

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH THE  
COMMITTEE ON AGING AND THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
SENIOR CENTERS AND FOOD INSECURITY

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CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE  
JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON  
AGING AND THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
SENIOR CENTERS & FOOD INSECURITY

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April 19, 2023  
Start: 10:15 a.m.  
Recess: 1:10 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala,  
Chairperson of Committee on  
General Welfare  
  
Crystal Hudson,  
Chairperson of Committee on Aging  
  
Darlene Mealy,  
Chairperson of Subcommittee on  
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Eric Dinowitz  
Linda Lee  
Christopher Marte  
Kristin Richardson Jordan  
Lynn C. Schulman  
Justin Brannan  
Sandra Ung

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COUNCIL MEMBERS: (CONTINUED)

Nantasha Williams  
Althea Stevens  
Lincoln Restler

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3 SENIOR CENTERS AND FOOD INSECURITY 3

4 A P P E A R A N C E S

5 Jill Berry  
6 First Deputy Commissioner at the  
7 Department of Social Services

8 Anya Herasme  
9 New York City Aging

10 MJ Okma  
11 Sage

12 Dickran Jebejiah  
13 Food Policy Manager for the Metropolitan  
14 Council on Jewish Poverty

15 Camila Gomez  
16 God's Love We Deliver

17 Rachel Sabella  
18 Director of No Kid Hungry New York or  
19 Share our Strength

20 Sharon Asherman  
21 Director of the Older Adult Center in the  
22 Riverdale Y

23 Emilio Tavaréz  
24 Policy and Research Director for Hunger  
25 Free America

Jane Jang  
Grants and Advocacy Coordinator from the  
Korean Community Services of Metropolitan  
New York

Leah Eden  
Executive Director of Equity Advocates

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

6 Debipriya Chatterjee  
7 Senior Economist with the Community  
8 Service Society of New York

9 Maria O'Hada  
10 Kitchen Aid of Center Square or the Adult  
11 Center at Greenwich House

12 Stacey Gay McRae  
13 Kitchen Aid at Greenwich House, Our Lady  
14 of Pompeii Older Adult Center

15 Brianna Paden-Williams  
16 Communications and Policy Associate at  
17 Live On New York

18 Vik Bensen  
19 Policy Analyst at City Meals on Wheels

20 Helen Jang  
21 Senior Director of KCS Older Adult  
22 Centers

23 Mary Archana Fernandez  
24 Director for Family Support Services  
25 SACSS

Jeremy Caplan  
Executive Director at Encore Community  
Services

Matthew Josbiach  
Founder and CEO of a New York City based  
non-profit

Davinder Singh  
India Home

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

Rebecca Valdez  
Corbin Hill Food Project

Erin Reddan  
Regional Manager at Emblem Health  
Neighborhood Care

Judy Secon  
Deputy Executive Director of New York  
Common Pantry

Bobby Brannigan  
Co-founder and CEO of Mercato

Karen Carp (SP?)  
President of Karen Carp and Partners

Tanisha Grant  
Executive Director and Founder of Parent  
Supporting Parents

Megan Eisenberg  
Director of Case Management for Services  
now for Adult Persons, INC

Keith Carr  
Senior Manager of Policy and Government  
Relations at City Harvest

Nicole Hunt  
Associate Director of Public Policy at  
the Food Bank for New York City

Imtiaz Hussain (SP?)  
Senior Manager of Advocacy at United Way  
of New York City

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

Kevin Jones  
Associate State Director for Advocacy at  
AARP New York

Arif Sumanu (SP?)  
Grow-NYC

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: This is a microphone check  
for the Committee on General Welfare, Aging, Senior  
Center and Food Insecurity, located in the Committee  
Room, recorded by Nazly Paytuvi on April 19, 2023.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning and welcome to  
the New York City Hybrid Hearing on the Committees  
on General Welfare together with Aging and Senior  
Centers and Food Insecurity. Please silence all  
electronic devices. Chair, we are ready to begin.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Good morning everyone. My  
name is Diana Ayala and I am the Chair – hold on a  
second, there's like an echo. Got it, okay, thank  
you.

Good morning everyone. My name is Diana Ayala  
and I am the Deputy Speaker of the New York City  
Council and the Chair of the General Welfare  
Committee. I'd like to begin by thanking everyone  
for joining us this morning for our joint hearing  
with the Committee on Aging and the Subcommittee on  
Senior Centers and Food Insecurity in New York City.

Food insecurity effects countless individuals and  
families in the city. Some of the primary causes for  
hunger and food insecurity include poverty,

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1 unemployment, lack of affordable housing, health care  
2 costs, high health care costs and the lack of access  
3 to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

4 These issues are deeply interlinked with one another.

5 Lack of neighborhood access to affordable and  
6 nutritious food also contributes to hunger and food  
7 insecurity. Numerous studies have shown that hunger  
8 and food insecurity are prevalent among children,  
9 college students and the elderly, minority groups and  
10 undocumented immigrants.  
11

12 While we are holding a hearing, a joint hearing,  
13 my focus today is on all New Yorkers who are food  
14 insecure. According to the New York City Mayor's  
15 Office of Food Policy 2022, Food metrics annual  
16 report, an estimated 1.2 million New York City  
17 residents were food insecure. New York City's  
18 residents make up 50 percent of all food insecure  
19 people living in all of New York State.

20 Nearly 1.2 million New Yorkers were food insecure  
21 even before the COVID pandemic with more than 185  
22 million missing meals across the five boroughs, also  
23 known as the meal gap. We know that number has grown  
24 due to the economic impact of the pandemic on  
25 individuals and families in New York City.



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1 Food costs are exorbitant here as well. For  
2 example, average meal cost in New York City, New York  
3 County are estimated to be \$6.31. Almost twice as  
4 high as the national average of \$3.25. In New York,  
5 high food prices can make circumstances even more  
6 difficult for food insecure households.  
7

8 The Committee on General Welfare holds an annual  
9 hearing on food insecurity in New York City. At  
10 these hearings, we examine issues surrounding access  
11 to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, known  
12 as the SNAP benefits and the consistently growing  
13 resilience on food pantries and soup kitchens. The  
14 Committee also addresses the issues surrounding the  
15 city's main funding stream for food pantries and soup  
16 kitchens, previously known as HRA's Emergency Food  
17 Assistance Program, also known as EFAP, and now  
18 called the Community Food Connection CFC.

19 At today's hearing, we want to examine SNAP  
20 usage. We hear time and time again about the  
21 significant delays in processing SNAP applications,  
22 which prevent New Yorkers from accessing of much  
23 needed benefit as soon as possible.

24 We will also be seeking an update from the CFC  
25 program. I personally would like to think of ways

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1 that we can modernize – I’m sorry, I’m wearing old  
2 glasses and I am doing the best that I can to see.  
3 Ugh, the struggle.

4 We will also be seeking an update on the CFC  
5 program. I personally would like to think of ways  
6 that we can modernize the selection process at food  
7 pantries to curb food waste, which we also know is an  
8 ongoing issue. Additionally, we will be exploring  
9 what can be done to supplement SNAP benefits given  
10 the recent end to the programs emergency allotment,  
11 which increased SNAP benefits to provide economic  
12 stimulus during the COVID pandemic.

13 I want to thank the Administration, the  
14 advocates, the providers, and all who have taken the  
15 time to join us here today. At this time, I’d like  
16 to acknowledge my colleagues who are here with us,  
17 Council Member Ung, Schulman, Hudson, Mealy, Lee,  
18 Marte and I’m sure that we’ll be joined by a few  
19 others. And I would like to finally thank the  
20 Committee Staff who worked to prepare this hearing  
21 Aminta Kilawan our Senior Counsel, David Romero  
22 Counsel, Julia Haramis Senior Finance Analyst, Rose  
23 Martinez Assistant Deputy Director, Anne Driscoll  
24

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1 Data Scientist, Lizette Gondiadiaz (SP?) Legal Intern  
2 and my Staff Elsie Encarnacion Chief of Staff.

3 I would now like to turn it over to my colleague  
4 Council Member Hudson, Chair of the Committee on  
5 Aging to deliver her opening statement.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Thank you so much Chair  
8 Ayala and good morning. I'm Council Member Crystal  
9 Hudson, Chair of the Committee on Aging and thank you  
10 again Deputy Speaker Ayala for calling this very  
11 important oversight hearing on food insecurity in New  
12 York City. Thank you.

