



**Testimony of Jill Berry, First Deputy Commissioner
New York City Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council,
Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging, Subcommittee on Senior
Centers and Food Insecurity
Oversight, Food Insecurity in New York City Hearing
April 19, 2023**

Good morning. My name is Jill Berry and I serve as the First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Social Services (DSS). I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy, and the members of the Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging, and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for holding today's hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City. I am happy to have the opportunity for the Department of Social Services to offer testimony.

I want to begin by relaying a message to any New Yorker who is currently experiencing food insecurity: We are here to help. You can call 311 or visit foodhelp.nyc.gov to find nearby food pantries and community kitchens; in addition, Access HRA and our Benefits Access Centers serve as further resources to connect with assistance.

As the Mayor's Office of Food Policy has outlined in the *Food Metrics Report*, "food insecurity is the lack of access, at times, to enough nutritionally adequate food for an active, healthy life for all members of a household. Food insecure families may worry that food will run out before they have enough money to buy more, eat less than they should, or be unable to afford to eat balanced meals."

The City of New York serves as an active partner in combatting food insecurity. The nation's largest municipal social services agency, DSS assists approximately three million New Yorkers every year, administering critical programs that provide greater food security to vulnerable New York City households.

The Department of Social Services administers critical programs that connect New Yorkers to the food assistance they need. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) helps approximately 1.7 million New Yorkers access nutritious food; the average monthly number of SNAP recipients aged 65 or older in FY 2022 was approximately 360,000 New Yorkers. Community Food Connection (formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program, EFAP) funds more than 600 community kitchens and food pantries across the city. Community Food Connection (CFC) distributed more than 17.7 million pounds of shelf stable and frozen foods in FY 2022. Community kitchens provide hot meals and food pantries provide groceries for clients to prepare meals at home.

The new name reflects the critical role food pantries and community kitchens play in addressing food insecurity across communities citywide, ensuring that everyone has access to fresh, healthy food. DSS CFC's new emergency food distribution model, which launched in September 2022, provides an increased variety of food, including fresh produce, dairy, shelf-stable foods, frozen foods, and more flexibility when ordering and scheduling deliveries.

Additionally, we have progressively pursued culturally sensitive food options in our CFC offerings. For the first time, CFC is providing Halal certified proteins; CFC offerings have also expanded the number of options for Kosher certified foods. In addition to religious dietary needs, we recognize the diversity of our New York communities and endeavor to provide foods people are used to and grew up with. Cultural sensitivity is a shared value; we appreciate your work as a Council in uplifting the need to be intentional in pursuing more culturally sensitive food options and we will continue to work with CFC partners to achieve that aim.

Outreach is an essential component of our work – we have a responsibility to not only make assistance available but make New Yorkers aware that the City is a partner in food security. To that end, the DSS Office of Community Outreach (OCO) conducts targeted outreach campaigns to organizations serving specific populations, including older adults, the LGBTQI community, persons with disabilities, and immigrant communities. OCO conducts presentations and attends resource fairs, farmers markets, and other events to promote SNAP awareness and increase engagement. In addition, SNAP Support Services works to educate the public about SNAP benefits to maximize the City's use of available federal programs to increase the purchasing power of low-income New Yorkers. SNAP Support Services 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 to find nearby food pantries and community kitchens, or reach us through Access HRA or our Benefits Access Centers.

While we endeavor to support a range of nutritious food options at pantries, it is important to remember that external events that impact the national food system also impact local pantries. Supply chain disruptions, inflation, and other external shocks that have consequences for the corner bodegas, supermarkets, and grocery stores also have real consequences for our food pantries.

As a City, we work to be the best partner we can in helping pantries account for the seasonality of items and use funds in the most cost effective ways to get the most out of taxpayer dollars used to support food pantries' important work. We should also keep in mind that as the federal government and New York State government wind down COVID pandemic-related emergency food assistance measures, lines of funding that were available in the past are reduced or halted altogether; some one-time payments have already ended. For example, February 2023 marked the final month of federal funding for supplemental benefits for SNAP (Emergency Allotment of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits). Food pantries also receive lines of funding from multiple levels of government – thus advocacy on the State and Federal levels to be conscious of the challenges food pantries face remains important. Indeed, we value the Council's support and advocacy in reaching out to partners across government to highlight the importance of tackling food insecurity and mobilizing resources to meet neighborhood's needs.

On benefits processing – I would like to reiterate several points made by Acting Commissioner Park when she testified before the Council in March. The COVID-19 pandemic caused extraordinary adversity and resulted in an increase in demand for public benefits; relative to January 2019, January 2023 SNAP applications were up 67%. Throughout, we have pursued steps to streamline the process, make the best use of technology, adapt our systems, and mobilize our teams to accommodate New Yorkers' needs. We prioritized frontline staff hiring, we sought and obtained waivers from State and federal partners, and our teams connected more New Yorkers to benefits than in recent pre-pandemic years, with 1.77 million New Yorkers receiving SNAP benefits – the highest number since 2014. We remain focused on solutions to deliver for our fellow New Yorkers.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today, and we welcome your questions.

Thank you.



Asian American Federation

Testimony for New York City Council Committee on Aging

Jointly with the Committee on General Welfare and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

April 19, 2023

Written Testimony

I would like to first express my gratitude to the Committee Chairs and Council Members of the Aging, General Welfare and Food Insecurity committees for organizing this hearing, and allowing the Asian American Federation (AAF) to present its written testimony regarding the needs of our older-adult community. My name is Lisha Luo Cai, the Advocacy Coordinator at AAF, where we are honored to represent the unified voice of 70 nonprofit organizations serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers. At AAF, we also lead the Seniors Working Group, the first Asian-senior-focused coalition in New York State, consisting of 12 Asian-led and Asian older-adult-serving AAF member organizations.

First, here are some statistics that highlight the experiences of our older-adult Asian community, and the crucial work of our Seniors Working Group: in 2021, these organizations served nearly 250,000 Asian older adults, out of which 87,000 were low-income individuals. Despite 13.9% of the city's older population being Asian, there is still much work to be done to cater to our community's needs, particularly since the number of Asian older adults living in poverty has surged by 63.4% from 2010 to 2019—the largest percentage increase among all major racial groups. Of those older adults living in poverty, 29% reside alone, and 80% have Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Our Seniors Working Group prioritizes several key needs of our older-adult community: access to food programs, access to direct services at older-adult centers, safety from anti-Asian violence, and combating mental health and social isolation. Access to food programs has been identified as the most crucial issue. Amidst continuing pandemic-related and anti-Asian-hate-related isolation and surging food costs, many of our most vulnerable are being compelled to make a difficult choice between hunger or compromising their safety. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are facing significant pressure, as they have to scale up congregate meal services while also serving a senior population that remains indoors. While in-person services are essential to expand, it is imperative to recognize that there have been permanent changes in behavior, and a significant portion of seniors still require food deliveries.

Although Asian New Yorkers constitute at least 10% of the population in more than half of the City Council districts, with the other half experiencing some of the most significant growth in Asian populations, it is concerning that the Asian American community received only 1.4% of the total dollar value of New York City's social service contracts from Fiscal Year 2002 to 2014. This reflects a larger, long-standing trend. As the Seniors Working Group members balance the requirement for culturally competent food, reopening senior centers per the City's expectations, and addressing the needs of isolated seniors, they are facing a daunting task and are overburdened, understaffed, and at risk of burnout.

Thus, in order to support the critical work of our Seniors Working Group and address the needs of the vulnerable older-adult Asian community, we make the following recommendations:

1. Continue funding a network of linguistically and culturally competent food service programs that provide alternative food benefits to older adults.

2. Increase funding to Asian-led, Asian-serving older-adult service providers, and expand this funding to include time and expenses spent on case management.
3. Our CBOs are juggling expansion of in-person services while catering to the needs of an isolated senior population without funding to meet the demand for both streams. The City must support both workstreams and acknowledge the differing demands amongst our community members, especially when it comes to basic needs like food access.

The Asian American Federation is grateful for the chance to highlight the essential work that needs to be done and for prioritizing the voices and needs of our older adults and service providers, who are the real experts in this area. We are excited to collaborate with all of you, and policymakers are always welcome to attend our Seniors Working Group meetings. Thank you.



**Testimony of
Kevin Jones
AARP New York**

**Committee on General Welfare Jointly with the
Committee on Aging and the Subcommittee on Senior
Centers and Food Insecurity**

Subject: Food Insecurity

April 19, 2023

Contact: Erik Kriss (518) 360-9213 | ekriss@aarp.org

Good afternoon, Chairs Ayala, Hudson and Mealy and members of the City Council Committees on Aging and General Welfare.

My name is Kevin Jones and I am the Associate State Director for Advocacy at AARP New York, which represents 750,000 members in New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Older adults represent New York's fastest-growing demographic. According to a new report from the Center for an Urban Future (sponsored by AARP), New York's 65-and-over population grew by 31 percent over the last decade, or more than 800,000 people, while the under-65 population shrank by nearly half a million.

In New York City, every borough's 65-plus population increased, including by 35 percent in the Bronx, 39 percent in Queens, 36 percent in Brooklyn, 33 percent in Manhattan, and 35 percent on Staten Island. Today, the boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn each have more residents ages 65 and over than the entire population of any other city in the state.

Additionally, the number of older New Yorkers living below the poverty line increased by 37.4 percent over the past decade. An estimated 21% of older adults in New York City live in poverty forcing them to make tough choices such as paying rent or buying food and Black, Latino, and Asian American New Yorkers are even more likely experience food insecurity and hunger.

Despite this new demographic reality, the city is not prioritizing the basic needs of our older adults. Before discussing food insecurity, I'd like to underscore that NYC Aging receives less than one percent of the city budget. And now, the mayor proposes cutting even that small amount by \$25 million despite the increased demand for aging services.

We need to invest more to support older adults, not less. This is especially true when it comes to food insecurity, particularly because of the impacts of inflation, which has rapidly increased food prices, making it even harder to put food on the table. Over 2.2 million New York City residents are food insecure, roughly 25 percent of the population.

Specifically, we are asking the city to:

- Increase investment in home-delivered and congregate meals by \$29.4million to meet rising inflation costs and increased demand for services.
- Expand the city's funding allocated for home-delivered meals programs to ensure that more eligible older New Yorkers can access two meals per day, seven days per week, with culturally appropriate food options.
- Increase the per-meal reimbursement rate for meal providers, given that the city's funding currently does not cover the cost of these meals.

I'd also like to take a moment to address access to SNAP, the federal food stamp program which has been linked to better health outcomes and reduced hospital and nursing home admissions among older adults, resulting in millions of dollars in savings for taxpayers.

Unfortunately, participation in SNAP among eligible older adults is low. Reasons for the low participation rate include the stigma associated with the program, a burdensome application process, and other barriers. Additionally, many older New Yorkers saw a reduction in their monthly SNAP benefits after COVID emergency allotments were ended on March 1st. Although this emergency COVID measure expired, there's no expiration date in sight for inflation-boosted prices on groceries.

We recommend the following to increase participation rates:

- Allow Medicaid recipients to opt-in to SNAP.
- Expand outreach and education to inform SNAP participants of the opportunity and how to shop for groceries online using SNAP benefits safely.

Older New Yorkers built this city and made it great. Without real investment, we will leave our city's older adults behind. The over 1.8 million older adults living in New York City deserve better.

Thank you.



Testimony

**New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Committee on Aging
Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity
Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City
Wednesday, April 19, 2023**

**Submitted by:
Lakisha Morris
Director of Operations, Community Outreach Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Catholic Charities Community Services on the challenges we face as food costs continue to rise and available funding remains on a steep decline. I am Lakisha Morris, director of operations within the Community Outreach Services Division. As you continue the budget process, we ask that you consider the challenges facing those in our city who continue to experience food insecurity and the limitations of providers, like us, who continue to serve them with dwindling resources.

The Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York seeks to uphold the dignity of each person as made in the image of God by serving the basic needs of the poor, troubled, frail and oppressed of all religions. We collaborate with parishes, as well as non-Catholic and Catholic partners, to build a compassionate and just society. Through a network of administered, sponsored, and affiliated agencies, Catholic Charities delivers, coordinates, and advocates for quality human services and programs touching almost every human need.

Workforce Development, Investment in Human Service Agencies & Contract Reform

As much attention has been paid to high vacancies and attrition in City agencies, human services agencies likewise continue to struggle with astounding vacancy numbers. One Catholic Charities agency reports having nearly 200 current vacancies in both direct service and operations staff lines. Another stated that higher-than-normal vacancy rates for clinicians and mental health treatment providers, child welfare case planners, and direct support professionals limit the services they can provide to the community and have the potential to adversely impact client safety. We thank the Council for its support of a \$60 million investment in the human services workforce in FY23, a welcome step toward alleviating the effects of years of underinvestment, even as guidance was delayed for at least 6 months and funding totaled less than the 4% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) the Council included in budget negotiations.

Despite improvements, rising costs have outpaced contract rates, which, combined with the difficult and often in-person nature of human services' work, has led to profound recruitment and retention issues as workers take lower-risk but higher-paying jobs. Without compensation commensurate with the critical skills and expertise required for this mission-driven work, any economic downturn will further pressure the human services community just as more New Yorkers are seeking assistance. The inclusion of a 6.5% COLA, in the FY24 budget, as well as the continued and accelerated progress of the Clear the Backlog Initiative and the recommendations of *A Better Contract for New York: A Joint Task Force to Get Nonprofits Paid On Time*, will help human services nonprofits to meet current and emerging needs.

Feeding Our Neighbors – Our reach

In the past year, through our Feeding Our Neighbors program, Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS) has distributed over 5 million meals to over 650,000 households. We operate 40 food programs and have enrolled over 7,700 individuals in the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). Our Homebound Program serves over 230 clients who are elderly or disabled.

Feeding Our Neighbors – A growing problem

While the skyrocketing increase in food insecurity caused by the COVID-19 has partially subsided, demand remains elevated from pre-pandemic levels, spurred on by persistently high, and continually increasing, prices that cut into the budgets of both clients and the pantries that serve them.

Likely due to factors stated above, CCCS is experiencing a decrease in-kind donation. We currently receive fresh produce from City Harvest and Food Bank, and while we are grateful for these donations, it is not enough to fill the growing need in the communities we serve. Many of our pantries have seen an uptick in new clients over the past several months. This is in part due to the recent influx of asylum seekers who are dependent upon pantries to feed their families. It is also due in part to the increased cost of food items -- the price of eggs, meats, dairy and fresh produce have increased so dramatically in recent months that they have become unaffordable for many, even those gainfully employed. Unfortunately, our resources are limited. As costs continue to rise and demand continues to increase, we cannot afford to maintain a constant supply of these items on any regular basis.

The recent expiration of enhanced SNAP benefits further exacerbates food insecurity. During the height of COVID, many households that relied on SNAP were able to ensure that they had enough food to last a full month. While proposed changes to the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) may help certain families, more immediate relief is needed to prevent an irreversible rise in hunger in New York City. Many of the households that we serve are expected to receive a 50% reduction in SNAP benefits.

These reductions combined with the increases in food prices will have many families faced with difficult decisions on how best to prioritize household expenses such as paying rent and preserving their housing or purchasing food.

Feeding Our Neighbors – Our limitations

Catholic Charities Community Services was recently informed that our contract will not be renewed for HPNAP – Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program- a nearly \$2M loss in total. This is a devastating loss to our Feeding Our Neighbors program. Without this funding we will be forced to reduce staffing levels and cut food supplies for 16 of our pantries.

During the COVID pandemic, we were funded \$350k through EFSP – the Emergency Food and Shelter Program -- which allowed us to support 16 of our pantries through additional food purchases and supplement the meals we provided. Recently, this award was reduced to \$225k-a substantial decrease of roughly 35%.. Although EFSP and other funders like it are making efforts to return to pre-COVID funding levels, unfortunately, this is not representative of what vulnerable communities who make up our client base are experiencing.

Reductions in governmental funding as described above, together with the decrease in in-kind support and funding, CCCS will find it extremely difficult to maintain the standard of support that we have been providing over the years, leaving many families and communities without the support that they need to lead and healthy and productive lives.

Feeding Our Neighbors – The answer

To properly address the food insecurity issue that the city is facing, we must be in a position to increase SNAP benefits for families in need of supplemental food support and provide additional funding for smaller food organizations so that they can purchase more nutritious foods for the households that rely on them. In addition, special care needs to be taken for the elderly and disabled, who have dietary and mobility restrictions that limit their access to food. It is undisputed and well documented that access to healthy and nutritious food is a precursor to one's ability to live productively. Hunger disrupts a person's ability to succeed in other areas of their life- academically, economically, physically, and emotionally. Increasing funding to support access to those facing food insecurity is a necessary and life-saving matter that we respectfully call on the City Council to continue to address.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony today.



April 17, 2023

New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

To Whom it May Concern:

On behalf of Catholic Charities of Staten Island (CCSI), we appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony regarding "Food Insecurity in NYC."

CCSI has been a trusted community-based organization serving Staten Islanders for more than 30 years. CCSI has operated Older Adult Centers under contract with NYC throughout our history, including two centers presently – Anderson Neighborhood Senior Center and West Brighton Neighborhood Senior Center. The core service within these centers is congregate meals (breakfast and lunch), to ensure that seniors have access to healthy, well-balanced meals. We have also operated a variety of Emergency Food Service programs since 2002. This unit presently includes a Mobile Food Pantry which serves six locations throughout Staten Island, a community food pantry in Port Richmond, a Food Hub which further supplements seven smaller community-based food pantries, and we are developing a food pantry delivery service for homebound individuals. The provision of food services in these programs allows us to understand the food needs of community members and to see firsthand the harsh impact of reducing and/or eliminating food subsidies, compounded by rising food costs on individuals as well as programs such as ours.

NYC, over the last three years, responded to COVID with a multitude of feeding programs for individuals/families and with funding for agencies to provide food in communities. Many of these programs, such as the SNAP boost, have been scaled back, phased out, or eliminated altogether, and the timing could not have been worse as it coincided with skyrocketing food costs last year. The combined impact has been drastic for most families, especially those who are already struggling to make ends meet living in poverty. People are visiting food pantries at higher rates because of this, but the impact is also felt by pantries, such as those of CCSI. Funding put in place due to COVID is no longer available, so we have had to reduce the amount of food we purchase, and in turn reduce the number of times households can make use of our pantries. Throughout COVID, households could visit any of our pantries

120 Anderson Avenue
Staten Island, NY 10302

www.ccsi.org





weekly. We have since had to scale that down to a maximum of twice per month. We are doing everything in our power to prevent us from having to further reduce it to once per month.

This has also affected services within our Older Adult Centers. Low-income older adults are particularly affected by the aforementioned challenges, and they have also lost to-go meals that had been available to them through Older Adult Centers during COVID. NYC Department for the Aging allowed us to prepare freshly cooked meals in a to-go fashion as "Grab & Go" meals. This allowed older adults to obtain free quality meals in any way they felt safe and comfortable. It also allowed older adults who struggle with food insecurity to have a means to obtain free quality meals to get them through center off-hours and weekends, which is when elders often struggle in isolation. Our elders are especially feeling the impact of these changes over the last six-plus months.

We implore our leaders to reconsider the implementation of these and other valuable food resources to allow our most vulnerable community members the opportunity to not have to struggle with this most basic need. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle LaVignera", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michelle LaVignera

Director of Operations





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

**Testimony of Jenny Veloz, Policy and Advocacy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council
Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19th, 2023**

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Ayala and all the members of the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's oversight hearing on food insecurity. To ensure New York City continues its recovery from the pandemic, we must make strong and robust investments in food and nutrition supports for all families in the city.

New York leaders must address the widespread hunger crisis that was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Nearly 1.5 million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity, including 1 in 4 children.ⁱ This represented a 46% increase in childhood food insecurity over pre-pandemic numbers. Investments in many federal hunger prevention programs have lapsed, leaving children and families struggling to afford healthy meals and groceries. The expiration of federal emergency SNAP allotments and the backlog of SNAP applications (causing delays in families access their benefits) continue to adversely affect New Yorkers who need these services the most. ⁱⁱ According to city data, last year HRA failed to promptly process four of every 10 applications for SNAP, leaving thousands of low-income New Yorkers struggling to pay for groceries as they waited for their benefits. The rate of timely processing fell from about 92% in FY21 to just over 60% in the fiscal year spanning July 1, 2021 to June 30th of 2022.ⁱⁱⁱ With inflation at an all-time high, it is imperative that New York City continue to invest in resources that are vital to the health and well-being of families and children. These food initiatives play a crucial role in ensuring families have healthy food options.

As a member of the NYC Food Policy Alliance, CCC supports the Alliance's [FY24 City Budget Platform](#). In particular, we recommend the following investments in CFY24 Budget to help fight food insecurity:

- **Increase HRA's budget baseline to engage community based organizations (CBOs) in benefits outreach and streamline benefits applications.** CBOs play an integral role in providing information and assistance to individuals applying for benefits, ensuring that people are aware of available benefits and able to access them



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

- **Direct HRA to ensure that any cuts in headcount vacancy do not impact benefits enrollment and frontline positions are not eliminated.** Increase wages to help fill critical vacancies and improve internal systems to more efficient. Delays in processing SNAP applications are causing irreparable harm to families already struggling with other high costs.
- **Increase funding to a total of \$59 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC), formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).** We urge that the \$30 million that was allocated for FY23 and FY24 be baselined and the overall budget increased to a total of \$59 Million to accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program.
- **Evaluate the newly relaunched Grocery to Go Program.** To make the program more impactful, we strongly recommend increasing the monthly credits allotted to each participating household to ensure funds are reaching the individuals the program was intended to serve; expanding the list for diet related conditions to widen the scale of the program; and allowing young adults who meet the other eligibility criteria to participate in the program.

