emancipated youth, college students,  
elderly, rent or, or debt burdened and those with

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catastrophic medical expenses are hungry. These populations choose between their most urgent bills or skipped... or a skipped inadequate meal. Many New Yorkers suffer quietly behind closed doors with gross malnutrition, vitamin deficiencies and hunger because they're poor. Regular missed meals or meager meals lead to a multitude of long-term expensive health challenges. Additionally bill 3640 should consider setting aside funding for urban farming incentives with a focus on community and rooftop gardens. Encourage individual window sill gardens for herbs and other easily grown edible plants, this will allow for fresh produce in house. Consider allocating funding for... more funding for health bucks of fresh food and vegetable farmer's market coupon program run by the New York City 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 New York City Five Boroughs Food Program on the MTA subway, AM and Metro daily newspapers, and frequently run a PSA on NYC, New York One. I thank you for considering my suggestions to reduce hunger in the city of New York.

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you Miss  
3 O'Shields.

4 MICHAEL HIGGINS: Good afternoon, my name  
5 is Michael Higgins, I am a third year GS student  
6 studying Urban Studies and specialize in geographic  
7 information systems. I am also the Co-Founder and  
8 Chair of the Food Pantry at Columbia. Columbia  
9 University is one of the eight ivy league  
10 institutions in the country and we are the, the Food  
11 Pantry at Columbia is the only pantry that is run by  
12 students in the ivy league... ivy league institution. I  
13 want to thank Chair Levin, Chair Barron and all the  
14 Council Members for the opportunity to testify here  
15 today and I'm going to give a brief history of the  
16 food pantry and then talk very briefly about some of  
17 the things that I would like to see going forward in  
18 our... in our next chapters. The food pantry at  
19 Columbia was formed in May 2016 in a collaborative  
20 effort between the General Studies Student Council  
21 and the First Generation, Low Income Partnership. Our  
22 mission is very simple, relieve hunger in... you know  
23 relieve hunger on our campus through the acquisition  
24 and distribution of both perishable and non-  
25 perishable food to those who need it, and this

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includes students and Columbia affiliates. So, just to give everyone a, a heads up, this is something that we have found out that not only students are utilizing this, this resource but also Columbia affiliates as well whether they are administrators or work study students or of that nature. During its development GS... GSSC and FLIP determined that there was a... an issue within the School of General Studies in relation to hunger. As a small test pilot, GSSC allocated 1,000 dollars to purchase food, advertised on, on social media and reserved space to distribute the food. Before the end of the first week of the teste, we realized that hunger extends beyond the borders of the School of General Studies and at... it was at that point that we decided to make this a larger, more, more formal situation and less than three years later the food pantry at Columbia is a self-contained university, university recognized student group with an eight person board, seven committees and an average of 200, 200 committee members or 200 volunteers per year. Our data shows that not only do we have a significant reach within, within the School of General Studies but we also have a significant reach across the entire university.



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2 Only one of the 21 schools within the university  
3 have... has not utilized the pantry at some capacity,  
4 shape or form and this is more pronounced this  
5 particular semester, the start of this, this calendar  
6 year where it looks like the entire undergraduate  
7 school... undergraduate schools, all four undergraduate  
8 schools as well as the... as well as some of the  
9 graduate schools and professional schools are now  
10 utilizing the pantry at a higher rate. And one of the  
11 things that we need going forward in our next chapter  
12 is an access to, to SNAP, SNAP options. We are  
13 partnered with... excuse me, we are a member of the  
14 Food Bank for New York City and this allows us to  
15 purchase our food at a much lower cost than it would  
16 if we were doing a... purchasing through retail  
17 establishments or even the school's wholesale  
18 provider SYSCO, that's one option that we have in  
19 relation to the, the Food Bank for New York City. The  
20 Food Bank for New York City also allows us to, to  
21 provide students with the option to apply for SNAP  
22 however, because a vast majority of students who  
23 would apply for SNAP would be turned down because  
24 they don't necessarily qualify is something that we  
25 would like to have a larger discourse going forward

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2 as to what exactly we can do to make this process  
3 better for all students. I do have my written  
4 testimony presented to the Council and I would  
5 appreciate any follow up that you may have. Thank you  
6 very much.

