



Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Homeless Services

Testimony of Scott French, Administrator
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Before the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare
Food Insecurity Hearing
April 13, 2026

Good morning. My name is Scott French and I serve as Administrator of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) within the Department of Social Services (DSS). I would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee on General Welfare for convening today's hearing on food insecurity. I am joined today by HRA Chief Operating Officer Matthew Brune, Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Chief of Shelter Operations Iris Rodriguez, Deputy Commissioner, Street Homeless Solutions Division within DHS, Cassandra White, and Administrative Nutritionist in the DSS Health Service Office Diana Salerno. Food security is an integral part of our work at DSS-HRA-DHS and we appreciate the opportunity to highlight the important programs, benefits, and collaborations underway to make for a more food secure New York City.

I would like to begin by shining a spotlight on critical resources for anyone who is facing food insecurity. Help is available. You can call 311 or visit FoodHelp.nyc to find nearby food pantries and community kitchens. Access HRA, our mobile app, and our Benefits Access Centers serve as further resources where clients can apply for benefits. For those clients already receiving SNAP, the City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) food access initiatives serve as additional resources including: Health Bucks, Get the Good Stuff, and Groceries to Go.

In addition to the work of DSS-HRA-DHS, I want to recognize the work of our partners in government, including DOHMH and the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), and our partners in serving New Yorkers including food banks, community kitchens, community fridges, and mutual aid groups; from our community-based organizations to our houses of worship, an array of sectors and volunteers is engaged in tackling this significant challenge. In addition, advocates and policymakers across government and across our shared communities play critical roles in uplifting food security, raising awareness about where to receive assistance, and tackling the challenges food insecure households face with dignity and respect.

Outreach

Meeting New Yorkers where they are, providing culturally competent services, and treating applicants and clients with dignity and respect are all touchstones of DSS-HRA-DHS' outreach strategy to advance food security. The Office of Community Outreach (OCO) conducts targeted outreach campaigns to connect with communities and organizations serving specific populations like older adults, immigrant communities, persons with disabilities, and the LGBTQIA+

community. OCO hosts presentations, attends resources fairs, farmers markets, and other community events to increase SNAP awareness and engagement.

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

In 2025, DSS conducted a total of 76 trainings in using these tools to submit SNAP and other benefit applications and provide benefit case management via Access HRA; 1,902 participants attended these trainings. Attendees include staff from other municipal agencies and community partner organizations. These trainings also served as a forum for questions and concerns from providers and advocates working directly with HRA and DHS clients.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

DSS-HRA serves as the administrator of vital programs to combat food insecurity. As of February 2026, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) served 1.7 million New Yorkers. The US Department of Agriculture's SNAP Program Access Index (PAI) serves as one key metric for assessing SNAP's reach in states and municipalities, and one indicator of the work undertaken to connect communities to SNAP. The 2024 Program Access Index data is the most recent available (this is due to the fact that the 2025 Census data used in the calculation will not be released until the fall of 2026). The 2024 SNAP Program Access Index for New York City was 95.7% - meaning DSS-HRA administered SNAP benefits to more than 1.79 million New Yorkers out of the 1.87 million New Yorkers below 125% of the Federal Poverty Line (FPL). Thanks to the hard work of DSS-HRA and our community partners, New York City's PAI has historically outpaced those of the State and the US overall – in 2023 the State's 2023 PAI was 85.3% and the US PAI was 80.0% compared to the City's PAI of 94.9%. For New York City, the difference between serving 95.7% and 80% of people below 125% of FPL is more than 250,000 New Yorkers.

What do those numbers and percentages mean? That means fewer heads of households facing sleepless nights worrying about the next meal. That means more of our family, friends, and neighbors having the food security they deserve. Those numbers are also a positive reflection of our past efforts to leverage technology, our outreach efforts, and our connections with sister agencies and community partners. DSS-HRA remains committed to building on that success in connecting eligible New Yorkers to SNAP.

We will continue to bring the same problem-solving mindset to bear as we tackle outstanding challenges, including bringing the program error rate further down and increasing the timeliness rate of SNAP application processing.

A present-day change to SNAP we are tackling is the new, federally imposed able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWD) rules. The first month of the new ABAWD work rules was March 2026. Concisely, those rules expanded the work requirements for SNAP clients and mandate sanctions for noncompliant SNAP participants. Prior to the rules going into effect, we mobilized. We worked to notify SNAP clients about what the rules mean for them and connect with community partners about how they help. We are keeping a keen eye on what additional measures we can take to ensure people remain connected to this critical benefit. In terms of notifying clients, that has meant direct client communication, including texts, emails, and push notifications. In terms of connecting clients to resources, that has meant connecting clients to HRA's Pathways for Access to Careers and Employment (PACE) program; hosting community meetings and webinars so community organizations know that qualifying community service, volunteer work, work experience, and jobs skills training programs may be part of meeting a SNAP client's work requirement; and stepping up efforts to ensure that clients who are eligible for exemptions understand what documentation we need to properly register their exemption. Our work managing this federally imposed transition in work requirements is not complete, we will continue to monitor and evaluate the experience of SNAP clients and make the adjustments we can to connect SNAP clients with the information and resources they need to comply with the new rules.

Community Food Connection (CFC)

Community Food Connection (CFC; formerly the Emergency Food Assistance Program) serves as another key tool in our toolbox for combating food insecurity in New York City. CFC funds a network of more than 700 food pantries and community kitchens across the City. Published in January, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy's CFC Fiscal Year 2025 Impact Report goes into far greater detail about CFC's critical accomplishments. I will share the most important highlights. In Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25), CFC helped those providers supply more than 47.1 million pounds of food across 170 neighborhoods in our City. That was about 4 million more pounds of food than was supplied in FY24. In FY25, CFC providers recorded 1.9 million more visits than in FY24—with the visit count for FY25 being 37.1 million. Across FY24 and FY25 the breakdown of the ages of the people served remained the same, approximately 49% adults, 30% children, and 21% older adults.

Our FY27 plans for CFC build on our FY25 and FY26 successes. We recognize the critical role CFC and our provider partners play in advancing food security. That is precisely why the administration proposed increasing the baseline of CFC funding to \$69.4 million in FY27, further investing in the network of provider partners and our shared capacity to uplift food security in our communities. In addition, DSS recently released a challenge-based procurement inviting qualified vendors to design and implement a scalable, participant-centered solution, likely to be voucher-based or credit-based, to enhance the City's emergency food assistance system. Through this pilot, and augmenting the work of the Community Food Connection funded pantries and community kitchens, DSS seeks to expand food access, increase participant choice, and reduce some operational inefficiencies within the emergency food network. In the initial phase of the pilot, the agency will enroll 400-600 households. DSS expects to make a contract award shortly and envisions that the pilot will start in FY27. We want to be sure to meet the challenges of affordability shocks around energy and their knock-on consequences, including consequences for inflation

estimates. As always, we will continue to closely monitor the situation our providers face and work with the Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

Legislation

Introduction 790 sponsored by Council Member Joseph would require DOHMH and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM) to annually report on warming centers, including an assessment of the geographic availability of warming centers and recommendations on the distribution and utilization of warming centers across the City. We support transparency and data-informed public policy making. We would want to have further conversations with the sponsor and the Council about what agency (or team of agencies) is best placed to produce the most effective report. The provision of different kinds of warming centers is a function that cuts across multiple agencies and partners; we would want to be sure the legislation takes due consideration of that fact in crafting the reporting requirement.

The Preconsidered Introduction (File #T2026-1550), we understand as focused on combating SNAP Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card skimming, creating an office within DSS to focus on proactive measures to prevent SNAP EBT skimming and requiring annual reporting on SNAP EBT skimming in New York City. We wholeheartedly agree that SNAP EBT skimming is a heinous crime, literally stealing food from the most vulnerable in our communities. It is important that SNAP clients know the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) advises EBT cardholders to take advantage of EBT Card Freeze – permitting clients to freeze or unfreeze their card to protect their benefits. Cardholders can go visit ebtEDGE.com to learn more.

DSS works with federal, State, and local law enforcement to combat skimming through participation in outreach and in joint investigations and partnerships. With respect to outreach and raising awareness, the DSS Accountability Office (AO) has conducted numerous presentations about skimming risks at community centers and senior centers in collaboration with District Attorney's offices, the Department for the Aging, and the Department of Investigation (DOI). With respect to joint investigations and partnerships with law enforcement to combat skimming, DSS makes appropriate referrals to law enforcement and has supported skimming investigations. For instance, DSS supported Operation Flagship, where the US Secret Service, NYPD, US Department of Agriculture, the Kings County District Attorney's office, and DOI seized and removed more than 100 skimming devices.

At the direction of the federal government, the authority for restoring skimmed benefits expired on December 21, 2024 and the US Department of Agriculture directed our State oversight body, OTDA, that states must cease accepting applications for the replacement of stolen SNAP benefits. Households are still able to submit applications for the replacement of stolen Cash Assistance (CA) benefits. The federal direction to cease collecting applications to replace stolen SNAP benefits, relates to the preconsidered introduction in that HRA does not have the facility to act here. State authorities may have the facility to monitor and act as they are responsible for issuing replacement EBT cards. That is a transaction that can happen independent of DSS-HRA and without DSS-HRA facilitating.

We were deeply appreciative to see Governor Hochul's New York State budget proposed funding for the long-term solution to these crimes against our clients: putting the chip technology used in debit and credit cards onto EBT cards (that is Europay Mastercard Visa microchips or EMV chips). We strongly urge the State authorities to implement that solution as quickly as practicable. New York State has authority over the cards and the transition to more secure technology to the use of chips to stop EBT card skimming.

We would like further discussion with the Council about this preconsidered introduction and the limits federal and State authorities' mandates have created in this area. Given the various concerns, we do not believe it is feasible to proceed with this legislation at this time.

Advancing food security is a critical goal, and as with almost any goal worth achieving, we face significant hurdles. Affordability challenges, current energy shocks reverberating through the economy to our food system, and longstanding challenges like ensuring that our neighbors who may not be as literate with technology or who may speak another language connect with the culturally competent outreach that meets them where they are. We remain committed to overcoming those hurdles with the help of our hardworking staff at DSS-HRA-DHS, our outstanding partners across government, and the array of community organizations, institutions, and advocates who are dedicated to making food security for every New Yorker a reality. Thank you, Chair Hudson, members of the Committee on General Welfare, and your colleagues on the Council for your ongoing contributions to this important work. We look forward to continuing to work in partnership with you on this issue.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify and welcome your questions.

Thank you.



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

ANTONIO REYNOSO

Brooklyn Borough President

**City Council Committee on General Welfare
Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity
April 13, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee for holding this hearing today, and for your continued work to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of income, have access to the social safety net they need to survive. I am representing Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, who remains a committed partner in protecting low-income families who are struggling to put food on the table. For this reason, he supports the proposals to establish a SNAP Anti-Fraud Officer within the Department of Social Services, and to call on the State to create a SNAP and Cash Assistance Fraud Victims Fund.

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP) is the largest and most effective federal food assistance program in the United States, providing monthly benefits to more than 41 million low-income Americans¹ In New York City, SNAP serves 1.73 million residents (32% of households and 21% of individuals), including more than 500,000 children who rely on these benefits to maintain a nutritious diet.² Accordingly, nearly two-thirds of SNAP benefits in New York City go to families with children.³

Lack of access to healthy food can lead to chronic health conditions in children and adults, including asthma, anemia, cognitive and behavioral problems, anxiety, and depression.⁴ SNAP participation dramatically improves these health outcomes. Low-income SNAP participants are more likely to report excellent or very good health compared to non-participants.⁵ Children receiving SNAP report better health and their families are less likely to delay medical care to pay for other necessities.⁶ According to the American Journal of Public Health, pregnant women on SNAP give birth to fewer low-birthweight babies.⁷ Adults who received SNAP benefits as children had lower risks of heart disease and diabetes later in life.⁸ These findings underscore that SNAP is not only a food security program, it is also a public health necessity with long-term benefits.

¹ [Source](#)

² [Source](#)

³ [Source](#)

⁴ [Source](#)

⁵ [Source](#)

⁶ [Source](#)

⁷ *ibid*

⁸ *ibid*

Saving money on food also allows families to use their limited resources for household necessities such as rent, utilities, and medical expenses.⁹

Yet the program's effectiveness depends on participants' ability to access their full benefits at the time of disbursement. When those benefits are stolen through fraudulent means due to lack of government safeguards, families are left to fend for themselves. Fraud, in this context, steals low-income families' ability to live a healthy and dignified life.

SNAP fraud typically occurs via card skimming, card cloning, or phishing – when scammers send false emails or text messages claiming a recipients' Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card has been locked or that they need to verify enrollment by clicking links or calling a phone number prompting them to provide sensitive account information. The recipient will then attempt to use their SNAP benefits at a grocery store, only to find that their benefits have been stolen. A variety of processes exist to prevent such fraud, including the ability to freeze EBT cards between uses, but they are technologically complex and place a heavy burden on SNAP recipients and local governments.

Nationwide, SNAP recipients have filed 465,000 individual reimbursement claims, of which New York accounts for 20%. According to the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), there were 85,000 claims for stolen public benefits filed statewide between 2023 and 2024 alone. In New York City, DSS/HRA reported in early 2025 that nearly 95,000 low-income households had their SNAP and cash assistance benefits stolen through electronic fraud in the prior year, with \$47.7 million in losses.¹⁰ Through December 20, 2024, victims of SNAP skimming could apply to the federal government to have stolen benefits replaced, but that program has since expired, leaving New Yorkers without recourse.¹¹

Since then, community-based organizations have been forced to step in, providing emergency food assistance to families who have had their benefits stolen and assisting with fraud claims. Red Hook Initiative alone has filed 85 individual claims totaling more than \$40,000 in stolen benefits from Red Hook residents since the federal program ended. According to Homecrest Community Services, more than 51,000 Brooklyn residents have experienced SNAP fraud. Elected officials across Brooklyn report that constituents are flooding their offices seeking help after having their SNAP benefits stolen. Advocates and lawmakers are calling for preventative measures such as chip-enabled EBT cards and stronger fraud protection.¹²

Through the 2023 and 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, the federal government allocated funding for states to provide refunds to victims of SNAP and cash assistance fraud who had their benefits stolen. However, this temporary funding was not extended for 2025 and 2026, leaving thousands of New Yorkers in dire need of a compensation fund. When the federal government fails to protect its most vulnerable, it is the State's responsibility to step in to fill that gap.

⁹ [Source](#)

¹⁰ [Source](#)

¹¹ [Source](#)

¹² *ibid*

Borough President Reynoso strongly supports Resolution 21, calling on the New York State legislature and Governor to pass and sign A03578/S00403. This legislation would establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund and provide immediate relief to thousands of families who have been robbed of the benefits they need to survive.

He also supports the creation of a SNAP Anti-Fraud Officer role, but notes that DSS needs a clear plan for implementation. It is important that the agency prevent unnecessary surveillance or harm to recipients, while ensuring timely support for individuals at risk of losing benefits due to fraud. He encourages close and timely coordination across agencies and community partners to identify patterns, streamline responses, and connect impacted households to rapid assistance. Incorporating accessible reporting mechanisms and strengthening fair hearing processes will help ensure that recipients can contest wrongful benefit loss and receive support.

Additionally, the Borough President calls on DSS to pair enforcement with prevention by investing in modern technological safeguards and public awareness. An investment in technology will reduce the number of skimming scams, which will lead to less fraud. Lastly, he encourages DSS to build partnerships with retailers as integrity stakeholders. With proper training, retailers can report suspicious activity early and protect community members.

Protecting our community's access to fresh and healthy food options is paramount. Reducing instances of SNAP fraud will ensure that constituents have timely access to their benefits and preserve their wellbeing. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.



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

Testimony of Julia McCarthy, J.D., Senior Program Officer, New York Health Foundation

Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Oversight – Food Insecurity

April 13, 2026

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

Access to nutritious food affects health. Food-insecure New York State residents are twice as likely as their food-secure counterparts to report poor health.¹ They are also more likely to have lower diet quality, higher diet-related disease rates, and higher health care costs.^{2,3,4} Understanding the harm food insecurity causes, NYHealth has committed to improve food security across New York City and State. Core strategies of our work include maximizing participation in federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), as well as increasing access to healthy, high-quality food in public institutions like schools and food banks. Notably, NYHealth's investments helped secure universal free school lunch for New York City's 1.1 million public school children.

Most recently, NYHealth and our grantee partners have been working to mitigate the harmful effects of the federal H.R. 1 legislation with a specific focus on nutrition benefits. Our efforts have ranged from advocacy and technical assistance for local agencies to cash assistance for SNAP recipients during the November federal government shutdown. We have also spoken out through testimony and comments, and convened the funder community to respond. We are

¹ New York Health Foundation. (2022). *NYHealth survey of food and health*. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/nyhealth-survey-of-food-and-health-2022/>.

² Morales, M.E.; Berkowitz, S.A. (2016). The relationship between food insecurity, dietary patterns, and obesity. *Current Nutrition Reports*, 5(1):54-60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13668-016-0153-y>

³ Gregory, C.A.; Coleman-Jensen, A. (2017). *Food insecurity, chronic disease, and health among working-age adults*. (Economic Research Report No. 235). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/84467/err-235.pdf>.

⁴ Berkowitz, S.A.; Basu, S.; Meigs, J.B.; Seligman, H.K. (2018). Food insecurity and health care expenditures in the United States, 2011-2013. *Health Services Research*, 53(3):1600-1620. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12730>

concerned that food insecurity rates will increase dramatically in the coming months and are committed to working with the City to address this problem.

Food Insecurity Is at the Highest Rate in More than Five Years

In late 2025, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released its latest report on household food insecurity. The findings are stark. New York State's rate of food insecurity exceeds the national average. Between 2022 and 2024, 14% of households in New York State were food-insecure compared with 10.3% from 2019–2021—a 36% increase. And nationally, approximately 59% of food-insecure households relied on one or more major federal nutrition assistance programs, like SNAP, WIC, and National School Lunch Program.⁵

For the past five years, NYHealth has also tracked food insufficiency—a more severe, short-term version of food insecurity—in New York State using U.S. Census data. Our most recent analysis shows that in 2024, food insufficiency rates in New York were higher than they were during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ Disparities also persist. Nearly 1 in 5 Black and 1 in 7 Hispanic New York State residents experienced food insufficiency, compared with 1 in 11 white residents. Nearly a third of residents in the lowest income bracket (those with an annual income of less than \$25,000) experienced food insufficiency, 13 times the rate for residents in the highest income bracket (those with an annual income of \$100,000 or more)⁷ These recent increases in food insecurity and insufficiency are likely driven by several factors, including rising food costs and expiration of federal pandemic-era safety net programs and benefit increases.

Recent federal action threatens ongoing access to the comprehensive data that guides our collective work. In September 2025, the USDA announced the termination of future Household Food Security Reports, which have been the gold standard for nearly 30 years. The reports provide rigorous measures to track trends over time and identify the highest-risk groups, so resources are effectively targeted. At the very moment when more New Yorkers are likely to struggle because of coming cuts to SNAP, limited data will be available to guide strategic decision-making.

Fortunately, New York State legislators are exploring ways to fill this gap. They are considering a sensible, practical solution to add a brief food security module to the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), the largest continuously conducted health survey. New York administers the survey under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Legislation pending at the State level (A9168/S8553A) is actively in committee discussion and would help codify this solution.

SNAP Challenges and Cuts Are Intensifying Threats to Food Security

⁵ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. (2025). *Household food security in the United States in 2024*. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/food-nutrition-assistance/food-security-in-the-u-s/>.

⁶ Okonkwo, C., Ford, M., McCarthy, J., Barrett, A., Havusha, A., & Sandman, D. (2025). *Hunger on the rise: New York's food insufficiency rates hit new highs and exceed pandemic levels (2024 update)*. New York Health Foundation. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/hunger-on-the-rise-nys-food-insufficiency-2024update/>.

⁷ Okonkwo, C., Ford, M., McCarthy, J., Barrett, A., Havusha, A., & Sandman, D. (2025). *Hunger on the rise: New York's food insufficiency rates hit new highs and exceed pandemic levels (2024 update)*. New York Health Foundation. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/hunger-on-the-rise-nys-food-insufficiency-2024update/>.

SNAP is the country's largest and single most effective tool to fight hunger. Research shows SNAP can reduce overall food insecurity prevalence by as much as 30% and can improve racial disparities in food insecurity.^{8,9} It also improves dietary quality, supports positive health outcomes, and lowers health care expenditures.^{10,11, 12}

SNAP helps nearly 3 million New York State residents afford food each month, including 1.8 million people in New York City alone.^{13,14} Approximately, 30% of New York State residents participating in SNAP are children, 21% are older adults, and another 10% who are not older adults have a disability.¹⁵ Beyond supporting household food security, SNAP generates significant economic activity in local communities, as federal nutrition dollars flow into grocery stores, farmers markets, and other food retailers across the State.^{16,17} An estimated \$5 billion dollars in annual SNAP benefits generates \$7.8 billion in economic activity in New York City¹⁸

As the Council is highlighting today, organized criminals are exploiting vulnerabilities in outdated SNAP delivery systems to steal millions of dollars in benefits from New Yorkers who rely on these dollars to feed their families. The State is also taking steps to address this issue and modernize SNAP systems. As a start, Governor Hochul recently announced plans to secure chip-based technology that makes cards virtually impervious to mass skimming.

Compounding these threats, overall SNAP access is at serious risk. H.R. 1, shifts high costs to states based on the accuracy of application submissions (i.e., error rates), expands work

⁸ Ratcliffe, C., McKernan, S. M., & Zhang, S. (2011). How Much Does the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Reduce Food Insecurity? *American journal of agricultural economics*, 93(4), 1082–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ajae/aar026>

⁹ Samuel, L. J., Crews, D. C., Swenor, B. K., Zhu, J., Stuart, E. A., Szanton, S. L., Kim, B., Dwivedi, P., Li, Q., Reed, N. S., & Thorpe, R. J., Jr (2023). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Access and Racial Disparities in Food Insecurity. *JAMA network open*, 6(6), e2320196. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2023.20196>

¹⁰ Andreyeva, T., Tripp, A. S., & Schwartz, M. B. (2015). Dietary Quality of Americans by Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Status: A Systematic Review. *American journal of preventive medicine*, 49(4), 594–604. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2015.04.035>

¹¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919214001419>

¹² Berkowitz SA, Seligman HK, Rigdon J, Meigs JB, & Basu S. (2017). Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) participation and health care expenditures among low-income adults. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 177(11), 1642–1649. doi: 10.1001/jamainternmed.2017.4841.

¹³ Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2024). *SNAP participation by Congressional District*. New York State. <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/reports/SNAP-Congressional-Districts.pdf>

¹⁴ Office of the New York State Comptroller. (2025). *Nutritional assistance – Federal funding and New York*. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/budget/fed-funding-ny/nutritional-assistance>

¹⁵ Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2024). *SNAP participation by Congressional District*. New York State. <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/reports/SNAP-Congressional-Districts.pdf>

¹⁶ Hall, L., & Nchako, C. (2023). *SNAP food assistance is a sound investment in our nation's health, well-being, and economy*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/snap-food-assistance-is-a-sound-investment-in-our-nations-health-well-being-and-economy>

¹⁷ Canning, P., & Stacy, B. (2019). *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the economy: New estimates of the SNAP multiplier*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/pub-details?pubid=93528>

¹⁸ The \$5 billion figure is an annualized estimate based on the \$423.9 million in monthly SNAP benefits issued to New York City residents as of January 2025. Office of the New York State Comptroller. (2025). *Nutritional assistance: Federal funding and New York*. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/budget/fed-funding-ny/nutritional-assistance>

requirements, and adds eligibility restrictions. As a result, New York State could lose an estimated \$1.4 billion in SNAP funding, and an estimated 300,000 people could lose their benefits outright, increasing food insecurity and depriving the local economy of hundreds of millions of dollars. As an indicator of future harm, during the federal government shutdown when SNAP benefits were paused, local grocery stores in certain neighborhoods reported losses of roughly half their revenue.

These changes are phasing in fast. Many immigrant populations recently lost benefits, and stricter work requirements took effect in March. The burden is falling heavily on New York City—home to approximately 60% of the State’s SNAP recipients—and other county governments to preserve access for as many New Yorkers as possible. New York is one of only ten states where SNAP benefits are administered at the city and county level, with support from the State’s Office of Temporary Disability Assistance.

To preserve SNAP access for as many New Yorkers as possible, we recommend the City:

Ensure that the New York City Human Resources Administration (NYC HRA) has the resources it needs to navigate the massive changes ahead. As the local SNAP administrator, NYC HRA is facing an overwhelming undertaking in the face of H.R. 1 and needs the resources, staffing, and systems to navigate changes. We appreciate that the agency has engaged community partners and is working diligently with outdated systems and a constrained budget. Our partners in the legal assistance, direct service, and advocacy sectors are working to identify needs and propose potential solutions that the Council should consider. For example, Urban Justice Center-Safety Net Project (UJC-SNP) has documented historical problems with the call centers in their report “Failing Phones.”¹⁹ As we understand it, the center receives 10 million calls annually but only has the capacity to handle four million. The number of calls is only likely to increase in the next few months when the new work requirement rule goes into full effect. Upgrades to the call center, technology to streamline workflow for HRA staff, and increased capacity to communicate with participants in plain language are just a few examples of changes that may be needed. We look forward to working with our grantees and HRA to support high-priority, feasible, and practical changes.

Advocate for the continued modernization of SNAP systems at the State level. The State has taken important steps, including moving to chip-enabled cards on an aggressive timeline. The Council can continue to advocate for improvements by encouraging State-level adoption of industry-standard, real-time analytics capable of preventing fraudulent transactions, including touchless payments, transaction blocking, and other standard financial service practices (e.g., protections available on commercial credit and bank cards). UJC-SNP has also been ensuring that community members know the risks; there are opportunities for the Council to expand on this type of consumer education.

Support existing City food programs that fill gaps. A large and growing number of families don’t qualify for nutrition benefits, and many who do qualify still struggle. Making emergency food accessible is essential. New York City has made important commitments, including

¹⁹ Urban Justice Center Safety Net Project. (2020). *Failing phones: A report on HRA’s infoline*. <https://snp.urbanjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2020/08/HRA-Infoline-Report.pdf>

supporting grocery delivery through efforts like the recent PantryLink pilot program and existing Groceries to Go program. The City is also working to meet the needs of immigrant communities through innovative benefit models. For example, the East Harlem Neighborhood Health Action Center just published a report documenting best practices for reaching immigrant communities across City nutrition benefit programs. The City should continue to explore ways to scale these best practices and bolster the overburdened emergency food system through Community Food Connection.