For many families, schools are one of the primary places where children receive consistent meals and can be educated on healthy meals and nutrition.

As such, we support the following school food initiatives:

- **Invest \$37 million to provide flexible food and nutrition education funding.** This funding will allow schools to partner with an organization to provide food and nutrition education for students and help teachers integrate food education into their curriculum. It will also support food and nutrition programs with students, their families and the school community and strengthen implementation of school wellness policies.
- **Increase compensation and head count at the DOE's Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS) to \$3.5 million.** Increasing compensation would reduce vacancies, improve retention and enable OFNS to increase participation in school meals programs.
- **Commit an additional \$200 million in capital funding to continue redesigning remaining middle and high school cafeterias.** There are currently 65 redesigned cafeterias serving over 103,000 students, with around 130 more cafeterias already funded for redesign. This modernization of middle and high school cafeterias shapes students' experience with school meals and increases lunch participation.

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 and Administration to make sure that



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

all New York City families and children have access to the nutritional support they need and deserve to be healthy and thrive.

ⁱ Feeding New York City's Children Beyond the Pandemic. City Harvest. May 2022 Retrieved from:

<https://www.cityharvest.org/food-insecurity/>

ⁱⁱ "40% of NYC Food Stamp Applicants Left Waiting for Benefits, Data Shows." City Limits 11/10/22. Retrieved from:

<https://citylimits.org/2022/11/10/40-of-nyc-food-stamp-applicants-left-waiting-for-benefits-data-shows/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ "40% of NYC Food Stamp Applicants Left Waiting for Benefits, Data Shows." City Limits 11/10/22. Retrieved

from: <https://citylimits.org/2022/11/10/40-of-nyc-food-stamp-applicants-left-waiting-for-benefits-data-shows/>



**Testimony of City Harvest
Before the Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging
and Committee in Senior Centers and Food Insecurity**

Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City

April 19, 2023

My name is Keith Carr and I am the Senior Manager of Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest, New York's largest and longest operating food rescue organization. Thank you, Chairperson Diana Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee, Chairperson Crystal Hudson and members of the Committee on Aging and Chairperson Darlene Mealy and members of the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for holding today's joint hearing on food insecurity in New York City particularly as it raises awareness to food insecurity and hunger's effect on our most vulnerable population, our seniors.

This conversation couldn't be happening at a more urgent time given the recent cessation of the Emergency SNAP Allotments by the federal government. As we speak, over 1.7 million New Yorkers are grappling with how to feed themselves and their families after over \$234 million in lost SNAP benefits, or a total of roughly 40 million lost meals due to the expiration of those SNAP EA benefits in March. As the Speaker mentioned in her State of the City, our city has not fully recovered from the economic, social or public health impacts of the pandemic. Many families are still struggling to make ends meet, including predominately Black, Brown and women-led households that make up most of the frontline and essential workforce. Many of these communities were among the most food insecure neighborhoods in our city, even before March 2020. Now is not the time to roll back benefits or support on any level of government, especially in our city.

The Pandemic's economic toll continues to disparately impact our city overall. Since May of 2020, the unemployment rate in New York City has hovered around twice the national average at around 5.6%. The economic strain that so many New York families are facing continues to materialize at our food pantries. Compared to 2019, average monthly visits to New York City food pantries and soup kitchens remain up nearly 80 percent. To meet the need in NYC, this year City Harvest will rescue and deliver 75 million pounds of food for New Yorkers in need — nearly 20 percent higher than pre-pandemic levels.

But as a food bank that has tirelessly fought to keep food on the plate for millions of New Yorkers for nearly four decades, we know far too well that charitable food programs cannot end hunger without the foundation of effective public policy, nor without the collective power of coalitions. City Harvest is a member of the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a multi-sector group of 75+ food system stakeholders from across New York, including frontline CBOs directly impacted by food insecurity. The Alliance's mission is to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to our current economic and hunger crises, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system. Collectively, we approach this work through an anti-racism lens to ensure communities of color and other systemically under-resourced communities benefit from public policies and funding. City Harvest stands with the Alliance's list of priorities, as you will see presented in the full platform we've printed and submitted for this hearing.

In reviewing the Mayor's Preliminary Budget, City Harvest is uplifting the following priority areas for the FY2024 budget, all of which we believe show urgency for the disparate need in our city and a commitment to equity and our seniors:

1. **Direct the HRA to ensure that any cuts in department headcount vacancy do not impact benefits enrollment and frontline positions are not eliminated**
 - a. As the Speaker emphasized throughout her State of the City, it is of the utmost importance that City Government fills critical vacancies to ensure New Yorkers get the help that they need. We are very concerned with recent reporting that HRA is processing just [46.3% of applications for SNAP benefits](#). Allowing cuts to HRA and other agencies across the board will only worsen this situation. We urge the Administration to reconsider its proposed cuts to HRA and to more seriously address the vacancy rate at the agency, which is greatly contributing to the slow processing of SNAP applications. We also urge the Administration to ensure any cuts in headcount vacancy for HRA do not impact benefits enrollment and ensure frontline positions are not eliminated.
2. **Increase HRA's budget baseline to engage community-based organizations (CBOs) in benefits outreach and streamline benefits applications.**
 - a. We urge the city to increase funding for the agency and CBOs engaged in benefits outreach to meet ongoing demand and improve the administration of critical food benefit programs. The expiration of SNAP EA for over 1.7 million New Yorkers calls for an all-of-government approach to ensure that families maximize the benefits that are available to them. Increased funding for benefit outreach is a vital strategy for the city to do its part in ensuring that CBOs are equipped to help New Yorkers who have been harmed by cuts to pandemic-era programs.
3. **Increase funding for Community Food Connect to \$59 million to reflect the rising cost of food in the program**
 - a. The Mayor's preliminary budget proposes baseline funding of \$23.8 million plus an additional \$30 million for a total program budget of ~\$52 million. We urge that \$30 million that was allocated for FY23 and FY24 to be baselined as well as a moderate increase for a total of \$59 Million to accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need, including

the continuing influx of asylum seekers and other migrants seeking refuge in New York City.

4. **Invest \$38.4 Million of new funding to combat hunger among older adults for home delivered meals programs and congregate meals at older adult centers.**

- a. The reauthorization of the Older American's Act, which improvements were called for in the National Strategy to End Hunger, is expected to be negotiated and enacted in 2024. New York City can set the bar for the national response to senior hunger with real investments in meal delivery programs that have scaled back since the height of the Pandemic, despite senior hunger remaining stagnant compared to other age groups. That is why we stand with the NYC Food Policy Alliance on the following budget requests:
 - i. \$6.7M for inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for home-delivered meals
 - ii. \$27.1M for inflation cost for raw food and other items for congregate meals at older adult centers
 - iii. \$567k to address the DFTA's home-delivered meal waitlist
 - iv. \$4M to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals not provided through DFTA, especially as they have not seen an increase in years.

SUPPORTING DATA

- The number of Seniors served by City Harvest pantry partners has increased by over 77% when compared to pre-pandemic levels (FY19) and continues to increase at a time when all other age groups are not.
- Seniors (*65+) are roughly 15% of New York City's population, but more than 24% of City Harvest Mobile Market participants self-identify as seniors.
- Poverty rates are much higher for children than for adults, including seniors; however, poverty rates have increased for seniors while decreasing for all others between 2010 and 2021 (ACS 5-Year Estimates, 2021)
 - While the Supplemental Poverty Measure indicates that millions of children and *able-bodied adult without disabilities* avoided an even greater economic crisis due to the Child Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credits, pandemic unemployment benefits, changes to SNAP, school meals and rental assistance, millions of seniors on fixed incomes and income-based housing were not eligible for any of these programs.
- Seniors participate in SNAP at a lower rate (70% of eligible seniors participate in SNAP versus over 82% of all households). This is partially due to some seniors on fixed incomes and fixed income-base housing expenses either being eligible for a smaller SNAP allocation, the process of documenting medical expenses being too tedious, missing recertification for their benefits, or other barriers. Increasing benefits and streamlining medical deductions may encourage more seniors to go through the process. **The process should not be a barrier to accessing benefits. Technical support and simplification will help our seniors get the assistance they need.**

- 29% of participating SNAP households across the nation include a senior; the number is 41% in New York State
- According to Feeding America' State of Senior Hunger Report:
 - Compared to 2001, the fraction of food insecure and Very Low Food Secure seniors increased by 29% and 84%. The number of seniors in each group rose 126%, and 222%, which also reflects the growing population of seniors. Continuing with historic trends documented in prior reports, we find that food insecurity is greatest among Blacks and Hispanics, those with lower incomes, those who are younger (ages 60-69), and those who are renters (https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/The%20State%20of%20Senior%20Hunger%20in%202020_Full%20Report%20w%20Cover.pdf)

Conclusion

We thank the Committee on General Welfare, the Committee on Aging, the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity and the Council for holding this vital hearing. City Harvest will remain vigilant in our work to provide food for families today and in our advocacy for legislation that builds resiliency beyond the COVID-19 era. We remain committed to working with you on budget efforts and policy solutions that help New Yorkers become more food secure.

Keith Carr

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TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

**Before the New York City Council Aging Committee
Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Jointly with the Committee on General Welfare, and the Subcommittee on
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity
Honorable Diana Ayala, Chair, and Honorable Darlene Mealy, Chair**

**Oversight: Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19, 2023**

Prepared by:

**Vik Bensen
Policy Analyst**

I would like to thank the Council and Chairs Hudson, Ayala, and Mealy for holding this important hearing on food insecurity in New York City. Citymeals works with the City and the network of home-delivered meal (HDM) providers to fill the gap in the City's program by funding the preparation and delivery of meals on weekends, holidays, and emergencies to homebound older adults alongside additional supplemental feeding and connective services. The Department for the Aging (NYC Aging) funds one meal a day on Mondays through Fridays (excluding holidays); to fill the gap on the remaining 115 days, Citymeals funds the same network of providers to prepare and deliver weekend and holiday meals. In addition, we are the City's primary emergency food responder for homebound older adults.

Two trends have long necessitated a significant investment in aging services: the rapidly increasing number of older New Yorkers, and the increasing poverty rates for this group. As of 2021, there were over 1.3

million New Yorkers 65+ years old—that’s an increase of 35 percent from 2010.¹ In 2021, the poverty rate for this group was 17.9 percent²--older adults are the only group in New York whose poverty rates have increased rather than decreased since 2010.³ These trends are meeting the issues of our moment: lingering economic and health impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, record inflation, skyrocketing food insecurity, and the ending of federal pandemic relief funding for nutrition programs older adults rely on, like SNAP and Home-Delivered Meals.

In response to the pandemic and the exacerbated vulnerability of this already at-risk group, the government mobilized at all levels to fight the wave of food insecurity that swept the nation. Federal relief bills funded expansions to the food safety net targeting older adults, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Home Delivered Meals (HDM), and Congregate feeding programs at Older Adult Centers (OACs). These expansions were critical for older adults and the community-based aging services organizations they rely on, providing funding and regulatory flexibility for nutrition programs and increased purchasing power through SNAP emergency allotments. However, now federal and local emergency supports have ended, and programs are returning to pre-pandemic operations despite the continuing high need and the persistent threat that Covid-19 poses to the health and wellbeing of older adults. While these pandemic-era expansions were meant to be temporary, they continue to be important in addressing gaps in the nutrition safety net for older adults. Therefore, we urge the City to adequately fund food programs targeting

¹ U.S. Census Bureau. S0103: Population 65 Years and Over in the United States, 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. Accessed at: <https://data.census.gov>; and,

U.S. Census Bureau. S0103: Population 65 Years and Over in the United States, 2010 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. Accessed at: <https://data.census.gov>

² U.S. Census Bureau. S0201: Selected Population Profile, 2021 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates Selected Population Profiles. Accessed at: <https://data.census.gov>

³ NY Comptroller: NY Comptroller, New Yorkers in Need: A Look at Poverty Trends in New York State for the Last Decade. Accessed at: <https://osc.state.ny.us>

older adults and work with providers to adapt and improve these programs so they can meet the ever-evolving needs of this rapidly growing and diverse population.

Programs serving older adults, including SNAP, HDM, and Congregate meals, have ultimately fallen short in meeting the needs of the most food insecure older adults. Federally, the Older Americans Act only requires congregate and HDM programs to provide one meal per day, five days a week. This is not enough to meet daily nutritional needs for those without access to additional food. About 14 percent of our meal recipients rely on the one meal they receive per day, and national data from 2018 showed that 66 percent of home-delivered and 54 percent of congregate meal recipients report that these meals provide half or more of their daily food intake⁴. Moreover, the City's HDM program can leave older adults to fend for themselves two days each week unless additional local funding is provided. If it weren't for the weekend and holiday meals provided by Citymeals, homebound older New Yorkers would go even longer without food on a three-day holiday weekend when meal providers are closed.

Older adults who rely on OACs for a daily meal may also not receive enough food to meet their nutritional requirements. Typically, the congregate meal program requires older adults to have their daily lunch at the center, in a congregate setting, so as to offer opportunities for socialization. But this is a needless restriction that may be a barrier for those who need a meal but do not want or feel comfortable dining with others. Nonetheless OACs are not contracted to be open on weekends, nor do they have the necessary funding to provide to-go weekend meals for their most food-insecure attendees. While program staff often go above and beyond to do what they can to help

⁴ Administration on Community Living: ACL's FY18 OAA Report to Congress. Accessed at: [FY 2018 OAA Report to Congress \(acl.gov\)](#)

those needing extra food day by day, this problem should not be left to them—it requires large scale response from the City.

Finally, SNAP can be used by older adults to fill the remaining meal gap by providing additional dollars for the purchase of more food. However, older adults are historically under-enrolled in SNAP, and for many who are enrolled, overly restrictive income requirements leave them with only the minimum benefit level of \$23 per month⁵. Around a third of the HDM participants Citymeals serves receive SNAP, which they use in tandem with their daily meal to meet their food needs.

Federal dollars were used locally during the pandemic to enhance the older adult feeding network. New food programs like GetFood, Grab and Go at OACs, and eventually Recovery Meals, all helped older adults access the food they needed. These new offerings brought important changes to the network like more flexible delivery schedules, an additional meal if needed, and a new option to simply pick up a meal at an OAC to take home. The GetFood program issued new contracts for services to increase the capacity of the HDM network. These contracts had multiple menu options, including cultural meal and frozen meal options, with more flexible delivery times. Moreover, these programs did not require the same intensive intake assessment, removing an important barrier to access for many when applying to HDM. Finally, the SNAP emergency allotments brought all participants at least up to their maximum benefit level, dramatically increasing their food purchasing power. This, combined with innovations in online grocery ordering with EBT, brought newfound benefit adequacy to many older adults receiving SNAP.

⁵ FRAC: SNAP Emergency Allotments—New York. Accessed at: <https://frac.org>

⁶ Administration on Community Living: ACL's FY18 OAA Report to Congress. Accessed at: [FY 2018 OAA Report to Congress \(acl.gov\)](#)

Since these expansions have all expired, programs are returning to their pre-pandemic modes of operation—despite the fact that they were already in dire need of investment and innovation. This means there is now less food, choice, variety, and flexibility for meal recipients, and more strain on the providers, whose contracts cannot support the dramatic inflationary cost increases of the past year. For older adults receiving SNAP, the hardest hit are those receiving the minimum, many of whom have seen benefits fall from \$281 to \$23 per month, a loss of \$258 a month⁶. Households with older adults in them are losing an average of \$168 per month⁷. With inflation increasing the cost of food, these emergency allotments are even more critical to the food security of older adults who are often unable to access other nutrition programs such as food pantries and soup kitchens. The impact of all of these changes will be outsized amongst older adults living alone on a fixed income⁸. Over one third of New Yorkers aged 65 and over live alone, and 33 percent of them live in poverty⁹. HDM participants will be especially vulnerable: 57 percent of our meal recipients live alone, 40 percent rarely or never leave their homes, and 8 percent have no one they can talk to regularly besides their meal deliverer. For these older adults, services like HDM and mobile food pantries are life-saving.

Economic hardship from inflation and the expiration of aid is not only impacting older adults, but also the providers who serve them. While the network has seen increasing need over decades, thousands of new meal recipients have transitioned from pandemic programs to the City’s regular HDM and congregate meals programs. Before the pandemic Citymeals was

⁶ FRAC: SNAP Emergency Allotments—New York. Accessed at: <https://frac.org>

⁷ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: Temporary Pandemic SNAP Benefits Will end in Remaining 35 States in March 2023. Accessed at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/temporary-pandemic-snap-benefits-will-end-in-remaining-35-states-in-march>

⁸ FRAC: “Hunger is a Health issue for Older Adults”. Accessed at: frac.org

⁹ DFTA/NYCAging: DFTA Annual Plan 2022. Accessed at: [DFTA Annual Report](https://dfta.org/annual-report)

serving 18,000 older adults and today we are serving nearly 22,000. Providers have seen on average a 27 percent increase in the cost per meal compared to last year due to significant inflationary costs. Some contracted programs have spent past their food budget, with months still left in FY23. The programs and services offered through the City's network of aging service providers are critical to the health and wellbeing of New Yorkers. Moreover, adequately funding them is a smart investment that yields long-term budget savings. Federal research shows that "for every \$25 per year per older adult that states spend on home delivered nutrition, the state reduces their percentage of lower needs nursing home residents by one percent when compared to the national average."¹⁰ Rather than burying our heads in the sand in the face of the extraordinary economic challenges the city is experiencing, we must understand that there is no returning to "business as usual" and see this as an opportunity. This is the time to commit to modernizing and adequately funding food programs for older adults, acknowledging the diversity of this population and its changing needs.

At Citymeals, we will continue to advocate for federal investment in feeding programs like SNAP, but the administration has the power to act locally to protect the food security of vulnerable older adults. Citymeals recommends the following to adequately address food insecurity for older adults:

\$4 million in the FY24 budget for Citymeals' weekend and holiday meals which are not covered under existing NYC Aging contracts.

The increasing need for meals—due to a rapidly aging population, the impact of Covid-19, and staggering inflation—is straining our ability to

¹⁰ Administration on Community Living: ACL's FY18 OAA Report to Congress. Accessed at: [FY 2018 OAA Report to Congress \(acl.gov\)](https://acl.gov/fy-2018-oaa-report-to-congress)

feed hungry, homebound older New Yorkers. In FY22, our food costs increased 33% and our fuel costs nearly doubled—all while we have served thousands of new meal recipients. Private fundraising cannot keep pace with this growing need, and we urgently require the support of our partners in city government to ensure that we can continue to feed the most vulnerable older New Yorkers.

\$14 million for home-delivered meals and \$46 million for congregate meals at Older Adult Centers to address cost increases for raw food, gas, and other items.

Inflationary costs are making necessary operations for older adult nutrition programs prohibitively expensive. Programs have been pushed beyond capacity for too long due to rising costs and infrastructure needs. While the recent investments to raise the meal reimbursement rate were long-needed and important, they were not enough to address the financial strain that has been compounded by the impact of the pandemic. The network is in dire need of additional funding to offset the rising costs associated with providing these vital nutrition services.

A 6.4 percent automatic cost of living adjustment for human services contracts

Programs cannot function without the staff needed to do the work. HDM and OAC staff were among the frontline workers of the Covid-19 pandemic. They responded to food insecurity across the city while facing their own economic insecurity from low wages set by city contracts. Low, stagnant pay has been a significant obstacle in recruiting and retaining staff across the network. The work is physically and emotionally demanding for the kitchen staff who begin cooking at 5AM and the meal deliverers who work in all conditions,

delivering out of hand-trucks or vehicles. Program directors relay losing talented staff across departments—meal deliverers, kitchen managers, and administrative staff—to comparable private sector jobs whose pay they cannot compete with. These challenges also impact meal recipients: a lack of staff means deliverers have longer routes that take more time to complete and leave less time for a check in. Where relationships between recipients and deliverers provide necessary social contact for older adults, frequent turnover makes it difficult to build familiarity.

Flexibility in HDM and OAC contracts to allow providers to meet food insecure older adults where they are.

Older adults have diverse needs and the City's nutrition services should reflect that reality. There is a middle ground between those who are able and want to attend OAC services and activities, and those who are entirely homebound or bedbound. Some have chronic illnesses that ebb and flow, some are more comfortable going out in the warmer seasons than colder, and some need flexible meal options that can fit around their various appointments and obligations. Finally, older adults are still at the highest risk for severe Covid-19 infections, and many do not feel safe dining indoors due to their individual health circumstances, so they should have flexible options to receive HDM or pick-up Grab and Go meals.

The City should allow any OAC who wants to offer Grab and Go the ability to easily redirect their funds so they can better support older adults. The City should also update their case management assessment to include a person's risk for severe Covid-19 infection (and other communicable illnesses that could be life-threatening) as qualifying them for either HDM or Grab and Go.

Additional funding for HDM and OAC participants assessed to need more than one meal per day.

While Citymeals privately fundraises to fill the gap in the HDM program to provide a daily meal for weekends to homebound New Yorkers, OACs are only able to provide a meal five days a week per their City contracts. But it is clear that many who need a meal during the week also need a meal on the weekend, and they should be able to get one either by taking meals to-go from the center on a Friday or by dining at a center that is open for meal service on the weekends. There are clients receiving HDM and attending OACs that need more than the one meal per day they get through these programs. We know that 14% of our meal recipients rely on the one meal a day they receive through their local program. These clients should be eligible for more food through the providers that already bring them meals daily.