7 MEDHAT GARAS: Good afternoon everyone  
8 and Happy Valentines Day. Thanks for all of you and  
9 thanks for the Hunger Free New York City organization  
10 for inviting me today to speak to the Hunger Welfare  
11 Committee today. My name is Medhat Garas and I am low  
12 income member of Hunger Free New York City's Food  
13 Action Board for the past five years. As members we  
14 advocate for SNAP benefits for low income individuals  
15 who depend on SNAP benefits as well as the generosity  
16 of food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City.  
17 During these past five years I have volunteered at my  
18 local community pantries and soup kitchen drives in  
19 Staten Island to help other families put food on  
20 their table. During these years I have seen hundreds  
21 of people in my community struggling. Coming into the  
22 pantries, to get food for the week and to eat at our  
23 community soup kitchen is sometimes their only  
24 option. There are too many families and people living  
25 in poverty, in shelters, and living in food

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insecurity, I have seen senior citizens, unemployed people, immigrants from many countries and people from every denomination and religious backgrounds as well as, as veterans, disabled people and single mothers, single men, family, food insecurity does not discriminate, they all, all suffer. 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, as food kitchens and food pantries need to be well funded nationwide priority on food, we end hunger in this country. I want you... all of you to just remember last month how many federal employees were not being paid and were forced to go to all pantries around just to eat because of the government shut down. I'm here today to let the Welfare Committee and all of you... and all of those who in attendance to know that our low income people and seniors as well... as well our children and all of those who are vulnerable in our society need to eat and that SNAP programs as well as community food pantries and soup kitchens need to be well funded and need to remain open all year, all year around just to help families in need. No woman, man or child, citizen of the great state of New York should go

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hungry and congress should both expand SNAP  
eligibility and increase benefits for SNAP by  
adopting the moderate cost food plan. Thank you.

LORESA WRIGHT: Thank you. Good afternoon  
and Happy Valentines Day. My name is Loresa Wright,  
the Director of Crisis and Housing Supports at United  
Way of New York City. Thank you, Chairperson Levin  
and Chairperson Barron, as well as the Committee  
members for holding today's hearing. For nearly 80  
years, United Way of New York City has worked to  
support vulnerable New Yorkers throughout the five  
boroughs, fighting for health, education, and  
financial stability of every New Yorker. We partnered  
with the Women's Center for education and career  
advancement and City Harvest to release the 2000...  
2018, the Self Sufficiency Standards for New York  
City, a study that determines the required income to  
achieve... to achieve economic independence in each of  
the boroughs. We found that two in five working aged  
New York City households or over 2.5 million  
individuals lack income to cover just the basic  
necessities; food, housing, health care and child  
care. Between 2000 and 2018 the cost of these basic  
needs rolled to nearly three times the rate of wages.

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Eighty four percent of households not earning enough income to make ends meet have at least one working adult. The report show that food costs have increased an average of 68 percent across New York City with dramatic differences within the boroughs. As we all know when the grocery budget is insufficient families supplement with private and public assistance, yet according to the report only 31 percent of New York City families below the standard receives SNAP. This puts a tremendous strain on the New York City's emergency food system. To address these challenges United Way of New York City provides program funding and capacity building supports to food pantries and soup kitchens, shelters and emergency rent, mortgage and utility payments to households and SNAP enrollment. United Way of New York City, one of the leaders of New York City food assistance collaborative whose mission is to direct emergency food resources effectively and efficiently. Out of this effort plentiful was born. This app was... excuse me, this app for emergency food providers and their clients has improved how food insecure New Yorkers can locate emergency food in their area, make a reservation and easily pick up food at a scheduled

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time, it allows pantries to better manage their

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operations and communicate with clients in nine

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languages. To date plentiful has reached about 25

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percent of households that use the emergency food

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services. We urge the Council to increase emergency

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food assistant programs; EFAP's baseline food funding

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to 22 million to fully fund this work. We urge the

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Council to continue support to HRA's efforts enabling

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New Yorkers to apply for several benefits

11

simultaneously. We also urge the Council to expand

12

funding for New York City's Health Buck programs. The

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great driver of increased self-sufficiency is higher

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wages, New York... New York's move to 15 dollars

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minimum wage made a powerful difference for many but

16

we need to ensure these gains are not lost over time.