13 One in four - I think it's okay, one in four  
14 older New Yorkers is a SNAP recipient and for nearly  
15 three years, pandemic related emergency legislation  
16 enacted by congress allowed all SNAP participants to  
17 receive the maximum monthly benefit regardless of  
18 income.

19 Despite the economic downturn, government reports  
20 show that expansion of aid kept food insecurity from  
21 growing during the time. It also helped to cut  
22 poverty rates to a record low. The temporary  
23 increase, however, expired last month, effectively  
24 cutting benefits for the vast majority of SNAP  
25 recipients. Coupled with the rise and inflation,

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1 many New Yorkers are left to rely on food pantries,  
2 soup kitchens and older adult meal programs. And the  
3 level of need in the city for food assistance  
4 programs continues to remain higher than it was  
5 prepandemic.  
6

7 From available data, we know that persistently  
8 high rates of food insecurity and hunger coupled with  
9 racial and ethnic disparities and diet related  
10 diseases, this proportionately impact Black and  
11 Latinx communities, immigrants, low-income  
12 populations, LGBTQIA+ individuals and older adults.  
13 A 2021 study by Food Bank for New York City, found  
14 that the number of older New Yorkers who reported  
15 food insecurity may have increased to one in five  
16 compared to one and ten prior to the pandemic.

17 And a United Neighborhood Houses study found New  
18 Yorkers of color age 60 and older are five to six  
19 times more likely than their White counterparts to  
20 experience food insecurity. We also know there are  
21 large disparities in reporting food insecurity by  
22 borough with rates in the Bronx and Brooklyn  
23 significantly higher than the city average. Today,  
24 I'm interested in continuing the conversation with  
25 NYC Aging about how the city is working to offset the

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1 growth of food insecurity among older New Yorkers.

2 This includes a status update on the Home Delivered

3 Meal program for older adults, as well as the

4 waitlist for essential services including home care

5 services. Thank you to Chair Ayala and Chair Mealy.

6 Thank you to the advocates and members of the public

7 who are joining us today and thank you to

8 representatives from the Administration for joining

9 us. I'd also like to thank my staff Casey Addison

10 and Andrew Wright and Aging Committee Staff

11 Christopher Pepe, Chloe Rivera and Austrid Chan and I

12 just want to also acknowledge Council Member Brannan

13 for joining us. I will now turn it over to Council

14 Member Mealy, Chair of the Subcommittee on Senior

15 Centers and Food Insecurity. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Good morning and welcome to

17 this joint hearing on Food Insecurity in New York

18 City. I am Darlene Mealy, Chair of the Subcommittee

19 on Senior Centers and Food Insecurity. I want to

20 thank the Chair of General Welfare Committee, Deputy

21 Speaker Ayala and the Chair of Aging Committee

22 Council Member Hudson for joining us today to discuss

23 this important topic.

24  
25

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1  
2 In December of last year, the Subcommittee took a  
3 hard look at the impact of inflation and the rising  
4 costs on our city's older adults for food. Since  
5 then, I feared that the problem of food insecurities  
6 in our city have gotten only worse. Many older New  
7 Yorkers do not know where their next meal will come  
8 from. They face a crisis for access to healthy and  
9 nutritious meals. Issues of food insecurities have  
10 an impact majority on the Black and Brown communities  
11 and people living with low incomes. Our  
12 responsibility is to look out for those communities  
13 and ensure that they do not go hungry.

14 Our city's 300 plus older adult centers are  
15 vital. And they must continue to be reliable  
16 community lifelines for older adults. When it comes  
17 to assessing nutritional meals, instead of  
18 continually to underfund our congregate meals  
19 programs and providers, we must make an inflation  
20 adjustment in the new budget to cover the increased  
21 costs for meals and we must conduct additional  
22 outreach and marketing to our older adults. Aware  
23 that they can get healthy meals and socialize with  
24 others at our city's older adult clubs.

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1  
2 As we seek to welcome older adults back into our  
3 centers, we must renew the strength of our commitment  
4 to them by expanding the availability of these meals,  
5 including on weekends. Our older adult population is  
6 growing and the budget for older adult centers and  
7 nutritional culinary sensitive meals must grow with  
8 it. Through congregate and grab and go meals at  
9 older adult centers, home delivered meals, SNAP, and  
10 our city's network of food pantries and soup  
11 kitchens, and with the administrations strong  
12 support, we can reach our goal of ending food  
13 insecurities for our older adults.

14 I want to thank the Administration, all the  
15 advocates and members of the public who have joined  
16 us today. I would like to also thank my staff and  
17 the Subcommittee staff and I will now turn it over to  
18 the Committee Counsel to administer the oath. Thank  
19 you.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Would members of the  
21 Administration please raise your right hand. Do you  
22 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
23 but the truth before this Committee and to respond  
24 honestly to Council Member questions?

25 PANEL: Yes.

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4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin when ready.

5 Thank you.

6 JILL BERRY: Thank you. Good morning. My name  
7 is Jill Berry and I serve as the First Deputy  
8 Commissioner at the Department of Social Services.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: IS your mic on?

10 JILL BERRY: The red light is on. Is that  
11 better? Okay, my name is Jill Beery and I serve as  
12 the First Deputy Commissioner at the Department of  
13 Social Services. I would like to thank Deputy  
14 Speaker Ayala, Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy, and the  
15 members of the Committee on General Welfare,  
16 Committee on Aging, and the Subcommittee on Senior  
17 Centers and Food Insecurity for holding today's  
18 hearing on Food Insecurity in New York City.

19 I am happy to have the opportunity for the  
20 Department of Social Services to offer testimony. I  
21 want to begin by relaying a message to any New Yorker  
22 who is currently experiencing food insecurity. We  
23 are here to help. You can call 311 or visit  
24 foodhelp.nyc.gov to find nearby food pantries and  
25 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



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1 Food Policy has outlined in the Food Metrics Report,  
2 "food insecurity is the lack of access, at times, to  
3 enough nutritionally adequate food for any active,  
4 healthy life for all members of a household. Food  
5 insecure families may worry that food will run out  
6 before they have enough money to buy more, eat less  
7 than they should, or be unable to afford to eat  
8 balanced meals."  
9

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

16 The Department of Social Services administers  
17 critical programs that connect New Yorkers to the  
18 food assistance they need. The Supplemental  
19 Nutrition Assistance Program SNAP helps approximately  
20 1.7 million New Yorkers access nutritious food. The  
21 average monthly number of SNAP recipients aged 65 or  
22 older in FY 2022 was approximately 360,000 New  
23 Yorkers. Community Food Connection, formerly known  
24 as the Emergency Food Assistance Program or EFAP,  
25 funds more than 600 community kitchens and food

1  
2 pantries across the city. Community Food Connection  
3 distributed more than 17.7 million pounds of shelf  
4 stable and frozen foods in FY 2022. Community  
5 kitchens provide hot meals and food pantries provide  
6 groceries for clients to prepare meals at home.

7 The new name reflects the critical role food  
8 pantries and community kitchens play in addressing  
9 food insecurity across communities citywide, ensuring  
10 that everyone has access to fresh, healthy food.

11 DSS's CFC new emergency food distribution model,  
12 which launched in September 2022, provides an  
13 increased variety of food, including fresh produce,  
14 dairy, shelf-stable foods, frozen foods, and more  
15 flexibility when ordering and scheduling deliveries.

16 Additionally, we have progressively pursued  
17 culturally sensitive food options in our CFC  
18 offerings.

19 For the first time, CFC is providing Halal  
20 certified proteins; CFC offerings have also expanded  
21 the number of options for Kosher certified foods. In  
22 addition to religious dietary needs, we recognize the  
23 diversity of our New York communities and endeavor to  
24 provide foods people are used to and grew up with.

25 Cultural sensitivity is a shared value; we appreciate

1  
2 your work as a Council in uplifting the need to be  
3 intentional in pursuing more culturally sensitive  
4 food options and we will continue to work with CFC  
5 partners to achieve that aim.

6 Outreach is an essential component of our work.  
7 We have a responsibility to not only make assistance  
8 available but make New Yorkers aware that the city is  
9 a partner in food security. To that end, the DSS  
10 Office of Community Outreach conducts targeted  
11 outreach campaigns to organizations serving specific  
12 populations, including older adults, the LGBTQI  
13 community, persons with disabilities, and immigrant  
14 communities.