Partner with New York State to identify and implement solutions to fill food insecurity data collection gaps. New York City and State have impressive data collection infrastructure and expertise. New York State is considering filling gaps in federal food insecurity data using BRFSS with a bill currently in committee in the State Legislature (A9168/S8553A). The City and State can continue to use this moment to coordinate efforts to ensure data is available to assess progress and inequities.

NYHealth is grateful for the City's shared commitment to food security and to protecting New Yorkers' access to SNAP. We urge the City Council to continue its leadership by supporting City agencies implementing program changes in a way that is least harmful to New Yorkers and by continuing to use its voice to oppose harmful federal cuts. NYHealth is here to help: please call on us to organize the funder community and to help identify practical solutions. Together, we can ensure all New Yorkers have reliable access to the nutritious food they need to live healthy, dignified lives.



Testimony of City Harvest

Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee Hearing on Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP April 13, 2026

- 1. Fund Food Access Programs: Fund CFC at \$100M and Restore Food Access Discretionary Funds**
- 2. Enhance City Grocery Incentive Programs: Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff**
- 3. Defend SNAP: Fully Fund HRA ahead of \$100M in Admin Cost Shifts**

Thank you, Chairwoman Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee, for holding today's hearing on Hunger, Food Security and Federal Changes to SNAP. My name is Jerome Nathaniel, and I am the Director of Policy & Government Relations at City Harvest, New York's first and largest food rescue organization.

For over 40 years, City Harvest has worked with food businesses and producers, pantry leaders, our partners in government and New Yorkers of all walks of life to invest in food secure futures for all New Yorkers. This year, we are on pace to rescue nearly 90 million pounds of food from thousands of food donors and deliver it to a network of over 400 pantries across the five boroughs. City Harvest strives to ensure that the food we deliver, the majority of which is fresh produce, is responsive to the dietary needs, cultural preferences and religious requirements of our communities. And more importantly, we are responsive to the level of need in our community. No matter if there is a natural disaster like Hurricane Sandy, a public health crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic, or a human-made crisis like a government shutdown, we have always stepped up to the plate to serve New Yorkers.

But as we sit here today to discuss federal changes to SNAP, one thing is abundantly clear: We have never faced a crisis like this before. Last year's federal spending package, HR1, presents the largest cuts to SNAP in our nation's history. By shrinking eligibility, shifting more costs to states and local government, and making arbitrary changes to SNAP benefit calculations, HR1 cuts SNAP by more than \$186 billion over the next ten years. Based on our local application of

Feeding America's methodology, we're projecting that more than 250 million meals are at risk of being lost across New York City annually.

Today is a critical moment to take stock of the impact of HR1 on New Yorkers and for our local government to commit to fighting for food security. City Harvest is here to engage in deep partnership with our local leaders in and out of government, and we will not accept a loss of 250 million meals as "just the way it is." There are several ways that we can work together to make sure that New Yorkers are F.E.D.: Fund, Enhance and Defend. We must fund food access programs, enhance city grocery incentive programs, and defend SNAP.

F: Fund Food Access Programs

When SNAP falls short or people are pushed off benefits, they turn to pantries. As the federal government pulls back, the City has to step up. We must Fund Food Access.

That starts with increasing Community Food Connection (CFC) funding from \$74.5 million to \$100 million. More than 700 pantries rely on CFC to keep food on their shelves.¹ City Harvest also uses this funding to support Mobile Markets serving NYCHA communities across the five boroughs. CFC is the foundation of the local emergency food supply and it needs to be strengthened.

In addition, the City Council should maintain \$26.89 million in funding for discretionary food security initiatives. This includes \$15 million for the Feeding Our Communities Initiative, \$8.26 million for the Food Pantry Initiative, \$2.13 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative, and \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative. In total, this amounts to \$72.42 per year for each New Yorker experiencing food insecurity, or less than a week of groceries in our city.

E: Enhance City Grocery Incentive Programs

Programs like Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff work. They are helping New Yorkers stretch SNAP, afford fresh food, and stay healthy. Groceries to Go is reaching more than 4,000 NYC Health + Hospitals patients², while Get the Good Stuff supported over 19,000 New Yorkers across the city³.

These programs put real dollars back in people's pockets. Get the Good Stuff matches SNAP spending on produce, while Groceries to Go provides monthly grocery credits for patients

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/food-assistance.page>

² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/groceries-to-go.page>

³ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/free-produce-snap.page>

managing chronic conditions. Together, they connect food access with health and meet people where they are, from clinics to neighborhood stores.

At a time when federal changes are reducing the reach of SNAP, the City should be doubling down on what works.

But the FY2027 Preliminary Budget cuts \$3.2 million from Groceries to Go and excludes funding for Get the Good Stuff entirely. We are calling on the City to restore funding for Groceries to Go and to fund Get the Good Stuff at \$14 million.

D: Defend SNAP

HR1 tightens eligibility, expands work requirements, and shifts costs to states and cities. For New York State that shift could reach \$1.2 billion, putting hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers at risk of losing or struggling to access benefits.

At the same time, the scale of need is growing beyond what the emergency food system can absorb alone. Pantry visits are up 88 percent when compared to 2019.⁴ Meanwhile, the 2026 True Cost of Living report by the Fund for the City of New York found that nearly half—46%—of working-age households in New York City do not earn enough to cover the city's basic costs of living.⁵ This means that many of our neighbors must make tough choices—such as paying rent or buying groceries. These realities existed before federal cuts to SNAP. Not only do we need to defend SNAP, we need to address the generational affordability crisis that plagues working New Yorkers.

City Harvest is already responding. We have adjusted our operations to plan for increased demand and worked with HRA to train over 200 pantry partners to support New Yorkers navigating SNAP work-reporting requirements by serving as approved community volunteer sites where Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) can maintain their benefits by reporting adequate volunteer hours

But the City must do more to defend SNAP.

HR1 increases the local share of SNAP administrative costs from 50 percent to 75 percent, creating an estimated \$100 million gap for HRA. This is the baseline needed to keep the program running. Without it, delays, barriers, and case closures will increase, pushing more New Yorkers into the emergency food system.

⁴ City Harvest analysis of FeedNYC data

⁵ Overlooked and Undercounted: Struggling to Make Ends Meet in New York City 2026
<https://www.fcny.org/nyc-true-cost/>

Defending SNAP means fully funding HRA to administer and protect access to benefits. Anything less will drive demand that the emergency food system cannot absorb.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. City Harvest is proud to work alongside the City Council, our network of food pantries, and community partners to respond to rising hunger across New York City. As the need for food assistance continues to grow and federal policy changes place additional pressure on families, it is critical that the City strengthen the systems that help New Yorkers access food with dignity.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council to ensure that New Yorkers are F.E.D. Fund food access, enhance grocery incentive programs, and defend SNAP today.

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TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity

Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee

Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair

April 13, 2026

Submitted by:

Emma Lentz-Bessire

Senior Associate, Policy and Advocacy

Citymeals on Wheels

Citymeals on Wheels addresses food insecurity among New York City's homebound older adults in three ways: by funding weekend meals for the City's home-delivered meals program, serving as an emergency food responder for this population, and providing additional food to those who need more than the one meal a day they receive. In FY25, Citymeals provided 2.3 million meals to nearly 22,000 older adults in all five boroughs across all our programs.

Unfortunately, existing nutrition assistance programs that many older adults access, such as SNAP and food pantries, are largely inaccessible to those unable to shop for groceries regularly or prepare their own meals. Meanwhile, the aging sector's one-meal-a-day, five-days-a-week approach is not comprehensive. This leaves thousands of older adults falling through the cracks, unable to access other anti-hunger programs and remaining hungry: **60% of home-delivered meals recipients still experience food insecurity** despite Citymeals stepping in to privately fund weekend meals. This patchwork does not serve our older neighbors. A truly comprehensive

approach to hunger would offer a meal every day of the year to homebound older adults, while programs providing home-delivery step in for those who are in need of more food. The City must invest in new and expanded programs to ensure that the City's most vulnerable older residents have the food they need to live safely in their homes.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the Council support the following requests:

- 1. Support efforts at the state level to protect against SNAP skimming through EBT chip cards and the creation of a victim's compensation fund.**
- 2. Increase Community Food Connection funding at a baseline of \$100 million.**
- 3. Make the Feeding Our Communities Initiative permanent at a baseline of \$15 million annually.**
- 4. Invest in the congregate and home-delivered meals programs, both of which continue to face steep increases in program costs due to high inflation rates and years of underfunding.**
 - a. Pass Intro 280, to require the City's home-delivered meals program to provide a meal 365 days a year, with adequate funding in the budget.**
 - b. Increase per meal reimbursement rates for HDM from \$14.78 to \$16.17/meal.**
 - c. Increase funding for congregate meals by \$60 million.**

Strengthening the Emergency Food Network

New York City has one of the most diverse older adult populations in the country. Of the 1.8 million people aged 60 and older in New York City, 18% live below the poverty line and an increasing number are immigrants, women, and people living alone with limited social support.¹ The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have compounded the challenges, dramatically increasing food costs that persist to this day. As a result, we have seen food insecurity among older New Yorkers emerge as a crisis.

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

Citymeals has responded to this crisis by launching new programs in FY25 that go beyond our current one-size fits all model of nutrition programs for older adults. We have a long-term goal to reach 60% of our current service population (~13,000 recipients) with additional food while increasing choices and diversity of meals where possible. By working closely with the City's case management agencies, we identify meal recipients who are experiencing food insecurity and place them into one of the following programs.

Our **Breakfast Box** provides enough food for 30 meals including oatmeal, cereal, yogurt, milk, rice, and beans; four frozen breakfast meals, and a minimum of seven pounds of fresh produce—all procured, packaged, and delivered by Citymeals directly to homebound older adults on a monthly basis. **In FY25 this program provided 381,480 meals to nearly 2,000 HDM recipients.** Our **Mobile Groceries** program provides a monthly box with enough food for 14 meals, including pantry staples, two frozen meals, and about four pounds of produce. **In FY25, this program provided 44,559 meals to nearly 500 HDM recipients.** We are also running a smaller client-choice pilot program in partnership with the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, allowing an additional 200 participants in the Bronx to order their groceries by phone, text, or online, and offering the option to receive only fresh produce, a mix of canned and fresh produce, a mix of animal and plant-based proteins and milk, or all plant-based protein and milk. Participants receive enough food for 18 meals, delivered monthly.

The City's emergency food providers have already been absorbing the shock from changes to SNAP as demand at food pantries have skyrocketed. Without decisive local action, federal changes and rising inflation will continue to dramatically increase hunger across the City. This is why we urge City Council to act with urgency and intention to protect food access for older New Yorkers and strengthen the emergency food system. We first call on the City to **baseline \$100 million annually for the Community Food Connection**, which is the backbone of our city's emergency network, supporting over 700 pantries and community kitchens. Funding is flexible, efficient, and essential; it allows us to respond in real time to recipients' needs and rising demand. A permanent baseline will stabilize a system under unprecedented strain, enable us to

meet growing demand, and ensure equitable distribution to high-need communities like homebound older adults.

We also urge the City Council to **make the Feeding Our Communities Initiative permanent and baseline it at \$15 million annually**. Citymeals was incredibly grateful to receive \$600,000 from the Council through the Feeding Our Communities Initiative in FY26 to support our Weekend Meal Program and to expand our Mobile Grocery Program, allowing us to increase our Mobile Grocery Program by 100 recipients, expand to all five boroughs, increase the number of meals, and add culturally appropriate options. Making this funding permanent will ensure the entire system remains nimble, resilient, and responsive.

Protecting Access to SNAP

SNAP is a vital part of our anti-hunger infrastructure, providing older adults with choice and helping them remain healthy and in their homes. According to data on SNAP participation among HDM recipients from NYC Aging, 32% of all HDM recipients were enrolled in SNAP in FY25. **Across the entire city, older adults make up 30% of those enrolled in SNAP.**²

However, SNAP skimming has become a large-scale problem for low-income New Yorkers. Though countless New Yorkers rely on SNAP to buy their groceries, far too many have seen their funds stolen and as a result, are forced to skip meals without any recourse to regain those funds. Older adults enrolled in SNAP should not be punished for being victims of fraud, effectively losing their benefits and threatening their food security. Transitioning to EBT chip cards and creating a SNAP Skimming Victims Compensation Fund in the FY27 State budget would help mitigate the harm skimming causes since the federal government ended replacement funds in December of 2024.

As such, we strongly support the state legislature’s proposal to create a compensation fund for victims of SNAP and cash assistance fraud and are grateful for Council Member Aviles’ resolution in support.

Expanding Access to Hot Prepared Foods

Additionally, we are glad to see the issue of hot and prepared foods before the Council. Under federal law, SNAP dollars cannot be used for the purchase of hot and prepared foods. *For many older adults, this undermines the utility of this benefit.* In our 2024 research, older adults consistently referenced challenges associated with shopping and preparing food.³

- 38% of respondents reported a limited ability to prepare food, such as washing and chopping.
- 22% reported only sometimes being able to cook.
- 15% reported *never* being able to cook.
- 65% were living on \$15,000 a year or less.

Many focus-group participants cited the mental challenges of preparing a meal, such as planning and motivation, in addition to physical difficulties such as shopping for groceries or standing at a counter. With only one prepared meal delivered to them, many older adults are simply forced to skip meals or stretch out what they do receive to last.

The Hot Foods Act of 2025 would allow SNAP dollars to be used for hot prepared foods and provide significant relief for the roughly 32% of HDM recipients enrolled in SNAP. Citymeals is supportive of this bill, which was introduced in Congress in March 2025. Allowing SNAP recipients to buy hot prepared food would close an outdated loophole that allows recipients to purchase cold prepared foods but not hot. For older adults who may not have adequate equipment to heat up a meal at home, such as a microwave, this change could be a lifeline. Older adults have incredibly diverse needs, abilities, and preferences when it comes to food

and preparation. The Hot Foods Act would allow them to exercise choice and provide them with much-needed flexibility.

We wholeheartedly support the Hot Foods Act of 2025 and other bills that expand flexibilities for SNAP, and appreciate the Council's support for such a bill, but we also urge City Council to support the expansion of existing programs that provide prepared meals to low-income New Yorkers, including but not limited to, the home-delivered meal and congregate meal programs. There is work to be done at this moment in our own city to expand access to prepared foods, without waiting on the federal government.

Home-Delivered and Congregate Meals Programs in NYC

Both congregate and home-delivered meals are a vital part of our anti-hunger infrastructure. However, the federal Older Americans Act of 1965, which funds both programs across the country, only requires them to serve one meal a day, five days a week. HDM programs may choose to provide additional meals using local public or private funding. Across New York State, some counties do provide public funding for meals on weekends, and some even fund a second daily meal.

The solution in the City is a unique public-private model: Citymeals began as a fund within DFTA tasked with raising private dollars to cover the cost of meals for days the program did not operate. This created two funding streams flowing to the same network of contracted nonprofits providing the meals: one stream responsible for the total core program costs (including its overhead) and the other funding just the additional food.

For nearly 45 years, Citymeals has had the privilege of working in partnership with DFTA and the City's contracted HDM providers to ensure that homebound older New Yorkers receive at least one daily meal. In FY25, we infused the program with over 1.4 million weekend meals at a cost of over \$14 million. The majority of this funding is private. In FY25 we received \$2.7 million from DFTA, which is offset by a federal reimbursement of 74 cents on the dollar for these meals, and \$500,000 from the City Council for our weekend meals program.

While the return on investment for the City is significant, this model has begun to bow under the pressure of dramatic increases in both the number of older adults needing meals, and food costs. The model that worked for a program of 600 participants is not sustainable for a program feeding 22,000. The scale of this program requires more significant public investment, which Citymeals has requested for a decade.

The City has recognized the increasing costs of the program, raising its reimbursement rate to contracted providers by about a dollar every year since FY21, increases that Citymeals stood with advocates to fight for. But the City's investment in the weekend meals program has remained flat. If Citymeals were to increase our per-meal payment to providers at the same pace, we would have had to raise an additional \$1.5 million each year, or \$9 million over the past 6 years. We were able to increase our rate by a total of \$4 per meal over this time, but we know this is not enough and the widening gap between the true cost and what we can offer is becoming untenable for providers. Private fundraising for what is essentially a public program simply cannot keep up with a booming population of older adults and the skyrocketing costs of food, fuel, and labor. Without additional investment from the City, the day may soon come when providers can no longer afford to partner with us to provide weekend meals.

In the absence of a more equal partnership with the City, **we support Int. No. 280 which addresses this issue by expanding the HDM program to provide meals 7 days a week, 365 days a year.** The core program should provide at least one daily meal as this is the most basic need for all program participants. **Additionally, because the cost of providing HDM continues to increase, we ask that the City's per-meal reimbursement rate for its contracted providers be increased from \$14.78 to an inflation-adjusted rate of \$16.17.**

The other major food program serving older adults in New York City is the congregate meal program, providing hot meals and social connection in our communities. However, while the reimbursement rate for HDM has increased over the past five years, the rate for congregate meals has remained flat since 2019, despite rapidly increasing food and labor costs. Not only did the last increase in reimbursement rate predate a period of skyrocketing inflation, but we have heard directly from providers on the ground that their costs, such as wholesale food, have

outpaced general inflation rates. In addition to rising costs, recent changes to SNAP and new ABAWD regulations are likely to mean that more older adults will be in need of support. For example, during the federal pause in SNAP in November 2025, Citymeals deployed over 10,000 meals across the city in response to requests from OACs, case managers, and other community-based organizations in order to ensure that older adults had food to last them until benefits were restored. Though funds were eventually distributed, there is little reason to think this crisis could not return during future budget negotiations or that the extreme cuts to the program won't leave older adults in need of additional support from the city. This will place a strain on providers, even as they are already struggling under the weight of inflation. **The Council should invest \$60 million in the program to match real costs and support frontline providers.** This funding would simply provide an inflation adjustment that is long overdue.

Conclusion

Addressing elder hunger will take a multi-pronged approach. We must strengthen these tried-and-true programs and support the providers that keep them running and protect SNAP funds, while investing in innovative supplemental food programs that reach people in their homes and ensuring that SNAP truly fulfills the needs of its recipients.

We thank the City Council for its attention to the need for more prepared food programs and looking forward to partnering to ensure that homebound older adults have access to the nutrition they need to age in place and thrive.



2026 Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare on Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP.

April 13, 2026

Testimony of Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America

Thank you for holding this vital hearing today. My name is Joel Berg, and I am the CEO of Hunger Free America, a national direct service and advocacy nonprofit group headquartered in Manhattan, with a field office in the Bronx.

I am honored to submit this testimony today on behalf of the estimated 1.2 to 1.4 million city residents who now struggle against hunger, living in food insecure homes.

Our message is simple: New Yorkers face massive hunger and food insecurity crises citywide, made worse by the recent passage of H.R.1, which aims to systematically remove federal nutrition program participants. We need a massive response from the City, especially one that more intentionally helps SNAP recipients meet the new federal work reporting requirements and more generally focuses on increasing participation in and otherwise strengthening federally funded nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and Summer EBT.

We are here today specifically to support Intro 0247, Intro 0248, Res. 0021-2026, and Preconsidered Res. T2026-1597.

Intro 0247 would mandate a report on the feasibility of creating a universal benefits application for local public benefit programs and mandate the creation of a universal benefits application as determined feasible by the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services.

Intro 0248 which would require the Commissioner of Social Services to create a system to automatically enroll individuals in City-created benefit programs, like Fair Fares NYC. The Commissioner would be required to use recent records, like tax and social services assistance

rolls, to identify individuals who meet the eligibility criteria for these programs for automatic enrollment.

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

Economists often apply the term “opportunity costs” to high and middle-income people, meaning that the time they spend on one task is time not available to perform other, potentially more valuable tasks. But social scientists and program administrators rarely apply the concept of opportunity costs to low-income people, acting as if their time is essentially worthless. The reality is, applying for benefits in New York City is usually a time-consuming, humiliating, and costly process.

Hunger Free America has long championed the idea of a single portal for all City services and benefits. In 2021, then candidate Eric Adams promised to implement the MyCity portal, to make that a reality. When the website finally launched in 2023, it only offered eligibility screenings and applications for childcare benefits. Even now, New Yorkers who need to apply for SNAP, Cash Assistance and Medicaid renewal are directed to the separate Access HRA website. Additionally, automatically enrolling individuals in City-created benefit programs, like Fair Fares NYC would save individuals further time not having to fill out superfluous forms when the city already knows that the individual is eligible for these benefits.

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

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

Once again, we fully support INT 0248-2026 and Intro 0248-2026 and we hope you will work expeditiously to get this work started.

Additionally, we also support Res. 0021-2026 sponsored by Council Member Avilés which calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A03578/S00403 to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund. While it should be the responsibility of the United States Congress to pass legislation to create a cash assistance fund for fraud victims, we support the New York State Legislature doing this in the absence of federal action.

Hunger Free America also supports Preconsidered Res. T2026-1597, sponsored by Council Member Schulman, calling on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, S.1202/H.R.2512, the "Hot Foods Act of 2025," to permit Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits to be used to purchase hot foods or hot food products ready for immediate consumption. With many SNAP recipients working multiple jobs, raising families, having disabilities, and other barriers that can make exclusively cooking from scratch unattainable, it is imperative that the US government allow SNAP recipients to purchase hot prepared foods with their SNAP funds, which wouldn't cost taxpayers a penny more. Simply put, it's crazy that you can use SNAP benefits to buy a cold rotisserie chicken but not that exact same chicken hot.

Lastly, we would also like to testify against T2026-1631 sponsored by Council Member Zhuang which would create the role of SNAP Anti-Fraud Officer within the Department of Social Services (DSS). The SNAP Anti-Fraud Officer would be required to identify locations with the highest instances of fraud, determine proactive measures to notify SNAP recipients of fraud, identify procedures to prevent fraud, coordinate with non-profits and organizations on fraud cases, and provide an annual report on SNAP fraud in New York City.

Hunger Free America strongly opposes T2026-1631, which we don't think will actually reduce SNAP fraud, and instead supports far more effective methods to combat SNAP fraud while also maximizing the legitimate utilization of much-needed SNAP benefits.

First, I should note that SNAP skimming is a serious problem that needs to be better addressed. The NYC Department of Investigation previously found that, between August 2023 and March 2025 (when the federal government was still paying for the reimbursement of stolen benefits), 98,048 NYC households were reimbursed \$43.7 million for stolen SNAP benefits by NYC DSS/HRA. By our calculation, that meant that about 9% of the SNAP caseload were victims of skimming and that the amount reimbursed equaled only about 6/10th of 1% of the total SNAP benefits used by NYC DSS/HRA during that time. Still, every penny stolen from taxpayers and/or SNAP recipients is a penny too much.

If we thought this bill would either protect taxpayer dollars or reduce the harm to low-income New Yorkers who are victims of theft, we would support it, but we believe the preponderance of evidence is that this bill would cost taxpayers far more than it would save and would harm the most vulnerable New Yorkers far more than it would help them.

NYC DHS/HRA has the legal responsibility—and programmatic ability—to prevent and investigate any fraud or potential fraud by SNAP applicants, including when applicants intentionally hide income, or when, in very rare instances, applicants create fake identifies and/or seek to get duplicate benefits issued to them. NYC DHS/HRA also has the legal responsibility—and programmatic ability—to prevent and investigate any fraud or potential fraud conducted by its own employees, which, unfortunately, does sometimes occur.

Another type of fraud for which NYC DSS/HRA does not have the significant programmatic ability to address – is so-called SNAP “trafficking,” in which crooked retailers provide SNAP recipients with cash in exchange for SNAP benefits, usually taking a hefty percentage of the benefits payments for themselves. Preventing and investigating such fraud—which USDA has previously estimated to be about 1.6 percent of all SNAP benefits issued—is almost entirely the responsibility of the federal government. Nor does this bill even attempt to address that kind of fraud.

The last major kind of SNAP fraud – SNAP “skimming” – is when a criminal enterprise places a device on SNAP EBT reading equipment at food retailer checkout counters in order to steal benefits from the rightful user of that card, almost always without the knowledge of the rightful user of that card. This bill seems to be based on the premise that skimming is the one and only type of SNAP fraud, stating in its text: “The term ‘SNAP fraud’ means the theft of information that is stored on a SNAP recipient’s EBT card and used to fraudulently spend such recipient’s SNAP benefits.” However, NYC HSS/HRA currently has neither legal responsibility nor programmatic ability to address that type of fraud, skimming.

When the federal government previously paid for the reimbursement of such stolen benefits, NYC DHS/HRA was responsible for reimbursing such benefits. Skimming claim filers would report the location of the fraudulent transactions (i.e., the EBT terminal at which the benefits were fraudulently used). Unfortunately, that location is almost never the location where the skimming device was placed. If a skimming device is placed on EBT terminal A, it will be used to steal the card info, and then later used at a completely unrelated terminal B to drain the card balance. Clients can only see terminal B transactions in their transaction history. NYC DHS/HRA has previously identified locations where they believed skimming devices were placed (based on high numbers of skimming victims recently shopping at the same grocery store, for instance) and they conducted outreach to stores in many instances and referred the data to law enforcement.

[Per this City posting](#), federal reimbursements for stolen SNAP funds ended on September 30, 2025, because President Trump and the Republican Confessional majority ended such reimbursements. Thus, because SNAP recipients can no longer receive replacement benefits, people no longer apply to DHS/HRA for replacement benefits, and thus DHS/HRA no longer

directly obtains information about the retail locations at which SNAP skimming may have occurred.

In fact, the only way for NYC SNAP recipients to report that they have been victims of SNAP skimming is to contact the State's EBT contractor, hired by the NYS OTDA: <https://otda.ny.gov/workingfamilies/EBT-scam-alert.asp>. The City of New York is not involved in this process in any way.

But even if the State carried out significant extra work to provide real-time information on SNAP-skimming to NYC DSS/HRA, and furthermore, even if NYC DSS/HRA met the a requirement to spend scarce funds to hire a new "Anti-Fraud Officer", as required by the bill, to review such data , there is very little that the City of New York could do – either legally or practically – to prevent future skimming fraud. Moreover, NYC DHS/HRA already has employees whose job it is to prevent and detect fraud.

Once skimming is detected at a specific SNAP retailer location, the scammers quickly move on to a new retailer. Thus, even if the City knew where past fraud occurred, that would provide the City virtually no ability to prevent future fraud. Besides, such crimes are usually federal—not State or City offenses – so it is generally the federal government whose job it is to investigate and prosecute such SNAP crimes that are committed at retail outlets.