17

We urge the Council to work with state lawmakers to

18

support efforts to index wages annually and lastly,

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we know how critical education is to lifelong

20

success. We applaud the city and state's recent

21

efforts to ensure that hunger is not a barrier for

22

those seeking higher education. Thank you.

23

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: I want to thank

24

the panel... oh, I'm sorry.

25

LORESA WRIGHT: We have one more.

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
1 COMMITTEEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

2 ROBERT ENNIS JACKSON: Hello, my name is  
3 Reverend Robert Ennis Jackson, I represent Brooklyn  
4 Rescue Mission Urban Harvest Center who have been  
5 feeding families for 18 years. Our present... we have  
6 1,800 families... 1,800 families registered, we do  
7 365,000 meals a year, we're not as large from a  
8 pantry standpoint but we are established at a  
9 storefront style which is like a grocery store and we  
10 did that for a reason, it's an appointment pantry,  
11 customer choice where people get to choose their food  
12 off the shelf like a store but also looks like a  
13 store and that reason is because in my community  
14 there's one black person of color that owns a grocery  
15 store. There... most of the folks that are community  
16 based and not used to going into a store or having  
17 someone who looks like them producing a product or  
18 selling the product. In our program at Brooklyn  
19 Rescue Mission we have urban farms, we have two sites  
20 where we grow food, we have the food pantry, we also  
21 have done farmers markets in our community for nine  
22 years, we need funding for that because that's a very  
23 difficult part of our program to be able to have  
24 funding. We've had over 817 interns participate in  
25 our program and one of the reasons why I came to

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1 speak today is because out of that 817 interns I  
2 think 80 percent of them were food insecure, the...  
3 like Miss Barron's statement they were hungry, Mr.  
4 Levin you and Miss Barron are handling this  
5 conference very well today by the way. What I've  
6 learned is that the project that we put in place with  
7 working with young people is very important, in our  
8 program at Brooklyn Rescue Mission at our food pantry  
9 we have access, access for young people without  
10 stigma that... I heard Joel, Joel Berg say that food  
11 pantries don't do it a certain way but when you have  
12 a community based pantry where you have young people  
13 in communities who are food insecure when they go to  
14 a pantry and they don't have stigma they're going to  
15 do less criminal activities to, to, to provide food  
16 for themselves but you have a pantry where... it's like  
17 a grocery store, that's what we do, the 817 interns  
18 have come from high schools, come from CUNY where  
19 they were paid or volunteered, have come from masters  
20 programs including Columbia where they did dietician  
21 work to help us in... improve how we gave out foods to  
22 our clients. What I'd like to be able to see is an  
23 increased component of funding from the City Council  
24 that allows local pantries to be able to work with  
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youth around food in communities, that's what we've been doing for 18 years. We've seen so many young people who are involved in the food pantry understand how to defeat, defeat the poverty that's in their households. Not only are they bringing the foods back but they're getting a jump on, on understanding of why it's important for them to get that education so they're able to complete the high school alternative program or able to go back and work on studying harder at the college and we have... one of our interns that was a graduate intern that is now on our board. We would like to be able to help... your help in having local programs get items in place to be able to help young people around their community where they have no stigma even before they get to college. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Good, I want to thank the panel. Where exactly is your facility located?

ROBERT ENNIS JACKSON: We're in Central Brooklyn, we serve Bushwick west side... [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: What's the address?

ROBERT ENNIS JACKSON: 9,919 Gates Avenue.

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, I know  
3 where you are. Okay and to Mr. Higgins, how do you  
4 fund the Food Pantry at Columbia and what is your  
5 budget?