15 The Office of Community Outreach conducts  
16 presentations and attends resource fairs, farmers  
17 markets, and other events to promote SNAP awareness  
18 and increase engagements. In addition, SNAP Support  
19 Services works to educate the public about SNAP  
20 benefits to maximize the city's use of available  
21 federal programs to increase the purchasing power of  
22 low-income New Yorkers. SNAP Support Services also  
23 provides SNAP trainings and presentations, prescreens  
24 potentially eligible applicants, and assists with the  
25 SNAP application process. As I mentioned at the

1 start of my testimony, New Yorkers in need of  
2 assistance should call 311, visit [foodhelp.nyc.gov](http://foodhelp.nyc.gov) to  
3 find nearby food pantries and community kitchens, or  
4 reach us through Access HRA or our Benefits Access  
5 Centers.  
6

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

15 As a city, we work to be the best partner we can  
16 in helping pantries account for the seasonality of  
17 items and use funds in the most cost-effective ways  
18 to get the most out of taxpayer dollars used to  
19 support food pantries' important work. We should  
20 also keep in mind that as the federal government and  
21 New York State government wind down COVID pandemic-  
22 related emergency food assistance measures, lines of  
23 funding that were available in the past are reduced  
24 or halted altogether; some one-time payments have  
25 already ended.

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1 For example, February 2023 marked the final month  
2 of federal funding for supplemental benefits for  
3 SNAP, the Emergency Allotment of Supplemental  
4 Nutrition Assistance Program benefits. Food pantries  
5 also receive lines of funding from multiple levels of  
6 government, thus advocacy on the State and Federal  
7 levels to be conscious of the challenges food  
8 pantries face remains important. Indeed, we value  
9 the Council's support and advocacy in reaching out to  
10 partners across government to highlight the  
11 importance of tackling food insecurity and mobilizing  
12 resources to meet neighborhood's needs.

14 On benefits processing, I would like to reiterate  
15 several points made by Acting Commissioner Park when  
16 she testified before the Council in March. The  
17 COVID-19 pandemic caused extraordinary adversity and  
18 resulted in an increase in demand for public  
19 benefits; relative to January 2019, January 2023 SNAP  
20 applications were up 67 percent. Throughout, we have  
21 pursued steps to streamline the process, make the  
22 best use of technology, adapt our systems, and  
23 mobilize our teams to accommodate New Yorkers' needs.  
24 We prioritized frontline staff hiring, we sought and  
25 obtained waivers from State and federal partners, and

1  
2 our teams connected more New Yorkers to benefits than  
3 in recent pre-pandemic years, with 1.77 million New  
4 Yorkers receiving SNAP benefits, the highest number  
5 since 2014.

6 We remain focused on solutions to deliver for our  
7 fellow New Yorkers. We appreciate the opportunity to  
8 testify today, and my colleague from Department for  
9 the Aging and I welcome your questions. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you and good morning  
11 and you know, thank you for being here at this very  
12 important conversation. This is obviously something  
13 that keeps many of us awake at night and I will share  
14 that you know, I represent a very high needs district  
15 and even I was still shocked and alarmed by the long  
16 lines of individuals waiting for hours for a box of  
17 food during the pandemic. And the shock and  
18 realization that sometimes those boxes, they didn't  
19 really necessarily cover the needs of larger  
20 families, right which as we know, primarily in Black  
21 and Brown communities we have larger families and you  
22 know it was really, it was heartbreaking and eye  
23 opening and really a reflection of how much work you  
24 know continues to be needed to be done in order to  
25 ensure that food insecurity is not a conversation

1 that we're continuing to have in a city of New  
2 Yorkers where there's so much you know access to  
3 funding and resources. We want to make sure that  
4 everyone has access to those resources.  
5

6 So, I know that there are some questions that we  
7 will not be able to get responses to today and you  
8 can kind of direct me if I'm asking something that  
9 you know maybe that you know we shouldn't be asking  
10 today. As some of you may know there's a legal case  
11 still pending and so, some of our questions won't be  
12 able to be answered today but one of the largest I  
13 think complaints and the largest concern that we've  
14 had in the last couple of years has been the rising  
15 number of New Yorkers that are applying for SNAP  
16 benefits and the longer wait times because you know  
17 we also understand that every city agency, including  
18 HRA has been hit with a workforce you know deficit  
19 and that you know in turn impacts our ability or your  
20 ability to process applications as quickly as  
21 possible.

22 So, can you tell us what the current volume of  
23 new applications for SNAP is you know as of today?

24 JILL BERRY: [[00:23:07]

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is you mic? I don't know why  
3 your mic is on so low. Oh, okay.

4 JILL BERRY: Because I forgot to put it on,  
5 that's why.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Uh, okay.

7 JILL BERRY: We're seeing on average 42,700  
8 applications a month for SNAP benefits.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and how are we, are we  
10 doing any better in terms of the processing of the  
11 applications?

12 JILL BERRY: We still have a ways to go but we  
13 are making a lot of progress. I can share with you  
14 our timeliness numbers that are published in the MMR.  
15 And again, I want to preface this with - this is not  
16 ideal. Every New Yorker deserves to have their  
17 applications processed on time. That is our goal.  
18 That is what we are working towards. We understand  
19 that we have not been meeting our goal but we are  
20 working towards it and what I want to share is that  
21 we went from a low of 19.2 percent timeliness in SNAP  
22 in December, and for February, we're up to 49.9  
23 percent processed on time.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 49?

25 JILL BERRY: 49.9 percent.



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25

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2

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: In February?

3

4

JILL BERRY: Correct. That is not where we want  
to be but it is a huge amount of progress from  
December and we're continuing to make progress.

5

6

7

8

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. What do you estimate  
is the amount of time that a person, an individual  
who has applied is waiting from the point of applying  
to getting a response.

9

10

11

12

JILL BERRY: We're not really tracking it that  
way, we're just trying to get through every  
application at this point.

13

14

15

16

17

18

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, I mean, I think it's  
important to note because it's taking you know HRA  
two or three months to process an application.  
That's two or three months that a family is  
struggling to make ends meet. So, why are you not  
tracking that information?

19

20

JILL BERRY: Yeah, we can get that. We can get  
back to you on that number.

21

22

23

24

25

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean I think it's  
important. You know when I look and we've been  
having this conversation about food insecurity. When  
I look at food insecurity, I'm like you know it  
touches so many of us in so many different ways and

1 you know we're talking about you know ensuring that  
2 people have access to safety net programs and  
3 services but also once you know we're getting even in  
4 locations where we have access to food right, our  
5 schools, our hospitals, our you know senior centers.  
6 That the food, the quality of food right is  
7 culturally relevant and that is nutritious and people  
8 are actually eating it because it's also right, the  
9 added complexity of food waste. Because we're  
10 feeding folks you know food that they don't  
11 recognize. We're seeing this you know with the  
12 asylum seeker issue. We've seen videos of you know,  
13 bulk packages of you know food that has been turned  
14 down and thrown in the garbage. So, we want to  
15 eliminate a lot of that and we did see a lot of that  
16 during the pandemic as well but this issue with the  
17 SNAP benefits, you know really concerns us because  
18 you know for obvious reasons.

19  
20 You know I don't know if I've shared this before  
21 but I think I have. You know a few years, well,  
22 maybe not that many but enough years back, I went to  
23 HRA to apply for food stamp benefits because I was in  
24 between jobs and I was going to start working but it  
25 was a few weeks away and I was struggling and I

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27

1 remember sitting there from 9:00 in the morning all  
2 the way till 5:30 in the afternoon to be told that  
3 you know I had to come back in two weeks. They were  
4 going to give me an appointment. And I said well, "I  
5 can't come back in two weeks. Can I come back  
6 tomorrow?" And they said, "Sure, you can come back  
7 tomorrow."

9 So, I got up early the next day and I came back  
10 because I was expecting to get emergency food stamps.  
11 And I waited there till about 2:00 in the afternoon  
12 and then they called me and they said, "okay, you  
13 qualify. We have to give you an appointment for two  
14 weeks so you can come back." And I'm like, "but  
15 like, I wasted two days of my life and on top of that  
16 I'm still leaving here without any aid for myself and  
17 my family."

18 And that is not the exception. That seems to be  
19 the rule sometimes. And so, how are we, what changes  
20 is HRA you know, what is the immediate response to  
21 this workforce issue so that we can ensure that  
22 families are not waiting there for two days and still  
23 leaving without benefits and having to wait three  
24 months, two months to eat?

25

1  
2 JILL BERRY: Yeah, so staffing has obviously been  
3 a very big focus of ours and we have worked very  
4 closely with DCAS and OMB to improve our recruitment  
5 of frontline staff for especially for processing SNAP  
6 benefits. DCAS is helping a lot with their job fairs  
7 for recruiting. We're participating in job fairs  
8 with them every week. Over the last few months,  
9 we've hired over 100 eligibility specialists in our  
10 SNAP program. Those are the frontline staff that  
11 take the applications, conduct the interviews and  
12 process those applications.