The much better way to actually prevent such crimes is to pressure the State to accelerate its long-delayed plans to require fraud-reduction chips on EBT cards. In fact, those plans are so delayed that the [Legal Services Society is suing the State over this](#). Note that the lawsuit is only against the State—not the City—because, again, the City currently has no substantive role in preventing SNAP skimming. Also, given that most SNAP recipients use smart phones, HFA believes the best solution is for the State to allow those that have smart phones to redeem SNAP benefits through their phones without even needing an EBT card, which would reduce both costs for the State and reduce the number of EBT cards lost in the ever-more-problematic U.S. mail system.

As you know, DSS/HRA has many existing staff vacancies for existing functions, and all City agencies are now under great pressure to limit staff headcounts down due to budget concerns, so taking away scarce agency resources in order to create essentially a meaningless, performative new position makes little sense to us.

Moreover, this issue is distracting us from the far more important crisis: that between 1.2 – 1.4 million New Yorkers now live in food insecure households and that this situation is about to get far worse because up to third of the one million households in NYC now receiving SNAP could lose their benefits entirely if they are not able to meet the new federal work requirements.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers – especially low-income working families, legal immigrants, and people over 60 – are currently eligible for SNAP but not receiving it.

Thus, any efforts that distract the Council and NYC DHS/HRA from robustly addressing both the new work reporting requirements and the population of people eligible for, but not receiving, SNAP are deeply concerning to us.

The way this issue is being framed by the Council is deeply problematic in terms of messaging. Focusing on fraud – and not being clear that SNAP recipients are the victims of this fraud – instead of focusing on hunger and benefit inadequacy – advances a rightwing narrative that fraud is the most impotent issue facing safety net programs. That narrative will surely increase the already heavy stigma on SNAP participation, and further discourage eligible families from applying for, and or continuing to receive, this life-saving grocery assistance.

Background on The Current State of Hunger in New York City

According to raw USDA data analyzed by Hunger Free America:

Across New York City, 15.4% of the population, or 1.2 million people, lived in food insecure households between 2022 and 2024. The Bronx is New York City's hungriest borough in terms of prevalence and number of hungry people, with 24.5% of residents (330,329 people) living in food insecure households.

One out of every five children (20%) in New York City experiences food insecurity, while almost half (46.1%) of children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity in Manhattan and Queens among employed adults increased when comparing 2022-2024 to 2019-2021 levels. The number of food insecure older New York City residents increased to 258,991 between 2022 and 2024.

We believe that, currently, the number of city residents living in food insecure households may be 1.4 million or even higher.

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

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

If the City were truly serious about reducing hunger statewide, it would:

1. Ensure that the State significantly raises the minimum wage, including for tipped workers, and increase the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
2. Increase the City EITC.
3. Dramatically reduce the costs for quality housing.
4. Significantly increase free childcare.
5. Make buses free.
6. Authorize, fund, and implement a government-wide “Assets Empowerment/Middle-Class Wealth Generation Agenda” across multiple City agencies. This will dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from owing and paying interest on non-productive debts to owning assets such as first homes, small businesses, and savings accounts that can earn interest, increase in value, and/or provide profits. Stop the penalization of hard work – enact initiatives to eliminate, or at least reduce, “benefits cliffs” in which workers who get raises or work more hours are punished by having their governmental benefits cut or stopped entirely just when they start doing a little better.

Beyond those broad steps to reduce poverty and expand economic opportunity, the most cost-effective thing the City can do, by far, is to increase participation in and otherwise strengthen federally funded nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and Summer EBT. Specifically, by:

- Increase funding to nonprofit groups (including Hunger Free America) that increase access to government food benefits through the NYC Benefits program and direct City Council funding. We are requesting the City Council provide our local division Hunger Free NYC, \$200,000 in FY27 funding (\$75,000 more than FY26) to support SNAP and emergency food assistance benefits education, outreach, and training; SNAP eligibility screening, application, and recertification assistance; and technical assistance provided to low-income individuals. We are also requesting \$75,000 in FY27 for funding for Hunger Free NYC (\$25,000 more than FY26) to support increased participation in SNAP, other nutrition assistance benefits and to assist low-income households citywide who remain eligible to retain benefits and also to provide technical assistance to food pantries and soup kitchens.

- Increase the Civic Impact Fund to fund nonprofit organizations to host SNAP recipients as volunteers to meet their work reporting requirements.
- DSS should implement a comprehensive plan to work with – and fund nonprofits – to address the new work reporting requirements for SNAP and Medicaid. The agency should better pre-screen clients for disabilities and increase their ability to meet Medicaid and SNAP work requirements through paid employment, job training, and/or unpaid community volunteering. This could include utilizing a better digital ABAWD pre-screening and referral system. DHS staff needs to be carefully trained on the new work reporting requirements. HRA should work with NYS OTDA and nonprofit groups to better draw down federal SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) funds.
- Create a comprehensive, rapid effort to create one digital portal where New Yorkers can simultaneously learn about, apply for, recertify for, and access and utilize the full range of benefits and services they need, not only including services provided directly by city agencies, but also nonprofit services funded by the City, as well as key other programs (such as WIC) not directly funded by the City. Mayor Adams promised, but failed to create such a portal, but it is imperative that the Council and the Mamdani Administration work together to get this done rapidly and effectively.
- We are aware that this Committee doesn't oversee DOE, but we think it's imperative that the entire Council be aware of how imperative it is for DOE to ensure that all classes in all New York City public schools provide school breakfasts either in-classroom or as grab and go breakfast in their hallways. At least 310,205 New York City children live in food insecure homes and more than 154,000 New York City public school students—nearly one in every seven—experienced homelessness during the 2024–25 school year. Yet DOE is failing to adequately utilize one of the most impactful, cost-effective ways to ensure that such vulnerable students have the food and nutrition necessary to succeed at school: school breakfasts. In fact, NYC DOE has one of the lowest school breakfast participation rates of any large urban school district in the U.S. (and is much lower than Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston.) In October 2023 (the last month for which we data), only 39.6% of DOE students who received school lunches also received school breakfasts, one of the lowest school breakfast participation rates out of any big city school district in the nation. This means that more than 60% of students failed to obtain breakfasts, forcing many students to skip breakfast entirely or eat less healthy food they picked up at a bodega on the way to school. If DOE increased the ratio of breakfast to lunch consumption from 39.6% to 100%, that would feed another 345,540 kids per day, equaling about 62 million more breakfasts over the course of a year, which would be paid for entirely (or almost entirely by federal and state funds). Even if the ratio were brought to only 80%, that would feed an additional 235,205 students per day, or about 42 million

more breakfasts over the course of a year. To fix this, New York City Public Schools must make sure that all classes in all schools offer students the ability to eat breakfast in their first period classrooms and as grab and go breakfast in the hallways before the first period.

- Move beyond a reliance on means-tested programs aimed at mostly the impoverished to also focus more broadly on helping a wide array of New Yorkers obtain—and maintain—a full stake in the American dream with both universal programs (such free child care, buses, and school meals for all) and comprehensive policies to specifically help struggling New Yorkers develop assets in order to move from owing to owning.
- Make healthier food more accessible, affordable, and convenient in all neighborhoods, while utilizing food as an engine of community-based economic development. We hope that the City dramatically expands free food voucher programs, which are likely to be more economically efficient, equitable, and practical than creating a few City-owned grocery stores.
- Create formalized systems to empower New Yorkers with lived experience with poverty and food insecurity to advise the mayoral administration.

To increase participation in and otherwise strengthen federally funded nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and Summer EBT, we are also asking that the City Council ask Governor Hochul and the State Legislature to ensure that the final 2026 State budget deal includes the following:

- \$8.5 million to increase SNAP participation through the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP), New York’s network of SNAP navigators. They will play a critical role in helping New Yorkers access and maintain SNAP benefits amid federal policy changes, but without additional state investment to backfill federal cuts, many communities will lose SNAP navigators when they are needed most. (This is in both the Assembly and Senate bills).
- \$30M in supplemental WIC funding to ensure local agencies can serve all eligible families seeking services and reach more of the approximately 200,000 eligible but unenrolled New Yorkers. (Significant new WIC money is in the Senate bill.)
- \$10 million to go to a new fund to enable OTDA, NYC/counties, and nonprofit groups to better help households meet the new SNAP reporting requirements. We need to implement a comprehensive plan to help SNAP recipients meet expanded new work reporting requirements, including funding nonprofits to help SNAP ABAWDs meet these

new requirements through disability screenings, work placements, job trainings, and volunteer activities. (This is a new proposal.)

- \$50 million to expand access to civil legal services, increasing capacity for legal service providers and community-based organizations across the State to assist New Yorkers with enrollment in public benefits. (This is in the Senate bill.)

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

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Re: General Welfare of NYC Families Facing Food and Economic Insecurity

To the esteemed members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of The Campaign Against Hunger (TCAH) as we confront the deepening crisis of food and economic insecurity facing New York City families. These hearings are critical to ensuring that the realities facing our communities are not only heard, but acted upon, and I am grateful for your continued partnership.

I am Dr. Melony Samuels, CEO and Founder of The Campaign Against Hunger, an organization that has served New York City for over 27 years. TCAH provides emergency food assistance, benefits access, workforce development, nutrition education, and vital community services across the city. In the last fiscal year alone, TCAH served over 1.7 million individuals, distributed over 20 million meals, and 27 million pounds of food to New Yorkers in need. This level of service is not incidental; it reflects both the scale of the crisis and the trust communities place in our organization as a lifeline.

At the same time, we are navigating an increasingly complex and shifting policy landscape. With changes to SNAP and ABAWD requirements, thousands of New Yorkers, particularly veterans and young people aging out of foster care, are at risk of losing access to essential benefits. In response, TCAH has stepped forward as a solution.

We are actively working to ensure that communities remain informed and supported through these changes, and we are proud to partner with the Human Resources Administration (HRA) as a host site for volunteerism and workforce engagement across our warehouses, farms, pantries, and distribution sites. With more than 100,000 square feet of operational space across New York City, TCAH is uniquely positioned to help individuals meet work requirements, retain their benefits, and maintain stability during times of economic uncertainty.

We have also significantly expanded our Cyber Pantry model, ensuring that food is accessed and delivered to the homes of 20,000 families annually who cannot access traditional pantry systems. This innovation has allowed us to scale dignified, culturally responsive food access across boroughs, particularly in Brooklyn and Queens. Beyond food access, we are strengthening economic stability for families.

TCAH is now an official IRS VITA site, one of the few nonprofits in Brooklyn with this designation. Through this work, we are ensuring that low-income individuals can file their taxes safely and receive the full returns they are entitled to, protecting them from

predatory fees. This year alone, we plan to support over 2,000 households, returning more than \$3 million directly back into communities that need it most.

Our work also extends to long-term solutions through urban agriculture and climate-responsive innovation. This year, in partnership with the Mayor's Office, DDC, NYCHA, and other project partners, we will open the Marlboro Agricultural Education Center in Coney Island, a first-of-its-kind 8,000 SF Greenhouse development on NYCHA property that will serve as a hub for food production, education, and community engagement. This model is not only transformative, it is replicable across New York City.

At our Arverne East Farm in the Rockaways, we are advancing innovative cooling technologies that support both agricultural productivity and climate resilience. These efforts demonstrate that food access work and environmental sustainability must go hand in hand. We are not only feeding communities, we are building a healthier, more sustainable city.

In addition, we continue to advance our vision for a 90,000 SF permanent community food hub in Brooklyn, a critical infrastructure investment that will transform how food is sourced, stored, and distributed across New York City. This hub will anchor emergency food response, workforce development, and economic opportunity for decades to come. We have made significant progress on this project, but continued partnership and investment from the City are essential to realizing its full potential.

Despite the scale, innovation, and impact of our work, TCAH, and many organizations like us, continue to face significant funding challenges. While we are deeply grateful for the support we have received from our City partners, the reality is that funding has not kept pace with the magnitude of the work required.

We have advocated tirelessly for the resources needed to sustain and expand our services, yet we continue to encounter multiple roadblocks in securing the level of support that reflects our role as an anchor institution in this city's emergency food and economic stability infrastructure.

The economic climate is volatile. Demand is rising. Costs are increasing. And yet, frontline organizations are being asked to do more with less. TCAH is doing everything we can to meet this moment, but it is time for the City to meet us as well.

We urge the Committee and the Council to recognize not only the scale of our impact, but the urgency of this moment. Investment in organizations like TCAH is not optional, it is essential to the general welfare of New York City families.

Last year, your leadership helped secure \$1 million in new funding to support this work. That investment has made a tangible difference in the lives of New Yorkers. But the need continues to grow, and so too must our collective response.

We must act decisively to ensure that no New Yorker is left behind. We must invest in food access, economic mobility, and community infrastructure at a level that reflects the realities on the ground.

The Campaign Against Hunger remains steadfast in our commitment to this mission. We will continue to innovate, to serve, and to lead. But we cannot, and should not, do this alone.

Thank you for your continued partnership and your commitment to the people of New York City.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melony Samuels', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Melony Samuels
CEO & Founder
msamuels@tcahnyc.org
718-496-4013

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

191 Joralemon Street, 2nd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

**Testimony of Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director
Catholic Community Relations Council
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Oversight – Food Insecurity
April 13, 2026**

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

One of the major challenges our City faces is providing food for the rapidly increasing number of hungry New Yorkers. We thank the Council for recognizing and working to stem this growing crisis by creating the \$15 million “Feeding Our Communities” program in FY’26 which helps food pantries feed their clients. This funding was appreciated and absolutely essential, but additional money is desperately needed. We therefore request that the program’s budget be increased to \$25 million for FY’27 with \$2 million each allocated to our coalition of 4 nonprofit human service providers – Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of NY, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, the Met Council on Jewish Poverty, and the Hispanic Federation.

Community Food Connection is another valuable program that assists over 700 food pantries City wide, and we urge it to be baselined in the FY’27 budget in the amount of \$100 million.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York and Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens have been providing shelter, food, and other essential services to New Yorkers for more than one century. We develop and own thousands of affordable housing units for the elderly, formerly homeless and working families. Our developmental, health and vocational programs assist New Yorkers from infancy to homebound seniors, and we aid immigrants and refugees throughout the entire City with “Know Your Rights” seminars, telephone hot lines where they can receive help, and legal assistance.

Both Charities combined operate over 80 food pantries throughout the 5 boroughs serving more than 18 million meals annually. We have faced many challenges assisting New Yorkers over the last 100 years, but we are currently confronting a hunger crisis. This is due to the rising poverty rate of New Yorkers, the increase in food costs, the large percentage of households who are rent burdened and paying over 50% of their income on rent, and even more significantly, the unprecedented and continuing federal attacks on programs that protect our clients. Two of these are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).

SNAP provides essential funding to address food insecurity for vulnerable Americans. The reduction of \$186 billion from the program contained in last summer’s budget bill is particularly troubling and will have significant consequences by increasing the number of Americans facing hunger on a daily basis. Not only does this make it more difficult for households to meet their basic food needs, but it would also lead to broader economic and health challenges, such as an increase in medical issues and

hospitalizations. A similar situation exists with the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), a crucial federal food resource. This program was placed on “hold” by the federal government in 2025 and ultimately terminated. As a result, both Catholic Charities have sustained funding losses of over \$900,000 each, a challenging blow to our ability to supply our food pantries and feed our clients. In short, the financial resources of all nonprofit human service providers who provide food to New Yorkers are becoming increasingly strained at a time when the number of hungry residents continues to climb.

As we have seen the number of people at food pantries increase significantly, we are not just feeding more working families, seniors, and children. Recent clients include college students, recent college graduates who are either unemployed or underemployed, youth aging out of foster care and new immigrants, many of them with infants.

New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli’s April 2025 report on the cost of living reveals that 1 of 9 households in New York are affected by food insecurity. This is defined as “the inability at times to acquire adequate food for one or more household members due to a lack of resources.” That adds up to over 1.3 million New York City residents going hungry.

Our City faces daunting challenges but one of the most important priorities for all of us is to ensure that neighbors shall not go hungry. We therefore call on the City Council to increase the Feeding our Communities program funding to \$25 million with \$8 million being allocated to our coalition of four nonprofit providers who serve millions of meals to hungry New Yorkers annually, and in baselining the Community Food Connection program in the amount of \$100 million.

Thank you.



**Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on General Welfare
Chair, Council Member Crystal Hudson
April 13th, 2026**

Thank you Chair Hudson and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens.

We are grateful for the Council's leadership in addressing the growing hunger crisis in New York City, especially Council Member Avilés for all of her efforts in putting forth Resolution 21 that calls on the State Legislature and the Governor to pass and sign A03578 (Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes)/S00403 (Senator Zellnor Myrie), establishing a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund.

We regularly hear from community members, especially seniors, whose critical public benefits have been stolen through skimming, leaving them unable to meet their most basic needs. For many, this is not a mere inconvenience, it is a crisis that forces impossible choices between food, rent, medication, and other essentials.

These incidents are not isolated. They reflect a growing and deeply troubling pattern affecting some of our most vulnerable neighbors. To put this into perspective, more than 100 individuals across our programs have reported that their benefits were stolen, and 23 have experienced this theft more than once. In total, over \$20,000 has been taken from our community members. These are funds that were intended to sustain them through the month. For households already living on the edge, even a single instance of theft can trigger cascading hardships, including food insecurity, missed bills, and increased reliance on emergency services.

The impact extends far beyond individual households. Community-based organizations like ours are seeing increased demand for food assistance, case management, and crisis support as more families struggle to recover from these losses. In fact, our emergency food distribution lines have continued to wrap around the block, with many seniors waiting in lines for hours at a time in extreme weather conditions. Without a reliable reimbursement mechanism in place, there is often little recourse for those affected. Many are left navigating a complex and frustrating system, with no guarantee that their stolen benefits will be restored in time or at all.

Statewide, the scale of this issue is staggering. More than 100,000 New Yorkers have been affected by benefits skimming, resulting in hundreds of millions of dollars in losses. These are not abstract figures as they are meals that were never purchased, prescriptions that went unfilled, and households pushed further into instability. These are dollars meant to put food on



tables, keep lights on, and support children, working families, and seniors alike.

When these essential lifelines are compromised, the State has both a moral and practical responsibility to act. Failing to address this issue not only harms individuals but also places additional strain on already overburdened social services and community networks.

The State Legislature must act swiftly and decisively this session. The establishment of a robust and accessible reimbursement fund is urgently needed to protect our communities and restore stolen benefits in a timely manner. Such a fund would ensure that low-income New Yorkers are not punished for systemic failures in benefit security and that they can recover quickly from financial shocks beyond their control. New Yorkers deserve the assurance that when they rely on public benefits to survive, those resources will be protected. And when they are not, they deserve a system that responds with urgency, fairness, and compassion. We thank the Council for all of their advocacy efforts and urge for the passage of the resolution.

If there are any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy & Research Manager at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.

Dishout

Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee, good afternoon—and thank you for the opportunity to speak.

My name is Jamila Zomah, Founder and CEO of African Dishout, a platform dedicated to connecting communities to authentic, culturally rooted African meals by partnering with local restaurants across New York.

At African Dishout, we believe that access to culturally appropriate food should not be a privilege—it should be a standard.

Over the past three years, we have worked alongside organizations like Afrikana and the Gambian Youth Organization to support Ramadan meal programs across New York City—helping coordinate and distribute over 12,000 meals weekly to individuals in shelters and mosques.

And through this work, one thing has become very clear to us:

Food insecurity is not just about access—it is about dignity.

Because when someone receives a meal that reflects who they are—their culture, their faith, their upbringing—it does more than feed them. It affirms them. It tells them they are seen, they are respected, and they belong.

For many immigrant communities, that matters deeply.

And it's important to understand that even within cuisines are distinct. They carry different traditions, flavors, and cultural significance. These meals are not interchangeable.

Yet too often, our food systems treat communities as if they are.

The result? Meals that go uneaten. Programs that miss the mark. And communities that feel overlooked.

But we've seen what works.

When you partner with local, culturally rooted restaurants—businesses that understand the community—you don't just deliver food. You deliver meals that are trusted, that are welcomed, and that people are excited to receive. At the same time, you are reinvesting in small businesses that are the backbone of these communities.

This is what equity looks like in practice.

So I urge the Council to invest in food solutions that center cultural competence, community partnerships, and lived experience.

Because food is not just nourishment.

It is identity.

It is dignity.

And it is equity.

Thank you.



New York City Council
General Welfare Committee – Hearing on Food Insecurity
Testimony submitted by Joanna Mendez, Assistant Director of Public Policy
Monday, April 13, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on food insecurity.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people and no limits to their potential. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part-time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted, neighborhood-based spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need. Children's Aid addresses food insecurity directly through on-site food boxes and nutrition education classes while also seeing firsthand how gaps on SNAP, school meals, and emergency food programs leave families at risk.

Summary of Recommendations to the General Welfare Committee on Food Insecurity

- **Response to the Loss of SNAP-Ed:** Coordinate a Citywide response to the elimination of SNAP-Ed by providing bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million and align the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), New York City Public Schools (NYCPS), the Department of the Aging (DFTA), and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to mitigate nutrition-education and food access gaps that increase reliance on the emergency food system.

I. Coordinating the City Response to the SNAP-Ed Funding Loss

Children's Aid's Go!Healthy program addresses food inequities and improves health outcomes for children and families in low- and moderate-income New York City communities. We engage families in nutrition education, healthy food access, culturally responsive activities, food resiliency, and gardening education. Our work examines food systems through a health equity lens, advancing food justice by providing education, leadership, and job opportunities. Each year, we serve over 3,000 individuals, including 1,665 participants in nutrition education. Go!Healthy tackles food insecurity in City Council districts 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 49, and 50 by providing access to affordable, fresh, and healthy foods. Since 2003, Go!Healthy has promoted wellness through programming such as nutrition education, culinary demonstrations, gardening, and food box distribution.

Notably, Go!Healthy's nutrition education is supported by federal SNAP-Ed funding, a long-standing and vital partner in ensuring these services reach communities with the greatest need. For three decades, SNAP-Ed has played a key role in advancing New York's public health and food access goals. In neighborhoods across the five boroughs, SNAP-Ed helps New Yorkers stretch their food dollars, navigate rising food costs, and make informed decisions about what



they eat. Through partnerships with community-based organizations, schools, and local partners, SNAP-Ed delivers practical, culturally relevant education and connects New Yorkers of all ages to fresh, affordable foods in the communities where they live, work, and learn.

Despite the demonstrated importance of SNAP-Ed to preventive health efforts and its broad national success, the federal government eliminated this funding through H.R.1. As a result, New York City stands to lose not only a statewide network of educators, but also a deeply embedded set of programs operating in schools, community centers, food access hubs, and human-service providers across the city. Many providers have already begun terminating staff and winding down programming because the instability of SNAP-Ed's future makes it impossible to sustain operations or plan for upcoming program cycles. Without action, the City will see a rapid erosion of the infrastructure, partnerships, and neighborhood-level trust that has taken decades to build.

The scale of SNAP-Ed's impact is significant for New York families. In FY25, New York City SNAP-Ed providers reached more than 1.558 million participants and more than 79,000 nutrition workshops, many of them in New York City schools, after-school programs, and community-based organizations. Participants also reported significant life changes, including 57% who improved fruit and vegetable intake, 57% who increased physical activity, and 58% who engaged in more price comparisons while food shopping. Overall, household food security improved by 25% after participating in SNAP-Ed programming.

These outcomes are especially important for New York City as more households struggle with high food prices, reduced SNAP benefits, and anticipated changes in Medicaid eligibility. Every \$1 invested in SNAP-Ed saves up to \$9.54¹ in future healthcare costs—savings that directly benefit a City system already under strain. Losing SNAP-Ed programming now would increase demands on City-funded services, from emergency food programs to public hospitals, and would undermine the City's own strategies around prevention, chronic disease reduction, and community health. SNAP-Ed is one of the most effective tools to provide families with the nutrition education, skills, and support needed to stretch limited food dollars and maintain healthy diets even as federal benefits decline.

At Children's Aid, SNAP-Ed plays a central role in our work in the South Bronx, Harlem, Washington Heights, and the north shore of Staten Island, which host communities that consistently face some of the highest rates of food insecurity and nutrition-related health conditions in the City. SNAP-Ed enables Children's Aid to offer steep discounts on locally grown fruits and vegetables, deliver interactive, evidence-based nutrition education workshops led by qualified nutritionists for youth and families, and operate school and community-based distribution sites where families can pick up both their children and fresh foods. This integrated

¹ University of Illinois Extension. (2023, June 13). Available at: [Creating healthier Illinoisans: SNAP-Ed generates up to \\$135 million in future benefits | Serving Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan and Scott Counties | Illinois Extension | UIUC](#)



model is only made possible through SNAP-Ed's funding. Without the City's support, these programs will **fully cease operations by September 2026**.

We strongly support the inclusion of all affected providers in any City investment toward sustaining vital SNAP-Ed programming, and we recognize that many other organizations across the city are facing the same crisis. To help mitigate the immediate impact of the federal elimination, Children's Aid has applied for \$200,000 in City discretionary funds to support this work. In addition to our individual discretionary request, we urge the City to act at scale to preserve the work of all City community-based organizations being terminated by SNAP-Ed:

- **Fund SNAP-Ed Continuation:** Establish City bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million to continue SNAP-Ed operations through community-based providers, so families retain nutrition education and cost-saving skills, preventing avoidable strain on HRA programs.
- **Align HRA, MOFP, NYCPS, DFTA, and DOHMH to mitigate nutrition education and food access gaps** that push more families into emergency food assistance.

V. Closing

At a time of continued economic pressure and federal uncertainty, New York City cannot afford to retreat from its commitment to children and families. Children's Aid sincerely thanks the Committee for its leadership and partnership. We welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as budget negotiations move forward. Please feel free to contact Joanna Mendez, Assistant Director of Public Policy, at jmendez2@childrensaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



**Testimony of Jenny Veloz, Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council
Oversight Hearing Food Insecurity in New York City
April 13, 2026**

For over 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systems change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

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

Families in NYC continue to confront a severe affordability crisis. 73% of children in New York are economically insecureⁱ as families struggle with skyrocketing costs, including food prices. Last April, the State Comptroller's office released a report stating that while one in nine households in New York State experienced food insecurity between 2020-2022, the majority of those households lived in New York City.ⁱⁱ One in four children in New York City oftentimes do not know where their next meal will come from.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the face of high rates of economic security, households depend on food programs like SNAP to ease hunger. As the nation's most impactful hunger relief program, SNAP helps alleviate food insecurity and is a critical tool in poverty reduction, especially among children. In 2024, over a million households were enrolled in SNAP in New York City, and 33% of those households had children.^{iv} SNAP is an integral tool for ensuring children have consistent, nutritional food to support their health and development.