In the absence of continued federal emergency SNAP allotments, the City should consider supplementing SNAP payments to increase purchasing power for SNAP recipients

New York City has the ability to supplement the monthly SNAP minimum payment to increase benefit amounts for the most vulnerable struggling under continued inflation and economic hardship. Acting with local power to enhance SNAP benefits is a strong investment, as every \$1 the government spends on SNAP generates \$.80 to \$1.50 in economic activity¹¹. As New York City recovers from the economic impact of Covid, spending locally on SNAP can be a valuable tool.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service: Quantifying the Impact of SNAP Benefits on the U.S. Economy and Jobs. Accessed at: www.ers.usda.gov



Testimony at the Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City

Organized by Committee on General Welfare, jointly with Committee on Aging and Sub-committee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

Wednesday, April 19th, 2023

Presented by

Debipriya Chatterjee, Ph.D., CSS Senior Economist

Thank you, Chairpersons Ayala, Hudson, and Mealy and to the members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Debipriya Chatterjee, and I am a Senior Economist at the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), a long-time nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting economic opportunity for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. We use research, advocacy, and direct services to champion a more equitable city and state.

Today my testimony is going to focus on the state of food insecurity in New York City. For twenty years and continuing, CSS has been conducting a unique survey of opinions and hardships facing low-income New Yorkers in its Unheard Third Survey. Every survey, we ask people the following questions:

- Did you receive free food or meals from a food pantry, soup kitchen, meal program, family, or friend because you didn't have enough money to buy food?
- Did you often skip meals or go hungry because there wasn't enough food to buy food?

Based on their 'yes/no' responses, we gauge the extent of their food hardship. If a household answers 'yes' to both questions, we describe them as experiencing 'severe' food hardship; if they respond affirmatively to only one question, we describe them as experiencing 'moderate' food hardship. Our analysis of these responses shows that food insecurity is persistent and pervasive.

In 2022, 30 percent of all respondents said they experienced food hardship. Over half of low-income New Yorkers endured food hardship in 2022. Around 20 percent of these households endured 'severe' food hardship.

Food insecurity is at a crisis level for the city's Hispanic/Latinx residents: 60 percent of low-income Hispanic/Latinx New Yorkers reported experiencing food hardship; 26 percent of Hispanic/Latinx New Yorkers reported experiencing 'severe' food hardship. Almost half--48 percent--of Hispanic/Latinx women reported experiencing food hardship.

We know that the greatest casualty of food insecurity are the children whose physical, mental and cognitive development can be imperiled by lack of adequate nutrition. And yet, 61 percent of low-income households with children reported experiencing food hardship.

Testifying to the historical legacy of marginalization and continued gender inequities, low-income households headed by single females had the highest rates of food hardship with 58 percent reporting that they often endured hunger or had to seek out food donations.

Since prevalence of food hardship is intimately connected with prevalence of poverty, it is, perhaps unsurprising that respondents from the Bronx had the highest rate of food insecurity—36 percent—while Queens residents had the lowest rates (29 percent).

Across the city, for every demographic and socio-economic group, we found the same pattern over time: Food insecurity rates increased during the pandemic year (2020), but government assistance in 2021 helped alleviate food hardship for most New Yorkers. Food hardship rates increased to their pre-pandemic levels as pandemic-era assistance programs were phased out in 2022. The expiration of the Emergency Allotments program for SNAP (Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps) at the end of February was the last of the expanded assistance programs to end, even as continued high inflation, especially in food prices, is pushing these households up against the wall.

Our data shows that even among SNAP recipients, 57 percent experienced food hardship. To add insult to injury, this week the House Speaker was in our city advocating to pile on even more onerous work requirements on SNAP recipients, even though research shows that adding work requirements does little to improve long-term labor market attachment and outcomes and mostly just inconveniences recipients. The proposed measure would throw 736,000 New Yorkers off SNAP statewide, worsening the food insecurity crisis further.

So, what can we do? I would like to reiterate some of the policy recommendations that would help improve the crisis.

- The City administration needs to increase and baseline funding to adequately staff HRA's Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that SNAP applicants receive their benefits with minimal delays. A "timeliness rate" of 49 percent in February, even if a big improvement from the rate of 19 percent in December, 2022, is a cause for concern when over 60 percent of children in low-income households go hungry.
- The City should also increase and baseline funding to a total of \$59 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC), formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP).
- Finally, it should invest an additional \$200 million in capital funding for the continued redesign of middle and high school cafeterias to make them more modernized and culturally inclusive.

With the state budget still being negotiated, the City Council still has a chance to pressure Albany to pass the following legislation that would effectively address poverty and food insecurity.

- The expanded and reformed Empire State Child Credit: We now have rigorous research evidence showing that the federal expanded Child Tax Credit was a powerful force in alleviating poverty, especially child poverty, and that parents spent the extra cash in buying much needed basic necessities. Even as Washington plays politics with people's lives, New York can step up and do the right thing by extending the ESCC to our youngest resident (aged less than 4 years), and by eliminating the minimum income requirement which excludes the lowest income families, those most in need, from receiving the credit. They can even go one step further and increase the credit amount to \$1,500 per child, allow families to receive the credit irrespective of citizenship status, and pay out the credit quarterly or monthly to help families smooth out expenses.

- Increasing the cash assistance grant amounts: These amounts have not been adjusted for inflation in over two decades. It is long overdue for cash assistance amounts to reflect the current cost-of-living, especially in an expensive city like New York.

I would like to close by quoting the amazing Chef Jose Andres- “Food is national security. Food is economy. It is employment, energy, history. Food is everything.”

Thank you for this opportunity. Please feel free to reach out to me at dchatterjee@cssny.org if you have any questions or would like to discuss further.



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Testimony Submitted by
Ismail Samad, Interim Executive Director, Corbin Hill Food Project
Before the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging and
the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19, 2023

My name is Ismail Samad and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Corbin Hill Food Project. Thank you to Chairperson Diana Ayala as well as the members of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare, Chairperson Crystal Hudson as well as the members of the NYC Council Committee on Aging, and Chairperson Darlene Mealy and the members of the NYC Council Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Corbin Hill Food Project is a Black-founded, BIPOC-led food justice nonprofit and social enterprise that supplies fresh food to those who need it most. Our co-created flexible programs subsidize the cost and delivery of fresh produce through SNAP, GusNIP, and other grants to increase access and affordability of fresh food. Our vision is to build an aligned, equitable, and resilient food system by and for our communities. Our efforts are currently concentrated in Harlem and the South Bronx where we have 11 distribution sites serving 25-60 families on a weekly or bi-weekly basis.

Along with our partners, including but not limited to: Fortune Society, Harlem Wellness Center, Philip Randolph Houses, Bronx Health Reach, Lehman College, Brotherhood Sister Sol, Amsterdam Together, and Parents Supporting Parents NY, our focus is on last mile delivery, or moving fresh food directly to meet people where they are, in safe spaces. This is a challenging feat in a diverse city that contains communities within communities. Many we serve are invisible and historically excluded, whether they are the immigrants, elderly, home-bound, displaced by gentrification, or formerly justice-involved. Our small organization, however, is nimble and leverages deep partnerships to pool our collective resources, assets, and relationships to ensure our communities are fed healthy, relevant, and medicinal food in a way that engenders dignity, choice, and joy.

We acknowledge the tremendous and necessary efforts for food access to address food insecurity, and the need to continue funding free food. However; this larger system continues to measure success by volume and poundage of free food dropped into a community via "fly by", which reinforces dependency on the free food industrial complex without addressing the root causes of food insecurity.

We are here to advocate for systems change. Specifically, beyond the cost of purchasing local food, investments must also sufficiently cover the logistical challenges and lack of infrastructure as well as the people and organizations that support efforts to move food to those who need it most. We ask the Council for its continued support for ground-up, community-driven, community-based initiatives, including large investments for building capacity and infrastructure. These investments will ensure that organizations like

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ours and our partners can continue our work collectively and long term to create the supports for an alternative system that is self-sustaining, community-owned and controlled, and builds community wealth.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Ismail Samad
Interim Executive Director, Corbin Hill Food Project

For more information please contact:
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**WHO OWNS THE NARRATIVE
FOOD AS MEDICINE?
Dennis Derryck**

The NIFA GusNIP's Food as Medicine (FAM), a produce prescription program, is a recent strategy on a national level that promotes better health outcomes by ensuring community access to fresh, nutritious produce. Corbin Hill Food Project (CHFP) was one of the initial seven national recipients of a FAM grant in 2021, and of a subsequent enhancement grant in 2022, to develop innovations to its FAM project. As a BIPOC led organization, CHFP was the only organization in New York state to receive a FAM award in 2021.

The FAM strategy recognizes that nutrition is a critical determinant of community health. However, it is important to acknowledge that financial means and access to healthful food options are also part of this interplay and is a positive step forward. To this point, FAM should not be considered a silver bullet solution to overcome our community's many health and wealth disparities. It is a positive step forward that brings numerous challenges with it and begins with the relationship between health institutions working in Black and Brown communities. This is crucial given the ongoing discussions within the Black community regarding community sovereignty in decision-making.

CHFP seeks to link both theory and practice with the underlying assumptions as it implements its Farm Share distribution. CHFP's approach incorporates a community's lived experience that speaks to safe spaces both in its food distribution and the data collection settings and methods required for the FAM project. The linking of theory, practice and the examination of underlying assumptions often challenge the traditional existing relationship in how clinics and hospitals relate to our communities.

The FAM programs are primarily driven by health institutions, from clinics to hospitals to insurance companies, that can result in a top-down approach in defining what is healthy and nutritious for our community, and how best our community should be served. Often, in these types of decision-making hierarchies, Black and Brown communities are viewed as a monolith and its existing traditions and practices may be discounted and even deemed unhealthy in and of themselves. As FAM programs look to serve these communities, it is critical that we ask: How are the lived experiences of Black and Brown community members being incorporated and respected in the FAM service delivery and data gathering models?

CHFP has adopted a home delivery model, where distribution takes place within the building complex where residents reside in subsidized and supportive housing. This is consistent with recent studies on how best to meet the food needs of Black consumers, as convenience is ranked among the top three most important considerations when shopping among Black respondents. This is in contrast to non-Black people surveyed who ranked convenience seventh in importance according to the Nourishing Equity study (June 2022). It also recognizes that 20 percent of communities of color over the age of 60 in NYC have some form of disability, and so home delivery should always be part of an ecosystem of food access. Distributing food where participants reside also acknowledges that food and community are strongly linked from a

cultural standpoint in Black communities and such a distribution model, when coupled with food demonstrations held at the distribution site, can build community cohesiveness.

The home delivery model speaks to the concept of safe spaces for the FAM community CHFP is serving. The concept of safe space is also linked to who, how and where clinics and hospitals should operate within CHFP's FAM program. FAM requires the collection of health data on a voluntary basis, however sharing health information is not a precondition for participating in FAM. Common practice is that those involved in such programs have to travel to the clinics and hospitals to "be screened and registered" in order to be part of a program. Yet research evidence strongly suggests that meeting people where they are can have a positive impact on health outcomes. A recent study shows positive health outcomes for Black men being provided health service at Black Barber Shops. Following this model, Tulane University will be placing community health service workers in some four dozen Black churches based upon the concept, "If you can see patients in a comfortable, community-based environment, that may be superior to having the patient come into the hospital clinic for services." As was recently pointed out by the Fund for Health Equity, 80% of what happens to a person's health occurs outside a doctor's office. In addition, one has to acknowledge the historical lack of trust that Blacks have of medical institutions as being safe spaces. The role of community health workers remains important; however, their roles revolve around connecting people to health and other services. In the absence of institutional staff coming to community sites to collect data and enroll participants, CHFP staff has taken on that function.

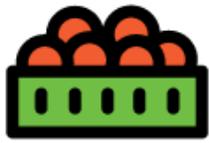
As FAM unfolds across the country, this is an opportune time to reexamine assumptions, acknowledge and pay homage to respected community beliefs, and perhaps, even, refine traditional program practices. While this piece speaks to linking theory and practice to safe spaces, convenience and access, and data collection, there remain a number of larger questions around FAM that are worthy of discussion among policy advocates, politicians, funders and the Black community:

- How do Black communities define FAM?
- How do Black communities define nutritious food?
- How does one account for the historical shaming of Black food as one defines nutritious food?
- How do medical institutions, currently at the forefront of implementing FAM, address the reality that though our communities are Black, they are not monolithic, but rather can be best understood as different communities within our community?
- Does FAM's top-down approach led by health institutions allow for ownership of the program within communities?
- Is there community sovereignty within FAM?
- What structures will be created such that communities can empower themselves to become decision-makers not just advisors regarding their health and wellness?
- Given medical institutions are the primary recipients of FAM funding, is there a possibility that FAM will become a model in which institutions define what is best for our communities?
- What would FAM look like if it were to be a bottom-up community-based model?

One asks these questions since the momentum generated by FAM as a solution to our community health parallels the momentum generated around solutions that address food deserts. As Kenneth Kolb states in his book *Retail Inequality, Reframing the Food Desert Debate*, “the scholars, the media, the policy advocates and politicians decided that we knew best what people in urban food deserts needed.” Anthropologists Ashanté Reese and Psyche Williams Forson and others have shed light on how Blacks shop debunking an abundance of scholarly research on food access and food deserts (food apartheid), while the USDA continues to define food deserts by a mileage formula.

One cannot simply dismiss the conceptualization that providing access to food is now being reframed as health and food- Food as Medicine or the fact that the FAM approach often continues an emphasis on individual behavior change and fails to address the structural and systemic inequities that lead to poor health outcomes in the Black community. The scholarly work has begun as exemplified by the recently published 169-page report with its 2,500 citations by the Center for Food as Medicine. However, to maximize FAM’s health impact will require further examinations of assumptions, and the expansion of knowledge from many of the Black anthropologists and Black cookbooks that provide the historical framework with which to define nourishing food. It also provides a framework for innovations and practices by which FAM can best incorporate the lived experiences of the Black community it will be serving. This is both a call to action by BIPOC leaders to take ownership of the narrative in which we define what the Black community wants from FAM, and also a call to action for funders and policy makers as to how they can better serve BIPOC led organizations.

Dennis Derryck, Ph.D. is Founder, Corbin Hill Food Project Inc. and Professor Emeritus Milano Graduate School of Policy, Management and Environment, New School University. *Who owns the narrative Food As Medicine?* Dennis Derryck, February 24, 2023. derryckdennis@gmail.com



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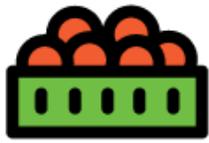
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Monday, January 30, 2023

Roundtable speakers and guests, it's wonderful to be here together today in DC. Thank you to Congressman McGovern for sponsoring this event and to Farm Sanctuary for the invitation to participate. We're also grateful to Congresswoman Schrier for her participation, and Rep. Alma Adams for her leadership on these issues.

My name is Rebecca Valdez from Corbin Hill Food Project, a food justice nonprofit and social enterprise. Thank you for allowing me to speak from my experience as a registered dietitian interested in health equity. I found my way to Corbin Hill Food Project after working for a local WIC agency where we provided critical nutrition assistance to low-income families. However, I found myself having the same conversations with families over and over. They'd say, "My kids love fruits - could we get more fruit?" and I'd reply, "No, but I can give you four gallons of milk? Would that work for you?" You see, telling people how to eat for better health always felt as if we were skipping a step because the families I counseled knew what they wanted and wanted to feed their family nutritious foods but their resources were limited and fruits and vegetables were too expensive. The WIC food package also provided very limited agency to choose what foods they could purchase - The choice between milk and soymilk isn't much of a choice when what they needed was access to fruits and vegetables. I became interested in Corbin Hill Food Project's work in providing affordable and accessible fresh produce, which is notably limited in the WIC package.

Corbin Hill Food Project's mission is to supply food to those who need it most. For over a decade, the organization's innovative strategy utilizes existing community assets to bring farm fresh produce to underserved communities in New York City. We also work in community forming food system partnerships across the food supply chain to support organizations that advocate for land and capital access for BIPOC and underserved farmers and food producers.



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Corbin Hill Food Project pioneered farm shares, a concept similar to CSAs or community supported agriculture. However, a distinction from CSA is that farm share's benefits go beyond providing farmers with markets but help to increase access and affordability of fresh produce in low-income communities. Rather than paying upfront for an entire season to support farmers, Shareholders are able to pay weekly, pause their share, and leverage SNAP dollars. Additionally, farm share aggregates produce from multiple farms in the region to ensure that farm share is available year round and each week's produce contains a variety of foods, including at least one leafy green and fruit among other seasonal items.

Equally important to Corbin Hill Food Project in delivering fresh, nutritious food is delivering food sovereignty. While farm share costs were subsidized through SNAP and other grants, community partners chose to work with Corbin Hill Food Project using their dollars to purchase food with us because of what we represent - in line with Corbin Hill Food Project's values of racial equity, we prioritize sourcing locally from Black and BIPOC food producers. However, there are many challenges due to New York State's geography and limited-resourced, smaller scale BIPOC producers.

Despite the challenges, Corbin Hill Food Project was deep in community and developed farm share programs that would fit the needs of its members providing fresh food with choice and dignity. As the demand for farm share grew, Corbin Hill Food Project became a hub of food hubs, helping to facilitate the movement of food from producers to community while thinking forward to the market access farm share could create for BIPOC food producers to scale as we continued to build relationships across the food system. At its peak, Corbin Hill Food Project served farm shares at 29 sites across all five boroughs in New York City.

However, overnight, COVID-19 closed down all but 2 of our locations. Corbin Hill Food Project went from farm share generating \$700,000 in revenue to \$60,000. But the money to purchase food didn't just evaporate - the money shifted because of federal policies that consolidated resources to emergency food and food charity. The organizations that previously purchased food



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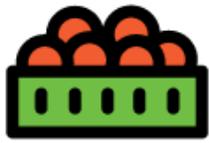
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from Corbin Hill Food Project were faced with the choice to stretch their dollars or get free food from the food bank - which is not really a choice. This model of the charitable industrial complex effectively erased BIPOC-led intermediaries, such as the Corbin Hill Food Project, who fight for community food sovereignty.

Due to COVID-19 and our loss of revenue, Corbin Hill Food Project pivoted to providing emergency food as a way to continue to participate in the food system as a voice for the community. Over a two-month period, we delivered 4,000 boxes of food weekly over 20 weeks serving 800 food insecure families. An equally important measure of success was that 25% of every dollar spent went to Brooklyn Packers, a Black-led, worker-owned cooperative, and to a Black farmer —a non-extractive economic model that provides food access while building community wealth. For the Brooklyn Packers to succeed in its rapid growth, Corbin Hill Food Project secured a \$100K line of credit to support the Brooklyn Packers with their cash flow enabling them to do \$320,000 worth of business.

What started as a dream and idea to feed people has over the years developed into a mission and movement for food sovereignty and a wealth-building food system in communities of color. But despite the self-determination of our community to feed itself, we are still far from that reality.

While the Biden-Harris administration's White House Conference proclaimed to erase hunger by 2030, we ask - at what cost? How can we even begin the conversation about community food sovereignty if billions of federal funds have been invested in food banks which are flooding our communities with free food? At present, "free food" has been forced down our throats, choking off our airways and our ability to voice for ourselves the food we want in our community. Community driven models have no economic opportunity to participate when federal investments are all siphoned into consolidated big food operators who receive millions in contracts. It also further removes our dignity and bolsters the narrative of our communities receiving handouts.



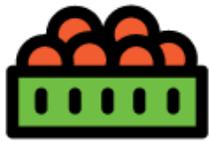
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I'll illustrate: Most recently, Corbin Hill Food Project secured two grants from NIFA for a Food As Medicine Produce Prescription program totalling \$951K to serve approximately 500 families over the next two years. While we applaud the administration for the progress in putting money into BIPOC-led organizations to deliver food to our community, it's important to recognize that simply shifting the responsibility to us forces us to be complicit in a system that does not promote food sovereignty. Specifically, grant restrictions put us in a position where we do not have the agency to purchase from BIPOC-owned and operated farms and food producers, who are often over-trained with insufficient access to land and capital to produce enough food to fulfill the government contracts.

To cite another example, Corbin Hill Food Project recently applied for a New York State grant where we proposed creating a Black-led micro-food hub to provide food to underserved communities. When we asked our partner farmer David of Trinity Farm what he needed to support his growth and to scale his operations to meet the needs of the RFP, he cited a \$45,000 forklift. Unfortunately, the fine print of the RFP stated that the limit on any piece of equipment was \$5,000, which must be used for leasing, rather than purchasing equipment. In essence, the grant offered us money to purchase food but insufficient funds to invest in the infrastructure and assets required to move the food from the BIPOC producers we want to support and feed our community.

While the White House strategy contains strong language of community and justice, their allocations need to support access to sufficient funds to truly support transformative food systems and models. Federal allocations speak to upholding the status quo rather than financing the many BIPOC-led organizations around the country that are seeking to lead food system transformation. This mirrors the experience that I and so many others had at WIC - we're told to educate our community on healthy eating rather than giving them the tools and resources to be successful.