13 And as of last week, we had 815 eligibility  
14 specialists onboard in our agency in the SNAP  
15 program. Hiring has been a tremendous help in  
16 addressing our processing delays.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Did something change? You  
18 know was there any change in salary or why are people  
19 applying now that weren't applying six months ago?

20 JILL BERRY: OMB's lifting of the two for one  
21 rule was definitely a help and the partnerships with  
22 DCAS over recruitment going to more job fairs weekly.  
23 All of that has been a tremendous help in our  
24 recruitment efforts.

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And we've partnered in some  
3 of those.

4 JILL BERRY: Right anybody else who wants to  
5 partner with us, we're happy to come out to recruit.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes, please colleagues,  
7 whoever can take them up, please do. Because this is  
8 something that's beneficial to all of us. So, I'll  
9 ask a couple of other procedural questions and then I  
10 want to allow the other Chairs to ask questions  
11 because we do have a hearing here at 1:00 for  
12 Finance, so I'm sure that at some point, they will  
13 come and try to kick us out.

14 Regarding the state COVID benefits, those were I  
15 guess I think they ended in February or March?

16 JILL BERRY: The end of February was the end.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, so you know, I did  
18 personally through the General Welfare Committee put  
19 in a request to the governor to consider adopting a  
20 similar policy to that of Governor Murphy's in New  
21 Jersey for the state to pick up an additional \$93 a  
22 month benefit for food stamps recipient. Have HRA  
23 had conversations with the state about you know doing  
24 something similar?

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30

1  
2 JILL BERRY: We've been relying a lot on our  
3 great congressional delegation in Washington to make  
4 sure that they are advocating to maintain or even  
5 increase our benefits. We're working with city  
6 partners to advocate to maintain or even increase  
7 benefits, and we are happy for all the advocacy at  
8 both the federal and the state level to make sure  
9 that we both maintain the current level of benefits  
10 for SNAP recipients and increase it if at all  
11 possible.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do SNAP recipients receive  
13 cost of living adjustments?

14 JILL BERRY: I'm sorry.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do SNAP recipients —

16 JILL BERRY: Yes, every fall, there is a Thrift  
17 Food plan adjustment to the SNAP benefits.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Every fall?

19 JILL BERRY: Every fall.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, what is the percentage  
21 of that increase?

22 JILL BERRY: It's Thrifty Food Plan based on  
23 costs of groceries and things like that.

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Well, hopefully they're  
25 calculating the cost of eggs.

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31

1  
2 JILL BERRY: There was a pretty large increase  
3 last fall. It was the first time we saw such a large  
4 increase.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, the inflation rates are  
6 astronomical in our communities. So, during - I know  
7 that and I'm not even going to ask the question  
8 because I know that my city, My City Platform has  
9 been lounged. Could you kind of walk us through what  
10 the status of the initiative is and what has the  
11 first phase of the lounge entailed and what will the  
12 second phase entail?

13 JILL BERRY: So, those questions are really  
14 better presented to OTI whose taking the lead on  
15 this. We did partner closely with them for the child  
16 care application that went live recently on My City  
17 and we look forward to continuing to partner with OTI  
18 as they add more items to the platform.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Will HRA programs be  
20 included? Do you know?

21 JILL BERRY: That really is a question for OTI.  
22 We stand ready to partner with them and we had a  
23 great partnership with them on the child care  
24 application that launched.

25

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But they have not reached out  
3 to ask HRA to participate as of yet? To include HRA  
4 programs into that database?

5 JILL BERRY: We were very focused on the child  
6 care application. I'm not sure what their next steps  
7 are at this time.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, and can you tell us  
9 what the current case ratio for SNAP is?

10 JILL BERRY: I'm sorry?

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The current case ratio?

12 JILL BERRY: Oh, so the SNAP program is not a  
13 case load-based program. It's activity based, so as  
14 applications come in, as recertifications come in,  
15 case changes come in, the next available staff member  
16 processes each one.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, HRA's longstanding food  
18 assistance program, formerly known as EFAP, was  
19 revamped and expanded as of September 2022 and  
20 renamed the Community Food Connection Program or CFC.  
21 We would like to learn more about how this new  
22 version of the program has been going. And who is  
23 the new vender for this program? And do they use  
24 subcontractors as well?



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1  
2 JILL BERRY: The program is going well. We meet  
3 regularly with some of the emergency food providers.  
4 A lot of the larger ones and we've recently started  
5 introducing a few smaller ones as well. I  
6 participated in that meeting myself to get feedback  
7 on the new provider and the program and make sure  
8 that we're adjusting as necessary. Feedback has been  
9 really positive so far. We've made small tweaks  
10 where needed but generally the providers are happy  
11 with the new provider. H. Shire is the name of the  
12 vendor and they've been very responsive to any issues  
13 that have risen as we rolled out in the new program.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, can you tell us about -  
15 a little bit about the diversity of the food offered  
16 under the CFC? You know our Kosher, Halal,  
17 culturally relevant and healthy options included?

18 JILL BERRY: Yup, so with this new program, it's  
19 very different than the prior EFAP program. We have  
20 fresh produce. We have dairy, shelf stable foods,  
21 frozen foods, culturally appropriate foods, including  
22 but not limited to Kosher and Halal items. As I  
23 mentioned in my testimony, we have Halal proteins for  
24 the first time ever. And just a lot more flexibility  
25 when ordering and scheduling deliveries under the old

1  
2 program. We would order the food from DCAS and have  
3 it delivered to the Food Banks Warehouse and then the  
4 emergency food providers had a choice of what we  
5 chose to have delivered to the warehouse. The way  
6 this works now is H. Shire has a huge catalogue of  
7 food available that's constantly changing and  
8 updating on produce especially as the seasons change,  
9 meat products, and can be much more responsive to  
10 seasonality to prices etc., giving all of our  
11 emergency food providers a whole lot more choice than  
12 they had under the prior program.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: So, the providers decide what  
14 type of products they want?

15 JILL BERRY: Yup, we get them a line of credit  
16 and they go into the online website that Shire has  
17 and they pick the items that they want. They can  
18 have different items every month. They can make  
19 changes if their population is changing or the needs  
20 of their community are changing.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's wonderful. Can you  
22 tell us what the percentage of food distributed are  
23 fresh items such as fruits, vegetable and proteins  
24 versus shelf stable items?

25

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1  
2 JILL BERRY: I have that here. So, right now, we  
3 are not separating out the produce. We'll make sure  
4 that we do that for Federal Fiscal Year 2024. So, in  
5 the numbers I'm going to give you, the produce is  
6 included in our refrigerated item count.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay.

8 JILL BERRY: But for – and this is percentages  
9 based on pounds of food. So far, what has been  
10 ordered is 63 percent dry food, 13 percent frozen  
11 food, and 24 percent refrigerated food, which again  
12 includes fresh produce.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I have a pantry around the  
14 corner from my apartment and I'll tell you that I'm  
15 very impressed with the quality of the food options  
16 and I am seeing, you know at least in my experience  
17 I'm seeing a lot more like bananas and a lot of fruit  
18 and vegetables, really fresh, really you know, really  
19 nice. They look like they're really good quality and  
20 the lines have grown. I mean obviously word gets  
21 around right. Everybody's like really excited about  
22 it. When my mom was alive, I couldn't get her off  
23 the line. I'm like, "mom, you don't need to be on  
24 the line." And she's like, "they get really good  
25

1 stuff. This one has hot dogs and the other one has -

2 "

3  
4 JILL BERRY: It's a special event too and I'm  
5 glad to hear the quality is -

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, hot dogs, they were  
7 giving hot dogs at one point and milk and that was a  
8 huge thing for her. And I think that comes right  
9 from having been food insecure your entire life. She  
10 had a huge appreciation for that. And I'll ask one  
11 final question because I know that we have a lot to  
12 get to. In the Fiscal Year 2023 adopted plan, \$14  
13 million in city funding was added to HRA's budget in  
14 just Fiscal Year 2023 for benefit access pilot  
15 program. In the preliminary plan, 4.9 was rolled  
16 from Fiscal Year 2023 to 2024. Can you detail what  
17 the benefit access pilot program is and does it just  
18 relate to SNAP or other benefit programs included?

