

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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February 10, 2020

Start: 12:15 PM

Recess: 12:33 PM

HELD AT: 250 Broadway, Committee Rm.  
16th Floor

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Vanessa L. Gibson  
Barry S. Grodenchik  
Robert F. Holden  
Brad S. Lander  
Antonio Reynoso  
Rafael Salamanca, Jr.  
Ritchie J. Torres  
Mark Treyger

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

(sound check) (pause) (gavel)

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: This is a hearing of the New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare. Today the committee will be voting on several bills related to hunger and equitable access to food in New York City. The proposed bills will make critical strides not only on hunger, but on the much needed improve-on much needed improvements to the city's practices on planning, distribution, and data collection related to food. These bills will seek-seek to facilitate greater integration of urban agriculture, food systems into the fight against hunger and inequity. Despites strides such as the rate of food insecurity in the city being on the decline, an estimated one million New Yorkers remain food insecure, and the persistence of the meal gap, which refers to the number of meals missed from insufficient resources is staggering. Food waste and system inefficiencies underscore the need for creating a comprehensive and integrated plan with an average of 8.7 pounds of food wasted by New York City households every week. Addressing these individual institutional and agency wide inadequacies will help to ensure that there is improved access, equity, and

2 security in food for all New Yorkers. Among the  
3 bills we are voting on today Proposed Intro 6650-A by  
4 Council Member Adams would require HRA to provide  
5 information about the Health Bucks Program at  
6 farmers' markets in New York City to all individuals  
7 who receive or apply for SNAP. The Health Bucks  
8 Program was created in 2005 to provide New Yorkers  
9 with additional purchasing power to buy fresh locally  
10 grown produce. This bill would help ensure more SNAP  
11 recipients are taking advantage of the program.

12 Proposed Intro 1659-A by Council Member Margaret Chin  
13 would require DSS in collaboration with the  
14 Department for the Aging to develop a plan to  
15 identify and enroll seniors who are eligible for  
16 SNAP, but aren't yet enrolled. While DFTA and City  
17 Meals on Wheels do help screen elderly homebound New  
18 Yorkers for SNAP benefits, many seniors aren't  
19 connected to the benefits, and are unaware of the  
20 program. As we have heard in testimony from prior  
21 hearings, and as is well documented, hunger and food  
22 insecurity persist among college students. Many  
23 colleges and universities in the city have emergency  
24 pantries. However, we now that the need is greater  
25 than what is being provided. Many SNAP recipients

2 may not be able to prepare meals for themselves, and  
3 may not have adequate facilities to do so such as  
4 those residing in shelter. The utilization and  
5 effectiveness of SNAP could also be improved if  
6 recipients were able to use their benefits to  
7 purchase a hot or prepared meal. Resolution 1024 and  
8 Resolution 1025 by Council Member Farah Louis calls  
9 on the state to expand eligibility for SNAP to  
10 college students and to the—into the Restaurant Meals  
11 Program to allow the disabled, elderly and homeless  
12 SNAP recipients to utilize their benefits for hot  
13 meals and prepared foods at participating stores,  
14 delis and restaurants respectively. Thank you very  
15 much to all the advocates who are here today, and who  
16 testified in the past for joining us, and look  
17 forward to hearing from you all on these critical  
18 issues. I'd like to quickly thank my staff, my Chief  
19 of Staff Jonathan Boucher, and Legislation Director  
20 Elizabeth Adams, and Committee staff Aminta Kilawan,  
21 Senior Counsel, Crystal Pond, Senior Policy Analyst,  
22 Natalie Omery Policy Analyst, and Julia Haramis,  
23 Finance Analyst. Now, I would like to read a brief  
24 statement by Council Member Adrinne Addams, Sponsor  
25 of Intro 1650. This is a statement from Council

2 Member Adrienne Adams on Introduction 1650. Good  
3 afternoon. I would like to start by thanking Chair  
4 Levin for his willingness to deliver these comments  
5 on Intro 1650 on my behalf. Unfortunately, our  
6 current food system is broken. Everyday people  
7 struggle to afford to feed—afford food to feed  
8 themselves and their families. We need to increase  
9 access to healthy food for New Yorkers with easy and  
10 affordable ways for residents to eat their fruit and  
11 vegetable requirements. Previous efforts to increase  
12 food access has not created a comprehensive systemic  
13 change needed to dismantle the deepening racial and  
14 economic inequities experienced in many communities  
15 across New York City. Our food system continues to  
16 exacerbate existing gaps and alienates historically  
17 marginalized communities. New efforts to increase  
18 food equity are needed that cross multiple sectors as  
19 unhealthy food is a problem that falls  
20 disproportionately on poor and low-income people. A  
21 healthy diet can be transformative, and I encourage  
22 my colleagues to vote in favor of Intro 1650 and the  
23 entire package. Sincerely, Council Member Adrienne  
24 Adams. And with that, I would like to turn it over