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We know that the reality is that hunger is not going to go away by 2030, and organizations like ours need to be around to speak for our community rather than allowing food banks or other existing institutions to decide for us what our community can and should be allowed to eat. At a federal level, BIPOC organizations, farmers, food producers, truckers, aggregators, and distributors need long-term investment and trust to do the work of our community, build infrastructure, and acquire assets to support community ownership and food sovereignty.

Thank you.



ELMCOR

YOUTH & ADULT ACTIVITIES, INC

Serving Families for 50 Years

Tuesday, April 18th, 2023

New York City Council Testimony

Committee on General Welfare and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City

Re: Support of Aging in Place Package

Good morning, my name is Saeeda Dunston, and I am the Executive Director of Elmcor Youth & Adult Activities. I want to first thank Chair Cystal Hudson, Chair Darlene Mealy, and Council Members for the opportunity to speak before you today.

On behalf of Elmcor, I'd like to express our appreciation for the introduction of Int 0945-2023. This bill takes a necessary step by providing technical support and education related to the use of computers, phones, and telehealth by aging adults. This will help assimilate aging adults into our now digital world, prevent isolation by connecting older adults to the internet, and provide the necessary education to bolster older adult mental health treatment via telehealth. This holistic approach to serving elder New Yorkers will serve as an essential lifeline for these communities.

We know this fight firsthand. For over 55 years, Elmcor has been at the forefront of servicing not just elder New Yorkers but all populations from preschool aged children to older adults. We are a Queens-based, non-profit, multi-service organization of professionals providing comprehensive, human justice-based services.

Unfortunately, the work we are doing is needed now more than ever. As your Committee Report acknowledges, food insecurity has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic, with the Department of Agriculture reporting a significant increase especially for women living alone and elderly individuals. As with many issues, people of color are at the frontlines of this crisis due to historical discrimination and structural racism. According to a study by United Neighborhoods Houses, among NYC residents aged 60 and older, adults of color are five to six times more likely than their white counterparts to experience food insecurity. The pandemic only widened this gap.

As an organization that served many of the communities that were at the epicenter of the pandemic, we experienced this increase in demand at our own sites, with our food pantry program increasing by 600%. In the first year of the pandemic alone, we served an average of more than 800 families each week.

This food insecurity presents a significant problem for our older neighbors. Outside of the need to ensure our elder residents are receiving sufficient nutrition, these economic

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pressures also have the potential to isolate older adults, as rising prices can encourage individuals to cease social activities. This can compound the mental stress these communities are still shouldering from the pandemic.

To that end, we take a holistic approach to serving our elder neighbors by providing not only nutritional, food pantry services but a wide range of social, cultural, and recreational programming that promote the healthy, full participation of older adults in the community. At our four older adult centers in Queens, our participants can take advantage of everything from telephone reassurance and technology support to continuing education and holistic care assistance.

We know firsthand that the fight to ensure older adults maintain a happy and healthy lifestyle is far from over. An issue as multifaceted as this cannot be solved with a single piece of legislation. But this legislation is an essential first step, providing the foundation for older adults to maintain a healthy and active lifestyle.

We applaud the legislation and thank the Council for their leadership on this issue. We also appreciate the Council's proposed \$51 million increase to NYC Aging's budget to support older adult centers. We look forward to partnering with the city in any way we can to ensure the needs, wants, and dignity of our older New Yorkers are preserved.

Sincerely,

Saeeda Dunston
Executive Director

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New York City Council Committee on Aging Jointly with the Committee on General Welfare and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity Oversight – Food Insecurity in New York City

Testimony of EmblemHealth

April 19, 2023

My name is Erin Reddan and I am a Regional Manager at EmblemHealth Neighborhood Care. On behalf of EmblemHealth and the thousands of New Yorkers we employ and cover, I would like to thank Chair Hudson, Chair Ayala, and Chair Mealy, and the members of the Committee on Aging, the Committee on General Welfare, and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for holding this hearing and for providing the opportunity to speak on the pressing issue of food insecurity in New York City.

The EmblemHealth family of companies provides insurance plans, primary and specialty care, and wellness solutions. We have been serving as trusted partners at our 13 EmblemHealth Neighborhood Care centers since 2012 where we provide free in-person and virtual support, access to community resources, and health and wellness classes to all community members, ensuring that individuals are connected to care at the right place and at the right time. We are changing how community members access care, providing continuous support and culturally competent care and resources, including virtual classes to ensure we can also reach homebound individuals. Our staff represent and reflect the communities they serve, and across our various sites, we provide services and support in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Haitian Creole.

Addressing food insecurity and providing access to healthy food and nutritional guidance are some of Neighborhood Care's key priorities, and we offer a range of services to community members. We have partnered with other organizations such as NY Common Pantry, La Jornada and the Campaign Against Hunger to bring food pantry events and farmers markets to our Chinatown, Crown Heights, East New York, Harlem, and Jackson Heights locations. We also provide culturally competent nutritional guidance in our classes such as Plant-Based Eating 101 and Discover a Heart Healthy Diet, and our care team is trained to assist with accessing SNAP benefits. In addition to our ongoing programming, we also host special resource event days to connect more community members to care. For example, we are hosting a Healthy Eating Habits event at our Crown Heights location today which includes a cooking demonstration, farmer's market, health check ins with a registered nurse on-site to answer general questions, diabetes A1C screenings for eligible EmblemHealth members, and blood pressure screenings for all community members.

In 2022, over 61,000 individuals accessed care through our Neighborhood Care sites, with nearly one in three individuals being over the age of 65. This makes us uniquely positioned to help address the challenges that older adults are facing, including issues like food insecurity,

loneliness and social isolation, and digital literacy. We support Int 945-2023 and the City Council's efforts to improve technical support for older adults, allowing them to lead healthier and more connected lives, and we have similar work underway through our free cell phone and tablet literacy classes and one-on-one support. Our efforts focused on food access help older adults to learn healthy behaviors, to have increased access to healthy food, and to make connections in the community. We know firsthand how access to fresh food and education has a significant impact on overall health and wellness, especially when it comes to older populations who are more likely to be facing chronic conditions such as diabetes and heart disease, which we also provide programming and support to help manage.

Combatting food insecurity in New York City requires a coordinated effort among public and private stakeholders to ensure all communities, especially the most vulnerable, have access to fresh food, nutritional guidance, and support. EmblemHealth Neighborhood Care hopes to be a constructive partner and resource to the City Council to accomplish these goals.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that everyone in our communities has access to equitable, holistic care and resources.



**Verbal Testimony Submitted by
Leah Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates
Before the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging and
the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity**

**Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19, 2023**

Thank you to the Chairs and members for holding today's hearing. My name is Leah Eden, Executive Director of Equity Advocates. Equity Advocates fights the root causes of food insecurity through policy and systems change and **since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have convened the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#)**, a multi-sector group of 75 food system stakeholders from across the City, including frontline CBOs working to address food insecurity and strengthen the food system.

I am here today to thank the Council for its support in making investments in the emergency food system and ensuring timely access to critical benefits like SNAP, as many today have spoken about.

But I'm also here to urge the Council to intentionally invest in community driven long-term solutions to food insecurity that also work towards creating ownership models and wealth creation for historically marginalized communities across the entire food system. When thinking about how to sustainably address food insecurity, **the City should partner with and support** community food hub models like Universe City and Corbin Hill Food Project, and community-owned food retail such as Central Brooklyn Food Coop, to leverage existing and growing community-owned food, health, farming and retail infrastructures. The Council can also increase funding for its Worker Cooperative Business Development and Community Land Trust Initiatives to support worker cooperatives in the food space and access to land for farming and gardening.

Another way to invest in community driven solutions to food insecurity is through strengthening our city's urban agriculture sector and increasing funding to train the next generation of successful urban farmers by expanding the DOE's Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources CTE program and investing in local training programs like Farm School NYC.

Our written testimony has additional detail. Thank you again for this opportunity to share recommendations that address food insecurity while providing ownership models and wealth creation within our food system for historically marginalized communities.

**Written Testimony Submitted by
Leah Eden, Executive Director, Equity Advocates
Before the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging and
the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity**

**Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19, 2023**

My name is Leah Eden, Executive Director of Equity Advocates. Thank you to Chairperson Diana Ayala as well as the members of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare, Chairperson Crystal Hudson as well as the members of the NYC Council Committee on Aging, and Chairperson Darlene Mealy and the members of the NYC Council Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Equity Advocates builds the capacity of nonprofit organizations to address the underlying causes of food inequity through policy and systems change. We partner with New York-based organizations working to alleviate hunger and poverty, providing them with the tools they need to be more civically engaged—including policy education, advocacy training and coalition leadership.

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, Equity Advocates has convened the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a group of 75+ food system stakeholders from across NYC including frontline CBOs working to address food insecurity and strengthen the food system. The Alliance's mission is to identify and advocate for public policies and funding that not only respond to our current economic and hunger crises, but also address the ongoing vulnerabilities and injustices of the food system. Collectively, we approach this work through an anti-racism lens to ensure communities of color and other systemically under-resourced communities benefit from public policies and funding.

Our city has not fully recovered from the economic, social or public health impacts of the pandemic. Many families are still struggling to make ends meet and our partners are seeing an unprecedented demand for emergency food assistance. Since May of 2020, the unemployment rate in New York City has hovered around twice the national average at around 5.6%. The most recent United States Department of Labor data shows that inflation rose to a record 9.1% in June 2022, the largest gain in nearly four decades, reflecting increased food, shelter, and fuel costs nationwide. In that same time period, 64% of respondents had difficulty paying for usual household expenses¹.

Access to healthy, culturally appropriate food is a continuous issue that New Yorkers face and yet the Mayor is proposing flat funding across the board for critical food assistance programs which will place an increased demand for food on pantries, farmers and supermarkets. We are very concerned

¹ United States Census Bureau Household Pulse Data Survey results from September 2022.

For more information please contact:

Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director at Equity Advocates, leah@nyequityadvocates.org

with recent reporting that HRA is processing just [46.3% of applications for SNAP benefits](#) and we know agencies are already understaffed due to job vacancies. Funding cuts to HRA and other agencies across the board will only worsen this situation and urge the Administration to reconsider its proposed cuts to HRA and to more seriously address the vacancy rate at the agency, which is greatly contributing to the slow processing of SNAP applications. We also urge the Council to continue fighting to ensure any cuts in headcount vacancy for HRA do not impact benefits enrollment and ensure frontline positions are not eliminated.

To help address food insecurity in NYC, we urge the Council to intentionally invest in community driven long-term solutions to food insecurity that also work towards creating ownership models and wealth creation for historically marginalized communities across the entire food system. To sustainably address food insecurity, the City should consider the the following priorities:

- **\$4.9 Million for Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI).** We support the [NYC Network of Worker Cooperative](#) in its call for increased funding from \$3.7M to \$4.9M in FY24. This local discretionary initiative funds 15 worker cooperative support organizations that coordinate education and training resources as well as provide technical, legal, and financial assistance for the start-up of new worker cooperative small businesses, and provide assistance to existing cooperatives. We urge that this increase in allocation help put worker cooperative support organizations that prioritize food businesses—such as RiseBoro Community Partnerships' [Worker Coop Development Program](#)—on the path to partnership within WCBDI. This focus on cooperative businesses within the food system will foster local food growers, aggregators, transporters, packagers, cooks, sellers and educators.
- **Create a new Food Justice Fund to allocate \$5 Million in Revolving Loans** that can support worker cooperatives, Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and other employee-ownership models within the food system. There is a need to fund small and working size ESOPS in zip codes that reflect a high BIPOC demographic. Providing access to capital for employee ownership models in the food systems is a key strategy to build community ownership within the local food system, especially in BIPOC communities that have historically had low rates of business establishment by neighborhood residents. In addition, we recommend exploring ways to de-risk the loan, waive personal guaranties and other requirements that often prevent cooperatives from accessing conventional financing.
- **Partner with and support community food hub models** like Universe City and GrowNYC, and community-owned food retail such as Central Brooklyn Food Coop, to leverage existing and growing community-owned food, health, farming and retail infrastructures. We urge the City to fund these community-led groups to create food security plans, establish pathways in the development of community food hubs and reduce barriers that prevent these types of projects from participating in city procurement contracts.
- **Fully Fund the Citywide Community Land Trust Initiative at \$3 million.** We prioritize the notion that moving public land with insecure tenure to trust land will strengthen land security and sovereignty and prioritize access to lands for people who have deep and

For more information please contact:

Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director at Equity Advocates, leah@nyequityadvocates.org

historic community connections, especially BIPOC farmers, growers and community gardens. Launched in FY2020, the citywide CLT discretionary funding initiative has helped catalyze CLT organizing, education, training and technical assistance. We support the [NYC Community Land Initiative \(NYCCLI\)](#) in its call for full funding to support 20 organizations working to develop and preserve deeply-affordable housing, community and commercial spaces, and advance a just recovery in Black and brown NYC communities. Public land must be used for public good, and be reserved for CLTs that provide for meaningful community control. It is also critical to raise awareness that CLTs can be utilized for commercial urban agriculture. We believe that this embodies the ability to balance local land control and long-term, stewarded development that addresses changing community needs. Supporting both Community-owned businesses and Community-controlled land together is part of an effort to democratize economic development in NYC's food system.

- We also support the passage of the [Community Land Act](#), an urgently-needed set of bills that give community land trusts (CLTs) and other nonprofits tools to develop and preserve permanently-affordable housing, community and commercial space, and other neighborhood assets.

Another way to invest in community driven solutions to food insecurity is through strengthening our City's urban agriculture sector and the following priorities:

- **Allocate funding for the new Office of Urban Agriculture** housed within the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability (OLTPS) to maintain appropriate levels of staffing and increase transparency about Office goals and activities among the community of urban agriculture practitioners. Use funding to create a position dedicated to ongoing, intentional community engagement to inform the urban agriculture advisory's development of a set of recommendations as outlined in Local Law 123.
 - As it is within the Office's duty and power to make recommendations to the "heads of relevant agencies with respect to protecting and expanding urban agriculture," we urge the Office to partner with the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) to ensure that interested youth can meaningfully participate at urban agriculture sites through both Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and Work Learn Grow (WLG). The Office of Urban Agriculture can play a leadership role in managing the placement of youth participants at community gardens with the collaboration of local CBOs, expanding participation of local compost operations as worksites, aligning the program timelines to allow for youth participants to be matched with an urban agriculture worksite year-round through both programs.
- **Increase funding to train the next generation of farmers and strengthen viable urban agriculture career pathways for youth** by expanding the DOE's Career and Technical Education program to strengthen its Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources and investing in local training programs with a commitment to social justice such Farm School NYC.

For more information please contact:

Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director at Equity Advocates, leah@nyequityadvocates.org

- **Establish a grant program** managed by the NYC Urban Agriculture Office targeted to residents in low income communities to invest in and provide technical assistance to urban agricultural startups and their acquisition of equipment, growing space and staff.
- **Invest in GreenThumb at \$4.8 Million** to support the hiring of additional Community Engagement Coordinators, creating a permanent full-time Youth Engagement Coordinator position for the current seasonal position, and providing compensation for both youth and community gardeners that take leadership roles within GreenThumb Youth Leadership Council program, which is currently unpaid.
 - Direct the Parks Department to reduce administrative barriers to providing direct stipends from the City to community gardeners and youth to ensure Greenthumb can compensate community gardeners to teach workshops and train youth to run these programs, making existing gardening programming sustainable.
- **Increase opportunities for young people with \$206.5 million in baseline funding for Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) and \$20 million in baseline funding for Work Learn Grow (WLG),** the complementary school-year youth workforce program. Mayor Adams has expressed his commitment to investing in the future of urban agriculture, yet current DYCD regulations create a barrier for urban agriculture worksites that would provide meaningful experiences for young people. We urge the DYCD to commit to a reassessment of these programs to ensure successful partnerships with food systems and urban agriculture worksites by:
 - Increasing baseline funding for employer placements and supporting CBOs that are working with DYCD.
 - Advocating for the reallocation of funding for the program to be directed to out of school programs.
 - Ensuring youth interns are placed at their selected work site based on their interests.
- **Maintain \$7 million in funding for NYC Composting programs.** We applaud Mayor Adams for [announcing a roadmap](#) to create the first citywide curbside composting program ever by the end of 2024. These programs are vital to the community because they create local sustainable jobs, reduce landfill waste, gardeners and residents having access to resources in their communities, are eco-friendly and sustainable, and promote community involvement. We want to uplift the support for:
 - Incorporating the NYCHA and public housing in the compost programs initiative to encourage community engagement and divert food waste from landfills.
 - Developing more transparency for accessing foodscap bins so that community members can register for food scraps collect services.
 - Partnering with and increasing funding for local foodscrap hauling CBOs to collect foodscraps from households who are interested in the initiative. Residence should also be provided with the assurance that they can drop off their food waste at local drop off locations in their neighborhoods.

For more information please contact:

Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director at Equity Advocates, leah@nyequityadvocates.org

- We urge the city to prioritize food waste reduction efforts to alleviate the waste management burden on city agencies and CBOs.

To help address food insecurity in New York City, we've identified the following priorities to strengthen the emergency food system and ensuring timely access to critical benefits:

- **Increase funding to a total baseline of \$59 Million for the Community Food Connection (CFC), formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP),** to accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need, including the continuing influx of asylum seekers and other migrants seeking refuge in New York City. We are so appreciative that the Council's Response to the Preliminary budget included a call to increase and baseline the budget for CFC to \$60 million and to engage in an additional outreach and education campaign to ensure smaller, community-based providers have access to the program. We appreciate the CFC program, but want to see changes including the addition of Halal certified products in the vendor product list and better prices for fresh products. We also urge HRA to direct H. Schrier to seek EFP input into what foods are provided through the program and allow providers greater flexibility to select their own foods.
- **Invest \$38.4 Million of new funding to combat hunger among older adults for home delivered meals programs and congregate meals at older adult centers.**
 - \$6.7M for inflation cost for raw foods, gas and other items for home-delivered meals
 - \$27.1M for inflation cost for raw food and other items for congregate meals at older adult centers
 - \$567k to address the DFTA's home-delivered meal waitlist
 - \$4M to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals not provided through DFTA, especially as they have not seen an increase in years.
- **Direct the HRA to ensure that any cuts in headcount vacancy do not impact benefits enrollment and frontline positions are not eliminated,** increase wages to help fill critical vacancies and improve internal systems to be more efficient. To help fill these vacancies, we urge the Council to support the Human Services Council's #JustPay campaign, calling for a 6.5% COLA for City-contracted human services workers in the final budget.
- **Increase HRA's budget baseline to ensure it can engage community based organizations (CBOs) in benefits outreach and streamline benefits applications.** We urge the City to increase funding for the agency and CBOs engaged in benefits outreach to meet ongoing demand and improve the administration of critical food benefit programs. We applaud the Administration for launching phase one of the MyCity portal, featuring the new streamlined child care assistance application, which consolidates a complicated paper application used by multiple government agencies (DOE and ACS). This is a great start and we encourage the City to continue to ensure all HRA/DSS programs are included in this portal. A potential next step would be to support the SNAP program (run by NYC HRA) to have a joint application with the WIC program (run by NYS DOH).

For more information please contact:

Leah Kabran Eden, Executive Director at Equity Advocates, leah@nyequityadvocates.org

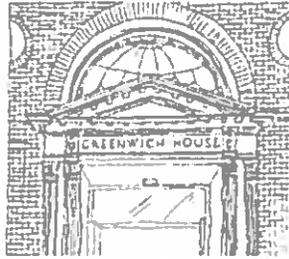
- **Evaluate the newly relaunched Grocery to Go Program.** This program emerged in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic as food assistance for homebound New Yorkers and has since been drastically redesigned to provide food insecure New Yorkers who also have hypertension and/or diabetes with monthly credit to purchase groceries through an online marketplace of local grocery stores. Most participants that were originally participating in the Get Food program will not meet the new requirements for the Groceries to Go Program due to their physical health status. Given the short timeframe in which the allocated funds will need to be spent (by June 2023) and the highly specific eligibility requirements, we are concerned that the DOHMH may not be able to fully enroll 5,000 New Yorkers in time to spend down all of the available funds. To make the program more impactful and ensure unspent credits do not go to waste we strongly recommend: 1) the monthly credits allotted to each participating household are increased to ensure that funds are reaching the individuals that the program is intended to serve, 2) expand the list for diet related conditions to widen the scale of the program, and 3) allow for the participation of young adults who meet the other eligibility criteria. Finally, we encourage the program to allow enrollees to have the freedom to use the credits on food items of their choosing that reflect need, cultural preference, dietary or medical requirements and personal taste. We strongly encourage the DOHMH not to apply additional limitations to eligible foods and to maintain that Grocery to Go credits can purchase SNAP approved items.

We also stands in full support of the NYC Food Ed Coalition’s call for quality food and nutrition education for all NYC Students, including:

- \$37 million to provide flexible food & nutrition education funding for all NYC schools.
- \$3.5 million to increase compensation and head count at the DOE’s Office of Food and Nutrition Services (OFNS).
- Renew \$500,000 in City Council discretionary funding for the Food Ed Hub based within the Tisch Food Center.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Leah Eden
Executive Director, Equity Advocates



Greenwich House

**Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Aging, General Welfare, and the Subcommittee on
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity**

April 19, 2023

**Maria Ojeda
Kitchen Aid**

**Greenwich House, Center on the Square
www.greenwichhouse.org**

My name is Maria Ojeda and I am the Kitchen Aide of Center on the Square Older Adult Center at Greenwich House. Thank you to the Chair and fellow City Council members for this opportunity to testify today.