6 MICHAEL HIGGINS: That's a great  
7 question, so the funding comes directly from two main  
8 sources, monetary tax deductible and non-tax  
9 deductible donations that come from individuals as  
10 well as student organizations within the university  
11 but then also as was alluded to by another  
12 individual... another student comes from student fees,  
13 that's something that we don't like but at the same  
14 time because of the fact that there are institutions  
15 within a university that, that do contribute monetary  
16 funding those funding's only come from one source  
17 which is student fees, that's something that we're  
18 going to be looking into resolving in the future and  
19 right now that's why we have options for tax  
20 deductible monetary donations as well.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Okay, thank you  
22 very much. Thank you to the... [cross-talk]

23 MICHAEL HIGGINS: You're welcome... [cross-  
24 talk]

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...panel, I  
appreciate your testimony.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you to this  
panel. We have... we have one final panel Jason  
Hilliard from Community Food Advocates; also, I want  
to thank that panel for their patience and the  
upcoming panel for their patience. Judith Secon from  
New York Community Pantry... New York Common Pantry;  
Amy Blumsack from Neighbors Together and if Mr. Zamir  
Hassan has returned. Okay and just those three.  
Thanks. And if anyone else wishes to testify please  
sign up with the Sergeant at Arms because this will  
be the final panel.

[off mic dialogue]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Whoever wants to  
begin.

JUDY SECON: Okay, good afternoon, I'm  
Judy Secon, Senior Director of Programs and  
Operations for New York Common Pantry. Thank you for  
the opportunity to provide this testimony and for  
your 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

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with food insecurity to essential resources. We provide healthy groceries, meals, nutrition education, SNAP enrollment, tax return prep and supplementary food for seniors. We are starting our second five-year plan to increase our services through mobile and school pantries and to increase the availability of healthy food choices and to have more food rescue opportunities. Our first plan helped us to extend our services from one location in East Harlem throughout Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn and the Bronx. Support from the City of New York has been essential and allowed us to serve close to half a million visitors, partner with over 120 sites across New York City, serve over six million meals and assist residents in obtaining over 8.6 million in resources last year. When 19 percent of the city's soup kitchens closed, we were ready to increase the number of our hot meals we served by 30 percent. We were ready to serve furloughed federal workers instantly. We were ready to serve more Bronx residents at our second location and increased our services by 50 percent. We were ready for an 80 percent spike in the number of families we served across both our pantries just last week because of

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1  
2 the SNAP gap. We have seen great empathy for the  
3 federal workers who have recently been affected by  
4 the government shutdown but the people we serve day  
5 in and day out deserve the same empathy and ongoing  
6 committed responses as they struggle to get by in New  
7 York City. In order for New York Common Pantry and  
8 other emergency food providers in the city to remain  
9 ready to serve, we must be able to rely not just on  
10 EFAP but also on the Council through its various  
11 funding lines and we call on the Mayor to increase  
12 those areas in his budget. EFAP provides us with a  
13 steady stream of food which allows us to leverage  
14 other sources to create new service delivery systems,  
15 essential to reach the food insecure population but  
16 we still are short of what is necessary. We are  
17 grateful for your continued support and are eager to  
18 find new ways we can continue as your partners in the  
19 work we do.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I just  
21 want to... one more person signed up, Carina Santos  
22 Taveras Welfare Rights Initiative. You can go ahead..

23 AMY BLUMSACK: Hi, good afternoon, thank  
24 you Chairperson Barron, thank you Chairperson Levin  
25 and all the rest of the committee members for the

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opportunity to testify on food insecurity in New York City. My name is Amy Blumsack, I'm the Director of Organizing and Policy for Neighbors Together. We are a soup kitchen and community-based organization located in Ocean Hill Brooklyn. We were founded in 1982 and we've been serving hot meals to people in need for the last 36 years, we serve approximately 80,000 meals a year. Since our founding we've expanded to two additional programs, our empowerment program provides stabilizing services to people who come through our doors and our community action program engages community members in organizing, policy and legislative advocacy and leadership development. We currently serve over 10,000 unique individuals' site wide. And so I want to thank the Council and the Speaker for their leadership and protecting hungry New Yorkers and securing an increase in baseline food funding for EFAP last year and I'm here to ask for your continued leadership in the fight against hunger and to ask for an additional increase in baseline food... baseline food funding for EFAP to 22 million dollars. Emergency food programs like Neighbors Together we really rely on EFAP funding and I think now more than ever with the