19 JILL BERRY: So, New York City Benefits Program  
20 is being managed out of City Hall through us and it's  
21 going to focus not just on SNAP benefits or DSS  
22 benefits but it will focus on all benefits that are  
23 available in New York City, including things like  
24 SCRIE, DRIE and other programs. They are working  
25 with the CBO's who were selected for the program to

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37

1  
2 get them set and up and running and we are working in  
3 close partnership with them. But City Hall really is  
4 driving that.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: City Hall is -

6 JILL BERRY: Betsy MacLean's office, PU, the just  
7 looking at benefits overall for the city. I think  
8 it's great that they're taking a leadership role  
9 there, so that it will be a one stop shop for all New  
10 York City benefits and not just DSS benefits.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you tell us why was a  
12 portion of the funding rolled into the preliminary  
13 plan?

14 JILL BERRY: I think it was probably a delay in  
15 the program but they would have to better answer  
16 those questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And how many CBO's will HRA  
18 contract with for this program?

19 JILL BERRY: I think I'm going to have to get  
20 back to you on that. It's, I want to say like 30,  
21 30-ish.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 30-ish, okay, do we know how  
23 many years the CBO contract is for?

24 JILL BERRY: I don't have that with me, no.

25

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1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, uhm, I will pass it  
3 over to Council Member Hudson.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so much. I  
5 wanted to ask about the Elderly Simplified  
6 Application Project or ESAP for SNAP. For a few  
7 years now New York State has been participating in  
8 the ESAP program, which makes the SNAP application  
9 and renewal process easier for qualifying households  
10 with elderly or disabled individuals. How many ESAP  
11 applications and renewals did HRA process in Fiscal  
12 Year 2022? And Fiscal Year 2023, sorry?

13 JILL BERRY: I'm sorry.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Both Fiscal Years 2022  
15 and 2023.

16 JILL BERRY: Yeah, so we're not tracking by the  
17 type of application that is submitted for ESAP. We  
18 do make the application available at our website.  
19 You can get it through Infoline. But we're not  
20 tracking the type of application when we're process  
21 the SNAP.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, noted thank you.  
23 Is ESAP available through Access HRA?

24 JILL BERRY: You can download and print the ESAP  
25 application through Access HRA yes.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And has HRA coordinated  
3 in any way with NYC aging to increase awareness of  
4 the ESAP, perhaps at older adult centers or through  
5 New York or through NYC Aging's Case Management.

6 JILL BERRY: Yeah, our outreach teams work  
7 closely with our partners at The Department for the  
8 Aging on all benefits access including for SNAP,  
9 including ESAP applications, absolutely. It's part  
10 of our standard outreach package.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Part of what?

12 JILL BERRY: Standard outreach packaging.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you and what  
14 percentage of qualifying elderly or disabled  
15 individuals are currently using the ESAP application?

16 JILL BERRY: We're not tracking by the type of  
17 application that we receive.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, by the type or even  
19 okay. Does HRA automatically make qualifying SNAP  
20 applicants and enrollees aware of the ESAP?

21 JILL BERRY: No.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, once you're receiving  
23 SNAP benefits and you reach a particular age, you're  
24 not necessarily made aware of ESAP?

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1  
2 JILL BERRY: No, not necessarily. We do make  
3 people aware of they are eligible for our IBR  
4 recertification process, which is a phone-based  
5 process. It's even easier than the ESAP application.  
6 You don't need to submit any paperwork. We will  
7 notify you if you are eligible. You call the 24-hour  
8 automated phone line for IBR that allows you to  
9 certify that yes, I don't have any earned income. My  
10 unearned income remains the same. I haven't moved.  
11 All the members of my household are the same. You  
12 just say yes to those prompts and then your benefits  
13 are recertified without any need to submit an  
14 application.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you and then  
16 in your testimony, you mentioned prioritizing  
17 frontline staff hiring. Do you know what the current  
18 vacancy rate for those positions is?

19 JILL BERRY: No, I don't know what the current  
20 vacancy rate is. What we have been doing is filling  
21 positions and hiring up and we will continue to work  
22 closely with OMB to make sure that we have enough  
23 staff to process all of the applications that are  
24 coming in and complete all of our work.  
25



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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, is it fair to say  
3 that you currently don't have enough staff then to  
4 complete the work?

5 JILL BERRY: Yeah, that's why we have been  
6 working so hard to fill positions. Working with  
7 DCAS, working with OMB on hiring. It's been an  
8 absolute high priority for our agency to fill our  
9 frontline vacancies.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, maybe you can  
11 follow up with the specific number of vacancies for  
12 those frontline staff?

13 JILL BERRY: Absolutely.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, great. Thank you.  
15 I'm going to move on to NYC Aging. Please provide an  
16 update on the number of older adults visiting OAC's  
17 for congregate meals, and has this number increased  
18 since December of 2022?

19 ANYA HERASME: Hi, good morning. So, I can get  
20 back to you with an exact number but we're seeing  
21 about 80, 82 percent I believe participation in our  
22 programs. We have seen a steady increase, so we're  
23 still not at full participation but we are seeing the  
24 numbers go up, so we're very proud of that.

25

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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Do you have attendance  
3 numbers by month that you can share?

4 ANYA HERASME: Yes, I don't have them with me but  
5 we can circle back with you on that, yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. How many  
7 OAC's continue to provide a grab and go meal option.

8 ANYA HERASME: I don't have that exact number but  
9 it's about one-third I believe of our programs that  
10 are paid to do a grab and go option.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And do you know how often  
12 and for which meals? So, like how many days a week  
13 and if it's for breakfast or?

14 ANYA HERASME: So, it's typically one meal a day  
15 that they can do. I can just say generally it's  
16 probably lunch, sometimes dinner but I don't, again,  
17 I don't that in front of me but we can circle back if  
18 you did want that information specifically but it's  
19 one meal for five days a week.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: One meal for five days a  
21 week. Okay, great. And what about the utilization  
22 rates of the program?

23 ANYA HERASME: Of?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Participants.

25 ANYA HERASME: Of participants.

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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yeah, so one-third of  
3 OAC's have the program but then how many older adults  
4 are utilizing?

5 ANYA HERASME: Are utilizing the Grab and Go?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yeah.

7 ANYA HERASME: That's something we'd have to  
8 circle back with you on.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. How have OAC  
10 utilization rates impacted the allocation of funding  
11 to OAC's in the FY24 budget? So, has there been a  
12 direct correlation between increased or sustained  
13 utilization and increased funding or sustained  
14 funding?

15 ANYA HERASME: For Fiscal Year 2024?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Correct.

17 ANYA HERASME: So, we're still negotiating with  
18 OMB on the budget so we hope to have more information  
19 on that at the Executive Budget Hearing in May.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, I look forward to  
21 that. Do you have data that you can share that  
22 demonstrates the impact of the Join Us Campaign?

23 ANYA HERASME: It's too soon for us to have exact  
24 data but we did see an uptick in interest, so we  
25 don't know specifically numbers on how many more

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1  
2 people participated but we did see a lot more people  
3 visiting our website, calling Aging Connect, so.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Do you know, when you say  
5 how many more, do you know approximately what that  
6 increase may have looked like? So, not necessarily a  
7 total number but like five percent more than before  
8 or ten percent more calls?

9 ANYA HERASME: Uhm, I think it's - I don't have  
10 that with us about the specifics about how much more  
11 interest but I think that's something to circle back  
12 on as far as the attendance though, we do hope to  
13 have that information in the future.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay.

15 ANYA HERASME: Oh, and I just want to add sorry,  
16 it's hard to correlate exactly because there's so  
17 many different, there's different outreach going on  
18 besides the Join Us, so it's hard to say specifically  
19 that the Join Us Campaign, you know when we an  
20 increase in attendance.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Has had a director -

22 ANYA HERASME: Yeah, exactly.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: But overall, you're  
24 saying you've seen more phone calls, more website  
25 visits?

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1  
2 ANYA HERASME: Yes, yeah, absolutely, yeah. When  
3 the campaign launched, we did see an increase in  
4 interest.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, what can the City  
6 Council do to help NYC Aging increase older adult  
7 awareness of OAC's and the resources they offer  
8 including nutritious meals?