- Greenwich House has been around for 120 years. We provide services that support people in New York City of all ages. We do this by providing programs for art and education, health services, and services for older adults.

Greenwich House has five centers in Manhattan for older adults. We help members with social activities, learning, and staying healthy.

- I have worked as a Kitchen Aide for 6 years. I hear from people every day who are having a really hard time and do not have enough food to eat.
 - Just last week, a woman asked me if I had any leftovers because she didn't have enough food for dinner. It was heartbreaking. I gave her rice and vegetables, which is all I had.
 - If we had more funding per meal, our seniors would have more to eat during lunch, which is the only meal some have all day.
- Across our Older Adult Centers, we serve about 250 meals a day, five days a week. Many of our members arrive in the morning and stay all day until we close because they crave community and social connection.
 - We used to provide breakfast – a bagel and butter – but we stopped because we no longer have the funding.
 - On Fridays, we used to provide frozen meals so that seniors had food to eat over the weekend when our center is closed. However, we no longer have funding for this so many seniors are saving portions of their weekly lunch to eat over the weekends.

The City should consider increasing the funding per meal to ensure we can provide seniors with more quality, nutritious foods. We are only currently funded to serve lunch, but we know if we could serve breakfast, snacks, and even dinner, there would be no shortage of demand.

Overall, more funding per meal; the opportunity to serve breakfast and snacks; and frozen to-go meals for the weekend, would make a big difference in the lives of our members who are experiencing food insecurity.

Greenwich House appreciates the New York City Council for working to address food insecurity for our older community members. I thank the Committees for the opportunity to testify today.



Greenwich House

Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on Aging, General Welfare, and the Subcommittee on
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

April 19, 2023

Stacey Gaye McRae
Kitchen Aid
Greenwich House, Our Lady of Pompeii Center
www.greenwichhouse.org

My name is Stacey Gaye McRae and I am a Kitchen Aide at Greenwich House's Our Lady of Pompeii Older Adult Center. Thank you to the Chair and fellow City Council members for this opportunity to testify today.

- Greenwich House provides older adult services, arts and education programs and health services to over 20,000 New Yorkers annually. Our Lady of Pompeii is one of five Older Adult Centers in Manhattan, offering our members vital social, educational, physical, and cultural resources.
- As a Kitchen Aid, I work with many older adults who are rely on our lunch service as their only meal for the day. Data shows that poverty rates increased for older adults in 2021 while the cost of living continues to rise. So many people tell us they can't afford groceries and that their SNAP benefits don't go as far as they used to.
- Unfortunately, I have also seen how changes in these programs can have a devastating impact on their ability can have to access the food they need to stay healthy, nourished, and age with dignity.
- One of the most critical issues that I have witnessed is that our centers are only funded to serve lunch.
 - This valuable service is a lifeline for our seniors and one meal a day is not enough to sustain them all day. This can have a profound impact on their overall health and well-being.
 - I serve lunch to our members every day, and I get to know them. They are like family. When we are closed over the weekends, a lot of our members tell me they do not have access to much food until we open again.
 - For example, last week I was sitting at the front desk when a member arrived early for lunch to ask if there would be any extra food available. I told him I wasn't sure, but he could stand on line after meal service ends. He joined a long line of others in need of more food. Luckily that day, we had more rice available

to offer, but that is not the case every day. On days when there are no extras, I witness members eating only half of their lunch meal and saving the rest for dinner.

- **If we had more funding per meal, we could offer each member more food to help sustain them through the day.**
 - **If we had funding for a proper breakfast and snacks, that would help us better meet the needs of our community.**
- It concerns me greatly to think of what our members will do as summer approaches and the temperatures rise making it more difficult for them to commute to our center for lunch or grocery stores.
 - **If we had funding to provide frozen meals for weekends, that would help them a great deal.**

Overall, more funding per meal; the opportunity to serve breakfast and snacks; and the ability to provide more frozen meals for weekends would really help our community.

Thank you to the New York City Council for working to address food insecurity for our older community members, and thank you to the Committees for the opportunity to testify today.

Joint Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on Aging, Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity, and the Committee on General Welfare

April 19, 2023

Good morning members of the NYC Council Committee on Aging, the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity, and the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Bonnie Lumagui and I am testifying per written testimony on behalf of Hamilton-Madison House, as its Assistant Executive Director for Older Adults and Community Services, regarding the rising food insecurity we see in the older adults we serve.

Hamilton-Madison House and our City Hall Older Adult Center have been providing linguistically accessible and culturally sensitive services to NYC older adults for over 70 years. Our programs serve more than 6,000 older adults per year. City Hall Center is one of NYC's largest and longest-running older adult centers, open to all our neighbors over 60 years of age while serving a large immigrant community, many of whom speak Chinese.

As a direct services organization providing delivered pantry meals to our 4 Senior Housing/Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), Social Adult Day Services, as well as providing congregate breakfast and lunches at our older adult centers, we are witnessing firsthand the ruinous effects of food price inflation on our senior population. Demand for both our pantry meals and our congregate dining meals has risen since last year:

- For our pantry meals, we delivered 6,900 bags of food every month from July to Oct 2022. Over the last 3 months (Jan-March 2023), that number has increased by 8.5% to 7,480 bags of food per month.
- In our congregate dining at our older adult centers, we've seen demand for communal lunch skyrocket. From April 2021 to April 2022, we served 215 congregate lunches. From April 2022 to the beginning of April 2023, we served more than 12,197 congregate lunches. Alongside congregate dining, we served 36,668 grab-and-go meals from April 2021 to April 2022, which increased 9% the following year, to 39,951 grab-and-go meals served.

According to Asian American Federation (AAF) demographic data, the Asian-American senior population in NYC grew 33.6% from 2015 to 2020 – from 125,879 to 168,719 people. Asian-American seniors (aged 65+) are the fastest-growing population within that age bracket across the City. As of 2020, 24% of Asian-American seniors live in poverty. We anticipate that the demand for our services, including pantry and congregate dining, will only continue to grow.

Like the older adults we serve, our organization is also being forced to adapt to inflationary pressures like the rising cost of food. Some of the most painful increases we've felt from March 2020 to March 2023 are:

- The price of eggs increased 59%: from \$39/case to \$94/case
- The price of fish increased 42%
- Pears increased by 29% and kiwis by 25%
- Chicken legs increased 29%, from \$1.39/lb. to \$1.95/lb.
- Flank steaks for pork and beef both increased around 20% each. Pork flank steaks went from \$2.59/lb. to \$3.25/lb., while beef flank steaks rose from \$3.69/lb. to \$4.56/lb.

These price increases are also acute among culturally-appropriate foods traditionally used in Chinese cuisine:

- The price of mustard greens increased 24%, from \$29/case to \$38/case
- Bok Choy increased 17%, from \$29/case to \$35/case.
- Napa Cabbage (also known as Chinese cabbage) increased 15% from \$28/case to \$33/case.

These price increases, along with the rising demand for our meal services, means we've had to adapt our senior center menu options to "do more with less." We serve fish less frequently for lunch, from once a week to once every other week. We purchase less pears and peaches and have substituted them with more inexpensive fruits such as oranges and bananas. Some fruits with large seasonal price swings, such as kiwis, we no longer purchase when they are out-of-season and expensive. Lastly, we are increasingly forced to utilize frozen rather than fresh market vegetables for our meals on days when we observe a price spike that our budget cannot cover.

SNAP emergency allotment benefits ended Mar 1, 2023, with many New York City households seeing a \$95 reduction in benefits per month. This reduction in benefits could not have come at a worse time. USDA statistics observed a 9.5% inflation in food prices from 2022 to 2023 nationwide, and they are forecasting another 7.5% increase in prices for 2023 across the country.

Last, but certainly not least, the reimbursement rate for our meal services has remained static in the face of these observed price increases and increasing demand. At the current reimbursement rate, we estimate that we will be forced to further economize our fruit and vegetable choices to less expensive alternatives that are likewise less culturally appropriate for our older adult clientele, many of whom are Chinese-American.

In conclusion, I urge this committee to provide increased funding for our senior-serving meal programs that is commensurate with the increase in food prices. Additionally, our cooks, assistant cooks, kitchen aides and custodians working to deliver quality meal service also require commensurate pay increases in line with inflationary pressures impacting the cost-of-living in NYC. Now more than ever, our older adult neighbors need the meals and supportive wraparound services that organizations like Hamilton-Madison House provide to the community.

Thank you for your time, your attention, and your thoughtful consideration this morning.



2023 Hearing of the NYC Council Joint Committee Hearing on
General Welfare, Aging and the Subcommittee on Senior
Centers and Food Insecurity

April 19, 2023

Testimony of Emilio Tavarez, Director of Advocacy, Policy,
and Research, Hunger Free America

Good day. I am Emilio Tavarez, Director of Advocacy, Policy, and Research, Hunger Free America, a nonprofit direct service, and advocacy organization which works citywide and has offices in the Bronx and Manhattan. I am honored to testify today on behalf of the approximately 1.3 million New York City residents 65-and-over whose services we are addressing in today's hearing, who make up 16.2 percent of the city's population. An estimated 338,000 older New Yorkers struggle against hunger, so both the city's economy and older New Yorkers suffer when eligible people don't access the federally-funded nutrition benefits for which they are eligible, so we urge the city to better use data matching and other technologies to make it easier for them to get food help would be both smart and compassionate. Hunger in New York City is soaring again in all five boroughs of New York City for four reasons:

1. The pandemic's negative impact upon the City's economy has yet been fully reversed. For instance, the unemployment rate in The Bronx in January 2023 was still 7 %
2. The federal government recently slashed SNAP (food stamps benefits) for most of the 1.8 million low-income New Yorkers who rely upon them (which hit older adults especially hard as they saw their food budget cut from over \$286 a month in SNAP to \$23.)
3. The most recent influx of migrants into this City desperately need food assistance.
4. Still-high inflation rates not only make it harder for struggling New Yorkers to afford enough food, but also makes it harder for frugal non-profit groups like Hunger Free America to pay for our excellent staff and necessary rent.

This dramatic trend should alarm us all and lead to higher investments in support for the nonprofits and community-based organizations that form the backbone of the city's older adult services system and a multi-agency effort to make sure that a lot more of the older New Yorkers who are eligible for federal, state, and local government benefit programs take advantage of them: in the Bronx, where we do the bulk of our benefits outreach, the number of older adults in

poverty in the Bronx increased by 44 percent, from 32,881 in 2011 to 47,363 in 2021 – that’s the largest numerical increase of any county in the state. The number of older adults in poverty in Manhattan increased by 23 percent—from 37,639 in 2011 to 46,314 in 2021. Brooklyn saw the third-largest increase in the number of older adults living in poverty of any county in the state, as the number rose by 11,550 from 69,535 to 81,085. The number of older adults in poverty in Queens increased by 32 percent—from 42,598 in 2011 to 56,098 in 2021. The number of older adults in poverty on Staten Island increased by 63 percent—from 5,132 in 2011 to 8,380 in 2021.

We need a massive response from the City that goes way beyond merely nominally increasing funding for emergency food distributions. The most impactful and cost-effective way for the City to fight hunger is to increase participation in the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called the Food Stamps Program). Doing so would dwarf any other effort. If current caseloads and benefits levels stay stable, federal SNAP spending in New York City over the next year would be \$5.4 billion, which would equal 90 times the amount of funding (\$60 million) that the City Council previously allocated to emergency food programs through EFAP and P-FRED. If the City did more to work with nonprofit groups on SNAP outreach and access, and was able to raise the SNAP caseload and SNAP spending by merely five percent, that would equal \$270 million in extra federal spending on food relief, 4.5 times the money allocated to emergency food programs.

It is important to note that, not only is every penny of SNAP benefits paid for by the federal government, but any City money also spent on approved SNAP outreach and enrollment activities – including money sub-granted to nonprofit groups for such purposes – is matched 100 percent by the federal government, though the State. For all those reasons, the most cost-effective way for the City to reduce hunger – by far – is to fund efforts to increase enrollment in SNAP and other federally funded nutrition benefits. For example, **every City dollar that Hunger Free America spends on SNAP outreach work generates at least \$60 in federal benefits that fill the grocery carts of struggling new Yorkers.**

With older adults driving the population growth across New York, city leadership should also seize opportunities to tap the many strengths of older New Yorkers—to fill employment vacancies, create new businesses, and serve as volunteers and mentors. In addition to addressing the needs of older New Yorkers, policymakers should view this growing population as a positive force and take action to realize its full potential.

Background on The Current State of Hunger In New York City

Hunger estimates at the borough-level are calculated using three-year averages from the USDA’s data in order to increase accuracy due to small sample sizes. According to raw USDA data analyzed by Hunger Free America, across New York City, 14.5% of the population, or 1.2 million people, lived in food insecure households between 2019 and 2021. Staten Island is New York City’s hungriest borough in terms of prevalence, with 23.2% of residents (120,672 people) living in food insecure households, **but every borough continued to have a serious hunger problem.**

Brooklyn contains the highest number of individuals living in food insecure households, reaching 376,201 people between 2019 and 2021. Trends in hunger between 2016-2018 and 2019-2021 mainly showed an increase in the rate of hunger across the boroughs, except for the Bronx. The rate of food insecure individuals was the same as pre-recession levels of 14.5% between 2006- 2008. One out of every five children (20.2%) in New York City experiences food insecurity, while more than one quarter (28.7%) of children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity among employed adults increased in nearly every borough, when comparing 2019-21 to 2016-18 levels. The number of food insecure older New York City residents increased to 215,188 between 2019 and 2021.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the US Census Bureau launched the Household Pulse Survey (HPS) to collect timely data on household experiences during the pandemic. The HPS measures food sufficiency, which is not directly comparable to the USDA’s food security measurement due to different methodologies, response rates, and time periods covered. The number of New York State residents without enough food over one seven-day period was 34.6% higher in October of 2022 than in October of 2021. This was slightly higher than the 29.6% increase nationwide. Hunger Free America attributes that surge to the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credits and universal school meals, coupled with the impact of inflation.

Number of People without Enough to Eat, October 2021 vs October 2022 Changes in Food Insecure Individuals from 2019 to 2020

	<u>October 2021</u>	<u>October 2022</u>	<u>Percentage Change</u>
National	19,859,009	25,734,272	+29%
New York State	1,171, 123	1,576,641	+34.6%
New York City Metropolitan Area*	1,218,736	1,641,037	+34.7%

**The NYC Metro Area includes parts of NJ, CT, and PA*

Citywide in New York, in a Hunger Free America survey, more than a quarter of respondents (29.9%) said they did not distribute enough food to meet current demand. Nearly three-fourths of respondents (73.1%) said they served more people in 2022 than in 2021.

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 I would be glad to discuss, I think 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 1-10 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. Given the huge spike in unemployment since then, those numbers are surely far higher now. 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), also in 2018, USDA estimated that whopping 39% of the pregnant women and children under five 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.

Steps the City Council Should Take to Better Fight Hunger:

- **Increase ~~and formalize funding~~ to nonprofit groups (including Hunger Free America) that increase access to government food benefits, building ion the new NYC Benefits program.** As detailed above, every City dollar spent on SNAP outreach can generate up to \$60 in federal SNAP benefits. Just as P-FRED and EFAP have formalized a way for emergency food programs to receive funding from the City, the Council should authorize a specific long-term source of benefits outreach funds.
- **Rapidly eExpand on Mayor Adams' recently unveiled "MyCity" portal to include programs that boost the food and nutritional security of older adults such as SNAP, HEAP, and the Medicare Savings Program.**
- **Increase data matching between city agencies.** This would ensure that older adults receive all of the benefits for which they are already eligible for.
- **Develop food hubs in public housing buildings to allow older adults to order groceries to be delivered to their buildings.**
- **Fund all senior centers to enable them to conduct enrollment into federal and state benefit programs such as SNAP, HEAP, Medicare Savings Program**
- **Urge the state to raise the minimum wage, index it to ~~inflaction~~inflation, and end the sub-minimum wage for tipped food service workers.** Currently, workers in the food service industry are guaranteed minimum wages of between \$8.35 to \$10 per hour, depending on where they live in the state. When tips do not provide much more than that (as they often do not) these workers and their families live in poverty. Because so many workers have left or are leaving the industry because of lessened tips and increased hostility and harassment during the pandemic, hundreds of restaurants in the state are raising wages voluntarily; but those forward-thinking restaurants say that they are at a disadvantage if they do it alone, which is why they want the state to set a level playing field with the uniform, higher wage. Governor Hochul has the legal ability to unilaterally end this sub-minimum wage, if she does not do so, the state legislature should.
- **Increasing home-delivered meals to older adults unable to obtain food in-person**

- **Enact, fund, and implement a government-wide “Assets Empowerment/Middle Class Wealth Generation Agenda” to dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from *owing* non-productive debts interest to *owning* assets such as first homes and small businesses.** While extra funding from the Council would be helpful in this regard, the Adams Administration can start much of this work with existing funding.



Commitment to Improve the Quality of Life

December 14, 2022

Oversight - Food Insecurity and Older Adult Centers

Thank you Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy, Council Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on Older Adult Centers and Food Insecurity for this opportunity today.

I am testifying on behalf of India Home, the largest organization dedicated to New York's South Asian older adults through culturally competent older adult programs. We are in six locations across Queens, in Jamaica, Ozone Park, Flushing, Kew Gardens, Elmhurst, and Jamaica Estates. We get anywhere from 200-300 older adults per week at our centers.

Our food programs have been a trusted component of our services from our inception.

We have served nearly 200,000 meals to our older adults catered to their diverse South Asian diets, whether they are Bangladeshi Muslims, Gujarati Hindu vegetarians, Jain vegetarians, or Indo-Guyanese Hindus. It has been core to our mission that our programs filled a gap in cultural competence that conventional older adult center programs had from the get-go. Research had shown that South Asian older adults had already been food insecure prior to the pandemic, and a needs assessment we conducted in 2017 showed that having access to food and groceries was NY's South Asian older adults' highest financial concern. When the pandemic first hit, in a time of absolute crisis, India Home maintained our dedication and pivoted to provide home-delivered meals and groceries, while still ensuring cultural competence in what we serve. 10-20% of our clients, relied on our home-delivered meals during this time as their only nutritious meal for the day.

Culturally competent meals truly make or break programming for the older adults we serve. They require ingredients and dishes they are comfortable with, and partnerships with caterers that are not only familiar, but proficient and well-versed with their cultural palates, while upholding our clients' health and interests through nutritious choices. We have been entrusted in selecting those partners that are best suited to meet the needs of our older adults.

The budget that we receive for the culturally competent meals that we serve at our six centers is not sufficient to meet the actual costs. Our food is tailored to the diverse communities we serve, who have very diverse palates. Our meals are a large driving factor for bringing our older adults to the center, which we know DFTA wants. However, of the annual meal costs incurred at our older adult centers, which is our organization's biggest expense, 20% have to be covered through other sources of funding.

At the beginning of this fiscal year, we know that DFTA emphasized to have in-person congregate meals, without allowing Grab-and-Go. Our sites are in six different locations. As such, we must work with the sites that we have partnered with, which include mosques, Hindu temples and mandirs, and other community centers, which help our services to be more accessible. Some of these locations are smaller, with limited seating space for consumption of congregate meals.

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Mr. Sunil Aggarwal, MS, MBA



Commitment to Improve the Quality of Life

COVID-19 is still very much a concern for our older adults, with spikes in our own neighborhoods and communities, and cases increasing as we speak. We need all city agencies to be on the same page, and we need the agencies to be adaptive and realistic to the needs demonstrated by our community, holding our clients' safety of utmost importance. With COVID numbers increasing, there are clients of ours that do not want to eat at the center, and rightfully so. In crowded programming spaces where older adults want to engage in the programming safely with masks, mandating them to eat in that same space is insensitive to their health and well-being. As such, Grab-and-Go meals have been a crucial pillar that needs to be considered not temporary, but a lasting portion of our programming.

Furthermore, our homebound older adults are in a predicament given that we had to scale down the home-delivered meal program. These older adults once depended on our home-delivered meal program, which we had to conclude due to the urge to be back in-person and the lack of support and capacity. The HDM contractors to our knowledge are not South Asian do not provide meals to the level of cultural competence, nutrition and quality that we provided. Our clients, especially those with Medicare who do not have home health aide assistance, used to rely on our programs for their meals. These diverse homebound older adults of the South Asian community are now in a situation in which we can't leave them hanging. We have a client Randeria Uncle who comes to our center, and his wife recently fell, who used to be the one cooking meals for the both of them. She is now bed-ridden, and he depends on our center program for two days to bring that meal home to his wife via the Grab-and-Go method. We cannot be blind to these cases.

As the DFTA Commissioner said, life is not the same, and it will likely never be the same. We cannot force upon our life-affirming programs, methods that are not appropriate for the current reality. We need consideration of the Grab-and-Go program on a long-term basis, if not consistently throughout the year, with the option to wax and wane as per the seasons, with more allowance during the winter months during which time COVID cases commonly rise. We need the financial support from DFTA to support these methods to appropriately serve one of the fastest growing communities in New York, through more funding provided per meal, acknowledging the higher cost of culturally competent meals. With older adults being of the most vulnerable populations, we cannot afford to be tone deaf, we cannot afford to leave any older adult behind, and it is imperative that we ensure we do not deny our South Asian older adults the access to quality, culturally competent food that they deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Sincerely,

Shaaranya Pillai
Deputy Director, India Home

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NYC Committee on Aging-Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

April 19, 2023

Good afternoon members of the New York City council committee on Aging. My name is Helen Ahn, Director of KCS Older Adult Centers, and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Korean community services of metropolitan New York.