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continued threats to the anti-hunger safety net we need to know that we will have funding to support us if there should be the kind of cuts that have been threatened for the last year and more. Many other people already alluded to the, the devastating effects that cuts or rule changes to SNAP could have, the proposed public charge rule change, we think it would increase the number of people coming through the doors of emergency food programs significantly and, and really have incredibly harmful effects for low income New Yorkers and we plan on being there to absorb that need and to support New Yorkers in need but we will also need the support of the Council to be able to do that effectively. Additionally, as other government funding sources have decreased we are reliant on EFAP more and more to support the people who come through our doors and so the other thing that I wanted to say is that as we continue to increase our reliance on EFAP and as we are requesting... needing an increase in EFAP funding I also wanted to make some recommendations to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of EFAP. One thing that we think would be really helpful is in addition to the baseline food funding increase is to have an

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increase in the administrative funding because all of the emergency for... food programs need operational support to run things smoothly in addition to the food we need to serve to people who come to us for support. Also instituting the choice model would be incredible helpful for emergency food programs, having the ability to choose the types of food that we receive with our EFAP funding would allow us to provide culturally appropriate plates, healthy, wholesome, nutritious meals with the full... the food chart, the food pyramid, the food plate, the whole plate whatever it's called now, healthy meals and also having the ability to be in control of the time and size of the deliveries would be a really common sense solution because across the emergency food network the agencies vary really drastically in size and ability to absorb deliveries. So... and the last thing I'll say is an increase in access to fresh produce and in proteins would be really meaningful for getting healthy food to the people who come through our doors, everyone deserves a healthy, wholesome, nutritious and dignified meal no matter what their income level and we want to be able to provide that for people and we can do that with your



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continued support and leadership in ending hunger in New York City and so please consider increasing the baseline food funding EFAP. Thank you.

JASON HILLIARD: Good afternoon. Thank you, Chairs Barron and Levin, for inviting us.. for this opportunity to speak before you and your colleagues today. my name is Jason Hilliard, I am the Chief of Staff at Community Food Advocates. A broad.. we lead.. we led.. excuse me, we led the coalition which is a broad diverse coalition for the implementation of Universal Free Lunch throughout all the New York City schools. So, I want to thank you for your support in making that happen last year, last year was the first year that it was rolled out and now we're trying to build upon that program. As you know it's a federal program so every meal is reimbursed by the federal government and we feel that there are some advantages that we're leaving on the table and really maximizing this program and one of those issues that I would like to bring to your attention today is the enhanced cafeteria, this is a school food idea that we fell in love with a number of years ago. It is currently in approximately 48 buildings and will grow to 50 buildings over the next

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year and half. However, we're trying in this year's

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capital budget to increase that to 350 schools over a

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five year period the cost of these enhanced

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cafeterias are 500,000 dollars per school and we feel

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that 175 million dollars in the capital budget will

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be sufficient in reaching that goal of 360 buildings

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over a five year period. The advantages that we have

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found is that within our cafeterias has been very

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institutionalized over the years, the school food

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idea of enhanced cafeteria really modernizes the

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cafeteria making it more of a, a welcoming

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environment for students and we have found and our

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surveys as well and our analysis in getting out to

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several schools that its received well by the student

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population, it has increased the student

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participation rate within school... within those

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schools especially high schools by 30 percent and we

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feel that the Council should take this as a priority

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and especially this body in pushing this forward,

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thank you.

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CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Good after... can...