However, cuts to SNAP resulting from H.R.1 threaten to disrupt one of the most important resources to fight against food insecurity. As a result, food pantries, food banks, and other community food programs will become increasingly critical in lessening food insecurity. In 2023, over 7 million individuals in the city were served by food pantries.^v Last year, food pantries, soup kitchens and community food programs saw an average of over one million visits from NYC families. Food pantries are a dependable resource for families struggling to not only put food on the table, but to pay housing, transportation and child care costs.

City leaders must meet current needs and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers,



**Citizens' Committee
for Children** of NEW YORK

and potentially raise food prices. Anti-hunger programs like Community Food Connections (CFC) are a vital resource for families needing extra help in accessing healthy food options. Community Food Connection provides funding to over 500 pantries and soup kitchens to help New Yorkers access food.

We applaud the inclusion of \$53.6 million baseline funding for Community Food Connection (CFC) in the FY27 Preliminary Budget. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many, yet these essential services are being asked to do more with less. While this funding constitutes a substantial investment in CFC, more is needed to provide critical support for communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

As a member of the NYC Food Policy Alliance, a network of 60+ food system stakeholders that advocates for public policies and funding that ensure equitable access to a healthy, sustainable food system, CCC recommends the following investments be included in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- **Increase and baseline** funding for the Community Food Connections (CFC) program to \$100 million to meet the rising demand for food assistance (including enhanced access to fresh food) across New York City, especially in the wake of unprecedented federal cuts to nutrition programs.
- **Protect** food benefits and make healthy food affordable for all New Yorkers by increasing investment in universal, low-barrier food affordability strategies by advocating for necessary city-level investment to support SNAP administration and HRA workforce to protect effective access to SNAP, including:
 - **Increase** baseline funding for Health Bucks from \$500,000 to \$700,000 to expand access to fresh, healthy food for low-income New Yorkers and support local farmers.
 - **Maintain** \$3.1 million for Get the Good Stuff programs

CCC also supports the continuation of funding for the following City Council Initiatives:

- \$8.26 million for Food Pantries Initiatives
- \$1.5 million for Food Access and Benefits Initiatives
- \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative

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



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ⁱ NYC Mayor's Office of Equity and Racial Justice. "NYC True Cost of Living Measure." March 2026. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/equity/downloads/pdf/2026%20NYC%20TCOL%20Measure_4%206%2026.pdf

ⁱⁱ New York State Comptroller's Office. "The Cost of Living in New York City: Food." April 2025.

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-2-2026.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ City Harvest. "The State of Child Hunger in NYC." 2025. https://www.cityharvest.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/CityHarvest_ChildHungerReport_FY25.pdf

^{iv} Citizens' Committee for Children of NY. "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): New York City Quick Facts." November 2025. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.ccnyc.org/2025/12/NYC-SNAP-Factsheet-2025.pdf>

^v Citizens' Committee for Children of NY. "Keeping Track Data Book." May 2024.

<https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.ccnyc.org/2024/05/CCC-2024-Keeping-Track-economic-security.pdf>



55 Water Street, New York, NY 10041-8190

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

April 13, 2026

Testimony of EmblemHealth

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers we serve and those we employ, EmblemHealth would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee on General Welfare for their commitment to improving food insecurity in the communities we serve.

EmblemHealth is a mission-based, non-profit health plan with over 80 years of local experience, proudly serving more than two million New Yorkers. We operate 15 EmblemHealth Neighborhood Care centers where we provide free in-person and virtual support, access to community resources, and culturally competent programming to all community members. Many of our Neighborhood Care sites are co-located with our partner medical practice, AdvantageCare Physicians (ACPNY), which provides primary and specialty care at over 30 offices in the New York area to over 400,000 patients a year, including at 10 offices in designated Medically Underserved Areas.

In September 2025, EmblemHealth announced a \$2M investment to combat food insecurity across all five boroughs through partnerships with The Campaign Against Hunger, City Harvest, and the New York Common Pantry. We know that food insecurity is on the rise across all five boroughs, impacting over 1.4 million NYC residents, and this initiative is bolstering food security for the highest need communities we serve.ⁱ We have distributed nearly 34,000 bags of food since launching this program in September.

Food insecurity is the most acute need for individuals visiting our Neighborhood Care centers, and now community members can access more food distributions and farmers market events with vouchers to shop for produce, held conveniently at our trusted sites. Holding events at our sites allows us to address food insecurity while also connecting individuals to additional resources, support, and our free health and wellness classes. It's this unique approach that ensures individuals know where they can find ongoing support. Our team members speak English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Haitian Creole, and 81% are bi- or tri-lingual, ensuring we can provide support in community members' preferred languages. These food events build upon the food and nutrition support we provide at Neighborhood Care, which includes hosting nutrition classes and assisting with SNAP enrollment.

EmblemHealth also hosts food distribution events across the city at varying locations, by partnering with community organizations and local elected officials in all five boroughs. This approach enables us to reach more community members where they are, and to date we've distributed over 14,000 bags of produce and canned goods at these community events. Through our partnership with City Harvest we have also held mobile market events where community members can shop and choose whatever they would like from the market, filling their own bags. Details on our upcoming events can always be found at www.emblemhealth.com/food.

The need for enhanced food support in our communities is significant, and we've also been able to increase our impact through grant funding from elected officials across several of our sites. Grant programs allow us to bring tailored support to meet community members' most pressing needs, including

addressing food security, mental wellbeing, loneliness, social isolation, and more. In the last year alone, we've implemented grant programming at our Cambria Heights, Crown Heights, East New York, Flushing, Fordham Road (Bronx), and Harlem locations, made possible by Senator Comrie, Assemblymember Vanel, Deputy Speaker Williams, Council Member Hudson, Senator Persaud, Council Member Ung, Council Member Feliz, and Council Member Salaam.

We also host quarterly public health webinars to bring more free education and resources to the community, and we will be holding a webinar on Healthy Eating for Disease Prevention and Longevity in June. The discussion will cover navigating evolving nutritional guidelines, how eating habits affect health, and common chronic diseases linked to diet. We will keep you updated and welcome your attendance and participation.

We support the legislation under consideration today to strengthen and protect vital SNAP benefits, and to keep more community members safe with oversight reports on warming centers. We know that improving health outcomes and improving access to food support requires a coordinated effort to ensure that all New Yorkers, especially the most vulnerable and at-risk, have access to resources in their community. We are grateful for the opportunity to be a constructive partner to the City Council, and look forward to continuing to work together to keep our neighbors and communities healthy.

ⁱ <https://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2023/overall/new-york/county/new-york>



**Testimony Submitted by
Mikaela Perry, Advocacy Manager, Equity Advocates
Before the New York City Council
Oversight Hearing:
Committee on General Welfare**

April 13, 2026

Thank you to Councilmember and Chair of this committee, Crystal Hudson, for holding this oversight hearing on the state of food security in New York City. My name is Mikaela Perry, and I am the Advocacy Manager at Equity Advocates, a nonprofit organization that builds the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and systems change. We accomplish this through policy development, advocacy education and training, and coalition leadership.

Equity Advocates convenes the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a network of 60+ food system stakeholders that advocate for public policies to ensure equitable access to a healthy, sustainable food system.

Last year's passage of the federal H.R. 1 bill unleashed the largest cuts to food assistance in our nation's history, leaving New York City to manage a food affordability crisis. Under H.R. 1, roughly 180,000 New York City households are projected to lose their SNAP benefits, half of whose members are children and senior citizens. Estimates suggest that 70,000 residents in our city will be pushed below the poverty line every single year starting in 2028. As the federal government retreats, the City must step forward.

Luckily, New York City already has several programs in place that have proven successful and efficient in getting food on the table for vulnerable New Yorkers. To combat the increasing food affordability crisis, we urge the Council to grow these programs by enacting a budget that invests in access to healthy, affordable food and fosters long-term resilience and economic opportunity in the City's food system. Specifically, we respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following recommendations in the FY27 City Budget:

1. **Increase baseline funding to \$100 million for Community Food Connection (CFC)** to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC. We applaud the City Council for increasing this critical investment to \$74.5 Million in its Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Response. Due to an 83% rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, NYC's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain. An investment of \$100 million in CFC is essential to meet the growing demand for food, address increasing food prices and cuts to SNAP, and provide critical support for vulnerable communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

According to the 2023 New York City True Cost of Living Report, published by United Way of New York City, 50% of working age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs. Families struggling to make ends meet live in every NYC neighborhood but across family composition, work status, and education, the report finds that people of color are disproportionately likely to lack adequate income.



Further, 80% of households below the True Cost of Living had at least one working adult and the presence of children in the household almost doubles the likelihood that a household will have inadequate income.

Federal Cuts to hunger programs make an already dire situation even worse. Now is the time to meet current need and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will likely occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers, and raise food prices. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many of our neighbors, yet these essential services are being asked to do more with less.

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

2. **Increase funding for Health Bucks to \$700,000, Maintain \$3.1 Million in Funding for Get the Good Stuff, and Increase Funding for Groceries to Go to \$14 Million** to enhance reach and impact.

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

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

Additionally, by increasing funding for Health Bucks, local farmers and producers selling at farmers markets will see increased sales, bolstering our local economy. [Over 75% of farmers in New York State are small-scale](#), and financially bolstering this program provides an increased opportunity to support small-scale businesses, especially women- and BIPOC-owned farms.

Get the Good Stuff, which provides SNAP users with matching dollars to purchase fresh produce at participating grocery stores, should also be funded at \$3.1 million and expanded to include more stores and communities. The current \$10 per day match cap for SNAP incentives should be increased to further support families in purchasing sufficient ingredients for their families. As food prices have risen substantially, \$20 is not adequate to purchase fruits and vegetables to last several days, particularly for larger households. By increasing investment in these programs, the City can make fresh, healthy food more accessible to low-income communities while maximizing federal funding opportunities.

Finally, we urge the council to fund **Groceries to Go** at \$14 Million to expand the program's reach and extend the current 18-month participation limit. Groceries to Go serves a uniquely vulnerable population: NYC Care members who are managing chronic conditions like hypertension or diabetes. By providing monthly credits of up to \$270 that cover not just food, but also delivery fees and tips, this program is a lifeline for homebound New Yorkers and those with limited food accessibility options who cannot physically shop in person.

According to recent [program evaluation funded by the NY Health Foundation](#), the program's success is undeniable, with redemption rates reaching as high as 99.9% and documented improvements in participants' diet and health. The infrastructure—including a highly efficient, multi-lingual call center and a customized data system—is already in place and ready to scale. What is missing is the city's investment. Increasing funding will ensure that the City can move beyond the current enrollment of 4,000 participants and provide long-term, stable food security to those who fall through every other safety net. It is estimated that for every extra \$1 Million the city invests in this program, an additional 1,100 people can enroll in this program. This does not include their household members, which when taken into account would support an additional 1650 household members in accessing food per \$1 million investment.

Together, these three programs provide an incredible opportunity for the city to increase food security for its residents, despite cuts at the federal level. We urge the council to include funding for these programs in the FY27 Executive budget.

- 3. Allocate \$100 Million** in capital funds to support Mayor Mamdani's initiative to develop City-owned supermarkets. Both scale and sustained operational investment will determine the success of this initiative. Achieving real affordability requires a model that operates at sufficient scale, which our partners Community Food Advocates have identified at an initial 20 stores. While the \$70 million included in the Preliminary budget is an impressive baseline amount to initiate this project, long-term success will depend on ongoing operational funding. Current projections suggest approximately \$20 million per store in annual subsidy—roughly \$100 million annually for the first five stores— is necessary to ensure sustained affordability, quality jobs, and a dignified grocery experience for New Yorkers.

We also encourage the council to consider administration of this program, and highlight the need to ensure there are pathways to source food from local and regional farmers and producers in order to ensure New Yorkers are accessing the freshest ingredients, and our local economy is bolstered. Offices



such as the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture have existing relationships with urban farmers within the five boroughs and farmers throughout the regional foodshed. This office in particular is primed to ensure the food in the city-owned supermarkets is purchased through values-alignment, especially from BIPOC, Women-owned, and small-scale producers. When sourcing is considered, city-owned supermarkets could be a catalyst for an initiative that spans food security, climate justice, and economic development. Through this initiative and careful administration, NYC has an unprecedented opportunity to lead as an example to other municipalities across the nation in providing accessible, affordable, local food.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the City Council to achieve these goals.

Mikaela Perry
Equity Advocates
mikaela@nyequityadvocates.org

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare.

My name is Lisa Zhen, and I am the Director of the Social Services Division at Homecrest Community Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Homecrest Community Services serves older adults, families and youth across Southern Brooklyn. We provide culturally responsive, language-accessible programs out of four centers, including two DFTA-funded older adult centers where we offer daily meals. We also provide social services that help New Yorkers access public benefits and essential supports. Many of the people we serve rely on SNAP and cash assistance to meet their most basic needs.

Since the summer of 2023, we have seen SNAP theft as a recurring problem that comes in waves. Clients come to our offices after their benefits have been drained overnight. A 72-year-old client told us after being skimmed twice, “I never thought this would happen to me. I feel scared. How come no one stops it?”

In 2024, Homecrest helped 90 clients successfully obtain reimbursement after their benefits were stolen. But we also saw 160 additional clients who were not reimbursed because their claims came too late under the December 2024 federal reimbursement timeline. When reimbursement is not available, people stop reporting theft because reporting does not lead to relief.

New York has promoted tools like the ebtEDGE portal, including freezing cards and blocking certain transactions. These tools can help some clients, but they are not a reliable

solution for the population most affected. Many older adults struggle with navigating small touchscreens, difficult passwords requirements, and repeated login attempts that lead to locked accounts. Language access is also incomplete: some language options may appear before entering the portal, but key functions within the account remain limited and are not available in languages our clients rely on, including Chinese.

That is why Homecrest strongly supports Resolution 21 introduced by Council Member Avilés and urges the State to pass A03578 / S00403 to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims' compensation fund. We are grateful that New York has stated its commitment to longer-term security upgrades, including a transition to chip-enabled EBT cards. But that transition will take time, and families cannot wait years for protection. A compensation fund is the most direct way to address an immediate need. We also strongly support Int 0512-2026 introduced by Council Member Zhuang for the creation of a SNAP anti-fraud officer and fraud awareness campaign to better track and respond to theft.

Thank you to the committee for your time and leadership on this issue.



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

April 13, 2026

Submitted by:

Human Services Council of New York (HSC)

INTRODUCTION

HSC is a coalition of 185+ nonprofit human services providers in New York. Our sector's collective work offers lifelines to millions of New Yorkers. Food security is the heartbeat of those lifelines: our city's delicate infrastructure relies on it.

Human services providers are gravely concerned about the perfect storm of food crises:

- SNAP recipients face discriminatory new work requirements, cuts, and more due to H.R.1;
- Food insecurity across NYC is increasing due to a rapidly worsening financial crisis; and
- NYC has not recovered from the outbreak of food insecurity that has been concurrent with pandemic recovery since 2020.

Human services providers have already shown leadership in responding to this polycrisis. Our sector needs to be meaningfully included and resourced to sustain the concurrent advocacy, community engagement, and direct services that are even more critical at this time.

BACKGROUND

H.R. 1 has expansive and dangerous impacts on food security for communities providing and receiving human services in NYC. SNAP recipients who are Able-bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) have been subjected to discriminatory new work requirements since March 1, 2026. It is projected to impact hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, with the first round of lost benefits to be felt this June. The legislation also threatens SNAP benefits for people without citizenship, including New Yorkers who are lawfully residing humanitarian immigrants.

The City must also prepare for disruptions in critical food assistance due to mass funding cuts and greater financial burden shifted to states. The Fiscal Policy Institute has reported that H.R. 1 would threaten SNAP benefits for over 1 million New Yorkers, and that New York will need to spend an additional \$2.1 billion annually to maintain current SNAP benefits. The scope of impact on NYC is



dependent on the State and City's contingency plans. Connections to human services providers in that contingency planning remain largely unclear.

Human services providers have been working around the clock to respond to current impacts, and prepare for upcoming waves of crisis, with little to no additional resources. Providers have rapidly expanded and adapted services to prepare community members at risk of losing eligibility and expand access to work opportunities. This includes ramping up outreach, case advocacy, work placement, provision of volunteer hours, food provision/distribution, and more.

Even with these efforts, providers still report major gaps in community member awareness of the work requirement changes and later cuts. Providers are also struggling to rapidly scale up their capacity for significant increases in need for case support and work/volunteer placements for those seeking to maintain/regain benefits. They are concurrently trying to scale up crisis food provision and distribution planning for a potential mass increase of food needs from community members.

ADVOCACY

We support Council resolutions for legislation in Congress (S.1202/H.R.2512) and in New York State (A03578/S00403) as part of the steps in addressing food security.

And, we urge the **City and State to share a comprehensive, coordinated, and dual mitigation and response plan for the urgent food security polycrisis.**

The City's mitigation strategy to lessen losses of SNAP benefits should include to:

1. **Expand and tailor direct communications to SNAP recipients at risk due to new work requirements and other impacts of H.R. 1**, using community-designed "don't lose your benefits" messaging and a short action plan;
2. **Provide emergency funding to human services providers** to maintain and expand critical tailored outreach, case advocacy, work placement, and volunteer hours; and
3. **Leverage more City infrastructure**—such as better using NYC Service as referral partners for SNAP recipients and connecting via Dept. of Homeless Services contractors to better reach shelter residents.

The City's response strategy to increased needs for food access for those whose benefits/access will be lost should include to:



1. **Make critical investments in food security in the upcoming city budget**, including \$100M in baseline funding for the Community Food Connection (CFC) and authorizing funds for those who will lose benefits;
2. **Work closely with the State to stand up a robust emergency food distribution infrastructure** that more effectively and equitably connects to existing community networks (building on lessons from the response to the November 2025 SNAP crisis); and
3. **Support more state legislative campaigns designed to protect food security**, such as the Protect, Invest, and Expand Food Security Package and Snap4All.

CONCLUSION

The window is rapidly closing for meaningful mitigation and response to the current food insecurity polycrisis. We ask City leaders to protect our neighbors during this time with a comprehensive strategy that is closely coordinated with the State and with human services providers in NYC.



THE HUNTER COLLEGE NYC FOOD POLICY CENTER

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, Oversight Hearing on
Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP

April 13, 2026

Good morning, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee. I'm Dr. Mark Chatarpal, Executive Director of the Hunter College NYC Food Policy Center. Located in East Harlem, the Center works at the intersection of academia, community, and government to advance food security and position New York City as a model for equitable, evidence-driven food policy. We appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of three items on today's agenda.

Before turning to those items, I want to acknowledge the broader context in which this hearing takes place. Food insecurity in New York City is a persistent and growing crisis with deep roots in structural economic strain. Nearly half of working-age New York City households do not earn enough to cover the city's basic costs of living, including food, housing, healthcare, and childcare, according to early findings from the Fund for the City of New York's True Cost of Living Report.¹ That precarity is reflected in pantry demand: average monthly visits to food pantries and soup kitchens are up 89% compared to 2019, with more working families, seniors, and first-time visitors coming through the doors each year.²

Recent federal actions have deepened this crisis. Nearly 3 million New Yorkers statewide rely on SNAP each month, including 1.8 million New York City residents.³ According to OTDA data, roughly 65% of NYC SNAP recipients are children, elderly, or disabled.⁴ H.R. 1 threatens that lifeline. Through a combination of expanded work requirements, new cost-sharing measures, and sharply narrowed eligibility, including the elimination of SNAP access for refugees, asylum seekers, and others previously granted humanitarian protection, New York State could face up to \$1.2 billion in new annual costs.⁵ Statewide, more than 300,000 households are projected to lose some or all of their benefits, with an average monthly loss of \$220.⁶ In New York City alone, HRA has identified 122,000 SNAP recipients who are Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) who could potentially lose benefits under H.R. 1.⁷ According to Robin Hood's 2026 annual poverty tracker, these cuts could push roughly 70,000 New York City residents into poverty each year between 2028 and 2034.⁸

The November 2025 SNAP interruption showed in clear terms what happens when benefits disappear: depleted grocery budgets, skipped meals, and families forced to make impossible choices between food and other basic needs.⁹ Food pantries and soup kitchens across the city saw demand surge almost immediately,¹⁰ underscoring what advocates have long known: no emergency food program can fill the gap left by SNAP at scale.

The City and State cannot make up for what is being cut at the federal level, but they can and should act to limit the harm. The three items before the Committee today are a small part of that effort, and we support all three.

On Council Member Zhuang's preconsidered introduction to create a SNAP Anti-Fraud Officer:

New York leads the nation in stolen SNAP benefits, with over 165,000 claims between 2023 and 2025, totaling more than \$50 millions of dollars.¹¹ While DSS already plays a role in addressing benefit theft, that responsibility is one of many it carries. A dedicated officer could ensure SNAP fraud receives focused, sustained attention, though questions remain about what data DSS can actually access. That officer could also play a meaningful role in public education, including ensuring that more New Yorkers are aware of the new ability to freeze and unfreeze their EBT cards, a simple but underutilized tool that can help protect benefits from theft. We would note, however, that the most effective solution to skimming is upgrading EBT cards from magnetic stripe to chip technology, which is far harder to compromise, a transition Governor Hochul has included in her executive budget. We urge the Council to support both efforts.

On Council Member Avilés' resolution calling on the State Legislature to establish a SNAP fraud victims compensation fund (Res 0021-2026):

In the meantime, with federal authorization to replace stolen benefits having expired and New York no longer accepting replacement claims, skimming victims have no recourse.¹² A 2026 Propel survey of over 8,000 EBT cardholders shows the impact: 56% of victims skipped or cut back on meals, and 43% borrowed money or went into debt.¹³ A state compensation fund would ensure these New Yorkers don't have to go into debt to put groceries on the table, and would remain necessary even after the transition to chip cards. It should be designed with accessibility in mind: an adequate reporting window, availability in multiple languages, and as few procedural barriers as possible so that the people it is meant to serve can actually access it. We strongly urge the Council to pass this resolution.

On Council Member Schulman's preconsidered resolution calling on Congress to pass the Hot Foods Act:

SNAP recipients can buy a cold rotisserie chicken but not a hot one. The same bird, same store, different treatment based solely on temperature. This arbitrary rule is a genuine barrier to food security for the majority of NYC's SNAP population: working families, families with children, older adults, and people with disabilities.¹⁴ These are the New Yorkers least likely to have the time, equipment, or physical ability to cook at home, and for whom hot prepared foods ready for immediate consumption are often the most realistic option.

New York's Restaurant Meals Program offers a partial accommodation, allowing older adults, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness to use their SNAP benefits to purchase prepared meals at participating restaurants.¹⁵ But the program has significant limitations. Its eligibility criteria exclude many SNAP participants who face the same practical barriers to cooking at home, including working adults and large families. Among those who do qualify, it is unclear how many are aware the program even exists, or how many qualifying restaurants have been encouraged to apply. Only roughly 220 locations across the five boroughs participate,¹⁶ many of them fast food chains. Expanding outreach to both recipients and prospective restaurant partners could help the program better fulfill its potential.

Investing in home-delivered meal programs that bring nutritious meals directly to older New Yorkers who are not able to go to restaurants is another important step. We support the passage of Intro 280, which would require the Department for the Aging to ensure that every older adult authorized to receive home-delivered meals receives at least one meal per day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.¹⁷

These are steps that can be taken now to help ensure more residents can access food in the way that best meets their needs, without waiting for congressional action.

Additional Recommendations:

We urge the Council to prioritize food security in this year's budget. That means fully funding the Community Food Connections program at a level that reflects the current and growing scale of need. One-time emergency infusions have helped in past years, but providers need stable, predictable funding to plan, staff, and serve their communities. The moment calls for baseline investment, not stopgap measures.

The Council should also sustain and expand programs that stretch the purchasing power of New Yorkers, including Get the Good Stuff, which provides a dollar-for-dollar match on SNAP purchases of fruits, vegetables, and beans at participating supermarkets;¹⁸ Health Bucks, which offers matching coupons for fresh produce at farmers markets;¹⁹ and Groceries to Go, which provides monthly credits for grocery delivery or pickup.²⁰ These programs make healthy food more accessible and more affordable, and they deserve continued investment.

The Council must continue to ensure that DSS is doing everything it can to reach the 122,000 New York City residents HRA has identified as ABAWDs who may be subject to H.R. 1's new work requirements. That means clear, comprehensive guidance and targeted outreach to those who may face additional barriers, including non-English speakers, immigrants, older adults, and people experiencing homelessness. There is currently significant confusion about these changes, and many New Yorkers may not know they are affected. For those who are unaware and have not taken the necessary steps, the three-month clock may already be running, with potential loss of

benefits starting as soon as June. No New Yorker should lose their benefits simply because they did not receive clear, timely information about what is now required of them.

The consequences of inaction will be felt in empty refrigerators, in children who go to school hungry, in older adults who skip meals, and in families forced to choose between food and rent. We thank the Committee for its leadership on food security in this urgent moment and are happy to serve as a resource as this work moves forward.

Endnotes

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New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Testimony, hearing on Food Insecurity and Hunger
April 13, 2026

Dear Crystal Hudson and the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare:

For over thirty years, [Just Food](#) has been working to connect New York City communities to affordable, healthy, locally-grown food. We accomplish this by founding and supporting Community Supported Agriculture groups (called CSA) and by training community chefs and advocates to teach their neighbors and join community voices in bringing fresh and affordable food to all New Yorkers, with a special focus on underserved neighborhoods, which lack access to healthy, fresh food.