KCS Older Adult Centers have been providing culturally appropriate meal services and other crucial assistance to older adults since 1986. During F22, we served over 100,000 ethnic meals on wheels and over 100,000 in-person and grab-and-go meals. However, the pandemic and hate crimes have exacerbated food insecurity among older adults, especially among home-bound older adult immigrants who rely on community resources like ours.

As a frontline service provider funded under NYC Aging, we have seen firsthand the severe food insecurity experienced by many older adults in our community. We provide not only daily nutritious meals to homebound older adults and congregate meals and grab-and-go options for those who can travel to our centers, but also case management for heavily waitlisted clients, wellness checks, and education and recreation to reduce social isolation and increase social connection.

To continue providing these essential services, we urgently need more funding. Inflation, rising food costs, and strict nutrition standards, especially for ethnic raw food ingredients, have made it increasingly difficult to maintain quality programs. Home-delivered (**HDML service**) meal service providers have been directly impacted by the rising costs of raw food and transportation, and the current reimbursement rate of \$2.50 and rice per meal is not sufficient. The cost of rice, the main source of grain for ethnic food, has increased by over 66% as of today.

In addition, we are facing challenges in staff retention and recruitment due to the rising costs of gas, vehicle insurance, and repair costs, as well as the increasing cost of health insurance premiums. We cannot attract young people or retain existing staff to work for this meaningful service if we cannot increase staff salaries.

Finally, the new influx of meal services among young older adults, baby boomers who are turning 60, is adding to the increasing demand for high-quality services and driving up costs.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to provide continuous and increased funding to support our meal programs and other services for older adults. Our community needs us now more than ever, and with your support, we can continue to provide the essential assistance that so many rely on. Thank you for your time and consideration.



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뉴욕한인봉사센터

**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging and Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity
Discretionary Funding Budget Hearing – Food Insecurity in New York City
April 19, 2023**

**Testimony of Jane Jang, Grants and Advocacy Coordinator
Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS)**

Thank you, Council Members, for allowing me to testify today. My name is Jane Jang. I am a Grants and Advocacy Coordinator from the Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). Founded in 1973, KCS is the oldest and largest Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved communities across the New York City area.

78% of AAPIs in New York City are foreign-born. Our immigrant communities tend to display limited English proficiency (LEP) and therefore are more likely to fall below the poverty line. In fact, AAPIs demonstrate the highest poverty rate of all ethnic groups in New York City, with 1 in 5 of them living in poverty. Low income levels lead to a decline in individuals’ ability to acquire food on a daily basis. Accordingly, a 2022 report by NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health (CSAAH) found that access to food was Asian Americans’ top concern over the pandemic years.

To help maintain the health and well-being of underserved community members coping with food insecurity, KCS Flushing Older Adult Center provided 64,803 meals to Flushing-based older adults. Our Corona Older Adult Center provided 20,907 meals to Corona-based older adults. Our Home-Delivered Meal Program has delivered 73,077 meals as of February 2023. It is on pace to deliver 109,616 meals by the end of FY23. In addition to providing affordable and nutritious meals, KCS Older Adult Centers’ Nutrition program has been holistically fulfilling meal service needs unique to AAPI older adults, such as ethnic and easily digestible food, language access and accommodations for disabilities. Naturally, demand for our meal services across AAPI communities has only increased in the past few years.

We have been meeting this increased demand with support from dedicated staff and partner organizations. However, we have also been experiencing deficits for each meal we provide due to limited funding that reduces our capacity to pay for elevated raw food costs, hire and retain bilingual and culturally competent staff, prepare meals, and distribute them across the city. Although we want to reach many more people

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who still need our services, we are struggling to sustain our program. KCS is just one out of many organizations that experience these challenges in serving our vulnerable communities.

Therefore, KCS asks that an equitable share of City funding be allocated towards our Nutrition program, while standing in support of requests from similar programs committed to combating food insecurity. Please take our request into consideration such that every AAPI New Yorker will be able to lead nutritionally balanced and healthier lives. Thank you.

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**New York City Council
Committee on Aging
Chair Hudson
Committee on General Welfare
Chair Ayala
Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity
Chair Mealy
April 19, 2023
Oversight - Food Insecurity in New York City**

My name is Brianna Paden-Williams and I am the Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LiveOn NY's members include more than 110 community-based nonprofits that provide core services which allow all New Yorkers to thrive in our communities as we age, such as older adult centers, home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing, NORCs, and home care. LiveOn NY is also home to the Reframing Aging NYC Initiative, part of the national Reframing Aging Initiative aimed to counteract ageism and improve the way policymakers, stakeholders, and the public think about aging and older people. With our members, we work to make New York a better place to age.

Background

For many older New Yorkers, food insecurity remains a harsh reality of daily life with more than [200,000 older New Yorkers](#) relying on food banks for all or most of their nutrition needs. Though New Yorkers aged 60 and above make up 15% of the city's population, they represent 27% of the New Yorkers who visit the city's food banks. While food insecurity among older adults has been exacerbated due the pandemic and rising food cost over the past year, community-based organizations including Older Adults Centers and home-delivered meals providers have been essential to ensuring older adults do not go hunger and have food on the table.

Furthermore, SNAP benefits have been vital in the fight against food insecurity for low-income older adults. However only about half of older New Yorkers who qualify for SNAP benefits are currently receiving them. The City must work to bridge that gap by reducing the stigma associated with receiving benefits and making the application process more accessible and widely promoted around the city.

As the aging population increases, the proportion of those living in poverty is steadily rising. [From 2011 to 2021 the total poverty rate among older adults increased from 11.8 percent to 12.3 percent according to a report from the Center for an Urban Future.](#) Demographic trends indicate that the issue of older adult food insecurity in our city will continue to grow without action.



It's time for the City to address food insecurity in a comprehensive way that truly meets the needs of older New Yorkers. To address the issues of food insecurity for older adults, LiveOn NY is proud to offer the following recommendations:

Recommendations

First, recognizing the operation of Older Adults Centers and the home-delivered meals program that provide nutritious meals for older adults would not be possible without the tireless work of human service professionals, **we join our partners in calling for the City to Just Pay for all human services workers a liveable and equitable wage with a 6.5% COLA for all human services workers contracts.**

The City must recognize how inflation has impacted Older Adult Centers and home-delivered meals providers and invest an additional \$64.8 million to meet the existing needs of food providers for older adults. Both Older Adult Centers and home delivered meal providers have seen an over 20% increase in raw food costs from last year alone. LiveOn NY recommends the City allocate an additional \$14 million to address the inflation cost for the home-delivered meals program as well as \$46.3 million for congregate meals for Older Adult Center Providers to continue serving their existing population into FY24.

In addition, the City should invest \$4 million to fully fund holidays and weekend home-delivered meals. The current meal program funding does not cover meals on holidays and weekends, a gap that leaves many waiting for food from Friday into Monday.

The City should expand access to SNAP benefits for older adults. The under-enrollment rate of SNAP benefits is a major problem among older adults as well as other public benefits. Older adults face many barriers to utilize SNAP benefits including stigma, misconceptions about SNAP benefits, language barriers, and other obstacles. SNAP benefits help keep food on the table for New Yorkers including older adults. To respond to this, LiveOn NY recommends the City continues its strong outreach effort to ensure older adults know about and enroll in SNAP.

The Human Resources Administration should provide training for managers and directors of food pantries to actively promote SNAP at their locations and make applications available. The SNAP program is a critical component in the fight against older adult hunger. The city should target programs serving food insecure New Yorkers and facilitate easy applications for the program.

Increase city funding to make home-delivered meals available to any older adult who requests them. Regardless of one's utilization of benefits, older adults experiencing food insecurity for any reason should have food made available to them through the city's existing network of home delivered meal providers. Many older adults who do not fit the typical definition of need may be falling through the cracks in our current system. In addition, LiveOn NY also recommends **the City expands home delivered meal services to include 2 meals a day.**



Making New York a better place to age

LiveOn NY appreciates Chairs Hudson, Ayala, and Mealy for hosting this important hearing, and we look forward to being partners in the fight against food insecurity in our city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Testimony provided by Brianna Paden-Williams, Communications and Policy Associate at LiveOn NY For questions, please email bpaden-williams@liveon-ny.org

LiveOn NY's members provide the core, community-based services that allow older adults to thrive in their communities. With a base of more than 100 community-based organizations serving at least 300,000 older New Yorkers annually. Our members provide services ranging from senior centers, congregate and home-delivered meals, affordable senior housing with services, elder abuse prevention services, caregiver supports, case management, transportation, and NORCs. LiveOn NY advocates for increased funding for these vital services to improve both the solvency of the system and the overall capacity of community-based service providers.

LiveOn NY also administers a citywide outreach program and staffs a hotline that educates, screens and helps with benefit enrollment including SNAP, SCRIE and others, and also administers the Rights and Information for Senior Empowerment (RISE) program to bring critical information directly to seniors on important topics to help them age well in their communities.

New York City Council Subcommittee on
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

Hearing: "Food Insecurity in New York City"
April 19, 2023

Written testimony from
MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger

For decades, MAZON has worked to identify and remove barriers to food security for older adults in the U.S. And now, older adults are at higher risk for contracting COVID-19, and more likely to be adversely affected by the crisis. We are deeply concerned about the unique needs of LGBTQ older adults, who often face unique and persistent challenges to access services through the charitable food network, in addition to mounting barriers to federal nutrition safety net programs.

MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger was the motivating force behind the 2020 qualitative research report from UCLA's Williams Institute about food insecurity among LGBTQ older adults, which is part of the Institute's larger [Pathways to Justice Project](#) about poverty and economic insecurity among LGBTQ people. The report reveals persistent challenges and barriers to accessing the charitable food assistance network for LGBTQ individuals, illuminating the experiences of various demographics in both urban and rural settings.

As it stands, there is very limited data on LGBTQ older adult food insecurity, limited to either senior food insecurity numbers or food insecurity among the LGBTQ population as a whole. Just this past summer, the Census Bureau began collecting SOGI data for the first time as part of the weekly Household Pulse Survey, which tracks the economic conditions of Americans since the start of the pandemic. The first such [Pulse Survey](#) was striking and showed that LGBTQ Americans experienced food insecurity at twice the rate of non-LGBTQ Americans, 14% to 7%. Though this is an important first step, it still leaves an incomplete picture of hunger among LGBTQ older adults.

This brings us to the BRFSS, the largest national health survey of its kind, sponsored by the CDC, but administered locally by state public health departments in all 50 states, DC, Puerto Rico, and the other territories. The CDC describes the survey as follows:

The Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) is the nation's premier system of health-related telephone surveys that collect state data about U.S. residents regarding their health-related risk behaviors, chronic health conditions, and use of preventive services. BRFSS completes more than 400,000 adult interviews each year, making it the largest continuously conducted health survey system in the world. By collecting behavioral health

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risk data at the state and local level, BRFSS has become a powerful tool for targeting and building health promotion activities. As a result, BRFSS users have increasingly demanded more data and asked for additional questions on the survey.

As it stands now, 32 states and Guam currently collect SOGI data as part of their administration of the BRFSS^[1]. These states include both “red and blue” states, including many states that MAZON organizes in and also where we have many current and former grantee partners as well as synagogue partners. With this BRFSS data, advocates in Massachusetts determined that 19% of its LGBT seniors experienced food insecurity at some point in the prior year.^[2] However, it appears that no other states are using this data to calculate food insecurity numbers for their LGBTQ older adult populations. Upon further meetings and exchanges with Fenway Institute staff, we learned that staff in the Massachusetts Department of Health was able to calculate the statistic based on data sets provided from the BRFSS.

As we know from our other special populations work, data collection is the first key step to identifying and addressing the systemic factors leading to food insecurity among communities disproportionately impacted by hunger. With more concrete data that quantify a heightened level of need, we can then move to help design and advocate for programs aimed at directly helping LGBTQ older adults such as requiring cultural competency training for any and all service providers that interact with the LGBTQ older adult community. Using Massachusetts as an example, the state established a Special Legislative Commission on LGBT Aging in 2013, which released a recommendations report in 2015^[3]. From this report, Massachusetts took many actions to promote a higher quality of life including mandating cultural competency training for any aging program that works with the state.

MAZON encourages New York to undergo the same data calculation process undertaken by Massachusetts several years ago to determine the food insecurity rate for the states LGBTQ+ older adults.

MAZON would also like to share [the story of Alex](#), an LGBT Older Adult from New York City and his struggle with food security”

“When I left Ireland in 1961, coming to America was the bees’ knees. Even though much of my life gays had more challenges than we do today, I used to think, ‘Oh, life is fine, I can go on forever.’ Then all of a sudden I became almost a complete invalid. I never thought that someday I’d be like this – struggling to make ends meet, in a wheelchair because of a few strokes, unable to do things myself. I didn’t know what was going to happen to me. Sometimes, I didn’t care what happened to me. It’s very difficult to even talk about.

"I spent a long while rehabilitating in a nursing home. It was depressing there and I just had to get back home to my apartment. Seniors should be able to live out the rest of their lives in their homes – to have things around them that are familiar. No matter how old we are, we always like to be a little independent, you know? I'm home now, but I can't do much for myself in this wheelchair. I can't manage to cook. I can no longer work at the antique shop. For a while, my situation really depressed me. I don't have any family here in America. They're all gone.

"Now, five days a week I get Meals on Wheels delivered. It has been a godsend. Without it, I think I would have ended up in a nursing home for good because these meals are the only way I can get a balanced meal now, which I need to regain my strength.

"Up until the strokes, my life was kind of wild for someone my age – 81. I found a lot of activities to do for free. But on my Social Security and pension from Chase, I have less than 200 dollars to spend on food for the entire month so I'd hang out at my church where there was a lot of filming going on all the time. They were always feeding the film crews, so there were always lots of leftovers. Otherwise, I was subsisting on toast and tea, cans of soup. Sometimes, I'd buy grapes.

"If you have money, you can have a nice retirement. But if you don't have it, you have to take what you get. I lost a lot of my investments in the crash of 2008. My brother in Ireland sends me a little money once in a while. If I stayed at Chase longer, if I would have learned to keep up with the technology, I'd have a little more money. Woulda, coulda, shoulda.

"Now that my physical therapy has run out from Medicare, I've tried to get on Medicaid so I can continue recovering. I can't afford paying for therapy on my own. But I'm told that I make too much to get on Medicaid, and yet I have too little. I keep a few dollars under my bed but that's not enough. So, I'll just have to wait.

"I'm hoping to become a little more self-sufficient. I'm hoping to be able to take my Rollator and go across the street and get something at the store that I want. I don't think I'll ever be able to walk on my own. But I'm going to do the best I can. What I see for next year is Alex being out again, and doing the things that he did a year and a half ago."



MET COUNCIL

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.
Changing lives.

Chairs Ayala, Hudson, Mealy, and fellow members of the General Welfare and Aging Committees and the Subcommittee on Seniors Centers and Food Insecurity,

Thank you for taking the time to hold this oversight hearing on food insecurity in New York City. My name is Dickran Jebejian. I am the Food Policy Manager for the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, one of the largest emergency food providers in the city.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments ranging from 100% affordable housing to our award-winning family violence program to comprehensive Holocaust Survivor assistance, senior programming, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher emergency food network. In total, we provide a wide array of support to over 320,000 clients a year.

New York, a diverse and dynamic city, is a refuge for millions of people. Whether it is Ukrainians fleeing war, immigrants looking for a better life for themselves and their families, or Americans seeking opportunities in a city that allows them to truly be themselves, New York City provides a home. With this incredible diversity also comes the significant poverty that unduly affects millions of our residents. This poverty is persistent in our city, and emergency food is one of the most powerful tools we have to address it. Access to nutritious food leads to lower healthcare costs, higher educational attainment, financial flexibility to pay rent or bills, and an overall improvement in mental and physical well-being.

Met Council plays a unique role in the emergency food space by offering exclusively kosher and halal emergency food. While our goal is to ensure these communities with specific cultural needs have the resources they deserve, we are committed to serving any New Yorker in need, and we support all who require our services regardless of race, ethnicity, or religion.

Jewish and Muslim communities face significant barriers to food access. Recently, Met Council published a report on food insecurity and halal observance within American Muslim communities based on a nationally representative survey. Through this work, we found that over 80% of Muslim Americans observe a halal diet and that within these communities, food insufficiency was more than double the rate of all other respondents.ⁱ While this figure is nationally representative, New York is home to nearly one-quarter of all American Muslims, the largest concentration in the country, suggesting that Muslim New Yorkers struggle with food insufficiency at a similar and pronounced rate.

New York is also home to the largest Jewish population in the country. While the rate of kosher observance in Jewish communities is lower than the rate of halal adherence within Muslim communities, the sheer size of the Jewish population makes the kosher-observant population roughly the same size as the halal-observant population. Additionally, in these more observant communities, poverty rates are significant. Recent studies have shown that those who keep kosher are more likely to have lower household incomes than those who do not. This same research also showed that 45% of orthodox Jewish Americans, a community with a 95% kosher observance rate, struggled to pay bills or debts.ⁱⁱ During the height of the pandemic, over 20% of emergency meals, nearly 27 million meals, provided through the city's GetFoodNYC program were for either kosher or halal food.ⁱⁱⁱ

As we have seen COVID-19 emergency declarations vanish, SNAP emergency allotments ending for 1.7 million New Yorkers, and private funding waning, we want to thank this council and the members present today for their continued support of emergency food programs. By calling for \$60 million of baseline funding for Community Food Connections (CFC), one of the country's few city-funded emergency food programs, this council has shown its dedication to serving the programs that feed our communities.

While state and federal emergency food programs provide some funding to our pantries, CFC provides some of the most flexible and comprehensive funding we can access. As of FY23, CFC offers a robust product list that includes over 70 kosher-certified products. We thank the city for its effort to make this possible and note that this is significantly more than the eight kosher products available from USDA's TEFAP, which is the backbone of emergency food for most emergency food providers across the nation. Though we have immense gratitude for CFC, we must also note a few glaring flaws. First, though many kosher-certified products are available, CFC offers no halal-certified products. Even USDA TEFAP, a program with its own flaws, offers one halal-certified food product. Halal certifications, while often less ubiquitous than kosher, are essential for many processed food commodities and protein items. For instance, CFC offers frozen chicken, a highly valued emergency food commodity, but this chicken carries neither a halal nor kosher certification. This means our CFC funds cannot go towards purchasing something our clients truly value and which other New Yorkers can access.

Another major issue with CFC has been the pricing of fresh emergency food products. When the city ended the supply of fresh produce through the Pandemic Food Reserve Emergency Distribution Program, known colloquially as P-FRED, it sought to integrate fresh products into CFC, a hybrid of EFAP and P-FRED. While the availability of fresh products has dramatically increased due to this change, the prices of these products are often much higher through CFC than they are on the open market. This pricing causes emergency food programs to prioritize shelf-stable products rather than the fresh items New Yorkers want and an overreliance on private funding for food available may be available through CFC because the pricing simply does not add up.

Met Council, and our partners and colleagues, continue to serve more New Yorkers than at any point in the history of our organizations. While the pandemic may be over for many, the lasting economic effects and persistent inflation brought on by an unprecedented public health disruption remain part of the daily lives of our community members. With this in mind, we fully support the council's request for \$60 million in funding for CFC, and we hope to see continued support for emergency food and other social benefit programs going forward.

Thank you for your time today.

Sincerely,

Dickran Jebejian
Food Policy Manager
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

ⁱ Jessica Chait, Gabrielle Williams, and Dickran Jebejian, “Food Insufficiency and Halal Observance Among American Muslims: Met Council’s Analysis of The Institute for Social Policy & Understanding’s 2022 American Muslim Poll” (Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, March 2023),

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5eab6c28b259fc1e715ab71b/t/6425f99995fdaf1a9fe4c2d9/1680210329632/ISPU_FinalReport_WebPublishing_3.29.23.pdf.

ⁱⁱ 1615 L. St NW, Suite 800 Washington, and DC 20036 USA202-419-4300 | Main202-419-4349 | Fax202-419-4372 | Media Inquiries, “Jewish Americans in 2020,” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), May 11, 2021, <https://www.pewforum.org/2021/05/11/jewish-americans-in-2020/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Jessica Chait et al., “Getting Food to All Hungry New Yorkers” (New York, NY: Met Council, November 2021), <https://gettingfoodnyc.metcouncil.org/dist/pdf/MetCouncil%E2%80%93GettingFood.pdf?v=1.1>.



NEW YORK

Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Aging on Food Insecurity in New York City

April 19, 2023

Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York

INTRODUCTION

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

First, we thank the City Council for your continued commitment to protect New Yorkers from food insecurity. The City Council has long been a leader in addressing food insecurity, from supporting Breakfast in the Classroom, the expansion of universal school meals, and leading the charge for increased, baselined funding for food pantries and soup kitchens to ensuring that food insecurity remained a top priority throughout the pandemic. Now more than ever, we are grateful to count you as our partner in the fight against food insecurity. We were especially pleased by Speaker Adams' recent State of the City address and the recommendations tied to addressing food insecurity.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, our No Kid Hungry campaign builds and supports public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, No Kid Hungry provided more than \$7 million in emergency grants and support in New York and Puerto Rico to help schools, food banks and other community organizations feed kids during the crisis. In addition to our grant-making, we also offered strategic assistance to hundreds of local organizations and advocated for policies to address the unique barriers and unprecedented level of need brought on by the pandemic. This included national child nutrition waivers, which allowed meal providers to adapt and streamline their federal child nutrition program operations so they could keep serving meals to kids, other program flexibilities for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Pandemic EBT to help reach more kids in need. No Kid Hungry will also continue to operate a local text line this summer – “NYC FOOD” or “NYC COMIDA” to 304-304 - to help families locate meals, and No Kid Hungry New York will work closely with the New York City Department of Education to customize the service to reflect their specific offerings. Since 2011, our No Kid Hungry New York campaign has helped connect millions of children across the state with school breakfast and summer meals.