23

okay. Good afternoon, thank you so much for allowing

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me to testify. My name is Carina Santos Taveras, I'm

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a student at Hunter College, I also represent the

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Welfare Rights Initiative, which is a, a student  
activist and leadership training organization which  
supports CUNY students in crisis providing community  
leadership training and legal advocacy. I would like  
to express my concern regarding food insecurity among  
CUNY students such as myself. I have personally  
experienced food insecurity as a result of financial  
hardship and I'm not being... and not being able to  
access CUNY pantries at my home campus, Hunter  
College because not all CUNY schools provide their  
students in need with food insecurity resources such  
as food pantries and also cafeteria vouchers. Many  
students are forced to go without food for a day or  
more. In 2017, I was personally... I have personally  
gone to school hungry as a result of my campus,  
Hunter College not having available food resources.  
In addition, I was also not allowed to access food...  
CUNY food pantries and cafeteria voucher programs on  
other campuses. Many students... many times I was  
forced to rely on public food pantries, I would have  
to miss classes because the pantry's schedule  
conflicted with my school schedule. To avoid hunger,  
I took many days off throughout the semester to show  
up at the opening time of the food pantry and as a

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result my grades were impacted.. 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, this includes Excelsior, Pell, and  
TAP. Because I'm facing temporary, temporary  
homelessness I 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 date which will  
take place in May of 2019. Taking time off from  
school to potent.. and potentially running the risk of  
losing my funding.. my funds to access public pantries  
is not an effective way to challenge food  
insecurities among college students especially single  
college students. Unlike CUNY pantries, public  
pantries sometimes do not distribute the same equal  
amount of food to single able-bodied people as they  
do for families. I believe that an effective solution  
to tackle food insecurity among CUNY students is to  
emulate programs such as the cafeteria voucher which  
only three CUNY schools currently have in place;  
Bronx Community College, Medgar Evers and John Jay  
and CUNY pantries on campus versus a select few

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because again if you go to my school and my school

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doesn't have a pantry you can't go to CSI, John Jay

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or Lehman, they only serve their own students.

5

Another solution... I'm sorry. In addition, HRA

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expanding their definition of housing which would

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count college dorms as temporary housing allowing

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college students facing food insecurity and

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homelessness access to the 250-housing allowance as

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there is... as there is no policy or rule that excludes

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college dorms from the requirements for the housing

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allowances. I would like to thank you for allowing me

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to testify and I really appreciate your advocacy work

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for the community. Thank you.

15

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I want to thank this

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panel. Miss Taveras I think your testimony is a, a, a

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good... actually I'm sorry, we have one... our... one more

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member to testify but I want to thank you for your

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testimony, I think it's, its very impactful and, and

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certainly the recommendations including that last

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recommendation we would like to take that under

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advisement.

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CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Yeah because I,

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I, I currently live in the Hunter dorms and that's

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what's allowed me to complete my last semester if it

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weren't for that I would.. I would have been forced to drop out of school because I was put in that position, but I've tried to access the 20 to 250 housing allowance that HRA provides that they say that I can't get it because I live in a dorm but it's technically temporary, temporary housing.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We should.. we'll, we'll... [cross-talk]

CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Because I, I move out in May and Hunter has a policy where if you are scheduled to move out at a particular date in May when the semester ends and you're still there you will be charged 150 dollars per day until you move out so I can't like afford to stay after I graduate and I just want to add one last comment... [cross-talk]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sure... [cross-talk]

CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: For the last group that talked about why is that a lot of students are not accessing public assistance, I actually so with the Welfare Rights Initiative I work with that population and one of the things that I see is that many times if there's a student with a child they can't bring the child to the center so they may not be able to access it and then another issue is mental

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health. Many times, they go to their local centers

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and they're told false information, they're told that

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you know you may not qualify, you have to drop out of

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school, I've personally been told that for me to get

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benefits I need to drop out.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Which is

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unacceptable. The gentleman from HRA is indicating

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that he'll, he'll... he's here to, to meet with some..

10

CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Hi..

11

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But I want to also

12

congratulate you on graduating..

13

CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Thank you..

14

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: ..Miss Taveras.

15

CARINA SANTOS TAVERAS: Thank you.

16

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And.. okay, so Zamir

17

Hassan is the final, final member of the public to

18

testify. Thank you to this entire panel. Thank you.

19

You can go ahead sir.

20

ZAMIR HASSAN: I... good afternoon, I came

21

here at ten o'clock and kind of really got tired and

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I'm... this is the first time I'm doing something like

23

this. So, I need to.. [cross-talk]

24

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Welcome.