We currently maintain CSAs in all five boroughs of New York City, supplied by dozens of farmers throughout the Northeast. The CSAs are comprised of at minimum 50 member families, and often as many as 250 or 300, who receive a weekly delivery of fresh produce starting in late spring and continuing through fall and sometimes into the winter. Our working model has been successful over time because:

- Whenever possible we implement sliding scale pricing, in which affluent members pay more than the farmer's base price, subsidizing lower-income members, including those eligible for SNAP benefits. This creates a caring community in which members look out for one another. Moreover, a diverse member demographic creates a model of stability for the farmer, who can rely on a steady income as neighborhood composition changes over time.
- To bring our food models to the places where need is greatest, we partner with a wide variety of organizations, among them International Rescue Committee (IRC), GrowNYC, the Glynwood Center for Food and Farming, the Catskill Agrarian Alliance, the Hudson Valley CSA Coalition, Farm to School, Farm Generation, the NYC Mayor's office of Urban Agriculture, the People's Garden Initiative, the USDA, Fordham University, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, CEANYC, and many more.
- Our CSAs are deeply embedded in their neighborhoods, creating community within each individual CSA, reinforcing crucial ties with other organizations. They donate surplus produce to nonprofits that provide food access for underserved populations, sometimes supplementing this work with cash donations and educational initiatives. This allows the CSAs to cast a wide net for membership, reinforcing community ties. This effect became clear during the pandemic, when community networks of every sort found themselves shaken up, and our CSAs were able to find solutions to sharply increased levels of food insecurity within our neighborhoods.
- CSA creates deep ties between city residents and the farmers who supply them, educating children and adults about locally-sourced produce and the value of

knowing who grows their food and where it comes from. We offer stable markets for our farmers, many of whom make their living entirely off CSAs, and most of whom are certified organic growers. Our channels of rural to urban communication are broad, deep, and lasting.

- Our CSAs are volunteer-run, so our members feel the pride of ownership in something bigger than they are. In addition, CSA brings neighborhood members from multiple demographics together around a shared endeavour and a sustained conversation about food. Our community chef and advocacy training show members experiencing food insecurity how to effectively reach out for solutions for themselves and their neighbors.
- We nurture our networks through online google discussion groups, social media, network meetings online and in person, our annual forum, and more. We keep a special focus on neighborhoods where affordable, healthy food is scarce and chronic health problems are endemic, often partnering with nonprofits to start and maintain CSAs in these communities. Through all of these, we foster discussion about best practices; we educate, answer questions, and share information and ideas.

We know that food insecurity in New York City is made worse by unequal access to fresh, affordable, healthy food in low-income neighborhoods. Just Food would welcome an expansion of government and non-profit partnership to extend low-income access to our programs, especially CSA. Just Food's efforts contribute in a sustained, lasting way to solving these problems at the community level: the communities that make up New York City, and the community of food providers who serve city dwellers.

Sincerely,

Sheryll Durrant
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Ruth Katcher
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LENOX HILL NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

**Testimony at the Committee on General Welfare
Monday, April 13th, 2026**

Good morning, Chair Hudson and esteemed members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Evelyn García, and I am the Executive Chef & Director of Culinary Programs at Lenox Hill Neighborhood House.

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House was founded in 1894 as a free kindergarten for immigrants and is among the oldest settlement houses in the nation. At its core, our work has not changed in 132 years: we remain dedicated to improving the lives of New Yorkers through education, nutrition and wellness, social services, mental health support and much more. Among our many community-based programs, providing daily farm-to-table meals, nutrition education and SNAP assistance to neighbors from three- and four-year-old students and their families to older adults aging in place are key pieces of our mission.

Today, I want to speak about rising food insecurity in our city, and how we see it affecting our thousands of clients. Food insecurity is currently more widespread in New York than it has been since the Covid-19 lockdown. More than 1 in 10 New Yorkers are having difficulties accessing sufficient food, and more than 1 in 8 among households with children. Black and Latine families are more than twice as likely as White families to struggle with food access. The lowest-income households, including many of our clients, are the hardest hit, facing food insecurity 13 times greater than the highest-income families.

We see the real-world effects of these hardships in our community every day. Last year, we prepared and served nearly 260,000 meals to our older adult clients, unhoused neighbors and Head Start students. That's 26,000 more meals than the year before, and 17,000 more in our Older Adult Centers alone. We have also expanded our vital grab-and-go meal program for older adults to include our Early Childhood Center families. Since September, we have distributed more than 2,000 additional freshly prepared, frozen meals to ensure that these very low-income young families have a reliable source of nutritious food outside of school hours.

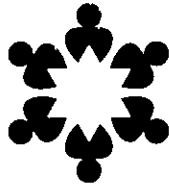
With the need for healthy food access so urgent and widespread, the Neighborhood House strongly supports today's proposals to support victims of SNAP and cash assistance fraud and to allow SNAP benefits to be used to purchase ready-to-eat hot foods. Many of our neighbors, especially older adults, have come to us for help because the SNAP benefits they rely on were electronically stolen. Fortunately, we are often able to work with HRA to get them reimbursed, but the experience of being robbed is deeply upsetting to our clients, and raising greater awareness of SNAP fraud and ways New Yorkers can protect themselves would be hugely beneficial. Ready-to-eat hot foods, moreover, are critical resources for older adults who struggle to cook for themselves, young parents working multiple jobs who do not always have time to prepare meals from scratch, and many others. Being able to purchase those dishes with SNAP benefits would help them to get meals on the table more quickly and easily, reduce their



LENOX HILL NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSE

stress and save money to support themselves and their families.

Thank you for your time and ongoing commitment to the wellbeing and food security of all New Yorkers.



MET COUNCIL

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.
Changing lives.

New York City Council General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing on Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP

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

Thank you for holding this oversight hearing on Hunger, Food Insecurity, and Federal Changes to SNAP. We are writing testimony on behalf of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council). Alongside food assistance providers and anti-hunger advocates across the city, we strongly support the resolutions under consideration today and urge the Council to invest robustly in food security by baselining \$100 million for the Community Food Connection (CFC) program in the FY27 budget and increasing the Council's commitment to the Feeding Our Communities (FOC) initiative to \$25 million.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments, including affordable housing, family violence prevention program, Holocaust survivor assistance, senior programming, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher emergency food network. Over the past six years, we have expanded our emergency food network to serve halal-observant communities and now regularly serve a network of halal pantries meeting the needs of Muslim New Yorkers who follow a halal requiring diet. Through all of our programs, Met Council provides support to over 320,000 New Yorkers annually.

As food prices continue to rise and pantry lines grow, Emergency food providers around the city are seeing unprecedented levels of need in the communities they serve. In 2025, with nearly 1.3 million New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity, food insufficiency exceeded the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.ⁱ Providers have already been stretched well beyond capacity from community need coupled with shrinking or stagnant public and private support before the most recent federal SNAP cuts.

City and State budgets have failed to keep pace with this crisis. Since 2021, funding for CFC has remained essentially flat, even as the need has grown dramatically, and providers have repeatedly called for the program to be baselined at \$100 million.ⁱⁱ Every year, providers are asked to do more with less. This chronic underinvestment is no longer sustainable, for providers or the New Yorkers who rely on their services.

The federal budget bill signed in July 2025 will accelerate this crisis dramatically. Starting on June 1st, 2026, nearly 200,000 NYC residents will immediately lose SNAP eligibility, with hundreds of thousands more losing benefits every month following. Additional restrictions on non-citizen eligibility threaten to cut off an additional 20,000 New Yorkers from the program. The human toll of these changes will be severe, and the emergency food system will be expected to absorb a large portion of these cuts.

The stakes are especially high because no food program does more with less than SNAP. For every meal a food bank or pantry provides, SNAP delivers nine at the same cost.ⁱⁱⁱ Emergency food providers, who's funding already fails to keep pace with inflation, cannot fill a gap of this size. When SNAP is cut, the need does not disappear; it shifts onto a network of providers already struggling to meet the needs of their clients.

Every day, Met Council's Benefits Access Team works with individuals receiving SNAP, or looking to apply. Since these cuts became law, our Benefits Navigators have encountered countless scenarios where needy individuals will no longer qualify for the benefits on which they have come to rely. Refugees and asylees who no longer qualify for benefits, must now figure out how to feed their families, adults age 54-64 who may have retired with the understanding that they would be able to continue to receive their benefits must now find work in order to continue to receive lifesaving benefits, along with hundreds of thousands of other New Yorkers. These major changes do not only impact those who are no longer eligible. On top of all of the individuals who have lost eligibility, there are more who will no longer apply or renew their benefits out of confusion about eligibility, fear of being deemed a public charge, or a reticence to want to engage with a hostile federal government that punishes them for experiencing poverty. These new rules are designed to actively discourage many of the individuals this program is designed to serve from participation.

New York City is a diverse, challenging, and amazing city, which provides refuge for millions of people. Alongside this incredible population and diversity, are the largest Jewish and Muslim populations in the country. This scale and diversity is also home to one of the largest impoverished populations in the country. This poverty persists and directly affects food insecurity and the need for emergency food throughout the five boroughs of NYC.

Research shows that poverty within the Jewish population tracks alongside general poverty and that Muslim Americans face food insecurity at a higher rate than nearly all other religious groups in the country.^{iv} New Yorkers observing religiously informed diets are often put in a position to compromise their religious observance or go without food when they try to utilize the emergency food system, which does not meet their needs. Yet, when we invest in feeding our communities, we invest in lower healthcare costs, higher educational attainment, financial flexibility to pay rent or bills, and overall improvement in mental and physical well-being for all New Yorkers, including those with religiously informed dietary restrictions.

In this time of overwhelming need, Community Based Organizations rely on the City Council to rise to the moment and support the emergency feeding system that supports the City's most vulnerable residents.

CFC is a unique program that through collaboration with providers, like Met Council, has grown to enable pantries to select the food that best meets the needs of their communities. It is particularly valuable for providers serving communities with specific needs, such as kosher or halal observance, because CFC includes many kosher and halal commodities that are not accessible through other streams of funding. An investment in CFC is a commitment to both combatting the looming SNAP cuts and advancing equity within NYC's emergency food system.

In FY26, the Council created the timely and effective Feeding Our Communities (FOC) Initiative. This program has already been transformative and helped to connect communities that are not served by the traditional emergency feeding system to vital resources. We are incredibly grateful to the Council for this initiative and want to make our support for the continuation of the program clear. Met Council and our partners Hispanic Federation, the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens have utilized this funding to purchase a deliver culturally appropriate food to areas with limited pantry and social service infrastructure, communities with religiously informed or culturally nuanced diets, and other isolated communities in need of service. Given the success of its first year, we urge the Council to continue and expand the initiative, increasing funding from \$15 million to \$25 million and to ensure that our coalition of diverse organizations receive \$2 million of funding from Feeding Our Communities.

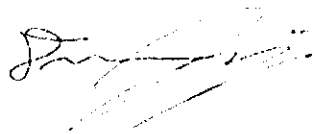
Additionally, we strongly support Resolution 0021, which calls on New York State to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims' compensation fund. Amid devastating SNAP cuts, it is vital that the individuals who do continue to qualify for the program are able to access their full benefit. SNAP benefit theft, often called SNAP skimming is a continuously growing, pervasive problem in NYC and the country as a whole. Before 2025, the federal government operated a program that replaced stolen benefit funds. That program has been terminated, and victims of SNAP skimming no longer have any recourse in the case that their benefits are stolen. It is vital that the state both implement this reimbursement fund and also fully fund the transition of EBT cards to contain chip technology and prevent skimming in the first place.

Finally, we support the resolution urging Congress to reconsider the Hot Foods Act of 2025 (S.1202/H.R.2512), which would allow SNAP benefits to be used to purchase hot, prepared foods. Met Council opposes additional restrictions on the usage of SNAP benefits, as they increase barriers to achieving food security for some of the most marginalized individuals. Older adults, people experiencing homelessness, and individuals living with disabilities, are just a small sample of the population who stand to benefit from increased access to prepared foods. These options are also useful for families with limited time to cook or with limited cooking options. SNAP recipients deserve to be treated with dignity when deciding what to purchase with their benefits. Paternalistic policies, like restricting purchases of hot foods, do nothing but stand in the way of using our tax dollars to fight food insecurity.

Emergency food providers are working tirelessly to meet growing demand, even as the social safety net continues to erode. With the cost of living in New York City rising and federal supports shrinking, the Council's leadership has never been more important. By baselining CFC at \$100 million and continuing FOC at \$25 million, the City Council can ensure that providers remain equipped to serve hungry New Yorkers.

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

Thank you,



Dickran Jebejian
Director of Policy
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

ⁱ Okonkwo, C., M. Ford, J. McCarthy, A. Barrett, A. Havusha, and D. Sandman. "Hunger on the Rise: New York's Food Insufficiency Rates Hit New Highs and Exceed Pandemic Levels (2024 Update)." New York Health Foundation, March 31, 2025. <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/hunger-on-the-rise-nys-food-insufficiency-2024update/>. ; New York City Council Data Team. "Emergency Food in NYC." New York City Council, 2024. <https://council.nyc.gov/data/emergency-food-in-nyc/>.

ⁱⁱ Stuart, Cassandra. "Yours, Mine, and Hours: An Analysis of the Community Food Connection Program." New York City Independent Budget Office, November 26, 2024. <https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/assets/ibo/downloads/pdf/community-and-social-services/2024/yours-mine-and-hours-an-analysis-of-the-community-food-connection-program-november-2024.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ ii Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, "Feeding America Statement on the Lapse of SNAP Funding," Feeding America, November 2, 2025, <https://www.feedingamerica.org/about-us/press-room/feeding-america-SNAP-lapse>.

^{iv} (Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021, "Jewish Americans in 2020"; Met Council, March 2023, "Food Insufficiency and Halal Observance Among American Muslims")



THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Danielle Lamb-Ridore, Principal
Lorraine Swearing, Assistant Principal
Website: www.ms-ap.org

TO: NYC Council Committee on General Welfare
DATE: April 13, 2026
RE: Testimony on Behalf of Seeds of the Middle
FROM: Danielle Lamb
MY EMAIL: Dlamb2@schools.nyc.gov

A CALL FOR THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TO ALLOCATE AT LEAST \$250,000 TO SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE TO FUND A NETWORK OF SCHOOL-RUN FARM STANDS AND HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS TO ADDRESS CHRONIC FRESH FOOD INEQUITY AND INSECURITY

Dear NYC Council General Welfare Committee Chair Crystal Hudson and Committee Members:

My name is Danielle Lamb I am the Principal of the NYC School, The MS for Art and Philosophy.

I am a resident of New York City, submitting testimony to support Seeds in the Middle's request for \$250,000 for a new, more impactful approach to addressing chronic food insecurity and inequity in our low-income neighborhoods that suffer from a systemic lack of access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, cooking classes and healthy choices.

We want our school to be part of this network and are appealing to you to support this powerful initiative. Their proposal for the Brooklyn Delegation directly applies to Brooklyn, but we are calling for funds to also impact all neighborhoods in need - especially those in the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn suffering from the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, maternal and infant mortality rates and premature death - all related to poor diet.

Kindly see Seeds in the Middle's proposal at the end of this letter. This is what we support.

Here is why:

- MSAP is a Title I public middle school in Brownsville, Brooklyn, a neighborhood with some of NYC's highest rates of food insecurity and diet-related illness, alongside limited access to affordable, fresh fruits and vegetables.
- Many MSAP students and families live in a food desert, where fast food and ultra-processed options are plentiful, while high-quality, affordable produce is scarce or requires traveling long distances.
- Food insecurity directly impacts our students' attendance, focus, physical health, and social-emotional well-being, making food access an educational equity issue, not just a public health concern.
- Seeds in the Middle provides a school-based, community-run solution that brings fresh, healthy food directly into the neighborhood, eliminating transportation, cost, and stigma barriers faced by families.



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- The use of HIP2B Healthy Bucks allows families to purchase fresh food with dignity; without long lines, first-come-first-serve limitations, or reliance on emergency food systems that are inconsistent and ineffective.
- MSAP strongly supports Seeds in the Middle's student-run café model, which gives students meaningful opportunities to plan, operate, and sustain a healthy food space within their own school.
- Through the café and farm stand, students build leadership, teamwork, financial literacy, and entrepreneurial skills, while gaining pride in contributing to the health of their school and community.
- Student-run cafés transform MSAP into a healthy oasis, offering fresh juice, smoothies, and nourishing options in place of candy and junk food; countering the flood of unhealthy options in the surrounding neighborhood.
- This model helps students feel a sense of ownership and belonging, reinforcing that they are not just recipients of services, but leaders and problem-solvers within their community.
- Seeds in the Middle aligns deeply with MSAP's commitment to student voice, restorative practices, workforce development, and community partnership, supporting long-term health, economic opportunity, and neighborhood resilience in Brownsville.

FY27 FUNDING REQUEST: \$250,000 (for up to 10 school-run farm markets in highest-need neighborhoods)

Overview: This is a call for a new, locally-based strategy to overcome persistent food insecurity and directly address the inequitable systemic lack of fresh fruits and vegetables or healthy choices in NYC's lowest-income, food-insecure zones - all predominantly communities of color suffering from NYC's highest rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, maternal and infant mortality and premature death.

Seeds in the Middle was founded in 2010, named by 4th graders at PS 91 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, among NYC's lowest-income neighborhoods. Educators were inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama's alarm about tragically high rates of diet-related diseases among Black/Brown Americans.

Educators, parents and students at PS 91 realized they lived at the center of the obesity epidemic. They had no nearby fresh produce, healthy cooking classes, affordable fitness or edible gardens - actually no way to avoid preventable diseases tied to poor diet. The closest farmers market was 2 miles away - a distance some parents walked and still do to get nourishing food for their families.

Then and 16 years later, farmers markets exist only in the wealthiest neighborhoods flush with shops and options to buy healthy at reasonable prices. In the dozens of neighborhoods that Seeds in the Middle serves and has served, farm stands are scant if they exist at all, and produce



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in supermarkets is often rotten or not fresh, and higher-priced than in affluent areas. The inequity is an invisible wall.

Despite millions of dollars invested by government & foundations, food insecurity, inequity and preventable disease rates have only gone up. Food pantries, free food distributions have not moved the needle on food insecurity and hunger. Nor do they regularly offer fresh healthy food. And people are forced for hours to stand in lines to get anything, always first come first serve. It is not only an insult to dignity, but such a method excludes the most vulnerable who cannot get there, keeps people dependent, fails to grow economic development through food, plentiful in other more fortunate areas. No sustainable access, just ineffective “drive-by” interventions.

This systemic failure is evidenced by NYC statistics year after year: obesity, hunger, diabetes heart disease rates among low-income New Yorkers is only going up, not down. We are calling for:

1. **EQUITABLE LOCALLY-RUN FRESH FOOD ACCESS:** Sustain and expand our network of student-run farm stands in the highest need neighborhoods. See [map bit.ly/seedsinthemiddlemap2026](http://map.bit.ly/seedsinthemiddlemap2026)
2. **DIGNIFIED, EFFECTIVE HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS:** distributed to those in need to “buy fresh” (no bread line)
3. **FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO NEED HEALTHY FOOD:** Engage schools, community-based and government organizations focused on poverty to identify those who need these Hip2B Healthy Bucks (our young moms and seniors, i.e., who can’t wait hours on bread lines)
4. **FRESH COOKING WORKSHOPS;** Hire culinary professionals to help people learn and feel empowered to prepare fresh, nourishing meals at home - guidance they often ask for but don’t get.
5. **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Stipends for teens, parents in need, community members identified by schools or local residents to be trained and run markets as sustainable businesses and school fundraisers.
6. **HIP2B HEALTHY CAFES:** Run by students, offering fresh orange juice, smoothies, i.e, to fundraise, instead of candy, junk food, thus making schools healthy oases amid a swamp of unhealthy advertising.
7. **COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCILS:** Residents say what they need and act, empowering healthy change.

Sincerely,

Danielle Lamb

Principal Danielle Lamb



Testimony Submitted by:

Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

**For the General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing on
Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP
April 13, 2026**

Thank you, Committee Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare for this opportunity. We appreciate the thoughtful manner in which the City Council is evaluating the food insecurity crisis in New York City and seeking ways to dedicate funding and to partner with community-based organizations to address it.

My name is Stephen Grimaldi. I'm the Executive Director of New York Common Pantry, one of the largest food pantry and social services organizations in the city, and a founding member of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access. The Roundtable is a coalition of nine of the largest emergency food providers in New York City. Aside from ourselves, it includes: Citymeals on Wheels, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Met Council, Part of the Solution (POTS), Project Hospitality, St. John's Bread and Life, The Campaign Against Hunger, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger.

For 45 years, New York Common Pantry has been one of the largest food pantry and social services organizations in the City. We see struggling city residents daily and have stepped up our provision of healthy and fresh food to communities in need. Last year, we served more than 11.7 million meals, assisted more than 764,000 guests and expanded our mobile programs to serve 350 community partner sites throughout the city with both food and public benefits access, including SNAP enrollment and recertification. We have operated a nutrition education program, funded by SNAP-Ed for over 12 years, and are now faced with a devastating loss to our programming due to the program's elimination.



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

- More than 40% of New York City families are unable to afford weekly food costs, falling short \$205 per week¹
- 1.3 million households – nearly 3 Million people – in New York are struggling to make ends meet.²
- More than 3 out of 4 NYC households say the cost of food is rising faster than their income³
- 1 in 3 New Yorkers has used a food pantry in the past 3 years⁴

The affordability crisis has made it difficult for New Yorkers to make ends meet and to feed their families. Everything in the city costs more -- the high cost of food, childcare, housing, healthcare, utilities... the list is endless. And federal programs designed to help low-income families, including pandemic-era SNAP benefit increases, stimulus payments, the Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit have all expired. NYC residents are working – sometimes two and three jobs – yet wages have not kept up with inflation.

SNAP

We're here today to discuss the impact of federal changes to SNAP on New York City families.

For perspective, **1.8 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP** benefits to feed their families.

- 79% of SNAP recipients are children, the elderly or the disabled.
- The loss of SNAP dollars will have an impact on the economy as well, for every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates up to \$1.80 in economic activity.
 - In addition to families suffering, this will hurt local grocers, farmers, small businesses and food workers
- SNAP provides 9 meals for every 1 meal soup kitchens and food pantries provide.
- Roughly 66% of our Choice Pantry members already receive SNAP and have to rely on our Pantries for food.

¹ Robin Hood Poverty Tracker, November 2025

² True Cost of Living Report, April 2023. Produced by Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington School of Social Work, for the Fund for the City of New York and the United Way of New York City

³ New Yorkers Are Going Into Debt Over The Rising Cost Of Food, No Kid Hungry Survey, March 2025.

<https://state.nokidhungry.org/new-york/new-poll-new-yorkers-are-going-into-debt-over-the-rising-cost-of-food/>

⁴ "The Annual State of Poverty and Disadvantage," Robin Hood and the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University, Volume 6, Winter 2024



Families need both SNAP dollars and assistance from emergency food providers to survive and thrive in the city.

But with the new work requirements and other restrictions, the OBBBA/H.R. 1 SNAP cuts are projected to impact **300,000+ NYC households**, and are estimated to **push approximately 500,000 New Yorkers into poverty** between 2028 and 2034.⁵

The loss of SNAP dollars to feed hungry New Yorkers will mean even more families will be coming to our doors for support. As the Council considers priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, we urge you to continue investing in frontline emergency food providers' innovative, community-based solutions that address food insecurity at scale and strengthen the emergency food system that so many New Yorkers rely on.

Continue Baseline \$100M for Community Food Connection (CFC)

- Dedicate \$100 million as a baseline annually for Community Food Connection (CFC) to provide sustained, flexible support for more than 500 pantries and community kitchens serving more than 1 million New Yorkers.
- Reform CFC eligibility and screening criteria to best serve the highest-need communities based on the Mayor's Office of Food Policy data guidelines.

Maintain \$15M for Feeding Our Communities

Last year, City Council funded this new initiative to provide additional support to emergency food providers. New York Common Pantry was awarded \$400,000 under the Feeding Our Communities Initiative. We need this funding to continue in FY27.

- This funding provided supplemental support for food and hygiene product purchases and operational expenses for food pantries and soup kitchens
- The adopted \$115.9 billion NYC Fiscal Year 2026 budget maintains steady funding for emergency food programs, with a \$15 million investment for the "Feeding Our Communities" initiative. We request that City Council maintains this funding for FY27.

⁵ [The Annual State of Poverty and Disadvantage](#), Robin Hood and the Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University, Volume 8, Winter 2026



Increase Support for SNAP Case Management Services

The City Council funds initiatives related to Food and Benefit Access, which provide support for case management and benefits assessment work. Given the changes to SNAP, including cuts to funding for SNAP Benefits Managers and onerous new administrative hurdles, we request that the City Council increases funding support for these critical case management services through its existing initiatives.

Support Collaborative, Community-Led Solutions

- Establish a dedicated City Council Committee on Food to reaffirm the City's commitment to building a just and resilient food system, elevate food policy across legislative priorities, and ensure sustained oversight and accountability in addressing food insecurity across all five boroughs.
- Broaden FeedNYC leadership to prioritize community-driven resource allocation and include frontline emergency food providers, thereby promoting equitable decision-making and improved transparency.

Fund SNAP-Ed Continuation with \$5-7M

- Establish City bridge funding of \$5 - \$7 million to continue SNAP-Ed operations through community-based providers, ensuring families retain access to nutrition education and cost-saving skills, and preventing avoidable strain on HRA programs.

SNAP-Ed strengthens the impact of SNAP by helping families stretch their food dollars and make informed decisions about what they eat. Through community-based providers such as New York Common Pantry, SNAP-Ed gives New Yorkers of all ages practical nutrition education and access points to fresh, affordable food that fits real budgets and real lives.

- Although H.R.1 completely eliminated federal funding for SNAP-Ed, the need – and the impact – remains. We request City Council increase funding to support essential SNAP-Ed programming to support New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet.
- Last year, NYCP's SNAP-Ed program, Live Healthy!, worked with more than 20,000 New Yorkers to create healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families, and we served the equivalent of 33,000 meals through our Farm Share Program. The termination of this education program will have a devastating effect on the low-income communities we serve.



New York Common Pantry

Since January, we have experienced more than a 10% increase in Pantry meals when compared to the same time last year, and that's on top of the 17% increase in individuals we served last fiscal year.

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

With committed, sustained investment to frontline providers, we can build a more equitable and resilient food system that ensures all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious food.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New Yorkers facing food insecurity.

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**For the Committee of General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing on
Hunger, Food Security, and Federal Changes to SNAP
April 13, 2026**

**Testimony submitted by
Jenny Coraisaca, Director of Nutrition
New York Common Pantry, Live Healthy! Program**

On behalf of New York Common Pantry, I would like to thank Chair Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit a testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary City budget.

For more than 45 years, New York Common Pantry has been committed to ensuring our communities have access to healthy food, championing the cause of hungry New Yorkers holistically, addressing food insecurity with food pantry and meal distribution programs, and the underlying causes of poverty with social services concentrated on public benefits acquisition. Last year, we served more than 11.7 million meals, assisted more than 764,000 guest visits and expanded our mobile programs to serve 350 trusted community partner sites throughout the city with both food and public benefits access, including SNAP enrollment and recertification.