No Kid Hungry New York believes that all children, no matter their borough or circumstance, deserve the opportunity to be nourished and safe, so they can live up to their full potential and achieve their dreams. Adequate nutrition, both at school and at home, helps lay the foundation for a child's physical and emotional development, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Years of data and research have demonstrated that federal nutrition programs are our nation's most effective defense against hunger and food insecurity and have helped lift millions of families out of poverty.

As the Council continues its work to improve the futures of all New Yorkers, there are numerous investments that can and must be made in the coming months and years to improve food access and food security for children and families across New York City. By providing needed support and funds to strengthen, expand, and promote federal nutrition programs and other safety net programs, New York City can help to reduce food insecurity for New Yorkers in every borough and continue to reverse the trend of drastically increased food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TACKLE HUNGER IN NEW YORK CITY

STRENGTHEN FEDERAL NUTRITION PROGRAMS FOR ALL NEW YORK CITY KIDS

Fully Implement Breakfast After the Bell. In 2015, New York City made a bold commitment to equity, requiring all city elementary schools to implement Breakfast in the Classroom and ensuring students in those schools could start the school day with a nutritious breakfast. New York City became a national model for child nutrition programs and paved the way for New York State, which passed legislation in 2018 requiring breakfast be part of the school day for more than 1,400 schools statewide, including over 1,000 schools in New York City. Despite these agreements, many schools chose not to participate and claimed there were operational barriers to offering grab and go breakfast or breakfast delivered to the classroom. During the pandemic, all New York City public schools have provided alternative breakfast options and this program expansion must become permanent. Students who start the day with breakfast have higher attendance, better test scores and fewer chronic health problems.

Prioritize SNAP on All Levels of Government. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is one of the most effective and efficient ways to ensure that kids and families have the support they need to purchase food. With the economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis permeating every part of the city, it is more important than ever to remove barriers that impede access to SNAP. The New York City Council can utilize their authority and voice on all levels of government to ensure eligible families are accessing SNAP.

At the City level, ensure SNAP applications in New York City are being processed within 30 days. The timeliness rate for SNAP applications in NYC dropped to 60 % in 2022¹, meaning 40% of the applications took a month or longer to be processed. Families and children cannot wait on agencies to fill roles or streamline internal procedures. The Council should work with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance and Human Resources Administration to immediately address staffing shortages to unlock and leverage federal dollars to support families and fuel economic recovery.

Lastly, long-term policy changes can only happen with intervention or approval from the state and federal government. As a member of the New York City Council, your voice carries a lot of weight with members of the New York State Legislature and Congress. As SNAP bills are being introduced in the New York State Assembly and Senate, the Council can play a major role in strengthening and expanding access to college students and ensuring reissuance of benefits to recipients who were victims of fraud. With Farm Bill negotiations already underway, it is critical for the New York City Council to ensure SNAP is strengthened and protected through the 2023 Farm Bill. No Kid Hungry New York is encouraging you to work with the NY

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2022/hra.pdf>

Congressional Delegation to protect the value of SNAP benefits, maintain and increase access to SNAP and defend and expand access to SNAP-Ed.

Address Summer Hunger For Every Family Member. Historically summer has been the hungriest time of year for students and families. Summer meals reach far fewer eligible students than meals served during the school year and pre-COVID, adults weren't served meals at all. In New York City, barriers to access summer meals often include lack of program awareness among families, accessibility of meal sites, and availability of meals to adults.

Broad promotion of the summer meals program and available meal sites is integral to reducing summer hunger among New York City's children. Ensuring that information regarding meal sites comes from trusted messengers, such as schools, local elected officials, principals, parent advisory councils, and faith leaders, is an important way to encourage families to participate in the summer meals program. Many families also struggle with reaching meal sites, especially if meal sites are not close to home or when facing extreme weather. Expanding the number of meal sites and strategically placing them to avoid gaps in service are both essential strategies to increase summer meals participation.

The New York City Council can also advocate to the federal government for the authority to distribute "non-congregate meals," which would allow summer meal sites to distribute 'grab and go' meals or deliver meals to eligible kids. Non-congregate summer meal service was available nationwide through pandemic waiver authorities which expired September 30, 2022. Congress additionally provided nationwide non-congregate service for specific rural communities in the FY23 Omnibus appropriations bill last year. Unfortunately, because this service is limited to rural communities, New York City cannot participate in this program. During the pandemic, this flexibility was critical to New York City families – they no longer had to bring children to a site and have someone watch them eat the meals in a set window. Families could pick up meals and bring it home to ensure children had the meals when they needed it. No Kid Hungry New York urges the Council to encourage Congress to provide this flexibility to all communities as non-congregate meal options meet families where they are.

Within the same FY23 Omnibus appropriations bill, Congress made Summer EBT (SEBT), a grocery benefit provided to families with eligible children during the summer months, into a permanent nationwide program. This legislation turned SEBT from a small-scale pilot that required an annual appropriation into a permanent program that serves all children eligible for free or reduced-price school meals in all states, territories, and covered Indian Tribal Organizations (ITOs) starting in summer 2024. Since SEBT won't go into effect until next summer, it is critical for the New York City Council to take the steps now to ensure smooth implementation. No Kid Hungry New York urges the Council to encourage Governor Kathy Hochul to allocate the necessary resources and funds for implementation. We encourage the Council to maintain a regular dialogue with the Governor and OTDA to ensure New York's plans around SEBT implementation and promotion is robust and reaches all eligible families. In addition, we urge the Council to weigh in with the United States Department of Agriculture on the SEBT rulemaking that is required to be finalized by the end of 2023.

Lastly, New York City should continue to provide meals to adults at summer meals sites as done during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked why they did not participate in the summer meals programs before COVID, many parents responded it was because only the child could eat and there weren't meals available for adults. As the hunger crisis will not disappear overnight, New York City should invest funds to continue to provide adult meals at all summer meal sites so that each member of the family can have regular access to meals.

Increase Awareness, Outreach and Enrollment for Nutrition Programs. With many New Yorkers still facing unemployment and underemployment, especially in the face of rising food prices and rent, safety net programs are more important than ever. Federal programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid and the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) exist to help families get back on their feet during hard times. However, these programs only work when people can access them, which can be confusing and lead to lack of confidence in enrolling or utilizing programs. New York City must prioritize funding for outreach and education efforts to help families enroll in programs for which they or their children are eligible.

Address Systemic Barriers for Immigrant Families. As many New Yorkers are qualifying for benefits for the first time and the chilling effect of the rescinded Public Charge rule is still being felt by immigrant families, all programs that serve children and families must address systemic barriers to ensure equitable access for immigrant families, such as promoting language access and cultural competency, partnering with trusted community-based organizations, strengthening transportation access, removing burdensome paperwork requirements, and addressing the impacts of structural racism and discriminatory policies.

INVEST IN THE COMMUNITY

Continue Providing and Expanding Culturally Responsive Meals. The New York City Department of Education has prioritized offering kosher and halal meals to children and families across the city. Each year, they have also expanded vegetarian and now vegan options. Failure to accommodate cultural food preferences can discourage children from participating in school, out-of-school time, and child care nutrition programs, so this expansion has helped increase participation. New York City should continue to expand diverse food options and provide city agencies with training and tools to engage communities and plan culturally relevant menus.

Strengthen the Emergency Food Network by Investing in Community and School Food Pantries. The New York City Council must continue to add funding and support for the emergency food network in New York City. Food pantries and soup kitchens are the last line of defense against hunger for many families. The emergency food system is facing higher food costs, staffing shortages and increased need. Further, many organizations who were not directly involved in anti-hunger programs before were compelled to create new programs to address food insecurity for clients because the need is so high. It is clear that the hunger crisis is far from over. Funding for the Community Food Connections (CFC, formerly known as EFAP) program, the Food Pantries Initiative and other new funding streams created at the start of the pandemic to support food pantries and soup kitchens should continue to be expanded. Particularly as CFC now distributes fresh produce, it's essential to increase funds and ensure distribution of CFC product is done in an equitable manner.

In 2016, New York City created the first-in-the-nation food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools, which provide food, cleaning supplies, menstrual products, and tools to address hygiene for families in the school community. The New York City Council should invest in new school pantries, and it should prioritize their location in communities experiencing the greatest food insecurity or lack a nearby, existing emergency food provider. Likewise, they should invest in mobile markets, which are another important strategy to increase access to healthy food, particularly in underserved communities. Mobile markets offer an opportunity for city agencies to partner with local nonprofit organizations and businesses to bring fresh produce to communities across the city that struggle to access it.

Ensure Meal Accessibility on Weekends and Holidays. The typical 180-day school year represents just under half of all days in a year. Summer weekdays only add about 50 more days. More than one-third of the year is made up of "non-traditional times" where children do not have consistent access to school meals or summer meals programs, such as weekends, holidays, and school breaks. New York City should explore

opportunities to provide better availability of food options during this time whether through schools, city-funded programs or community organizations to ensure children have access to meals no matter the day.

BE A CHAMPION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Create a Child Hunger Task Force. In order to address the child hunger crisis in a holistic way, New York City should convene a Child Hunger Task Force, led by the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services. The Task Force would be composed of a range of stakeholders including high-level representatives of every city agency, elected officials, non-profits, faith-based leaders, and other stakeholders. The Task Force's mandate might include identifying barriers that impede families from accessing nutrition programs (and whether there are different barriers for different constituencies) along with policies and programs to address those very barriers; cross-agency specific plans for promotion of child nutrition programs; recommendations for new initiatives to help families put food on the table; and if the programs are reaching all equitably. Making the Task Force a formal structure ensures that it is a long-standing commitment and priority for the City of New York.

Advocate for Children Beyond the Federal Nutrition Programs. It takes more than having access to food and federal nutrition programs to fight hunger. Safety net programs, like tax credits, child care and others, create economic opportunities for children and families that are fundamental to addressing the root causes of childhood hunger. The Child Tax Credit has been helping families with children for decades in the form of an annual tax refund, and in 2021, the benefit was expanded as part of the federal government's pandemic response to be available to the hardest hit families with income too low to require filing taxes. Unfortunately, Congress failed to extend the enhanced Child Tax Credit, which expired in 2021 and families are once again facing the decision to choose between paying for rent, utilities, and food. Without action from Congress, No Kid Hungry New York encourages the Council to advocate for the expansion of the Empire State child credit and New York State Child Tax Credit so families are provided with extra income support and avoid making difficult decisions.

CONCLUSION

New York City is continuing to recover from a prolonged period of unprecedented loss and challenges. Throughout the pandemic, city agencies and nonprofit organizations sustained and fed children and families. With the city back open for business and life taking on signs of more normal existence, it is essential that no New Yorkers are left behind. As you discuss food insecurity today, we urge the New York City Council to prioritize strengthening and funding programs that ensure no New Yorker faces hunger. No Kid Hungry New York stands at the ready to work with the Council and our fellow New Yorkers to ensure all children and families have access to the food they need to thrive.



Testimony Submitted by

Judith Secon, Deputy Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

For the Committee of General Welfare Budget Hearing on the FY24 NYC Budget

April 19, 2023

Greetings, I am Judy Secon, Deputy Executive Director of New York Common Pantry. I would like to express my gratitude to Deputy Speaker Ayala for hosting today's budget hearing and for allowing us the opportunity to present this testimony.

New York Common Pantry is dedicated to addressing hunger and promoting dignity, health, and self-sufficiency for food-insecure families and individuals. Our organization operates in over 250 community partner sites throughout the city and offers four interconnected programs: Choice Pantry, Help 365 Case Management, Live Healthy!, and Nourish. In the past year, our programs have provided more than 9 million meals, over 9 million pounds of food, assisted in accessing over 6 million in benefit dollars, and served nearly 600,000 program visitors. As a founding member of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access, we collaborate with other emergency food providers to advocate for our agencies and those we serve. We understand how devastating food insecurity is to the mental and physical health of those experiencing it, and how much it impacts the quality of life in the communities it impacts.

Food insecurity must be properly addressed with on-going adequate funding and infrastructure support, not just as a response to whatever crisis is happening.

The pandemic, inflation, migration, and SNAP cuts has left an overwhelming number of families struggling to make ends meet, but even before that there was an unacceptable number of food insecure people in the city, and those addressing the problem have to struggle to get the needed resources. SNAP cuts, the latest on this list, will increase the need at an unprecedented rate over the next year and it is unknown what other cuts may happen with the new Farm Bill. During March, when SNAP cuts went into effect, we saw a 35% increase in our pantry use versus last March. Our Choice Pantry Bronx program experienced a 44% increase in individuals served.

We appeal to the Mayor and the City Council to provide much-needed support and funding that will allow us to continue meeting this intractable and growing need throughout the city. Emergency food providers offer stability for many individuals who would not know where their next meal is coming from without us. However, we require adequate funding from the city budget to continue our work and recognize the ever-present and growing need for agencies like ours.

We applaud and support the City Council's budget response that called on the Administration to increase the CFC funding, and to request adequate support for all community based providers so they can continue to serve the food insecure in their communities. Furthermore, we urge the city to ensure transparency in determining food funding allocations and to provide escalation clauses in contracts so that agencies can cover rising expenses and salaries. We also request

that HRA and other agencies receive full funding to adequately staff and process SNAP and other applications and expand CBO benefits access capability.

We want to work with the Council members to help us provide access to healthy, nutritious food to those in need. We need adequate funding so that we can provide food and the staff to deliver services and the ability to work with agencies and have a voice to ensure funding is sufficient. We respectfully request that the FY24 city budget appropriately reflect the funding levels necessary to confront food insecurity in NYC as the ongoing issue it is for the communities we serve.

Rethink Food

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The New York City Council
General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City
Wednesday, April 19th, 2023, 10 A.M.

TO: The General Welfare Committee
FROM: Matt Jozwiak, Rethink Food NYC, Inc.
DATE: Wednesday, April 19th, 2023

Speaker Adams, General Welfare Chair Ayala, Commissioners, General Welfare Committee Members, Council, and Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on Rethink Food's efforts to combat food insecurity and support to frontline community-based organizations and our cities small businesses. My name is Matt Jozwiak, and I am the CEO of Rethink Food, a New York City-based nonprofit with the mission to create a more sustainable and equitable food system - one where every New Yorker has access to dignified, culturally responsive, and nutritious food. Currently, we operate in 32 council districts across all 5 boroughs; support and partnership with the Council will be critical to ensuring that Rethink can continue to operate its models that address food insecurity, sustainability, and local economic development to support the general welfare of every New Yorker.

I founded Rethink in 2017 in New York City after spending over a decade as a cook in the restaurant industry. We started with a small kitchen using excess food from restaurants to cater local community centers.

Our work has evolved to include another solutions to address food insecurity – the Rethink Certified restaurant program. Launched at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, with food insecurity escalating and restaurants facing widespread closures, Rethink leveraged its experience to partner with restaurants to prepare meals for communities facing food insecurity. In exchange, we provide grants to support food, operating, and staffing costs. We had a unique opportunity to distribute meals to vulnerable communities and help restaurants stay open and retain staff. In 2022, Rethink and its partners delivered nearly 2M meals to 75+ CBOs, invested \$8.6M into 46 restaurants (75% of which were minority and or women-owned).

The communities we serve report higher percentages of health and socioeconomic disparities. But our work does not end there, as Rethink continues to respond to the emergent and ever-changing needs for meals as our city faces new challenges.

Additionally, as the price of food has continued to increase, coupled with the changes in emergency government programs such as stimulus payments, SNAP Emergency Allotments, universal free school meals, and the Child Tax Credit, New Yorkers again are

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faced with food insufficiency, meaning a household sometimes or oftentimes does not have enough to eat in the previous 7 days, an even more dire situation that food insecurity. In a 2023 report for the NYS Health Foundation, they reported that nearly 1 in 10 New Yorkers (9.7%) reported food insufficiency, an 1.1% increase from 2021¹. And we know that the elderly, families with children, and communities of color continue to be disproportionately affected and face higher rates of food insufficiency.

Looking ahead to 2023, through Rethink Certified, we plan to provide ~50K meals per week to those individuals served by our CBO partners. Through the Commissary Kitchen, Rethink will convert donated food items from restaurants, hospitality institutions, food suppliers and grocery stores into nutrient-dense meals to deliver an average of 8K meals per week to CBOs in Queens, Brooklyn, and Manhattan at no cost. To continue this work, we are seeking support for our citywide funding requests through the Speaker's Initiative (\$150,000) and Food Pantries Initiative (\$50,000 from the Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and Bronx Delegations).

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. We look forward to continuing the conversation on how in partnership with the Council, we work together to ensure that the most vulnerable New Yorkers have access to healthy, dignified and culturally responsive food.

Respectfully Submitted,

Matt Jozwiak

¹ New York State Health Foundation, "Food Insufficiency During the COVID-19 Pandemic: New York State Trends 2020-2022", <https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/food-insufficiency-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-new-york-state-trends-2020-2022/#background>.

We refuse to be invisible®

TESTIMONY

New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare, jointly with the Committee on Aging
and the Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity
Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City
Wednesday, April 19, 2023

Delivered by:

MJ Okma

Senior Manager of Advocacy and Government Relations at SAGE

Good morning, Chair Ayala, Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy, and members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, Committee on Aging, and Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity. Thank you for your leadership in bringing together this important oversight hearing on addressing food insecurity in New York City. My name is MJ Okma, and I am the Senior Manager of Advocacy and Government Relations at SAGE, the country's first and largest organization dedicated to improving the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) and HIV-affected older people.

SAGE has been serving LGBTQ+ elders and HIV-affected older New Yorkers for over four decades. With the support of the New York City Council, we provide comprehensive social services and community-building programs through our network of LGBTQ+ older adult centers along with extensive virtual programming, and services for homebound LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV. SAGE also made history in 2020 and 2021 when, together with our developer partners, we opened New York's first LGBTQ+ welcoming elder housing developments located in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

While LGBTQ+ elders and older people living with HIV are resilient, they encounter unique challenges that have severe negative health, economic, and social implications. Our City's LGBTQ+ and HIV-affected elders have faced oppression and stigma throughout their lives, resulting in barriers that suppress their voices and economic opportunities.¹ This oppression has had major impacts on our community's food security. To address this crisis, SAGE recommends the following actions:

1. Collect, analyze, and publish data on food insecurity rates among LGBTQ+ older adults in New York City, which could be calculated, in part, by utilizing sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) data collected by the State of New York through the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS).

2. Invest in community-run programs such as Love Wins Food Pantry that serve sizable communities of color and LGBTQ+ individuals to improve equitable access to nutrition services by creating affirming spaces LGBTQ+ elders can access without fear of discrimination.
3. Prioritize and fund structural HIV interventions that incorporate food assistance strategies targeted towards older people living with HIV.

Despite a lack of comprehensive federal, state, or city data on food insecurity and SNAP participation of LGBTQ+ individuals and households, research indicates that LGBTQ+ elders in the United States report high rates of food insecurity. **A report from the Williams Institute, analyzing pre-COVID-19 data, found that LGBTQ+ elders are 60% more likely to experience food insecurity than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.**² Another recent study that analyzed information gathered from interviews with 93 low-income LGBTQ+ people living in Los Angeles, highlight experiencing lack of family support, shame in seeking assistance, and fear of rejection and judgment by service providers as direct barriers to nutrition services for LGBTQ+ elders.³

Food insecurity is also more likely to impact transgender elders and LGBTQ+ elders of color, who face compounding systemic oppression. Using data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau on the Household Pulse Survey, The Williams Institute found that transgender people of color were five times as likely to experience food insecurity than white cisgender people.⁴

While there is not comprehensive data specific to New York City, SAGE has witnessed high rates of food insecurity among our participants, disproportionality among elders of color. Currently, one of the top concerns SAGE is seeing among participants of color is access to fresh produce and other nutrition services – an issue for many areas of the City that are considered food deserts. We have also heard stories from participants, especially among transgender elders, about feeling unwelcomed or fearing discrimination at food pantries.

To work to address these concerns, SAGE has partnered with Love Wins Food Pantry to operate an LGBTQ+-affirming pop-up food pantry out of our older adult centers in Midtown Manhattan, Harlem, the Bronx, and Brooklyn. This new program has already fed over 400 households. We urge the City Council to invest in programs like Love Wins Food Pantry that serve sizable communities of color and LGBTQ+ individuals to improve equitable access.