9 ANYA HERASME: That's a great question. Thank  
10 you for asking. I think you know, just getting the  
11 word out there and helping to dispel the myths of  
12 aging. You know, I think there's less stigma still  
13 around ageism and people thinking that it's not - you  
14 know it's a place where people are just playing bingo  
15 or you know, it's not really lively and that's really  
16 not what our centers are. So, I think just  
17 continuing to spread the word of our programs, that  
18 we have so many resources there and services and  
19 getting people even just to check it out. I think  
20 once they see it they are usually very interested in  
21 coming back.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, I have visited so  
23 far many older adult clubs and I usually bring my  
24 colleagues for you know whose district I'm in, so at  
25 least you know more people are definitely visiting

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1 and aware I think and bingo is very lively and  
2 active.  
3

4 ANYA HENSME: It's just it's not all we do.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Yes, sure, there is very  
6 robust programming. Is there currently a wait list  
7 for home delivered meals?

8 ANYA HENSME: So, that's a great question. The  
9 waitlist varies day by day and that it's so  
10 currently, I think the last number we saw this week  
11 was two people, but it's really not indicative of a  
12 bigger chronic issue with the program, it's more  
13 about just like timely; I guess from the day somebody  
14 requests a meal to when they receive it. But again,  
15 it varies day by day and it's very, very minimal  
16 compared to how many older adults are receiving  
17 meals, so we're very proud of that.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, sorry, can you just  
19 run through that again. You're saying that there's a  
20 gap between when people request and then when they -

21 ANYA HENSME: Not a gap, it's more, it's I guess  
22 depending on what day you - you know if it's a Friday  
23 that you call and need a meal. If depending on what  
24 day the delivery is, it might be Monday. That's one  
25

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1 example of why there could be a waitlist but really  
2 it changes day by day and it's very minimal.  
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay do you have like  
5 maybe an average of the daily, the number of people  
6 per day that might be waiting? Like is it five or is  
7 it 100?

8 ANYA HENSME: I don't have that specifically with  
9 me but I would say it's closer to five. It's  
10 definitely, it's very minimal. Our programs have  
11 been doing a great job of ensuring that everybody who  
12 needs a meal, gets a meal.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Have home  
14 delivered meal utilization rates increased since  
15 December of 2022 as far as you know?

16 ANYA HENSME: Yes, we have, our December - I'm  
17 not sure of that specific date. We have seen some  
18 increase in utilization of HDM but I don't have the  
19 exact. We can circle back with you on the exact  
20 numbers of what the increase is.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, so you'll follow up  
22 with that? Okay.

23 ANYA HENSME: Yes.

24 COUNCIL MEMEBR HUDSON: I would be curious to  
25 know if they've increased? If so, by how much that

1 increase has been and then what you attribute the  
2 increase to? What does NYC Aging attribute the  
3 increase to?  
4 increase to?

5 ANYA HENSME: Sure. I mean, since the last RFP,  
6 the programs have changed a little bit. We have more  
7 flexibility. And types of meals clients can receive,  
8 so I think that's one of the reasons we believe that  
9 there is an increased desire for HDM meals and  
10 they're more culturally sensitive. And so, that's  
11 something we continue to work on as well.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, in FY23, the  
13 Council appropriated \$3 million for new home  
14 delivered meal vans. Can you please provide an  
15 update of the number of new HDM vans that have been  
16 operationalized and what steps still need to be taken  
17 in this process?

18 ANYA HENSME: Yes, I have that. I want to give  
19 you the exact number. I'm sorry, one second. I  
20 cannot find it here but I believe it's 14 have been  
21 delivered already but we are working with all our  
22 providers to ensure that they receive their vehicles  
23 before the deadline of June 30<sup>th</sup>.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, so that's 14 out 44  
25 total?



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ANYA HENSME: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, 31 percent about?

ANYA HENSME: Yeah, so that's what's been delivered. The other one's we're working with them and the vendors but there was a shortage.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, we've - hold on. Okay, we are requesting in our budget response to add \$5 million more for vans in NYC Aging's capital budget. So, hopefully we can get those vans out to the providers that really need them.

During the pandemic, we heard about issues of food waste, where older adults did not necessarily receive home delivered meals that met their dietary cultural or religious needs. How does NYC Aging work with HDM providers to ensure that older adults are receiving food they can or want to eat, so that as little as food as possible is wasted?

ANYA HENSME: So, as I mentioned, our HDM providers are required to provide culturally appropriate meals and through our case management programs, they work with the clients to ensure that they know what type of meals they're requesting. That they receive one that they can use and also,

1 that they get the amount that they need, so that  
2 there's little to no waste.  
3

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, can you describe the  
5 nutritional and dietary standards established for  
6 home delivered meals and congregate meals? Who sets  
7 those standards? What research or evidence are these  
8 standards based? If you could just talk a little bit  
9 about that and then I can ask for the follow-up  
10 questions.

11 ANYA HERASME: I'm sorry, I want to give you the  
12 exact - yeah, so we follow federal guidelines state  
13 and city. So, the federal guidelines in New York  
14 City Aging follows are the dietary guidelines for  
15 Americans and that's released every five years, which  
16 are put out by the U.S. Department of Health and  
17 Human Services and the U.S. Department of  
18 Agriculture.

19 The State guidelines are determined by the New  
20 York State Office for the Aging and their nutrition  
21 program standards mandate that meals follow dietary  
22 guidelines and outline procedures for service  
23 providers, including when to take food temperatures,  
24 ensuring appropriate documentation, and promote  
25 nutrition, education and counseling. And then

1 finally, the city guidelines follow Article 81 of the  
2 New York City Health Code, which all food service  
3 establishments must follow and the New York City food  
4 standards, which set requirements for any government  
5 facility where food is served including HSE  
6 contractors. These standards are typically stricter  
7 than dietary guidelines and include specific  
8 requirements for food items, such as canned and  
9 frozen vegetables to have less than 220 mg of sodium.  
10

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay great, that covered  
12 many of my questions but not all.

13 ANYA HERASME: Okay, great.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, who determines  
15 whether food is culturally appropriate or culturally  
16 relevant?

17 ANYA HERASME: That is a very good question. So,  
18 we work with our providers, our nutrition team works  
19 with the providers to ensure that the menus, as they  
20 develop the menus are culturally appropriate. We  
21 also survey clients. That's one of the requirements  
22 our providers do and our case management staff also –  
23 or not our staff but the providers, they serve  
24 clients who receive HDM meals also to ensure that  
25 they are satisfied with their meal. So, through

1 feedback and our work together, we helped create them  
2  
3 in use for the programs.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, bear with me as I  
5 just check these off real quick.

6 Do you know if the nutritional standards are  
7 being met across the board by providers? Or is NYC  
8 Aging aware of providers that are not meeting these  
9 standards?

10 ANYA HERASME: So, because we work with the  
11 providers to create the menus to ensure that the  
12 standards are met, they're inferior of all meeting  
13 them. If they're not for any reason, that that would  
14 be something we would find during assessment and we  
15 would just work with the program to figure out what  
16 the issues are and figure out a way to meet those  
17 standards.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. What does the  
19 process look like during an assessment for  
20 determining if somebody is out of compliance and how  
21 do you bring them into compliance?

22 ANYA HERASME: So, we have a tool that all of our  
23 nutrition consultants use when they go out to the  
24 field and so, they have questions on their whether  
25 they're following the menu. And so, that's something

1 that we can – as long as they follow the menu, then  
2 they would be in compliance because the menus are  
3 created in partnership with the programs to ensure  
4 that it is meeting the standards.  
5

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. I know you may not  
7 be able to address or answer all of these questions  
8 but I did want to just address the Medicaid  
9 enrollment issue if I may.

10 NYC Aging sent a notice to providers on March 30<sup>th</sup>  
11 that said they must stop enrolling new clients in  
12 case management and by extension home delivered meals  
13 if they're already enrolled in Medicaid. Reportedly  
14 due to a State Comptroller's audit about mixing or  
15 double dipping with federal funding sources. This  
16 has led to extensive confusion and deep concern about  
17 the ability of older adults to receive community-  
18 based services, including food. When and why did NYC  
19 Aging start accepting Medicaid enrolled individuals  
20 into their services?

21 ANYA HERASME: So, I'd first like to acknowledge  
22 that there has been no official report from the State  
23 Comptroller, which has implicated New York City Aging  
24 as incorrectly servicing clients who qualify for the  
25 HDM program. We were simply alerted to the

1 preliminary audit, which then compelled the New York  
2 State Office for the Aging to inform us that clients  
3 are not eligible to receive New York City Aging  
4 funded home delivered meals if they are currently  
5 receiving Medicaid and I still have to provide state  
6 oversight to our agency, which governs and funds the  
7 HDM program and we were responding to that directive  
8 based on that preliminary audit.  
9

10 Our practice was to secure services for all  
11 clients found to be food insecure during the initial  
12 intake and assessment process. This is an ongoing  
13 issue that we have now been alerted to and we're  
14 working to address.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: So, are you advocating on  
16 behalf of the folks who are Medicaid recipients and  
17 also HDM recipients who would presumably no longer be  
18 able to receive home delivered meals?