As part of our comprehensive programming, we run our Live Healthy! nutrition education program for under-served, high-need community members, with a focus on the SNAP-eligible population. Live Healthy! provides behaviorally-focused nutrition education, food equity initiatives, and obesity prevention programming for both adults and children. Nutrition workshops are delivered as single sessions or a series in a variety of settings, including schools, community centers, senior centers, food pantries, community colleges, and healthcare facilities. Through this work, the program aims to shift attitudes and behaviors toward choosing nutrient-dense, whole foods.

By addressing the social determinants of health, we take a whole-person approach to ending hunger. Through the integration of evidence-based nutrition education with policy, systems, and environmental strategies, we strive to create sustainable, long-term change in the communities we serve.

You've convened this hearing to discuss the impact of federal changes to SNAP. The loss of SNAP-Ed funding widens the chasm between those who can afford access to good nutrition and health in our city and the underserved communities who will be abandoned.

As the Director of Nutrition at New York Common Pantry, I oversee the implementation of SNAP-Ed programming in our community. I've had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the meaningful impact SNAP-Ed has on the individuals and families who participate in our programs. I've seen how this program changes lives. It empowers people with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make healthier choices and improve their overall well-being.

Our work goes beyond nutrition education. We equip participants with practical skills to shop, cook, and eat healthier, while offering culturally-relevant and accessible programming and resources. Through Nutrition Education, Recipe Club, Farm to Community and Fruit and Vegetable Prescription programs, we reach individuals who leave more informed, more confident, and better equipped to make healthier decisions for themselves and their families.

SNAP-Ed is not just a program—it is a vital investment in public health, prevention, and equity. The loss of SNAP-Ed funds will be felt not only by organizations like ours, but by the families and communities who depend on these services every day. It has allowed us to build strong partnerships, reach underserved populations, and address chronic health conditions through prevention-focused programming.

The loss of SNAP-Ed funding will force us to scale back or eliminate essential services and reduce access to trusted programs that meet people where they are. Many individuals would lose access to practical, culturally-relevant programming that truly makes a difference in their daily lives.

SNAP-Ed is more than education—it is support, connection, and a pathway to better health. Investing in SNAP-Ed is an investment in prevention, health equity, and community well-being.

Fund SNAP-Ed Continuation

As stated above, SNAP-Ed strengthens the impact of SNAP by helping families stretch their food dollars and make informed decisions about what they eat. Through community-based providers such as New York Common Pantry, SNAP-Ed gives New Yorkers of all ages practical nutrition education and access points to fresh, affordable food that fits real budgets and real lives. The Council should consider funding its continuation to support its residents in need.

We request that the City Council:

- **Establish City bridge funding of \$5 - \$7 million to continue SNAP-Education operations through community-based providers, ensuring families retain access to nutrition education and cost-saving skills, and preventing avoidable strain on HRA programs.**
- Although H.R. 1 completely eliminated federal funding for SNAP-Education, the need – and the impact – remains. We request City Council increase funding to support essential SNAP-Education programming to support New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet.
- Last year, NYCP's SNAP-Education program, Live Healthy!, worked with more than 20,000 New Yorkers to create healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families, and we served the equivalent of 33,000 meals through our Farm Share Program. The termination of this education program will have a devastating effect on the low-income communities we serve.

With committed, sustained investment to frontline providers, we can build a more equitable and resilient food system that ensures all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious food and nutrition education so that they can lead healthy, productive lives.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New Yorkers facing food insecurity.



Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group on

Oversight - Food Insecurity, Int 0790-2026, Res 0021-2026, T2026-1631 and T2026-1597

Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

April 13, 2026

Chair Hudson, Council Members, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the New York City Council on the oversight of food insecurity, Int 0790-2026, Res 0021-2026, T2026-1631 and T2026-1597. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am the Director of the Shelter and Economic Stability Project in the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”).

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

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

clients at Administrative Fair Hearings, conduct advocacy with the Department of Social Services (“DSS”), Benefits Access Centers and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of shelter and benefits.

All of my clients are those experiencing food insecurity. Based on my experiences working with them, I appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

I- Food Insecurity in New York City

1. Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City

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

These statistics do not affect the City's diverse population equally. Unsurprisingly, families and communities of color face higher levels of hunger.⁴ Similarly, rates of diabetes and hypertension, which are closely linked to nutritional intake, are higher among people of color.⁵ In fact, people of color are twice as likely to experience diabetes compared to their

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

² *Id.*; <https://robinhood.org/reports/poverty-tracker-spotlight-food-assistance-nyc-pantry-system/>

³ *Id.*

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/nycfoodbythenumbers.pdf>

⁵ *Id.*

White neighbors.⁶ Community health is inextricably linked to adequate nourishment, and research overwhelmingly demonstrates that food insecurity has significant health and economic consequences.⁷ In adults, the medical implications of inadequate nutrition include, but are not limited to, diabetes, obesity, heart disease, depression, and fatigue.⁸ In children, the consequences extend to low birth weights and delayed cognitive development.⁹ Such health concerns can then lead to lowered productivity and higher medical costs.¹⁰ In contrast, children who are well fed do better in school; seniors with adequate food access need not make the choice between feeling nourished and purchasing other necessities; families that are satiated thrive. As such, a discussion of food access is not only about individuals, but also extends to a concern for our collective health and communal strength.

Because of all of this, it is vital that the City prioritize access to food-related benefits that residents are entitled to. Many of our clients frequently encounter problems completing their applications and recertifications because of systems at DSS that are either not functioning well or that are not accessible. These include barriers to completing the phone interview, and documents that are not timely indexed and added to their case. Both persistent issues lead to cases not being adjudicated within the appropriate timelines and result in improper denials.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ <https://www.harvesters.org/Learn/How-Many-are-Hungry/The-Impact-of-Hunger>

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

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

One NYLAG client, Mr. S. was a food-insecure elderly holocaust survivor with limited mobility and a number of disabilities. Mr. S. (with the help of his community social worker) mailed in his recertification papers for SNAP, and his social worker called DSS to ensure that his recertification package was received. On that date, DSS confirmed it had received the recertification package and supporting documentation. Nonetheless, Mr. S. did not receive the next month's payment. When Mr. S's social worker called DSS to find out why he did not receive his payment, she was told that Mr. S. had failed to submit his recertification documentation. Moreover, Mr. S. never received a notice of discontinuance. Mr. S.'s elderly wife began visiting food pantries but was not able to get the types of food they needed, so they compensated by eating less. While NYLAG was able to reactivate Mr. S's case, this scenario is far too common for NYLAG clients. DSS must be adequately funded in order to perform its mandate—provide critical, life-sustaining benefits to those in need.

2. Food Insecurity in New York City Shelter

Food insecurity in the City's shelter system runs rampant. NYLAG clients frequently report that the meals they are served in shelter are too small to abate their hunger. They say they are only allowed to have one serving of each item per meal, and that the serving sizes themselves are very small. As a result, clients in shelter are left perpetually hungry. As we are sure that the Committee on General Welfare is already aware, and as aforementioned, such practices are inevitably damaging to the physical health of shelter residents; food insecurity is disproportionately linked to chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes.¹¹ For children, the consequences are particularly devastating. Research shows an association between food insecurity and delayed development in young children; risk of chronic illnesses like asthma and anemia; and behavioral problems like hyperactivity, anxiety, and aggression in school-age children.¹² Hunger has a direct impact on children's academic achievement and ensuing economic prosperity. Inadequately feeding shelter residents only further disenfranchises them. "Providing food" is not the same as providing enough food.

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

¹¹ <https://www.feedingamerica.org/hunger-in-america/impact-of-hunger>

¹² *Id.*

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

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

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

Problems with food access are even worse in the non-DHS shelter system solely for new immigrants. This shelter system does not comply with the minimum shelter guidelines mandated in New York City and does not provide the residents with adequate assistance transitioning to permanent housing. Among numerous other problems, NYLAG clients residing in these shelters report that they are not being provided with adequate food, and that they are not being served hot food. Compounding the difficulty for our new immigrant neighbors, most new immigrant shelter residents are not eligible for SNAP benefits, and if they are eligible for public assistance, their grants are reduced based on the alleged availability of meals in shelter. Our clients consistently report anxiety about food security and must turn to community groups for gap-filling services to address their persistent hunger.

3. Federal SNAP Cuts Will Exacerbate Food Insecurity

In New York City, 1 in 5 residents and 32% of households are reliant on SNAP.¹³ H.R. 1 recently authorized the largest cut to food assistance in American history.¹⁴ In New York, more than 300,000 households are projected to lose some or all of their benefits.¹⁵ Pantries in the City were already overburdened prior to the Federal cuts, and cuts to SNAP will only increase need.¹⁶ Many individuals experiencing food insecurity are older adults or people with disabilities who face additional barriers beyond the lack of food itself. For these New

¹³ <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/new-snap-data-shows-need-in-nyc/#:~:text=Data%20Resources,under%20the%20age%20of%2018.>

¹⁴ <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/snap-new-rules-2025/#:~:text=The%20%E2%80%9COne%20Big%20Beautiful%20Bill,or%20all%20of%20their%20benefits.>

¹⁵ Id.

¹⁶ <https://citylimits.org/im-afraid-of-wasting-away-city-food-pantries-struggle-as-funding-shrinks-demand-grows/>

Yorkers, getting to a food pantry can be impossible due to mobility limitations, chronic health conditions, or the sheer physical burden of carrying groceries home. As a result, even when food assistance is technically available, it often remains out of reach. NYLAG urges this Council to increase funding for food banks and community-based providers and to prioritize the development of a reliable, citywide system for delivering food directly to homebound seniors and people with disabilities. Expanding these services would help ensure that the most vulnerable residents are not excluded from essential nutritional support simply because they cannot leave their homes.

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

II- Int 0790-2026

NYLAG strongly supports Int. 0790-2026, which would require reporting on warming centers in New York City, including their availability and accessibility for vulnerable populations. This legislation is an important first step toward evaluating the effectiveness of the City's current approach.

Our clients consistently report that warming centers are difficult to locate and that, during typical Code Blue events, when temperatures drop to 32 degrees or below, centers operate for only limited hours. Although warming centers are generally open from 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 a.m., individuals who are able to find refuge overnight are forced back outdoors for much of the day, often in dangerously cold conditions. Even during a recent enhanced

Code Blue, when the City expanded warming center availability, there was widespread confusion about where centers were located and how to access them.¹⁷ For example, on a recent frigid night at the Staten Island Ferry Terminal, two warming buses were parked outside, yet no one inside the terminal—including unhoused individuals, an NYPD officer, and terminal staff—was aware of their presence.¹⁸

This bill would help establish critical best practices to better protect our most vulnerable neighbors and will hopefully lead to common-sense improvements, such as ensuring warming centers are open 24 hours a day.

III- Res 0021-2026 and T2026-1631

NYLAG strongly supports Res. 0021-2026, which calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A.3578/S.403, legislation that would establish a compensation fund for victims of SNAP and cash assistance fraud. NYLAG's Public Assistance and SNAP team hears daily from individuals whose SNAP or cash assistance benefits have been stolen, often leaving families without the resources they rely on to meet basic needs.

A.3578 and S.403 are essential bills that would restore fairness and financial security for low-income New Yorkers who have been victimized by SNAP skimming through no fault of their own. For a limited period, Congress authorized partial reimbursement of stolen SNAP benefits; however, that program has since expired, leaving victims with no way

¹⁷ <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-sent-a-warming-bus-to-a-hub-for-homelessness-those-who-needed-it-had-no-idea>

¹⁸ <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-sent-a-warming-bus-to-a-hub-for-homelessness-those-who-needed-it-had-no-idea>

to recover the assistance they depend on to buy food. Although some stolen cash assistance benefits may be replaced, reimbursement is capped at only two months' worth of benefits.

Benefit theft continues unabated, leaving families with absolutely no recourse when their SNAP benefits are drained by bad actors. In just the past six months, NYLAG has assisted clients who lost thousands of dollars in SNAP benefits—wiping out months' worth of grocery money in an instant. For many households, there is no safety net: once benefits are stolen, families simply go hungry. These bills would ensure that victims of fraud are not punished for systemic vulnerabilities beyond their control.

Worse, this type of card-reading fraud is largely preventable. Unlike most modern debit and credit cards, New York's EBT cards still rely on outdated magnetic-stripe technology and lack EMV chip technology, an industry standard that significantly reduces fraud by making card-copying far more difficult. For households living on the financial edge, the difference between a mag-stripe card and a chip-enabled card is often the difference between stability and hunger. Implementing EMV chip technology is a simple, proven, and long-overdue step that would prevent thousands of families from being victimized. We are hopeful that chip technology will soon be implemented in New York State, and we urge the Council to take action to address this skimming crisis in whatever ways it can.

For the reasons stated above, NYLAG enthusiastically supports T.2026-1631, which would create a SNAP anti-fraud officer position and establish a comprehensive fraud-awareness campaign. More than 60 percent of SNAP recipients in New York State are

elderly individuals, children, or non-elderly people with disabilities¹⁹, populations that are disproportionately vulnerable to financial fraud. Older adults, in particular, face significant risks, with studies showing that 41 percent of people over the age of 50 have reported being victims of financial fraud.²⁰ Similarly, research by the National Council on Disability has found that people with disabilities experience higher rates of fraud and identity theft than individuals without disabilities.²¹

Given that these at-risk populations make up such a large share of New York’s SNAP recipients, it is critically important to take proactive steps to prevent fraud and to educate communities on how to protect their life-sustaining benefits. Establishing a dedicated anti-fraud officer and a coordinated public education campaign would meaningfully strengthen safeguards, improve outreach, and help ensure that SNAP benefits remain secure and accessible to those who need them most.

IV- T2026-1597

NYLAG enthusiastically supports T.2026-1597, which calls on Congress to pass, and the President to sign, S.1202/H.R.2512, the “Hot Foods Act of 2025.” This legislation would allow SNAP benefits to be used to purchase hot foods, which are currently excluded under federal law as “hot foods or hot food products ready for immediate consumption.”

¹⁹ <https://www.nycfoodpolicy.org/who-are-the-nearly-3-million-new-yorkers-on-snap/#:~:text=The%20Supplemental%20Nutrition%20Assistance%20Program%2C,foundation%20of%20America's%20food%20system.>

²⁰ <https://www.aarp.org/money/scams-fraud/fraud-awareness-survey-2026/#:~:text=A%20new%20report%20explores%20people's,and%20understanding%20of%20criminals'%20tactics&text=About%2038%20percent%20of%20U.S.,ones%20to%20report%20high%20concern.>

²¹ <https://mdaquest.org/avoid-online-scams-targeting-people-with-disabilities/>

Access to hot food is essential for all SNAP recipients—and especially for individuals who lack access to a kitchen, require specialized diets, or observe religious or cultural food practices. These needs are particularly acute for New Yorkers living in shelters, where residents are typically prohibited from using kitchens and must rely on prepared meals or purchased food. In such settings, the inability to use SNAP benefits for hot meals significantly limits residents' ability to meet their basic nutritional needs.

For people with disabilities, the current restriction creates even greater hardship. Many require hot meals for medical or dietary reasons, yet the reasonable accommodation process can be lengthy and inaccessible, delaying access to appropriate nutrition. Allowing SNAP benefits to be used for hot foods would provide immediate, practical relief and promote dignity, flexibility, and food security for the households that rely on these benefits.

We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the work you have done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers, and for taking this opportunity to continue to improve the conditions for our clients. We hope we can continue to be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



Committee on General Welfare
Resolution 0021-2026: Establishing a SNAP and Cash Assistance Fraud Victims
Compensation Fund

To: Committee Chair Crystal Hudson
From: Xueqin Huang, Parent-Child Relationship Association Inc.
Date: 4/6/2026

Dear Committee Chair Crystal Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare,

We appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Committee on General Welfare on behalf of the community members we serve. Thank you for your leadership in addressing the disproportionate impact of SNAP and cash assistance fraud on low-income immigrant communities in New York City.

My name is Nicole Huang, and I am the Executive Director at the Parent-Child Relationship Association (PCR), a Brooklyn-based nonprofit organization serving immigrant families, particularly in Sunset Park and surrounding communities. Each year, we work with thousands of families, many of whom rely on SNAP and cash assistance as essential lifelines to meet their basic needs. In our day-to-day work, we have seen a growing number of families impacted by SNAP and cash assistance fraud, especially cases involving electronic benefit theft such as card skimming and unauthorized transactions. For the families we serve, this is not just a financial inconvenience, it is an immediate crisis. From 2023 through March 2026, we have worked with 1,141 families affected by benefit theft, representing over \$512,000 in stolen benefits. These benefits are often the only way families are able to purchase food and essential household items, and when those funds are suddenly gone, families are left without options, sometimes for weeks.

Many of the families we work with face significant barriers in reporting fraud or navigating the recovery process. Language access remains a major challenge, and the system can be difficult to understand, especially for those with limited digital literacy. Often, the individuals we serve are Limited English Proficient (LEP), and when they seek help, they are too often ignored or passed from one to another without clear answers or resolution. As a result, they are left especially vulnerable in situations like this, with little support and no clear pathway to recover their lost benefits. In some cases, families simply give up and absorb the loss. This issue disproportionately impacts immigrant communities and other vulnerable populations, and without timely and accessible support, benefit theft directly translates into food insecurity, mental stress, and instability for already at-risk households.

We strongly support Resolution 0021-2026 and the underlying State legislation, A03578/S00403, to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund.



Creating a dedicated compensation fund is a critical step toward ensuring that families are not left to bear the burden of fraud that is entirely beyond their control. We also encourage that any implementation includes timely reimbursement, clear processes, and multilingual access so that all communities can benefit. At PCR, we believe that no family should go hungry because their benefits were stolen. Protecting access to food and basic resources is fundamental to the health and stability of our communities. Thank you again for your leadership on this issue and for the opportunity to submit testimony. We would be happy to provide any additional information.

Respectfully,

Xueqin Nicole Huang

Executive Director

Rethink Food

116 W Houston St, 2nd Floor | New York, NY 10012
www.rethinkfood.org

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee.

My name is Pei Shan Wei, I'm the co-owner of Zaab Zaab, a restaurant with locations in Elmhurst, Williamsburg, and Chelsea, and a proud partner of Rethink Food. Since 2020, We've worked with Rethink to prepare and distribute hundreds of thousands of nutritious meals to community members across New York City. Today, We produce roughly 800 meals each week, which are delivered to four community-based organizations across the city.

I strongly support the legislation before the committee. I've seen the need for greater warming center resources firsthand, including during the February blizzard when I provided 155 hot meals to CPC Hong Ning House. I also support SNAP fraud protections and the Hot Foods Act, which would expand access for SNAP recipients while creating a pathway for small and mid-size restaurants like mine to serve healthy, culturally relevant meals in their own communities.

Small and mid-sized restaurants want to be part of the city's solution. Feeding people is what we do best. Restaurants are uniquely positioned to provide meals that reflect the cultural and religious needs of the communities they serve, including halal and kosher options.

Restaurants like mine are already doing this work, quickly, locally, and with care. With the right support and clear standards, we can be a strong partner to the City in delivering food that people will actually eat and trust.

Thank you.



Rethink Food

116 W Houston St, 2nd Floor | New York, NY 10012
www.rethinkfood.org

Good Morning, Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee.

My name is Shana McCormick, Sr. Director of Government and Community Relations at Rethink Food, a chef-led nonprofit that drives funding to mobilize local restaurant partners to create culturally celebrated meals for New Yorkers in need. To date, we have distributed over 34 million meals through this proven model and invested over 157 million into restaurants.

We strongly support the legislation before the committee today, especially around SNAP fraud and ensuring SNAP access. Last November, when SNAP benefits paused during the government shutdown, our team mobilized, doubling, and in some cases tripling, meal support across all five boroughs. And we are strong supporters of the Hot Foods Act — a meaningful opportunity not only to expand access for SNAP recipients, but to create a pathway for local, small to mid-size restaurants to prepare meals for their communities. We commend Council Members Avilés, Zhuang, Schulman, and Joseph for their leadership.

Rethink has also seen firsthand the power of leveraging existing infrastructure, and leaning on strong partnerships between nonprofits, small businesses, and City government to effectively respond to emergencies such as the Code Blue crisis early this year. In the past year alone, Rethink has provided over 72,000 emergency response meals to warming centers, NYCHA buildings, Health & Hospital sites and more during some of the most difficult times throughout our City.

New York City is facing a looming hunger crisis this summer, with 180,000 New York City residents at risk of losing SNAP benefits due to federal rollbacks in SNAP eligibility, Rethink Food stands ready to expand our work with City agencies to support meals for the most vulnerable New Yorkers: including individuals with chronic illness in need of specialized medically tailored meals which has delivered over 44,000 meals, CUNY students facing food insecurity, and families in the temporary housing system, and beyond. We look forward to partnering with the Administration and this Council to meet the needs ahead of us.

Thank you.





**Written Testimony from Selfhelp Community Services
NYC Council Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity
April 13, 2026**

Selfhelp Community Services submits this testimony in support of the New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity and the legislative items under consideration.

Selfhelp Community Services is one of New York City's largest nonprofit human service providers, serving older adults, Holocaust survivors, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable New Yorkers. Through our network of Older Adult Centers (OACs), Selfhelp provides meals, socialization, and supportive services to thousands of older New Yorkers annually, many of whom are living on fixed or extremely limited incomes.

Growing Food Insecurity Among Older Adults

Across our community, Selfhelp is seeing a growing number of participants experiencing food insecurity. Increasingly, older adults rely on the free, nutritious meals offered at their OACs as a vital source of daily nutrition. For many, these meals are not supplemental but essential.

Rising food prices have placed significant strain on older adults living on fixed incomes, including Social Security and other limited benefits. Even with access to SNAP, many participants report difficulty affording groceries and balancing competing costs such as rent, utilities, and medical expenses. As a result, consistent access to nutritious meals at Older Adult Centers is critical to maintaining health, stability, and independence.

Food insecurity among older adults is closely linked to poorer health outcomes, increased isolation, and higher reliance on emergency services. The meals served at Older Adult Centers support both physical health and social connection, helping older New Yorkers remain safely engaged in their communities.

Preventing SNAP Skimming and Benefits Theft

In addition to compensating victims after harm has occurred, preventing SNAP skimming and benefits theft must be a core component of the City and State's response to food insecurity. Many of the older adults Selfhelp serves are unfamiliar with online account monitoring, lack access to secure technology, or are unable to quickly navigate complex reporting systems when benefits are stolen. As a result, fraud often goes undetected until critical benefits are already gone, leaving individuals without resources to purchase food or other necessities.

Selfhelp urges the City Council and State partners to pair the creation of a SNAP skimming victims compensation fund with strengthened prevention and consumer protection measures, including:

- Support for the State to replace current EBT cards with chip-enabled cards.
- Expanded education and outreach to SNAP recipients—particularly older adults—on how skimming occurs, how to protect benefits, and how to report suspected fraud quickly.
- Improved coordination between City agencies, the State, and retailers to detect skimming activity earlier and prevent repeated incidents at known locations.



Preventing benefits theft is essential to protecting food access, particularly for individuals who rely on SNAP as their primary means of purchasing groceries. Compensation funds are critical for recovery, but proactive prevention measures can reduce harm, preserve dignity, and limit the cascading impacts of benefits loss on health and stability.

Impact of Rising Costs on Nonprofit Providers

The increasing cost of food has also created substantial challenges for nonprofit providers. Older Adult Centers are facing sustained increases in food prices, supplies, and operational expenses at the same time that demand for meals continues to rise. The cost of procuring and preparing nutritious, culturally appropriate meals has grown significantly, placing added pressure on already tight budgets.

We recommend increased investment in NYC Aging to meet demand and to address food insecurity among older adults.

Support for Legislative Proposals

Resolution 21 (Council Members Avilés, Louis, Encarnación, Salaam, and Vernikov)

Selfhelp supports Resolution 21, which calls on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, **A03578/S00403**, legislation to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund.

Selfhelp strongly supports both the underlying State legislation and the New York City Council's action urging its passage. For individuals living on fixed incomes, including many older adults, even a short disruption in benefits can lead a crisis.

Establishing a statewide compensation fund would provide critical protection for fraud victims, help stabilize access to food and basic necessities and prevent vulnerable New Yorkers from falling deeper into food insecurity through no fault of their own.

Resolution – Hot Foods Act of 2025 (Council Member Schulman)

Selfhelp supports the proposed legislation allowing SNAP benefits to be used for the purchase of hot foods. Many older adults face barriers to preparing meals, including physical limitations, lack of kitchen access, or health conditions. Expanding SNAP eligibility to include hot, ready-to-eat meals would improve access to nutritional foods and choice for New Yorkers using SNAP benefits.

Conclusion

Food insecurity among older New Yorkers is increasing, and we commend the NYC Council for advancing solutions to address these increased needs. NYC Aging funded Older Adult Centers and Case Management Programs often serve as a critical frontline resource in addressing this need. As food costs rise and demand grows, sustained investment in these programs are essential to ensuring that older adults have reliable access to nutritious meals. And we appreciate the Council's support for the State investment in chip-enabled EBT cards.

Selfhelp Community Services urges the New York City Council to advance solutions that strengthen food access, support nonprofit providers, and protect the health and dignity of older New Yorkers.

Submitted by Katie Foley, Managing Director, Selfhelp Community Services, kfoley@selfhelp.net

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

April 13, 2026

Oversight:	Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City
Res 0021-2026	By Council Members Avilés, Louis, Encarnación, Salaam and Vernikov
TITLE:	Resolution calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A03578/S00403 to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund
Preconsidered Int. No.	By Council Members Zhuang, Brooks-Powers, Morano and Banks
TITLE:	A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to creating a SNAP anti-fraud officer and fraud awareness campaign

INTRODUCTION

The Legal Aid Society (LAS) welcomes this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare on the important oversight topic of Hunger and Food Insecurity in New York City. We thank Chair Crystal Hudson and the members of the Committee for their continued leadership and commitment to advancing equity, stability, and access to justice for the City's most vulnerable residents.

With an annual caseload of nearly 200,000 legal matters, LAS takes on more cases for more clients who cannot afford private counsel than any other legal services organization in the United States. Through our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – supported and amplified by a robust Pro Bono program – we deliver comprehensive, high-quality legal services while pursuing systemic reforms that improve outcomes far beyond individual cases. LAS's unique value is our ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to our annual caseload, LAS's law reform representation for clients benefits millions of low- income families and individuals in New York City. The landmark rulings in many of these cases have a statewide and national impact.