It is also important to address the unique ways that food insecurity impacts older New Yorkers Living with HIV and the urgent need for structural HIV interventions that incorporate targeted food assistance strategies for elders living with HIV and long-term survivors. **Food insecurity affects about a quarter to half of people living with HIV (PLWH) in the United States compared to 14% of the general population.**⁵ At the same time, the number of New Yorkers aging with HIV is also growing. This is because powerful HIV drugs are allowing many people to lead longer lives with HIV, and—while most new HIV cases occur in young New Yorkers—people over 50 are acquiring HIV at increasing rates, accounting for 17% of new diagnoses in New York

City in 2020.⁶ As a result, in 2020 over 60% of New Yorkers living with HIV were over the age of 50 and is estimated to be up to 73% of New Yorker living with HIV by 2030.⁷

Numerous studies have directly linked food insecurity among PLWH to incomplete HIV viral load suppression, sub-optimal HIV treatment adherence, and increased HIV transmission risk.⁸ A 2017 meta-analysis also found there were 29% lower odds of achieving complete viral suppression among PLWH who experienced food insecurity, providing a direct coalition between addressing food insecurity and ending the epidemic.⁹

Despite the growing need for LGBTQ+ and HIV-competent aging programs and services, LGBTQ+ elders and older New Yorkers living with HIV are often invisible, disconnected from services, and severely isolated, leading to pronounced levels of food insecurity. We urge the New York City Council to address this crisis by collecting, analyzing, and publishing data on food insecurity rates among LGBTQ+ older adults in New York City; investing in LGBTQ+-affirming food pantry programs such as Love Wins Food Pantry; and prioritizing HIV interventions that incorporate targeted food assistance strategies for older people living with HIV.

Thank you, Chair Ayala, Chair Hudson, and Chair Mealy for your leadership. SAGE values our partnership with the New York City Council and looks forward to working with you and your offices to address these issues head-on.

*MJ Okma, Senior Manager for Advocacy and Government Relations, SAGE
mokma@sageusa.org*

¹ Fredriksen-Goldsen, K.I. et al., (2011) The Aging and Health Report: Disparities and Resilience Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Older Adults The Goldsen Institute, University of Washington.

² Brown, T.N.T, Gates, G.J., & Romero, A.P. (July 2016). Food Insecurity and SNAP Participation in the LGBT Community. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

³ Wilson, B.D.M., Badgett, M. V. L., & Gomez, A. G. H. (2020, June). Experiences with Food Insecurity and Food Programs Among LGBTQ People. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

⁴ Conron, K.J., O'Neill, K.K. (April 2022). Food Insufficiency Among Transgender Adults During the COVID-19 Pandemic. The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law.

⁵ Spinelli MA, Frongillo EA, Sheira LA, Palar K, Tien PC, Wilson T, Merenstein D, Cohen M, Adedimeji A, Wentz E, Adimora AA, Metsch LR, Turan JM, Kushel MB, Weiser SD. (December 2017) Food Insecurity is Associated with Poor HIV Outcomes Among Women in the United States. AIDS and Behavior.

⁶ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (December 2021). HIV Surveillance Annual Report, 2020.

⁷ Gilead Sciences (November 2021). HIV Age Positively® 2021 Progress Report.

⁸ McLinden, T., Stover, S. & Hogg, R.S. (May 2020) HIV and Food Insecurity: A Syndemic Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic. AIDS and Behavior

⁹ Aibibula, W., Cox, J., Hamelin, AM. et al. (November 2016) Association Between Food Insecurity and HIV Viral Suppression: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. AIDS and Behavior.



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TESTIMONY
CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON AGING
AND
GENERAL WELFARE
HEARING

APRIL 19,2023

10:00 A.M.

PAOLA MICELI, PRESIDENT/CEO
Services Now for Adult Persons, Inc.
(SNAP)

80-45 Winchester Boulevard

Building # 4 CBU # 29

Queens Village, N.Y. 11427

Phone: (718) 454-2100

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DISTINGUISHED MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON AGING AND GENERAL WELFARE I WILL BE READING THE TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF PAOLA MICELI, THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF SERVICES NOW FOR ADULT PERSONS, INC. (SNAP). AS MANY OF YOU ARE AWARE, SNAP IS A MULTI-SERVICE SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY DEDICATED TO ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF THE ETHNICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY DIVERSE OLDER ADULT POPULATION IN QUEENS COUNTY. SNAP COVERS HALF OF THE BOROUGH'S COMMUNITY DISTRICTS THROUGH MANY OF IT'S PROGRAMS AND WORKS CLOSELY WITH OLDER ADULTS TO IMPROVE THEIR QUALITY OF LIFE. COMPONENTS OF THE SERVICES PROVIDED INCLUDE HOT CONGREGATE MEALS SERVED IN BOTH OF SNAP'S OLDER ADULT CENTERS, HEALTH/WELLNESS PROGRAMS, EDUCATION/RECREATION, SOCIALIZATION AND CASE ASSISTANCE FOR CENTER MEMBERS AND SENIORS FROM THE COMMUNITY-AT-LARGE. SERVICES ALSO INCLUDE PROVIDING HOME DELIVERED MEALS TO FRAIL, HOMEBOUND OLDER ADULTS WHO ARE PART OF SNAP'S CASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. RECENTLY, MANY CLIENTS ARE ASKING SNAP CASE MANAGERS IF THEY CAN RECEIVE MORE THAN ONE MEAL A DAY DUE TO THE RISING COST OF FOOD, THEIR INABILITY TO KEEP UP WITH THE RISING COST OF INFLATION, AND THEIR INCREASING INABILITY TO PREPARE THEIR OWN MEALS DUE TO THEIR POOR HEALTH STATUS. SNAP HAS FOUND THAT OLDER ADULTS ARE FINDING IT MUCH MORE DIFFICULT TO MANAGE ON THEIR FIXED INCOMES. WE STARTED TO SEE A RISE IN THIS ISSUE DURING THE COVID PANDEMIC AND CONTINUE TO SEE THIS AS AN INCREASING CHALLENGE. SNAP'S CASE WORKER IS FINDING THAT MORE SENIORS ARE COMING IN FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS TO MANAGE FROM MONTH TO MONTH. INFLATION IS CAUSING THEM TO BECOME OVERWHELMED AND UNABLE TO MEET EXPENSES. FOOD STAMPS HAS BECOME THE NUMBER ONE

ENTITLEMENT THAT SENIORS ARE APPLYING FOR WHEN THEY COME IN FOR ASSISTANCE. THOSE WHO ARE ALREADY GETTING FOOD STAMPS ARE FINDING THAT IT DOES NOT STRETCH ENOUGH TO KEEP UP WITH THE COST OF LIVING. MANY SENIORS WITH DIETARY RESTRICTIONS SUCH AS: DIABETES OR HEART DISEASE NEED TO BE MORE SELECTIVE WITH THEIR FOOD CHOICES BUT ARE UNABLE TO TAKE PROPER NUTRITIONAL CARE OF THEMSELVES AS COSTS FOR THESE FOOD ITEMS ARE PROHIBITIVE ON THEIR FIXED INCOMES WHILE TRYING TO AFFORD OTHER HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES. MANY OF THESE CHRONICALLY ILL INDIVIDUALS ARE PURCHASING LESS EXPENSIVE FOOD ITEMS WHICH ARE OFTEN NUTRITIONALLY UNHEALTHY WITH ADDED SALT, FAT AND FILLERS. SOME CLIENTS HAVE EVEN RESORTED TO EATING FAST FOOD DAILY BECAUSE IT IS ECONOMICAL. WHILE FOOD STAMPS HAS INCREASED ITS INCOME ELIGIBILITY LIMIT, IT DOES NOT MEET THE NEEDS OF MANY OLDER ADULTS AS INFLATION HAS IMPACTED ALL EXPENSES AND SENIOR INCOMES ARE FIXED AND LIMITED. RISING COSTS FOR FOOD, RENT, UTILITIES AND OTHER NECESSITIES ARE TAKING A BIGGER BITE OUT OF THEIR LIMITED FUNDS. THOSE LIVING ON SOCIAL SECURITY WITHOUT PENSIONS ARE MOST AFFECTED. IN MANY WAYS FOOD STAMPS IS MEANT TO HELP PEOPLE MANAGE UNTIL THEY GET AHEAD BUT FOR MANY SENIORS FOOD STAMPS IS NECESSARY FOR SURVIVAL AND THERE IS NO GETTING AHEAD. FOR MANY OLDER ADULTS MEDICAL INSURANCE EXHAUSTS THEIR INCOMES WITH EXHORBITANT PREMIUMS AND DEDUCTIBLES. MANY NEED EXTRA BENEFITS BUT CANNOT AFFORD THE PLANS THAT OFFER EXTRA COVERAGE SO OFTEN TIMES THEY HAVE TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THEIR MEDICATION OR FOOD. ONE LEGALLY BLIND OLDER ADULT COMES TO MIND IN REGARD TO THIS ISSUE AS HER HEALTH NEEDS REQUIRE A PLAN THAT COSTS \$700.00 A QUARTER.

SOME POSSIBILITIES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED IN SEEKING TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF OLDER ADULTS MOVING FORWARD.

ONE POSSIBILITY TO CONSIDER IN REGARD TO HELPING OLDER ADULTS DURING THESE DIFFICULT FINANCIAL TIMES INCLUDES PROVIDING INCENTIVES FOR GROCERY STORES TO OFFER “FOOD GIVE AWAY DAYS” SO THAT THE EXCESS FOOD THAT THE SUPERMARKET CARRIES COULD BE GIVEN TO SENIORS ON THOSE SPECIFIC DAYS.

ALSO, ARRANGING FOR DELIVERIES FROM FOOD PANTRIES FOR HOMEBOUND OLDER ADULTS. ORGANIZATIONS LIKE SNAP CAN PROVIDE THE PICK UP AND DELIVERY OF FOOD ITEMS THROUGH THEIR TRANSPORTATION PROGRAMS.

MEDICAL INSURANCE COMPANIES COULD ALSO PROVIDE INCENTIVES FOR SENIORS BY REDUCING PREMIUMS OR DEDUCTIBLES FOR THOSE WHO PURCHASE NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED FOOD ITEMS IN THE SAME WAY CERTAIN INSURANCES COVER COSTS FOR HEALTH AND WELLNESS PROGRAM MEMBERSHIPS.

INCREASING RAW FOOD BUDGETS OF COMMUNITY-BASED AGENCIES LIKE SNAP SO THAT SENIORS COULD RECEIVE NUTRITIONALLY BALANCED LUNCH AND DINNER MEALS TO COVER A FULL WEEK OF FOOD.

SNAP IS GRATEFUL FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO TESTIFY AND WISHES TO EXPRESS OUR GRATITUDE TO THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON AGING AND GENERAL WELFARE FOR HOLDING THIS HEARING AND WORKING DILIGENTLY TO FIND SOLUTIONS THAT WILL HELP REDUCE FOOD INSECURITY AMONG OLDER ADULTS THROUGHOUT NEW YORK CITY.



TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

New York City Council Oversight Hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City

**New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Honorable Diana Ayala, Chair**

**New York City Council Committee on Aging
Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair**

**Submitted by:
Ariel Savransky, UJA-Federation of New York**

April 19th, 2023

Thank you, Chairperson Ayala and Chairperson Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare and Aging, for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Ariel Savransky, and I am a Senior Advocacy and Policy Advisor 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 has more than 50 thousand engaged donors in the New York area, supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services, and allocates over \$150 million each year to strengthen Jewish life, combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, and respond to crises here and across the globe.

Supporting the Human Services Workforce

Government human services contracts significantly underpay the workforce, which is made up largely of women and people of color. These professionals are essential to ensuring New York City is able to provide services for those who need them, and yet, the wages provided keep its workforce living in poverty. The FY23 budget included \$60 million baseline funding for human services workers, and we appreciate the Council calling on the Mayor to double that investment. However, this will not fully address the need.

A more substantial investment is necessary. UJA supports a 6.5% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for the human services workforce in FY24. An investment labeled as a COLA in budget documents with a designated percentage will allow nonprofit providers to implement

wage changes while waiting for funding from the City--something they were unable to do with the \$60 million investment in FY23. The 6.5% COLA will cost an estimated \$200 million and will assist workers trying to manage rising inflation costs.

In every nonprofit in UJA's network, finding and retaining qualified staff is consistently indicated as one of the main challenges facing organizations. Low salaries make it difficult to attract and retain qualified employees. Nonprofit employees often leave to work in similar positions in government or private industry due to the higher salaries that are offered. The 6.5% COLA would help nonprofits increase wages to be comparable to what individuals receive in government and private sector positions. Nonprofits cannot continue to have a positive impact on their communities without staff to lead these efforts. **An investment of \$200 million to implement a 6.5% COLA in FY24 must be made to maintain vital human services throughout New York City.**

Addressing Food Insecurity

New York City has not fully recovered from the economic, social or public health impacts of the pandemic. Many families are still struggling to make ends meet and UJA's nonprofit partners are seeing an unprecedented demand for emergency food assistance. Since May 2020, the unemployment rate in New York City has hovered around twice the national average at 5.6%. The most recent United States Department of Labor data shows that inflation rose to a record 9.1% in June 2022, the largest gain in nearly four decades, reflecting increased food, shelter, and fuel costs nationwide. Although the national inflation rate is at 9.1%, increases to basic grocery items include a 26.3% increase in the cost of butter and margarine, an 18.6% increase in the cost of chicken, and a 16.4% increase in the price of milk. In that same time period, 64% of respondents had difficulty paying for usual household expenses. With a national economic recession looming, UJA is concerned that the poverty rates, inequality and need for food assistance across the city will worsen.

Nearly 1.5 million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity, a 36% increase since the beginning of the pandemic. This includes one in four children – a 46% increase over pre-pandemic figures. Access to healthy, culturally appropriate food is a continuous issue that New Yorkers face; however, the mayor is proposing flat funding across the board for critical food assistance programs, which will place an increased demand for food on pantries, farmers and supermarkets. Visits to New York City food pantries and soup kitchens were up 69% in 2022 compared to 2019 and up 14% since January of 2022 due to increasing food prices.

The Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council), UJA's primary partner in addressing food insecurity in the New York Jewish Community, provided food to 246 pantries including 182 pantries serving the kosher community, 17 serving the Halal community, and 47 rooted in the general population in FY22. Furthermore, according to their November report, city-collected data showed that one in five New Yorkers sought kosher or halal food from the city's GetFood NYC pandemic program, showing that there truly is a need for kosher and halal food in the emergency food system. Without increased funding, these individuals and families relying on these pantries will not be able to access necessary food supports.

UJA-Federation submits the following recommendations to ensure that the local food system and supply chain remains intact, that all families are able to access the food and support they need, and that front line community-based organizations (CBOs) can continue to respond effectively to this crisis:

1) Increase funding to a total of \$59 million for the Community Food Connection program (CFC), formerly the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP)

- a. The Mayor's preliminary budget proposes baseline funding of \$23.8M plus an additional \$30 million for a total program budget of ~\$52 million. We urge that \$30 million that was allocated for FY23 and FY24 to be baselined as well as a moderate increase for a total of \$59 Million to accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need, including the continuing influx of asylum seekers and other migrants seeking refuge in New York City.
- b. Additionally, UJA urges the Council and the Administration to explore ways to include more kosher food options in the emergency food programs funded by the city. Historically it has been very difficult to obtain enough kosher-certified food from government or donated sources to meet the needs of even those requiring a “basic” level of kosher, and nearly impossible to meet those require a high standard of certifications. The USDA Emergency Food Access Program (TEFAP) requires kosher certification for only six products, and no foods made available through TEFAP have the certifications needed for those requiring the highest levels of kosher certification. Likewise, little kosher food is available from other sources of donated food like City Harvest or Food Bank for the City of New York. To provide a nutritionally balanced pantry bag in kosher-observant communities, Met Council must purchase much of the food it uses to serve these families. As such, the reach in these communities is dependent on and limited to private philanthropy and fundraising efforts.

UJA appreciates the steps that the city’s emergency food programs have taken to include more kosher and halal products in the system, as well as the requirement that the Community Food Connections provider demonstrate their capacity to source Kosher and Halal food serving a range of kosher levels. However, it is imperative that these efforts are expanded so that food pantries serving these communities have access to necessary resources.

2) Allocate additional funds within the Human Resource Administration towards nutrition benefit program enrollment and outreach.

- a. At the height of the pandemic, when rates of food insecurity had nearly doubled in NYC, only 50 percent of New Yorkers who were facing severe food hardship were enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Funding cuts to HRA and other agencies across the board will only worsen this situation and UJA urges the Administration to reconsider its proposed cuts to HRA and to more seriously address the vacancy rate at the agency, which is greatly contributing to the slow processing of SNAP applications. UJA urges the City to increase funding for the agency and CBOs engaged in benefits outreach to

meet ongoing demand and improve the administration of critical food benefit programs. Additionally, UJA urges HRA to allocate additional funds within the budget towards promoting and enrolling New Yorkers in social safety net programs, re-opening field offices closed during the pandemic, adding additional One Stop Shop locations, adding additional staff to the hotline to enroll people in programs and investing additional funding into promoting the Health Bucks and Get the Good Stuff Program at DOHMH.

- 3) **Fund pilot projects to enable the state government to work collaboratively with New York City to make it easier for eligible New Yorkers to apply for multiple food benefits online, as a first step toward doing so for all anti-poverty benefits.** Currently, New Yorkers eligible for multiple benefits must fill out individual applications for each benefit for which they are eligible to apply. According to the MyCity plan laid out by the Mayor, the goal of the Administration is to create one online portal with a universal application and verification process so that New Yorkers can qualify for multiple benefits simultaneously. In addition, the Mayor proposes combining all City agencies' data onto one universal platform so that any agency can assist any New Yorker with any benefit. UJA urges the Council and the Administration to work together to ensure this portal is developed and rolled out. As a first step in this process, UJA encourages the City and the State to work together to create a joint application for the SNAP program (run by NYC HRA) and the WIC program (run by NYS DOH).

- 4) **Evaluate the newly relaunched Grocery to Go Program.** This program emerged in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic as food assistance for homebound New Yorkers and has since been redesigned to provide food insecure New Yorkers who also have hypertension and/or diabetes with monthly credit to purchase groceries through an online marketplace of local grocery stores. Most participants that were originally participating in the Get Food program will not meet the new requirements for the Groceries to Go Program due to their physical health status.
 - a. Given the short timeframe in which the allocated funds will need to be spent (by June 2023) and the highly specific eligibility requirements, UJA is concerned that the DOHMH may not be able to fully enroll 5,000 New Yorkers in time to spend down all of the available funds. To make the program more impactful and ensure unspent credits do not go to waste, UJA strongly recommends: 1) increasing the monthly credits allotted to each participating household to ensure that funds are reaching the individuals that the program is intended to serve, 2) expand the list for diet related conditions to widen the scale of the program, and 3) allow for the participation of young adults who meet the other eligibility criteria.

Finally, UJA encourages the program to allow enrollees to have the freedom to use the credits on food items of their choosing that reflect need, cultural preference, dietary or medical requirements and personal taste. UJA strongly encourages the DOHMH not to apply additional limitations to eligible foods and to maintain that Grocery to Go credits can purchase SNAP approved items.

Older Adult Hunger

Just as everyday New Yorkers are struggling with inflation and the extreme rise in food costs, so too are providers of Home Delivered Meals (HDM) and Congregate Meals, which support older New Yorkers. To improve sustainability and broaden the reach of older adult meal programs in FY 24 and beyond, UJA supports an additional \$64.8 Million for the NYC Aging (formerly Department for the Aging) budget to specifically address hunger among older New Yorkers. This includes:

- **\$14 million** for inflation costs (covering raw food, gas, and other items) for home-delivered meals.
- **\$46 million** for inflation, raw food cost, and other items for congregate meals.
- **\$4 million** to support weekend and holiday home-delivered meals not provided by current contracts.

Conclusion

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist New York City's most vulnerable and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for your time and if you have any questions, please contact me at savranskya@ujafedny.org.

**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: 4-14-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicole Hunt

Address: _____

I represent: Food Bank For New York City

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Sabella

Address: No Kid Hungry New York

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4-19-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vik Bensen

Address: Flatbush Ave, Brooklyn

I represent: Citymeals on Wheels

Address: 355 Lexington Ave, Manhattan

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: 4/19/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebecca Valdez

Address: _____

I represent: Corbin Hill Food Project

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: 4/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Keith Carr

Address: _____

I represent: City Harvest

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: 4-19-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: M J Okma

Address: _____

I represent: SAGE

Address: 305 7th Ave, 15th floor



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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brianne Paden - Will, am

Address: 49 W 45th Street, NY, NY

I represent: Live On 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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jill Berry, Deputy Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: DSS-HERA

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: 4/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anya Herasme, Associate Commissioner

Address: 2 La Hayette - 7th Fl

I represent: NYC Aging

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: 4-19-22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Scott

Address: 310 GREENWICH ST

I represent: IPN Senior Center

Address: 310 GREENWICH ST

**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: 4/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Camila Gomez

Address: 1666 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS NY 10013

I represent: God's Love We Deliver

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: APRIL 19 2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MARIA DELO

Address: Saint MARY'S ST

I represent: GREENWICH HOUSE

Address: 20 W SQUARE NORTH

**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: 4-19-23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stacey Gail McKee

Address: Powell Street Bklyn. N.Y.

I represent: Greenwich House 11212

Address: 25 Carmine Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erin Reddan

Address: 52 Duane Street N.Y.C. 10013

I represent: Common Health

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: 4/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dickran Sebejian

Address: 77 Water St., N.Y., N.Y., 10005

I represent: Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

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: 4-19-23

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: SHARON FISHELMAN
Address: 5625 ARLINGTON AVE, Bronx N.Y. 10471
I represent: Riverdale Y.M.C.A. / W.H.A.
Address: 5625 ARLINGTON AVE Box 10471

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: 4/19/23

(PLEASE PRINT)
Name: JUDY SECON
Address: 8 East 109th St.
I represent: New York Common Party
Address: 8 East 109th St.

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