19 ANYA HERASME: Yes, we're working with the State  
20 Office for the Aging to figure out what the nuances  
21 are and how to best move forward.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Alright to figure out  
23 what the -  
24  
25

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1  
2 ANYA HERASME: If there are nuances so that  
3 there's no, yeah, to ensure that we're in compliance  
4 but also meeting the needs of our clients.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: But I guess my question  
6 is, not so much ensuring that you are in compliance  
7 but getting people the food that they've already been  
8 receiving and still need to receive.

9 ANYA HERASME: Right, so at the moment we are  
10 working with our case management programs to redirect  
11 clients who if they need meals, to ensure that  
12 they're getting them somewhere else. Either through  
13 an OAC or other program through Medicaid.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. We understand  
15 existing clients will be grandfathered in. Do you  
16 know how many people this might include? And if  
17 they're going to be grandfathered in permanently or  
18 just on a temporary basis?

19 ANYA HERASME: We're still working out the  
20 details and it's too soon for us to have any kind of  
21 data like that. This just went into effect a few  
22 days ago.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, we've heard from  
24 advocates that it could be close to 8,000 people,  
25

1 which is obviously very concerning, so you know we'll  
2 be following closely.  
3

4 And, okay, hold on one second. Alright, that's  
5 the end of my questions for now. Thank you so much.  
6 I appreciate it and I'm going to turn it over to  
7 Chair Mealy. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Wow, thank you. Thanks for  
9 being here. That was very alarming. I got to keep  
10 up with that 8,000. That's bad. I have a few  
11 questions. I'm not going to be redundant. In the  
12 Fiscal 2023 Adoption Plan, \$14 million in the city  
13 funding was added to HRA's budget. In just Fiscal  
14 2023, for a benefit access pilot program, in the  
15 Preliminary Plan, \$4.9 million was rolled from Fiscal  
16 2023 to 2024. Can you please detail what the  
17 Benefits Access Pilot Program is and does it just  
18 relate to SNAP or are other benefit programs  
19 included?

20 JILL BERRY: Thank you. So, the New York City  
21 Benefits Program is being managed out of City Hall to  
22 coordinate all New York City benefits as part of this  
23 program, not just DSS benefits. In our budget, we  
24 are a strong partner with City Hall Benefits Access  
25



1 but we're not the manager of this program and it will  
2 absolutely include all benefits, not just ours.

3  
4 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Do you know what CBO's are  
5 included in it, to implement this program?

6 JILL BERRY: We'll have to get back to you on  
7 that. I think that there's about 30 CBO's that were  
8 selected to participate. We'll have to get back to  
9 you on the details.

10 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay then. Early on in the  
11 pandemic, HRA began redeploying staff from other  
12 areas to assist with processing administration of  
13 SNAP and other benefit programs. Is the agency still  
14 redeploying staff for this?

15 JILL BERRY: We are still redeploying staff to do  
16 this work to process benefits. It's not as many as  
17 during the pandemic as the city has opened back up  
18 and programs have restarted, we have had to send  
19 staff back to their program areas. Most recently  
20 with the Medicaid unwinding and the requirement to  
21 start processing Medicaid applications and Medicaid  
22 recertifications, those Medicaid staff that had been  
23 redeployed to help out, have to go back to process  
24 the Medicaid recertifications. Just for example, we  
25 still have staff that are redeployed.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Do you know many for SNAP  
3 specifically?

4 JILL BERRY: I'll have to get back to you on the  
5 exact numbers of staff.

6 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: From which other areas at HRA  
7 are they being deployed to? From which other  
8 departments?

9 JILL BERRY: So, and again, I'll have to get back  
10 to you on the specifics but a couple of the primary  
11 areas that they are being redeployed from are the  
12 program integrity area. These are staff that are  
13 responsible for ensuring that those who are receiving  
14 benefits are eligible for benefits. We are relying  
15 instead on a lot of data matches to do that work,  
16 rather than the individual staff investigations.  
17 Just as a priority right now, it's more important to  
18 get people on benefits and then we can send those  
19 staff back to do the regular work once we get caught  
20 up.

21 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, I read your testimony.  
22 We prioritize frontline staff hiring. We sort and  
23 obtain waivers from the state and federal partners  
24 and other teams connected more New Yorkers to  
25

1 benefits than any recent pre-pandemic year with \$1.7  
2 million have received. What waiver was given?

3  
4 JILL BERRY: So, we've had a number of waivers  
5 throughout the pandemic. Some of the one's that we  
6 are continuing to work with, our state and federal  
7 partners on, are the waivers to allow us to extend  
8 SNAP recertifications. So, we have been getting  
9 waivers and we continue to make use of that to extend  
10 recertifications in additional four to six months.  
11 That frees up our staff to instead of working on  
12 those SNAP recertifications, those households can  
13 continue to get their benefits and we can focus our  
14 efforts on the new applications that are coming in.  
15 That has been a tremendous help that way in  
16 particular.

17 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, so it has helped?

18 JILL BERRY: Absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Absolutely, okay. I have two  
20 more questions. Knowing the needs tied to food for  
21 asylum seekers. What additional steps are being  
22 taken to address these needs? Is HRA looking to see  
23 if - what other benefits these families are eligible  
24 for and how are their needs being met?

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1  
2 JILL BERRY: So, asylum seekers that are in the  
3 DHS emergency hotels and in the HERCs, receive three  
4 meals a day at those locations.

5 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Are they eligible for any  
6 other programs you all are letting them know about?

7 JILL BERRY: They are absolutely welcome to and  
8 are applying for benefits. Some of them are eligible  
9 for safety net assistance based on their status and  
10 documentation but not all.

11 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay, my last question. Pre-  
12 pandemic EBT, we know pre-EBT applications are  
13 submitted by the state. In this case, OTDA and not  
14 New York City, yet we know now how important these  
15 benefits are to families struggling with hunger. New  
16 York State has not yet submitted a plan to USDA for  
17 the PEBT for the summer of 2023. What conversations  
18 are being had with OTDA to ensure that families will  
19 have access to the federal dollars for food?

20 JILL BERRY: So, the PEBT benefits are  
21 administered directly by the State OTDA. They do not  
22 flow through our agency. We'll have to get back to  
23 you on what their plans are.

24 CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Are you all in conversations  
25 or anything?

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JILL BERRY: It's not a benefit that flows  
through our agency. It is a state benefit program.

CHAIRPERSON MEALY: Okay then. Thank you Chairs.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I want to  
acknowledge that we've also been joined by Council  
Member Williams and Council Member Dinowitz. We will  
now hear from Council Member Schulman.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Thank you very much  
Chair and thank you very much Deputy Speaker Ayala,  
Chair of General Welfare and Crystal Hudson, Chair of  
Aging and Darlene Mealy, Chair of the Subcommittee on  
Food Insecurity for this important hearing.

So, I have a couple of questions. One is, who  
many older adults are on SNAP?

JILL BERRY: I believe I provided that in my  
testimony. 360,000 New Yorkers receive SNAP and are  
age 65 or older in FY2022. The average monthly  
number of SNAP recipients.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Of the entire  
population that gets SNAP, what percentage would you  
say that is?

JILL BERRY: 360,000 divided by 1.7 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I'm terrible at math,  
so don't ask me to do it.

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1  
2 JILL BERRY: I want to say it's like 15 percent-  
3 it seems.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: There a lot. I mean, I  
5 don't have a "high needs" district but I do have  
6 individuals with high needs and I also have - I  
7 represent District 29 in Queens, which has one of the  
8 highest number of older adults, many of whom are food  
9 insecure. So, that's an important issue for me.  
10 Have all of the former recovery meals clients been  
11 screened for home delivered meals and SNAP and if so,  
12 what are the percentages of clients that are eligible  
13 for these services?

14 ANYA HERASME: So, all of the recovery meals  
15 clients have been followed up with and were screened  
16 for whatever their needs are. There was many  
17 different needs, so some clients maybe didn't qualify  
18 or were able to go to an OAC or other program. For  
19 those who did qualify, they were screened and if they  
20 - depending on the assessment they will receive HDM  
21 programs. But everybody was notified at the end of  
22 the recovery meals and was appropriately sent to, you  
23 know referred to a program that worked for them.