2 to Council Member Louis the sponsor of Resolutions  
3 1024 and 1025.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you so much  
5 Chair Levin. Good afternoon everyone, and thank you,  
6 chair for the opportunity to speak about these  
7 vitally important resolutions. More than one million  
8 New Yorkers—New York residents are food insecure.  
9 These New Yorkers are forced to make critical choices  
10 between paying their rent, tuition or utilities  
11 versus buying groceries to feed their families or  
12 themselves. This is definitely a crisis. My two  
13 resolutions 1024 and 1025, call on the state to  
14 drastically expand access to the most basic human  
15 right, which is food. Resolution 1024 would call  
16 upon New York—the New York State Office of Temporary  
17 and Disability Assistance to expand STAP—SNAP  
18 eligibility for public—for public college students,  
19 allowing them to use their classroom hours to satisfy  
20 employment requirements. Resolution 1025 calls upon  
21 New York State Legislature to pass and for the  
22 Governor to sign legislation to opt into the already  
23 established SNAP Restaurant Meals Program, which will  
24 allow disabled, elderly and homeless SNAP recipients  
25 to use their benefits on hot meals, and other

2 prepared foods at participating grocery stores, delis  
3 and restaurants. SNAP offers recipients so many  
4 benefits, but the reality is that there are several  
5 barriers that prevent eligible recipients from using  
6 these benefits. It's up to us to keep these barriers  
7 low. The reality is that poverty and homelessness  
8 affect New Yorkers who are employed, underemployed  
9 and unemployed. Allowing vulnerable populations to  
10 use their benefits toward hot and prepared meals  
11 allows them to focus on other pressing issues,  
12 attending school, finding employment, securing child-  
13 childcare and looking after their own wellbeing. In  
14 our fight for equity we must grant New Yorkers who  
15 rely on supportive programs and services full access.  
16 I urge my colleagues today to support these two  
17 resolutions that will help close the gap and end  
18 hunger for millions of New Yorkers. Thank you so  
19 much.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you so much,  
21 Council Member Louis. Do any other Council Members  
22 have any remarks? Okay, seeing none, I will ask  
23 William Martin to call the roll.

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2 CLERK: William Martin, Committee Clerk,  
3 roll call vote Committee on General Welfare. All  
4 items are coupled. Chair Levin.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Aye on all.

6 CLERK: Gibson.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Chair, with your  
8 permission to briefly explain?

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you so  
11 much. Good afternoon Chair Levin and all of my  
12 colleagues. I am proud to vote on all of the items  
13 on today's agenda, and specifically I want to  
14 recognize Council Member Adrienne Adams and Council  
15 Member Margaret Chin. I am a big supporter of the  
16 Health Bucks Program that's administered by DOE/HMH,  
17 and I am one of the Council Members that continues to  
18 provide local discretionary funding to supplement the  
19 work that's already being done in my local district  
20 through monthly nutrition classes working with  
21 Farmers Markets, working with City Harvest and all of  
22 the different mechanisms in our city that really  
23 provide a lot of access. For us in the Bronx it's a  
24 challenge because we know many families are living  
25 literally in food deserts, and access to healthy

2 options should be a necessity, and not a luxury, and  
3 the Health Bucks Program has been providing great  
4 success. So, I look forward to the bill's  
5 implementation, and certainly focusing on seniors and  
6 their eligibility for nutritional benefits and SNAP  
7 is always a great thing because many seniors do not  
8 apply, and I want to recognize Council Member Farah  
9 Louis for her leadership on today's resolutions, and  
10 really making sure that we have partners in the  
11 state. Altada (sp?) the state agency has done a lot  
12 of work with us through the years, and—and certainly  
13 making sure that students in our CUNY system as we  
14 have a new \$1 million pilot that the city has  
15 embarked on with CUNY to focus on access to food  
16 pantries and additional food items. This is just one  
17 further step that allows college students access to  
18 healthier foods. So, with that, thank you colleagues  
19 on important legislation, and I vote aye on today's  
20 agenda. Thank you.

21 CLERK: Lander.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Congratulations  
23 to Council Member Louis as well as the other sponsors  
24 and gratitude for this very important package of  
25 bills. I vote aye on all.

2 CLERK: Reynoso.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER REYNOSO: I vote aye on  
4 all.

5 CLERK: Treyger.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER TREYGER: Aye.

7 CLERK: Grodnenchik.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GRODENCHIK: I want to add  
9 my voice to those who have already spoken. I want to  
10 thank the Chairman for his leadership on this food  
11 issue. I've been on this committee since I joined  
12 the council a little over four years ago, and this  
13 has been a passion of mine as many of you know, and I  
14 continue to advocate that no one should go hungry in  
15 our great city. We have the food, we have the  
16 logistics. It's just a matter of our will to ensure  
17 that nobody goes hungry. So, I think these pieces of  
18 legislation that we are going to pass right now will  
19 help to continue to build that strong foundation for  
20 New Yorker so that nobody goes hungry, and with that,  
21 I vote aye on all.

22 CLERK: Holden.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Aye on all.

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2 CLERK: By a vote of 7 in the  
3 affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions,  
4 all items have been adopted by the committee.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
6 colleagues. We will keep the roll open for another  
7 moment for some of our additional colleagues to come  
8 down. Congratulations Council Member. [pause]

9 CLERK: Continuation roll call Committee  
10 on General Welfare. Council Member Torres.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER TORRES: I vote aye.

12 CLERK: All items have been adopted by  
13 the Committee 8 the affirmative, zero in the negative  
14 and no abstentions.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, at 12:33 PM,  
16 this hearing is adjourned. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date: February 18, 2020