25

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1 COMMITTEEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

2 ZAMIR HASSAN: I, I need to tell you a  
3 little story. I came to the United States 50 years  
4 ago, went to grad school at... in Utica, New York and I  
5 was in IT when there was no IT so you can see how  
6 well I was doing in part of American dream, big  
7 houses, fast cars, right. The year 2000 I end up  
8 going to first time in my life to a soup kitchen as a  
9 chaperone to my son's school and I said wow, they  
10 live in my backyard, I didn't even know they existed  
11 and, and I started talking to myself because my  
12 tradition is I'm not supposed to go to bed if my  
13 neighbor is hungry so I started talking to all my  
14 friends and that's where this program really started.  
15 One thing we discovered work... so, I founded Muslims  
16 Against Hunger and one thing I discovered the people  
17 who are hanging out at the park, at the train  
18 station, we were not reaching out to them and I tried  
19 to open up my own soup kitchen and, and I realized  
20 that it's a lot of money, a lot of effort so I  
21 created this program called Hunger Van which is a  
22 mobile soup kitchen and what we do we, we have a  
23 kitchen, access to a kitchen, food is cooked there  
24 and we go in the street and give the food out and as  
25 I was doing that I realized the issue of student



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hunger so we were working with interfaith community services in Tompkins Square Park in 2017 we started a program on the campus of NYU and don't ask me why NYU because I'm from the elite, okay and, and we live in silos and that's where I could get money to funding so, we, we have 5,000 volunteers all over the world now and we have no institutional funding because our goal is not feeding people because one thing I have learned that all... as, as the, the Chair Barron has said it's not done yet. So, so I'm taking care... part into something else, where I am bringing people who... because everybody wants to do good, they need an opportunity. What Hunger Van has done... has done we bring people at schools at churches and, and have them pack food, have them make food and we reach out and in that process when that is happening we are educating them, you know why is it happening, am I hungry, what is hunger, you know how many people are hungry and people... when I tell them it's 38 million or 49 million in this country they're jaw drops because one of the issues is that institutions can do the best, I mean thank you very much for all these people who are here and doing work here and you guys so... but it has to be a grass root level, people have

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

to be educated at every level. We are doing programs with the... with high schools, we are doing programs with the colleges and we are bringing them together like one of the issues they were discussing earlier, I was here, the college program that they can't reach out to students and they are not coming to their program, they have the stuff so what I would do as a suggestion I'm going to follow up with them, I'll do an event at the college where we will bring all the people who wants to help out and we'll make food and give that food to their food pantry and so, so there is... has to be a lot of education on the ground in addition to everything else which is happening, the government is doing, the church is doing it, all these guys are doing it so there has to... there is a missing piece of education because we live in silos, you know I didn't know they existed, you know I thought that they, they lived somewhere else and that's what... especially the community, my community is a new community and they got a lot of money and guess what they are doing, they are sending it to, to where ever they came from and, and what I've been sexist with doing that, take their money and spend it here because they... because as part of my tradition

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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I'm supposed to give so much money, you know every

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year from my income so I'm trying to direct that

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money into... because where is all this money, it's in

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the suburb and, and, and what I'm trying to do bring

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that money into the city. So, so, so essentially

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everything that you guys are doing, great but there

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has to be an education piece and I'm trying to

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address that because I come from an educational

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background myself.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much

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Mr. Hassan, thank you.

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ZAMIR HASSAN: Any questions? By, by the

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way... [cross-talk]

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: Just... [cross-

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talk]

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ZAMIR HASSAN: ...last year all the numbers

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out there we have served 60,000 meals and, and with

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this NYU program which is started in 17 we have

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served their Washington Square Park right there about

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15,000 meals and, and we, we are only two days a week

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and we are planning to do it every day.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: We commend you...

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[cross-talk]

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ZAMIR HASSAN: That's... [cross-talk]

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE

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COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: ...for your service

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and for your insight and we thank you for coming,

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thank you.

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ZAMIR HASSAN: Thanks for having me here.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: That's it, gavel

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us out.

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CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Do you want to... do

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you want to gavel?

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COUNCIL MEMBER BARRON: There being no

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further witnesses this hearing is adjourned, thank

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you.

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[gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date

March 21, 2019