THE ABAWD WORK RULES AND TIME LIMITS

No New Yorker should ever go hungry in a city as abundant and well-resourced as ours. For 1.75 million New Yorkers, SNAP, the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is essential to putting food on the table. SNAP supports our local economy as well -- according to the USDA, every dollar in SNAP benefit generates up to \$1.80 in economic activity as those dollars circulate in the local economy. In 2025, SNAP recipients spent nearly \$5 billion across New York City to help feed themselves and their families, and results in \$8 billion of local economic activity.

The 2025 federal budget reconciliation bill ("H.R. 1") enacted devastating cuts to this crucial support. These cuts will result in significant harm to our client community in myriad ways. H.R. 1 eliminates the eligibility of several categories of legally present immigrants, including refugees and asylees, known broadly as humanitarian entrants. It narrows the eligibility of a standard utility allowance that will result in the reduction of SNAP benefits for many NYC households. H.R. 1 permanently freezes the Thrifty Food Plan which means that SNAP allotments will no longer keep pace with the actual cost of food. Most significant to our testimony, it makes changes to federal work requirements that will subject SNAP recipients to increased administrative burdens in order to maintain their benefits—specifically, it eliminates a waiver that had long protected New Yorkers from ineffective and burdensome ABAWD work rules and time limits. Finally, H.R. 1 also changes how the cost of SNAP administration and SNAP benefits are funded. For the first time ever in the program's 50 year history, states will be required to pay for a portion of the benefits based on reaching an arbitrary "error" rate. In sum, H.R.1 inflicted a sweeping retrenchment of the federal safety net and it rewrote how SNAP is funded, who is eligible, how benefits are calculated and imposes new complex administrative barriers to putting food on the table.

In this context, the role of the New York City Human Resources Administration ("HRA") is more important than ever. As federal programs contract, the City must ensure that its own administration of SNAP is accurate, accessible, and minimizes loss of benefits. This need is particularly urgent in the implementation of additional work rules and time limit on SNAP recipients classified as Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents, or ABAWD.

ABAWD work rules are complex and unforgiving. In broad strokes, the ABAWD work rules require 20 hours per week or 80 hours per month of work or work-related activity. Certain types of volunteer service can reduce the hours required. A person classified as ABAWD can receive only three months of SNAP benefits in a three-year period, unless they prove monthly compliance with these strict and confusing work requirements. The current statewide three-year clock runs through September 30, 2026 and will restart on October 1, 2026. Any month that a recipient fails to prove compliance with the work rules will be assessed as a “countable month” toward the time limit. Once that 3-month limit is reached, their SNAP benefits will be cut off until the recipient can re-establish compliance. If the recipient is part of a larger SNAP household, the food budget for the family will be reduced.

These complex ABAWD work rules apply in addition to the SNAP general work rules and, in many cases, interact with Cash Assistance work rules as well. In other words, low-income New Yorkers who rely on public benefits to meet their basic needs are subjected to three sets of overlapping work requirements and must understand how to demonstrate compliance with all. In practice, these rules will result in eligible individuals losing benefits due to administrative barriers—missed notices, documentation hurdles, or lack of access to qualifying work or volunteer programs.

Improper implementation of ABAWD work rules and time limits will compound the harm of federal cuts. Each erroneous countable month toward the time limit is an avoidable reduction in food assistance. The City cannot control federal policy, but it can control whether its own systems exacerbate or mitigate its impact.

Accordingly, HRA must take concrete steps to protect SNAP benefits. In the immediate moment, as countable months have begun, HRA must mobilize to ensure that no one loses benefits due to bureaucratic errors or obstacles.

I. HRA should take immediate action to prevent 122,000 ABAWD SNAP recipients from losing SNAP benefits beginning in June

HRA testified that currently 122,000 SNAP recipients currently coded as ABAWD may be at risk of losing their SNAP benefits in June, the first month when a SNAP recipient can be assessed as having accrued 3 countable months and therefore lose SNAP benefits. This number is not small, but it represents a clear and finite universe of SNAP participants who HRA must contact and engage in the next one and half months. HRA should deploy the necessary resources to connect with these individuals and help them determine how to best comply with the ABAWD work requirements or secure an exemption. Special attention should be given to the population of recipients aged 60-64 who are newly subject to the ABAWD work rules, though still exempt from the SNAP general work rules and Cash Assistance work rules. We urge HRA to utilize the contact information already in its possession, including telephone numbers, email addresses and mailing addresses, and make individualized outreach to all 122,000 individuals. The agency should ensure that they are screened for exemptions, and if necessary, connected with community-based volunteer and employment opportunities.

During these months, HRA must also ensure that SNAP recipients who receive notice that they have been assessed a countable month are able to dispute or appeal that determination. HRA must create process to document appeals, respond to them and make corrections where appropriate before countable months result in a loss of benefits.

The General Welfare Committee should continue to play an oversight role in the coming months to ensure that HRA accomplishes its goal to ensure that no New Yorker loses SNAP benefits in June.

II. HRA must ensure smooth implementation of the ABAWD work rules

HRA must ensure that no one loses SNAP benefits due to agency oversight or unnecessary bureaucratic red tape, and City Council plays an important oversight role. Legal Aid offers the following recommendations to ensure smooth implementation of the ABAWD work rules.

a. HRA must train workers to screen for exemptions, especially barriers to employment related to mental and physical disabilities, and give individuals easy access to being re-screened when needed.

HRA must proactively and accurately identify exemptions. At every application and recertification, an HRA case worker will screen the recipient for all possible exemptions to the SNAP general, ABAWD work rules, and Cash Assistance work rules too if they are eligible. Exemptions include that there are minor children under 14 in the household, pregnancy, caring for an incapacitated person either in the SNAP household or elsewhere, that the recipient is already working and earning \$213.50 per week, that they receive SSI income, or that they have barriers to employment, such as a medical condition or a disability.

Many exemptions should be readily apparent to the case worker. For example, if a person earns W2 income of at least \$213.50 per week or receives SSI income, that information will be readily available to the case worker, making that exemption easy to apply. However, while HRA will have ready access to income information for people with some forms of income, many working New Yorkers earn money in the informal economy. HRA should make efforts to ensure that self-employed individuals and gig-workers have the information they need to document their income and, where appropriate, secure an exemption from bureaucracy of the work rules.

Another exemption that may be difficult to assess relates to barriers to employment. Many individuals subject to SNAP and ABAWD rules could qualify for an exemption due to disabilities, medical conditions, or other barriers. These exemptions must be meaningfully screened for and applied. Further, HRA must maintain procedures for SNAP recipients who believe they are misclassified as ABAWD to request to be re-screened. As there are different sets of rules for people who receive SNAP-only and people who receive both Cash Assistance and SNAP, HRA must provide notices and other communications that give clear instruction regarding each category of benefits.

In their many public communications, HRA has advised SNAP recipients who believe they should be exempt from the ABAWD work rules due to a medical condition or disability to complete the Medical Statement and upload it to their AccessHRA account. While the form is simple and clear, for many New Yorkers with real barriers, asking them to collect and submit paperwork via technology just won't work. For many people, the only way to properly identify such barriers and limitations is with adequate screening. HRA must ensure that workers are trained to screen robustly for exemptions, especially barriers to employment related to mental and physical disabilities. Reading a check list of questions might not always be sufficient – especially when the screening is done on the phone and in a hurry.

Finally, HRA must create clear pathways for individuals who believe they have been improperly coded as ABAWD to request to be re-screened by an HRA worker. Again, uploading a document on

AccessHRA will be the preferred mechanism for many people, but for New Yorkers with real barriers, HRA must make efforts to ensure those barriers are accommodated, and their needs are met.

b. HRA must ensure that notices are clear, accurate and contain all necessary contact information.

HRA must ensure that notices are clear, accurate and contain all necessary contact information. This is especially important for notices to recipients regarding their ABAWD status and the SNAP work rules. These notices must provide information about how to seek additional information, to report an error, or request to be re-screened. Further, any notice regarding a countable month must provide clear instructions for filing an appeal, what to expect next, and contact information for questions. Recipients must understand what is required of them, how to maintain eligibility, and how to challenge an agency action. Confusing or incomplete notices will lead to missed exemptions, failure to record compliance, and erroneous loss of benefits.

c. HRA should continue to develop volunteer and work opportunities in partnership with community-based organization

HRA must ensure real access to qualifying work programs and volunteer opportunities. Volunteering with a community-based organization (“CBO”) is an effective and efficient path to fulfilling the ABAWD work rules. Participants can meet their ABAWD work requirement by performing volunteer hours with an approved CBO must volunteer for the number of hours equal to their SNAP allotment divided by the state minimum wage, which is \$17 per hour in New York City. A single adult receiving the maximum allotment of \$298 can comply with the ABAWD rules by volunteering with an approved CBO for 17.5 hours per month. Engaging with community groups to help ensure compliance with federal rules is the right kind of partnership. We commend HRA for inviting community-based organizations to register to be approved to certify volunteer hours and we look forward to hearing from HRA about the success of these partnerships.

d. HRA should create an ABAWD Ombuds Office with a direct phone number and email that can troubleshoot ABAWD issues

SNAP recipients, employers and community-based organizations must have a clear and easy way to contact HRA for questions about ABAWD work rules and penalties. HRA should create an ABAWD Ombuds Office that can respond and help troubleshoot ABAWD issues. Participants who believe they were mis-screened or are having understanding the rules they must follow are currently unable to contact an ABAWD expert at HRA who can help them navigate the complicated web of requirements. Further, in upcoming months, participants who seek to appeal a countable month should be able to reach HRA. Currently, HRA directs participants to contact the PACE or WeCare vendor to whom they have assigned. However, participants should have direct access to HRA for concerns that vendors are unable to address or when vendors fail to respond.

Likewise, community groups that offer volunteer opportunities lack a fast and easy way to have their programmatic and compliance questions answered. HRA has stated that some community groups will be approved to offer a pathway for full compliance with ABAWD based on SNAP allotment and minimum wage, while others will be able to certify total hours volunteered but counted against an 80 hours per month total.

For the population aged 60-64 who are newly subject to the ABAWD work rules but exempt from SNAP general work rules and Cash Assistance work rules, HRA has announced a voluntary pathway to participate in the WeCARE program to comply with ABAWD. The ABAWD Ombuds Office can help ensure the success of the new program.

Compliance with the ABAWD rules will require effective communication between HRA, vendors, CBOs, and SNAP recipients. An ABAWD Ombuds Office specifically focused on these issues and concerns can lessen the overall burden to HRA by providing a single point of contact. HRA should create an ABAWD Ombuds Office with a direct phone number and email where participants and businesses can reach out to solve problems and prevent the loss of benefits due to alleged noncompliance with ABAWD requirements.

- e. **HRA should publish its comprehensive ABAWD policy and publish regular reports with relevant SNAP data.**

Finally, the City Council has a critical oversight role to play. To our knowledge, HRA has not yet issued an updated comprehensive ABAWD policy directive incorporating the changes from H.R.1. The policy directive should be updated immediately and published. Further, to ensure transparency and accountability, HRA should publish regular reports on SNAP caseload, recipients coded as ABAWD, requests for exemptions, requests for rescreening, countable months assessed, countable months appealed, terminations, and overall program access.

SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATION

Beyond implementation of ABAWD work requirements, H.R.1 made sweeping changes to the SNAP landscape and as HRA continues to adapt to those changes and implement the requirements of the law, we urge them to exercise care and prioritize the needs and experiences of SNAP applicants and recipients. HRA must make every effort to ensure that eligible New Yorkers have the information they need to navigate the changing SNAP landscape and receive the benefits they are entitled to.

Res 0021-2026: The Legal Aid Society supports Res 0021-2026 calling on the New York State to create a SNAP and Cash Assistance victims' compensation fund. Skimming is a pernicious form of digital theft that happens quietly and without warning. Since December 21, 2023, due to a lapse in the federal law that previously authorized compensation, victims of SNAP skimming no longer have any recourse in federal or state law. Legal Aid applauds the Governor and the Legislature for taking steps to upgrade SNAP EBT card to updated chip technology (A699/S146). Once adopted, the actual implementation of chip card technology will take another 12-18 months, according to most estimations. Victims deserve compensation today. In their testimony, HRA expressed concern that a reimbursement of skimmed SNAP benefits would impact the recipients SNAP budget. While we understand the reason for such a concern, we believe it is misplaced here because SNAP rules permit a time-limited or one time grant to be excluded from the SNAP budget. Legal Aid joins with Council Member Aviles and all cosponsors in calling for the New York State legislature to replace stolen SNAP benefits and implement common sense improvements to the technology of EBT cards to protect against theft.

Preconsidered Int. _____ The Legal Aid Society supports the goal of Preconsidered Int. 2026-1631 , Creating a SNAP anti-fraud officer and fraud awareness campaign. We agree that HRA should make every effort to notify community members of the risk of skimming and take proactive steps to safeguard benefits until the state is able to fully implement chip EBT cards. We also agree that HRA should

work in collaboration with the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and other city and state agencies to identify procedures and best practices to prevent fraud across the five boroughs.

SNAP for All (A6632/S9033): Additionally, to respond to the new immigrant exclusion categories implemented by H.R.1, we encourage the Council to support state legislative efforts to include funding for a state SNAP benefit in this year's budget. SNAP for All would ensure that legally present immigrants, including the 40,000 New Yorkers newly excluded, would have access to state funds to feed their families.

CONCLUSION

As the federal government further abdicates its obligations to the public, local implementation matters more than ever. HRA must make every effort to ensure that the City does not compound federal cuts with preventable administrative failures. No New Yorker should lose access to food because of bureaucracy.

We thank the Committee for its work on the important topic of hunger and food insecurity in New York City, and for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We look forward to working with all City government partners to ensure access to SNAP benefits.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Testimony of UJA-Federation of New York

**Committee on General Welfare
Oversight hearing: Food Insecurity
Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Submitted by: Abbie Rubin-Pope
April 13, 2026**

On behalf of UJA-Federation of New York and our network of nonprofit partners across New York City, thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Abbie Rubin-Pope, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Associate at UJA-Federation of New York.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need – identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and allocates roughly \$200 million each year to support older adults, combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, strengthen Jewish life, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

Food insecurity continues to be a persistent and growing challenge across New York City. More than 2 million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity, driven by the lingering impacts of the pandemic, economic instability, and rising costs of living. This crisis is placing increased strain on both public benefits systems and the emergency food network.

UJA has invested approximately \$3.3 million in FY26 to address food insecurity, including funding for pantry staffing, digital infrastructure, emergency food support, and innovation to improve efficiency across the emergency feeding system. Across a broad network of pantry sites and community partners, these investments help ensure that New Yorkers can access food with dignity and consistency.

Innovations such as digital pantry systems have demonstrated that efficiency and dignity can go hand in hand. By streamlining ordering and distribution, these systems allow staff to spend more time engaging with clients, strengthening relationships, and providing more personalized

support. As a result, clients experience not only improved access to food, but also greater connection and care within their communities.

UJA is grateful to the Administration for baselining and including additional funding for the Community Food Connection program in the FY 27 Preliminary Budget. This funding will help those experiencing food insecurity, but more needs to be done to expand access to food to vulnerable populations. The following recommendations outline how the services and supports targeting food insecurity can be strengthened and ultimately have a wider impact on New York City residents.

SNAP and SNAP Skimming

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a critical lifeline for millions of New Yorkers, helping individuals and families afford food and reducing pressure on emergency food providers. However, SNAP is increasingly undermined by benefit theft, commonly known as EBT skimming.

This form of fraud has had a devastating impact on low-income New Yorkers. When benefits are stolen, households are often left without resources to purchase food for weeks at a time, forcing them to skip meals or turn to already overburdened food pantries. Older adults and individuals with limited digital literacy are particularly vulnerable to these scams and less likely to report theft.

In recent years, tens of millions of dollars in SNAP benefits have been stolen from New Yorkers, and the true scale of the problem is likely even greater due to underreporting. The expiration of federal reimbursement for stolen benefits has further exacerbated this issue, leaving many households without recourse.

UJA strongly supports Introduction T2026-1631, which would establish a SNAP anti-fraud officer and implement a citywide public awareness campaign. This legislation is a critical step toward:

- Identifying neighborhoods most impacted by SNAP fraud
- Improving communication with SNAP recipients
- Coordinating with community-based organizations
- Educating the public on how to prevent and report benefit theft

Strengthening fraud prevention and awareness is essential to protecting access to food for vulnerable New Yorkers and ensuring the integrity of the SNAP program.

Emergency Food Assistance Systems

As access to SNAP continues to be challenged, the emergency food network continues to absorb increased demand. Food pantries and community-based providers are serving more New Yorkers than ever, while facing rising costs and limited resources.

Sustained investment is needed to:

- Support pantry operations and staffing
- Expand capacity to meet growing demand
- Modernize systems that improve efficiency and client experience

Without adequate support, providers will be forced to make difficult decisions that could limit access to food or reduce quality of service.

Culturally Competent Food

New York City's diversity must be reflected in its food assistance programs. Access to culturally competent food—including kosher and halal options—is essential to ensuring equitable access to nutrition.

Providers often face barriers in sourcing and properly handling culturally appropriate food, and without adequate training and resources, food may be underutilized or inaccessible to the communities it is intended to serve.

The City should:

- Support training for providers on culturally competent food provision
- Ensure procurement systems allow for culturally appropriate food options
- Allocate resources in a data-informed way to meet the needs of diverse communities

Providing culturally competent food is not only about access—it is about dignity, equity, and ensuring that all New Yorkers can fully benefit from the services available to them.

Congregate Meals and Older Adult Nutrition

Congregate meal programs remain a critical component of New York City's food security infrastructure, particularly for older adults. These programs do more than provide food—they offer consistent access to nutritious meals, reduce social isolation, and serve as trusted points of connection to additional services and benefits.

However, congregate meal providers have faced years of flat funding despite rising food and operational costs. This sustained underinvestment has made it increasingly difficult for providers to maintain both the quality and quantity of meals, even as demand continues to grow.

For many older adults living on fixed incomes, congregate meals are a primary and reliable source of daily nutrition. Without adequate funding, providers may be forced to reduce portions, limit menu options, or scale back services—directly impacting the health and well-being of participants.

Investment in congregate meals is also a cost-effective public health strategy. Access to consistent, nutritious meals helps prevent hospitalizations, supports chronic disease management, and allows older adults to remain in their homes and communities longer.

The City must prioritize increased funding for congregate meal programs to stabilize providers, meet rising demand, and ensure that older New Yorkers can access healthy, dignified meals in community-based settings.

Conclusion

Food insecurity in New York City remains a complex and urgent challenge that requires coordinated investment and policy action.

UJA urges the City Council to:

- Continue to invest in the Community Food Connection program
- Strengthen and protect SNAP, including passing Introduction T2026-1631
- Invest in the emergency food network
- Support innovations that improve dignity and efficiency in food access
- Ensure equitable access to culturally competent food
- Invest in congregate meals and support older adult nutrition

UJA stands ready to partner with the Council to strengthen New York City's food system and ensure that all New Yorkers can access the food they need with dignity. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please contact rubin-popea@ujafedny.org with any questions.



**UNITED
NEIGHBORHOOD
HOUSES**

45 Broadway, 22nd Floor, New York, NY 10006
212-967-0322 | www.unhny.org

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

Oversight: Food Insecurity

**Submitted by Tara Klein, Deputy Director of Policy & Advocacy
April 13, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare for convening today's oversight hearing on food insecurity.

United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH) is a policy and social change organization with a mission to promote and strengthen settlement houses' neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. Settlement houses provide multi-generational services designed to support individuals, families, and communities. Settlement house programs build bonds within and between communities and create opportunities for advocacy and social change. UNH was founded in 1919 by settlement house leaders who recognized the strength in their collective voices to drive important social reforms. With this goal, UNH was tasked to coordinate the efforts of settlement houses; document their shared learning and experiences; and increase the influence and impact of settlement houses for the greater good of New York communities. UNH has successfully advocated for fair and affordable housing, child labor laws, inclusive policies and services for immigrants, adult literacy education, public recreation space, quality child-care and after-school programs, job training, programs serving older adults, access to the arts and to healthy food, and more.

Settlement houses address hunger through benefits enrollment, pantry services, community outreach, and referrals. Across the settlement house network, nearly 70,000 individuals received support with public benefits enrollment last year, including through NYC Benefits, the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program. Still, resources and government support remain sparse.

Food insecurity remains a top community need for New Yorkers. With rising housing costs and federal changes to SNAP, settlement houses continue to see an escalation in demand for food assistance across the five boroughs. In 2023, 14.5% of New Yorkers reported food insecurity—meaning they sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat—compared to 10.7% in

2019.¹ Roughly 1 in 5 New York children (19%) were food insecure in 2023.² Food insecurity falls disproportionately along racial lines: 26% of Hispanic New Yorkers, 25% of Black New Yorkers, and 9% of white New Yorkers reported food insecurity. Noncitizens are nearly twice as likely to be food-insecure as U.S.-born and naturalized citizens.³

Recent federal policy changes, such as expanded Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) work requirements and new restrictions on immigrant eligibility under H.R.1, will push more New Yorkers to utilize emergency food assistance at community-based organizations, which will further strain the long pantry lines that are already the norm at settlement houses.

This testimony will highlight the new SNAP work requirements and how community service can meet those requirements, ways to address the scourge of SNAP skimming, and enhancing food security for immigrant New Yorkers. We also emphasize the importance of funding programs that we raised in our Preliminary Budget testimony last month, such as the Community Food Connection (CFC) program and NYC Benefits.

New SNAP Work Requirements and Community Service

The federal administration has implemented new barriers to accessing SNAP that requires Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) recipients to meet specific work requirements, which is expected to impact hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers; similar rule changes will be coming soon for Medicaid recipients. These work requirements can also be met through community service or volunteer hours. Settlement houses are eager to assist New Yorkers who are unable to access SNAP benefits that they could previously access, and many have volunteer opportunities available, thus offering a win-win solution that also benefits the community. In fact, last year 13,535 people volunteered with UNH member settlement houses. Still, it takes staff time and money to manage volunteers, and the City should provide financial support and technical assistance to organizations who are providing these volunteer opportunities.

Some of this work is already happening, and we encourage the City to expand on these efforts:

HRA Community Service Partnership

The NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) has created an opportunity for CBOs to partner with the agency to offer community service and volunteer engagement opportunities to support cash assistance and SNAP recipients' compliance with work requirements, including ABAWDs. CBOs can fill out a form on HRA's website, choosing between two pathways: the Community Service Provider (CSP) track for high-touch organizations that can support structured, compliance-driven service activities, or the Self-Enrolled Voluntary Service Provider (SEVSP) track for light-touch programs offering voluntary, small-scale opportunities.

Several of UNH's members filled out this interest form and have been working with HRA to begin the partnership. Most are taking part in the SEVSP track for small-scale opportunities. Under this program, they complete a memorandum of understanding with a larger work referral

¹ [Food Insecurity among the Overall Population in New York](#) - Feeding America

² [Food Insecurity among the Child Population in New York](#) - Feeding America

³ [Food Insecurity Disparities Among Immigrants in the U.S.](#) - American Journal of Preventive Medicine

organization. The larger organization refers clients to volunteer opportunities in their local community including the CBO. The CBOs work on a clearance process and paperwork for the volunteer, receiving some technical assistance and support from the larger organization.

While the program is still under development, our settlement house members participating in the program suggest it is working well so far, and that there is good communication with the larger organization. Still, they are not receiving any financial support to help manage the volunteers, which is essential to ensure volunteers are properly placed, trained, managed, and supported. At one settlement house, there is just one volunteer coordinator who manages volunteers at multiple sites across an agency that serves 50,000 individuals each year. Another settlement house reports having three volunteer coordinators on staff, and that they would feel comfortable taking on up to ten new volunteers before needing to hire another coordinator.

As HRA rolls out this program, we urge the City to invest in the programs signing up to do this work so it can meaningfully carry out the City's goals, and we can begin to create systems to address federal work requirements that show no signs of ending in the near future.

Civic Impact Funding

The Civic Impact Fund (CIF), under NYC Service, provides up to \$10,000 for nonprofit and community-based organizations in TRIE-designated high-need neighborhoods to expand volunteer-driven services addressing food access, safety, and mental health. Organizations use this funding for staff time, supplies, volunteer stipends, and training needs. In 2024, CIF recipients engaged 2,792 volunteers, served 122,584 residents, and distributed 444,385 pounds of food. While these grants are often short-term and meant to support specific time-bound issues, it represents an important tool for the City to support and encourage community service. In addition, NYC Service offers wide-scale trainings and technical assistance for CBOs across the City who want to support and scale-up their volunteer work.

Investing in the CIF program and NYC Service presents an opportunity for SNAP recipients who are ABAWD to continue receiving SNAP benefits by meeting their work requirements through volunteering at organizations across the City. **In the FY27 Budget, the City should invest \$13 million in NYC Service and its Civic Impact Fund, which funds nonprofits to expand their volunteer infrastructure, which in turn will help those newly subject to federal SNAP work or volunteer requirements.** This investment would expand the CIF program to include more community-based organizations and larger grant sizes, allowing CBOs and settlement houses to expand or fund their volunteer programs. For example, between 50 to 100 CBOs could receive grants, worth about \$50,000 for small or mid-sized organizations, up to \$250,000 for larger CBOs, and about \$500,000 of the \$13 million fund could be reserved for administrative support for NYC Service.

SNAP Skimming

Over the last several years, SNAP skimming has emerged as a top challenge facing low-income New Yorkers. UNH's settlement house members have increasingly raised concerns that this is persistently occurring in communities, especially for older adults and those who rely on EBT card benefits to feed their families, and there is little recourse to address the problem. UNH strongly supports Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to transition to EBT chip card

technology to address SNAP skimming, and further supports a \$20 million State investment to create a SNAP skimming victims compensation fund to support New Yorkers who have had their benefits stolen. While most actions to address skimming must come from the federal or State government, there are some limited actions the City can take to help address the problem.

Skimming is the practice of individuals using devices and attaching them to point-of-sale (POS) machines or PIN pads to steal card numbers and other information from credit, debit, and EBT cards. The process of skimming retrieves data from the magnetic strip on an individual's card, which is then used to record the cardholder's PIN.

This has had a devastating impact on families such as skipping meals until the next grocery pay period, and leaving them without funds to buy essential groceries and other necessities. Skimming exacerbates food insecurity and financial stress for already vulnerable households, making it harder for them to meet their basic needs and maintain stability.

The scope of the problem in New York is stunningly large: The [USDA reports](#) that New Yorkers have received almost \$51 million in replacement SNAP benefits between 2023 and the end of 2024. The cost of this problem is likely even higher, since many families do not report the crimes. In a recent [Propel survey](#) of New York State SNAP recipients, over 2,500 of the almost 12,000 survey respondents reported having their SNAP benefits stolen within the past year. Nearly 40 percent of theft victims did not file for reimbursement, with the majority reporting that they weren't aware refunds were an option. The cost of this problem is likely higher, since many families do not report the crimes. With fewer recipients reporting skimming thefts due to the federal government no longer providing compensation funds, it is nearly impossible to have an accurate grasp on the amount of funds being skimmed.

UNH has been urging Governor Hochul to transition EBT cards with more secure chip card technology and we are grateful for the inclusion of chip cards in her Executive Budget Proposal. According to Visa, EMV chip cards decreased fraud by 87 percent from 2015-2019 because they have higher amounts of encryption technology on the chip. Several states have taken action to replace the cards on their own, including California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma. California saw an [83% decline](#) in skimming fraud when it implemented the chip cards in 2024-2025. We are grateful that New York will be the next state to make this simple and impactful change and we hope the Council will support this policy.

Resolution 21

We urge the City Council to support Council Member Alexa Avilés Resolution 21, which calls on the New York State Legislature to pass and for Governor Hochul to sign A03578/S403 to establish a SNAP and cash assistance fraud victims compensation fund. This aligns with UNH's advocacy at the State level of establishing a SNAP compensation fund. The State Senate included a \$3 million compensation fund in its one house budget resolution last month, and as the budget process runs late we hope that Council will support our efforts to get this funding across the finish line.

Statewide "SNAP4All" program

At the State level, UNH is advocating to create a "SNAP4All" program, which would utilize state funds to provide food benefits to low-income New Yorkers who are currently ineligible for SNAP due solely to their immigration status. Federal law limits SNAP participation to U.S. citizens and certain lawfully present non-citizens, while roughly 673,000 New Yorkers are excluded from SNAP for no other reason than their immigration status. Last year's federal spending bill went even further and struck existing SNAP eligibility for refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking, representing 41,000 New Yorkers. Every New Yorker deserves the basic human right to food, regardless of their citizenship status. Investing in SNAP4All ensures every New Yorker has the food they urgently need.

The NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council recently recommended the creation of a state food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status. Several states have recently enacted similar programs, including California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington. SNAP4All is detailed in legislation S.9033/A.6632 (Senator Rivera and Assemblymember González-Rojas).

We are grateful that the previous Council expressed support for this concept through the adoption of Resolution 57 of 2024, which calls on the state to advance this policy for older adults. **We urge the Council to support our ongoing efforts to create a SNAP4All program at the State level, and to explore new ways the City can step in and support these populations.**

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at tklein@unhny.org.

April 14, 2026

Dear Chair Hudson and members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare. My name is Alexina Cather, and I am the Director of Policy and Special Projects at Wellness in the Schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on hunger, food security, and the critical role of SNAP.

At Wellness in the Schools, we partner with public schools across New York City to support scratch-cooked meals, nutrition education, and building a culture of school wellness. Through this work, we see firsthand how deeply food access shapes a child's ability to learn, grow, and thrive. For many of the students we serve, consistent access to nutritious food is not guaranteed—and SNAP plays a vital role in helping to fill that gap.

The scale of need in New York City is significant. Approximately 1.4 million New Yorkers, nearly 15% of the population, are food insecure. At the same time, nearly 1.8 million New Yorkers, including over 500,000 children, rely on SNAP benefits to afford groceries. That means roughly one in five city residents, and nearly one in three households, depend on this program.

For families with children, SNAP is not supplemental; it is foundational. About one-third of SNAP households in New York City include children under 18. These are the same children we see in our school cafeterias every day, where school meals and SNAP together form a critical nutrition safety net.

Yet even with SNAP, families are stretching limited resources. The maximum benefit is roughly \$376 per household in New York, or around \$12 per day, an amount that is increasingly difficult to reconcile with the cost of food in New York City. When benefits fall short, children feel the impact—in their energy levels, their concentration, and their ability to fully participate in school.

As federal changes to SNAP are considered, we must protect and strengthen, not weaken, this essential support. Proposed cuts, increased administrative burdens, and restrictions on eligible purchases risk destabilizing families who are already navigating the high costs of living. Even short disruptions in benefits can have immediate consequences for children's well-being.

We also strongly support efforts to modernize SNAP to better reflect how families live today. Allowing SNAP benefits to be used for hot, prepared foods would provide critical flexibility for working families, particularly those with limited time, equipment, or stable housing. This is a practical, common-sense change that would make the program more responsive and more humane.

Additionally, protecting recipients from benefit theft and ensuring compensation for stolen SNAP funds is essential. For families living paycheck to paycheck, losing even a small amount of benefits can mean going without food.

Addressing hunger in New York City requires a comprehensive approach, and SNAP must remain a cornerstone of that effort. It works in tandem with school meals, emergency food

providers, and community-based programs to support children and families across the five boroughs.

At Wellness in the Schools, we see every day what happens when children have access to nourishing food and when they do not. Hunger is not just a health issue; it is an educational and equity issue. Protecting SNAP is one of the most important steps we can take to support student success.

We thank the Committee for its leadership and urge continued action to strengthen and safeguard SNAP for New York City families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Alexina Cather
Director of Policy and Special Projects
Wellness in the Schools



Testimony Submitted by
Chef Gregory Silverman, CEO, West Side Campaign Against Hunger
For the NYC General Welfare Hearing
April 13th, 2026

Dear Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today and for your continued leadership in addressing food insecurity across New York City. My name is Greg Silverman, and I am the CEO of West Side Campaign Against Hunger and Executive Director of The Roundtable NYC. The Roundtable is a coalition of nine of the largest emergency food providers in New York City: Citymeals on Wheels, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Met Council, New York Common Pantry, Part of the Solution (POTS), Project Hospitality, St. John's Bread and Life, The Campaign Against Hunger, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger.

Together, our members serve communities in all five boroughs and collectively support a network of more than 800 pantries, soup kitchens, and community-based food providers that serve over one million New Yorkers annually. We are here today at a moment of deep and growing need. Food insecurity in New York City remains persistently high and continues to rise. More than 1.4 million New Yorkers are currently experiencing food insecurity, including hundreds of thousands of children. Emergency food providers are seeing higher demand than ever before, while also facing rising food costs, supply chain challenges, and workforce strain.

At the same time, federal instability is placing even greater pressure on our already overburdened system. More than 1.7 million New Yorkers are at risk of losing access to SNAP benefits due to federal disruptions and the failure to deploy emergency funding. SNAP is the single most effective anti-hunger program in the country. When it is weakened, the consequences are immediate and severe: families skip meals, seniors stretch limited resources, and working New Yorkers are pushed deeper into crisis.

Emergency food providers cannot replace SNAP; however, we are, as always when tragedy strikes our city, being asked to absorb the shock. At WSCAH, thousands upon thousands of our customers we serve rely on SNAP. If these benefits are reduced or disrupted, along with the continued high food inflation and low wages in our city, we expect to see a massive increase in demand for our pantry services. Without decisive local action, these federal changes will dramatically increase hunger across New York City. That is why we urge the City Council to act with urgency and intention to protect New Yorkers and strengthen the emergency food system with dignity.

First, we call on the City to baseline \$100 million annually for Community Food Connection. CFC is the backbone of New York City's emergency food network, supporting more than 700 food pantries and community kitchens. This funding is flexible, efficient, and essential; it allows providers to respond in real time to rising demand and shifting needs.



A permanent \$100 million baseline will stabilize a system under unprecedented strain, enable providers to meet growing demand amid rising food costs, and ensure equitable distribution of resources to high-need communities. We also encourage continued improvements to CFC eligibility and data targeting to ensure resources are reaching communities with the highest levels of food insecurity.

Second, we urge the City Council to make the Feeding Our Communities initiative permanent by baselining it at \$15 million annually and aligning its innovative efforts with Mayor's Office of Food Policy supply gap data and CFC data to make sure impact are strengthened. This funding has proven critical in helping providers respond quickly to supply gaps and emergencies. Making it permanent, focused on frontline distributions and its data aligned across emergency feeding sector will ensure the system remains nimble, resilient, and responsive as conditions evolve.

Together, these two investments represent a commitment not just to emergency response—but to stability, dignity, and equity in how New York City addresses hunger.

We also want to acknowledge the legislation under consideration today, including efforts to expand access to hot foods through SNAP and to protect victims of benefit theft. These are important steps that recognize the real-world barriers many New Yorkers face in accessing food.

At The Roundtable, we see every day how community-based food providers serve as a direct and critical lifeline for New Yorkers. But we cannot do this alone. As federal support falters, and state budgets stagnate, the City must lead.

New Yorkers should not go hungry because of federal inaction or cruelty. The City Council has the opportunity, and the responsibility, to fill the gap with compassion, dignity, urgency, and sustained investment. With strong, permanent funding for CFC and Feeding Our Communities, New York City can build a more resilient, equitable food system that ensures every New Yorker has reliable access to nutritious food.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to addressing food insecurity.

Chef Greg Silverman

Executive Director and CEO of The West Side Campaign Against Hunger
Co-Founder and Executive Director of the RoundTable: Allies for Food Access
Co-Founder and Board Chair of The Alliance for a Hunger Free New York

263 West 86th street
NY NY 10024
gsilverman@wscah.org

TO; NYC Council Committee on General Welfare

DATE: April 13, 2026

RE: TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE

FROM:

MY EMAIL:

A CALL FOR THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL TO ALLOCATE AT LEAST \$250,000 TO SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE TO FUND A NETWORK OF SCHOOL-RUN FARM STANDS AND HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS TO ADDRESS CHRONIC FRESH FOOD INEQUITY AND INSECURITY

Dear NYC Council General Welfare Committee Chair Crystal Hudson and Committee Members:

My name is Sarah Lazar. I am a facilitator with The Service Learning Project, working with the 4th Graders at PS 147 in Brooklyn.

I am a resident of New York City, submitting testimony to support Seeds in the Middle's request for \$250,000 for a new, more impactful approach to addressing chronic food insecurity and inequity in our low-income neighborhoods that suffer from a systemic lack of access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables, cooking classes and healthy choices.

We want our school to be part of this network and are appealing to you to support this powerful initiative. Their proposal for the Brooklyn Delegation directly applies to Brooklyn, but we are calling for funds to also impact all neighborhoods in need - especially those in the Bronx, Manhattan and Brooklyn suffering from the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, maternal and infant mortality rates and premature death - all related to poor diet.

Kindly see Seeds in the Middle's proposal at the end of this letter. This is what we support.

Here is why:

Hello! We are the 4th Graders at PS 147 in Brooklyn, and we have been learning about how racism impacts communities in our city, specifically how racism affects food accessibility. We want to help Seeds in the Middle receive this funding because we've learned that:

- One way racism has affected people's access to food is because of "redlining", which is when banks were not letting mostly Black people borrow money so they could buy houses.

- Our city has many “food deserts, ”or neighborhoods with little to no access to grocery stores.
- Without healthy food, you can get sick, and it will affect your health.
- Everyone deserves food. It is not fair that not everyone is able to access food that they need.

Seeds in the Middle has a lot of really great programs. The ones that interested us the most were cooking classes, field trips, gardens to grow healthy food, and student-run farm stands. We really want to help people, and we hope you do too.

Thank you!

Sincerely,
The 4th Graders at PS 147

THIS IS SEEDS IN THE MIDDLE REQUEST

FY27 FUNDING REQUEST: \$250,000 (for up to 10 school-run farm markets in highest-need neighborhoods)

Overview: This is a call for a new, locally-based strategy to overcome persistent food insecurity and directly address the inequitable systemic lack of fresh fruits and vegetables or healthy choices in NYC’s lowest-income, food-insecure zones - all predominantly communities of color suffering from NYC’s highest rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, maternal and infant mortality and premature death.

Seeds in the Middle was founded in 2010, named by 4th graders at PS 91 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, among NYC’s lowest-income neighborhoods. Educators were inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama’s alarm about tragically high rates of diet-related diseases among Black/Brown Americans.

Educators, parents and students at PS 91 realized they lived at the center of the obesity epidemic. They had no nearby fresh produce, healthy cooking classes, affordable fitness or edible gardens - actually no way to avoid preventable diseases tied to poor diet. The closest farmers market was 2 miles away - a distance some parents walked and still do to get nourishing food for their families.

Then and 16 years later, farmers markets exist only in the wealthiest neighborhoods flush with shops and options to buy healthy at reasonable prices. In the dozens of neighborhoods

that Seeds in the Middle serves and has served, farm stands are scant if they exist at all, and produce in supermarkets is often rotten or not fresh, and higher-priced than in affluent areas. The inequity is an invisible wall.

Despite millions of dollars invested by government & foundations, food insecurity, inequity and preventable disease rates have only gone up. Food pantries, free food distributions have not moved the needle on food insecurity and hunger. Nor do they regularly offer fresh healthy food. And people are forced for hours to stand in lines to get anything, always first come first serve. It is not only an insult to dignity, but such a method excludes the most vulnerable who cannot get there, keeps people dependent, fails to grow economic development through food, plentiful in other more fortunate areas. No sustainable access, just ineffective “drive-by” interventions.

This systemic failure is evidenced by NYC statistics year after year: obesity, hunger, diabetes heart disease rates among low-income New Yorkers is only going up, not down. We are calling for:

1. **EQUITABLE LOCALLY-RUN FRESH FOOD ACCESS:** Sustain and expand our network of student-run farm stands in the highest need neighborhoods. **See map** bit.ly/seedsinthemiddlemap2026
2. **DIGNIFIED, EFFECTIVE HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS:** distributed to those in need to “buy fresh” (no bread line)
3. **FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO NEED HEALTHY FOOD:** Engage schools, community-based and government organizations focused on poverty to identify those who need these Hip2B Healthy Bucks (our young moms and seniors, i.e., who can’t wait hours on bread lines)
4. **FRESH COOKING WORKSHOPS;** Hire culinary professionals to help people learn and feel empowered to prepare fresh, nourishing meals at home - guidance they often ask for but don’t get.
5. **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT:** Stipends for teens, parents in need, community members identified by schools or local residents to be trained and run markets as sustainable businesses and school fundraisers.
6. **HIP2B HEALTHY CAFES:** Run by students, offering fresh orange juice, smoothies, i.e, to fundraise, instead of candy, junk food, thus making schools healthy oases amid a swamp of unhealthy advertising.
7. **COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCILS:** Residents say what they need and act, empowering healthy change.



Empowering all to create sustainable healthy places to live

Seeds in the Middle - Hip2B Healthy School Network of Farm Markets/Fresh Cooking - A PILOT

FY27 FUNDING REQUEST: \$250,000 (for up to 10 school-run farm markets in highest-need neighborhoods)

Overview: This is a call for a new, locally-based strategy to overcome persistent food insecurity and directly address the inequitable systemic lack of fresh fruits and vegetables or healthy choices in NYC's lowest-income, food-insecure zones - all predominantly communities of color suffering from NYC's highest rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease, maternal and infant mortality and premature death.

Background:

Seeds in the Middle was founded in 2010, named by 4th graders at PS 91 in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, among NYC's lowest-income neighborhoods. Educators were inspired by First Lady Michelle Obama's organic garden and her alarm about tragically high rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease among Black/Brown Americans.

Educators, parents and students at PS 91 quickly realized that they were at the center of the obesity epidemic with no access to fresh produce, healthy cooking classes, affordable fitness or edible gardens - actually no way to avoid preventable diseases tied to poor diet. The closest farmers market was 2 miles away - a distance that some parents walked and still do in order to consistently get nourishing quality food for their families.

Then and 16 years later, farmers markets exist only in the wealthiest neighborhoods flush with fresh shops and options to buy healthy at reasonable prices. In the dozens of neighborhoods that Seeds in the Middle serves and has served, farm stands are scant if they exist at all, and produce in supermarkets is often rotten or not fresh, and pricier than those in Park Slope or downtown Manhattan. The inequity is stunning, like an invisible wall.

Little to nothing has changed since we started in 2010, despite millions and millions of dollars invested by government & foundations. Food pantries, free food distributions have not moved the needle on food insecurity and hunger. Nor do they regularly offer fresh healthy food. And people are forced for hours to stand in bread lines to get anything, always first come first serve. It is not only an insult to dignity, but such a method excludes the most vulnerable who cannot get there, keeps people dependent, fails to grow economic development through food, plentiful in other more fortunate areas. No sustainable access, just ineffective "drive-by" interventions.

This systemic failure is evidenced by NYC statistics year after year: obesity, hunger, diabetes heart disease rates among low-income New Yorkers is only going up, not down. **TIME TO TRY A DIFFERENT APPROACH!**

Founded by Black and Brown New Yorkers tired of food inequity, we instead are calling for funds to:

1. **EQUITABLE LOCALLY-RUN FRESH FOOD ACCESS:** Sustain and expand our network of farm stands run by students in the highest need neighborhoods. **See our map at bit.ly/seedsinthemiddlemap2026**
2. **DIGNIFIED, EFFECTIVE HIP2B HEALTHY BUCKS:** distributed to those in need to "buy fresh" (no bread line)
3. **FOCUS ON IDENTIFYING THOSE WHO NEED HEALTHY FOOD:** Engage schools, community-based and government organizations focused on poverty to identify those who need these Hip2B Healthy Bucks (our young moms and seniors, i.e., who can't wait hours on bread lines)
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6. **HIP2B HEALTHY CAFES:** Run by students, offering fresh orange juice, smoothies, i.e, to fundraise, instead of candy, junk food, thus making schools healthy oases amid a swamp of unhealthy advertising.
7. **COMMUNITY FOOD COUNCILS:** Residents say what they need and act, empowering healthy change.

These are current partners of Seeds in the Middle - More schools have asked for us.



Farm Stands Fresh Cooking School Gardens Soccer 2026

Contact us: info@seedsinthemiddle.org
T: 862-701-3858



SOCCER PROGRAM - 

- Hamilton Metz Field

Garden Support

- Brownsville _ PS 184
- East Flatbush: IS 285 Meyer Levin
- Flatbush: PS 235

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1 Bed-Stuy Farm Stand @ Peaches | 9 Coney Island Farm Stand | 17 Flatbush - PS 6 |
| 2 Bergen Beach @ PS 312 | 10 Crown Hts-PLG SIMCA - Spot! Year-round! | 18 Harlem: PS 108 |
| 3 Brownsville - FirstStepNYC - SCO | 11 Crown Heights: PS 241 | 19 OceanHill - B'ville @PS-IS 178 |
| 4 B'ville @ PS-IS 184 | 12 Crown Heights @PS289 | 20 Sunset Park - PS 1 |
| 5 B'ville - MS for Arts/Philosophy | 13 Cypress Hills @ PS938, MS935 | 21 Sunset Park - PS 24 |
| 6 Bushwick @ PS 145 | 14 East Flatbush @ IS 285 | 22 Staten Island - PS 19 |
| 7 Canarsie at IS 68 | 15 East Flatbush: Cultural Academy for the A | 23 Staten Island - Concord HS |
| 8 Canarsie - HS for Innovation, Arts | 16 Flatbush - PS 235 | |

@seedsinthemiddle

Hi I'm Amber, like the Alert. I come from the Quakers, which is the oatmeal religion. And a trans woman.

I'm a home care aide and tour guide.

I'm also a community mother, I formerly run all-POC punk shows for teens at my Quaker Meeting, I was an Interfaith Center of NY Fellow, and for the general trans community I'd describe myself more as a "Mom! Mommmmm! make me a sandwich!"

I've been in poverty for most my adult life.

Trans woman, before we transition, we have to contend with crippling dysphoria, which is just disruptive as navigating a bigoted world. Since transitioning, jobs that were stable employment for me I started losing under bigoted circumstances. I had an employer tell me they were ok with hiring me as long as I was not "too flamboyant"

I've been on and off food stamps since 2013 or so. I'm just going to make a list of obstacles for me.

I have what I would call crippling ADHD. People think of ADHD and they're just like "oh, do your homework." But to put in perspective, my home care client is a wheelchair user, and looked at me having an ADHD episode and was like "I think your life is harder than me"

Navigating both signing up and re-certification has been prohibitively overwhelming for me, and my experience with the process is that it's been opaque. In the past four years I've had three attempts only to get something wrong or the window to turn things in closes.

One of the hurdles is that as a trans woman we have longer list of bureaucratic nightmares to deal with. People talk about choosing between paying between food or medicine. This also applies to the budget of time. Do I navigate the prohibitive bureaucracy of getting surgery, or the bureaucracy of food stamps?

The fact that I'm kind of close to getting to apply to food stamps again comes at the end of other major material obstacles being addressed.

Also, I'm not well fed, so it's hard to focus.

I had a case manager through The Gay Center who was personable, and held my hand through the process, but in 2024 The Gay Center discretely laid off all their case managers with a lot of other staff. I don't think they've been public about, and would love for ya'll to be more aware of.

Additionally, I was taking advantage of the pantry at Brooklyn Community Pride Center's Bed Sty branch, but they closed, I believe also in 2024. One of the pantry resources I use is at my Quaker Meeting, it's a mediocre pantry. Expired cereal.

I think the most reliable subsistence has been just random weekly dinners and my meetinghouse and trans pot lucks and so on.

Finding new pantries that are a fit for me eats into that time budget. I try to not set my step to the tempo of people who have more privilege to me, but as an unspeakably hot trans woman, finding a new pantries means finding spaces where a trans woman is not a circus animal. And being misgendered

while in line or people who hand me the bag is uncomfortable in the way cis people don't have to deal with.

I used to do farm worker organizing, and my mentor told me to always end with a call-to-action, so my asks are this.

1. I want a path to a case manager who's not asleep at the wheel.
2. I think some of the budget issues is because of Eric Adams pausing investment in Queer stuff for 3 years straight, as a stop-gap to more needed reforms, restore and increase funding.
3. There's a lot of trans women who live more Dickensian lives for me, and we're shy and suspicious about The System. Please go where we're at and have one-on-ones and ad hoc conversations about us. Also, we need organizing training.
4. Buy me a sandwich, I'm cute and a good conversationalist.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Berkman

Address: _____

I represent: New York Legal Assistance Group

Address: 100 Pearl St, 19th fl, NY (NYLAG)
NY 10004

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALANA TORNELLO

Address: _____

I represent: HUMAN SERVICES COUNCIL OF NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tara Klein

Address: _____

I represent: UNH

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. prison Res. No. 61-

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Labon? Rahimam (Le-bonni)

Address: _____

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NICHOLAS BUESS

Address: _____

I represent: FOOD BANK FOR NYC

Address: 355 FOOD CENTER DR. BRONX

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

SNIP
0021-2026

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 2026-1550 Res. No. 0021

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cathlene Vargaas

Address: 443 39th Street Brooklyn NY 11232

I represent: Center for Family Life

Address: same as above

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joanna Mendez

Address: 117 W 124th Street, New York, NY 10027

I represent: Children's Aid

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Eckerte

Address: _____

I represent: Met Council

Address: 1 State Street Plaza

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Brune

Address: _____

I represent: HRA 1055

Address: 150 Greenwich St NYC, 10078

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/2026

Name: JAMILA ZOMATI (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: AFRICAN DISHOUT

Address: 1854 CEDAR AVE

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

31

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

Name: Racquel Peters (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: The Campaign Against Hunger

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

Name: Melony Samuels (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: The Campaign Against Hunger

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/20

Name: Marcus Jackson (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Encore Community Services

Address: _____

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Greg Silverman (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: West Side Campaign Against Home

Address: 253 W. 86 St NY NY 10024

27

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Iris Rodriguez (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: DHS

I represent: Chief of Shelter Operations

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diana Salerno

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Administrative Assistant

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cassandra White

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Deputy Commissioner

Address: Street Homeless Solutions

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LISA ZHEX

Address: _____

I represent: Homecrest Community Services

Address: 1413 Ave T Brooklyn NY 11229



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



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 0021-7026

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/13/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Mah Chaturvedi

Address: 2180 3rd Av.

I represent: NYC Food Policy Center

Address: 2180 3rd Av.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

27

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JUDITH SECOR

Address: 8 E 109th St

I represent: New York Common Party

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Hets

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn NY 11232

I represent: The Campaign Against Hunger

Address: 200 Fulton St. Brooklyn NY 11222

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Melony Samuels

Address: 2010 Fulton St. Brooklyn NY 11233

I represent: The Campaign Against Mumps

Address: 2010 Fulton St. Brooklyn NY 11233

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1631 Res. No. 27

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Isabel Ortega-Romero

Address: Brooklyn Borough Hall

I represent: Brooklyn Borough President Reynoso

Address: 209 Joaleman

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

23

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Helen Strom

Address: 40 Recker St 9th Fl

I represent: Safety Net Project, Urban Justice Center

Address: 40 Recker St, 9th Fl NY NY 10006

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MOLLY ECKERLE

Address: _____

I represent: MET COUNCIL

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PEI WEI

Address: _____

I represent: ZAAD ZAAB

Address: REQUEST TO BE ON RETHINK FOOD

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ALI AHMED

Address: _____

I represent: BRAIN FOOD

Address: REQUEST TO BE ON RETHINK
FOOD PANEL

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHANA MCCORMICK, RETHINK FOOD

Address: _____

I represent: RETHINK FOOD

Address: REQUEST TO BE IN SAME PANEL AS ADAMA ALLAHMED, BATH PELWEL.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ADAMA BATH

Address: _____

I represent: AFRIKANA

Address: REQUEST TO BE ON RETHINK FOOD PANEL WITH WEI

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SCOTT FRENCH

Address: _____

I represent: HRA Administrator

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amber Flannery Field

Address: _____

I represent: Quakers

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 163

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/2006

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joel Berg

Address: _____ Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Hungry For Amvics

Address: 50 Broad Street, NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jerome Nathaniel

Address: 150 52nd St, Brooklyn, NY 11232

I represent: City Harvest

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: EMMA LENTZ - BESSIRE

Address: 360 LEXINGTON AVE, NEW YORK NY

I represent: CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/13/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Jacobson

Address: 55 Water Street New York, NY 10041

I represent: EmbemHealth

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julia McCarthy

Address: _____

I represent: New York Health Foundation

Address: 1385 Broadway, NY

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

32

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Matt Brune

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Chief Operations Officer

Address: _____

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

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THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diana Ramos

Address: _____

I represent: SafetyNet Project/Activists

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ADRIANA BAH

Address: _____

I represent: AR. 1000

Address: _____

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

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Adelo Ramirez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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