24  
25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: For older adults, how  
3 do you educate folks on being able to apply for SNAP  
4 if they need it?

5 ANYA HERASME: Sure, so at our centers, we have  
6 either there's programming that can be around SNAP.  
7 Also, our case, the case workers in the OAC's or in  
8 our NORC's or Case Management programs, also work  
9 with older adults to assess their needs and if  
10 necessary, of course help them apply for SNAP.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: And I'm also going to  
12 ask, I do this at a lot of hearings of the agencies  
13 that you work with the City Council members to  
14 promote that for their constituents as well, so that  
15 we can make sure that people are able to access the  
16 services that they need.

17 Now, I have -

18 JILL BERRY: I'd like to just add that our  
19 outreach teams at DSS, we also go out to the older  
20 adult centers to help with staff enrollment.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Great, thank you  
22 Commissioner. So, my question, actually Commissioner  
23 Berry to you is so, you said 49.9 percent right now  
24 of the SNAP applications, you're able to do on time,  
25 correct?

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1 JILL BERRY: Correct.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: What does on time mean?

3 JILL BERRY: On time means within 30 days. So,  
4 all the others are more than 30 days.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Do you have a  
6 percentage of what's the largest outlier outside of  
7 the 30 days?

8 JILL BERRY: We're really focused on anything  
9 that is past the 30 days.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay. And you said  
11 that you're actually in your testimony, you said that  
12 you have - you're working on streamlining the  
13 process. What does that exactly mean?

14 JILL BERRY: So, looking to make things easier.  
15 For example, just this week, for those who are  
16 applying for cash assistance and SNAP benefits  
17 jointly, we launched the cash assistance on demand  
18 telephone interview system, which is the same thing  
19 we have on the SNAP side, we now have it on the cash  
20 assistance side.

21 So, instead of us making a phone call out to an  
22 applicant to conduct the interview, that maybe we  
23 connect with the person, maybe we don't. Maybe we  
24 have to have a few calls back and forth. Very  
25



1 inefficient, it takes up a lot of time, our staff  
2 time and the clients time.  
3

4 As of this week, we launched on demand for cash  
5 assistance, so applicants for cash assistance, again  
6 and that's the cash assistance and SNAP applications.  
7 They can call us at their convenience Monday through  
8 Friday 9-5 to have their interview conducted.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Okay, and do you have  
10 anything else in addition to that or that's pretty  
11 much what you're working on? Are there other  
12 processes that you're trying to streamline or that's  
13 -

14 JILL BERRY: No, we've done a lot of other things  
15 in house to make sure that we are - that we've done  
16 things like instead of staff processing applications  
17 and recertifications that are relevant to the  
18 specific center that they're working on, we have made  
19 it so that staff can process any application that  
20 comes in citywide, so you don't end up with really  
21 long processing times at one center that might be  
22 lower staffed and shorter at another center that has  
23 more staff availability.

1           So, we've made changes like that just in  
2  
3 processing to make it more efficient and across the  
4 board.

5           COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Chair, can I ask one  
6 more question? Is that okay? Thank you. So, you  
7 also said in your testimony that you endeavored to  
8 support a range of nutritious food options. That  
9 kind of thing, so as Chair of the Health Committee, I  
10 just passed a citywide diabetes reduction plan. So,  
11 how does the nutrition fit in with trying to make  
12 folks healthier?

13          JILL BERRY: So, certainly as we are making food  
14 available through the Community Food Connections  
15 Program, we work closely with the Mayor's Office of  
16 Food Policy to make sure that the foods that are  
17 available are culturally diverse, are religiously  
18 diverse. We're also making sure that they meet our  
19 nutrition standards. So, each food item has to meet  
20 the city's nutrition standards.

21          COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: Would you be willing to  
22 work with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene  
23 as we develop this program to reduce diabetes, in  
24 terms of those?

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1  
2 JILL BERRY: Absolutely, we work very closely  
3 with them as well, absolutely.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SCHULMAN: I appreciate that very  
5 much because it's so important that the lifespan of  
6 an average New Yorker has gone down drastically  
7 according to the New York City Department of Health,  
8 so we want to do everything we can and have all the  
9 agencies work together to make sure that all New  
10 Yorkers are healthier and I appreciate that. Thank  
11 you very much.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Council Member.  
13 Council Member Lee.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Hi, good morning everyone  
15 and thank you so much Chairs for this hearing. I  
16 just want to revamp senior center before it's  
17 definitely very near and dear to me in social  
18 services as well. And thank you, because we actually  
19 had DSS at the Senior Center at the nonprofit I  
20 previously ran in and it was extremely helpful having  
21 that right there at the center.

22 So, quick question because as we all know, the  
23 Mayor recently announced another round of four  
24 percent PEGs across the board in terms of cuts. And  
25 so, just wanted to get a sense from you all and I

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1  
2 guess this is more geared towards DFTA. How will the  
3 PEG impact when it comes to meal services contracted  
4 through NYC you know Aging? And also, what other  
5 impacts will the cuts have for DFTA and contracted  
6 providers?

7 ANYA HERASME: The mayor only recently announced  
8 this PEG and we're still in the process of working  
9 with OMB to determine how this will be realized at  
10 New York City Aging. As discussions continue  
11 regarding the Fiscal Year 2024 budget, we look  
12 forward to meeting with Council next month following  
13 the release of the Executive Budget, which will  
14 provide clarity to this issue. As always, we're open  
15 to discussing budgetary concerns of Council and  
16 intend to have a fruitful discussion as part of the  
17 upcoming executive budget hearing.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay. And how is it that  
19 you all are assessing the inflation cost impacts for  
20 raw food, gas, other materials at the older adult  
21 centers and home delivered meals programs. And if  
22 so, what is the plan to address the budget needs?  
23 Because also, sometimes the regulation changes if  
24 there's cost increases. You know just what the plans  
25 are to address that.

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1  
2 ANYA HERASME: Sure, so HME providers have  
3 experienced increases in fuel, food, and  
4 transportation costs due to inflation, which has  
5 affected their operations. However, due to the  
6 reimbursement rate increase, some of those increased  
7 inflation requests have been covered or more easily  
8 weathered. We always work closely with our providers  
9 to address issues and respond to concerns, especially  
10 where food programs are concerned.

11 As OAC's are continuing to come back to  
12 prepandemic levels, they have been able to have more  
13 flexibility with regards to congregate meal funding  
14 while serving a smaller population than prior to  
15 March 2020. This has allowed them to adjust more  
16 easily to the impact of inflation.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and just out of  
18 curiosity, I don't know if this has changed  
19 internally at DFTA but for the ten percent indirect  
20 rates that are allowed in terms of flexibility with  
21 the contracts, is that something that can be applied  
22 towards some of those costs and is it a discussion  
23 where you and the providers are able to negotiate  
24 that based on each contract or how does that?

25

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1  
2 ANYA HERASME: I think that would be a better  
3 question for our fiscal team.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay and is there a  
5 possibility of a midyear increase for FY23 at this  
6 point to address the needs and if not, I mean, you  
7 sort of answered this but if not, how does DFTA  
8 anticipate providing, anticipate providers  
9 financially sustaining their meal programs?

10 ANYA HERASME: So, because we're still working  
11 with OMB, I think we can have more clarity on that at  
12 the next - the budget hearing.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay.

14 ANYA HERASME: But we are, you know, we're  
15 working with them closely to ensure that nobody goes  
16 without a meal.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, uhm, does New York  
18 City, does DFTA have an estimate of how many people  
19 who were previously receiving congregate meals before  
20 the pandemic, transition to home delivered meals due  
21 to mobility or cognitive challenges or other personal  
22 issues. Is that tracked?

23 ANYA HERASME: Uhm, yes, sorry, can you repeat  
24 the question is it tracking the former recovery meal  
25 clients?

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1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Yes, so, do you have an  
3 estimate or a sense of how many older adults moved  
4 from the normal congregate meals over to you know the  
5 home delivered meal program may be due to the  
6 pandemic or during that time?

7 ANYA HERASME: Yes, I do have that. I want to  
8 give you the right number. Yes, so as of February  
9 2023, there are 2,714 active HDM clients who prior to  
10 the pandemic were congregate meal clients at an OAC  
11 and have now transitioned to home delivered meals  
12 because of mobility issues. So, this represents 13.2  
13 percent of the number of currently active HDM  
14 clients.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, and then also, for the  
16 Grab and Go's because this is something we hear all  
17 the time because the grab and go meals during the  
18 pandemic actually prove to be very successful and a  
19 lot of seniors are still asking if they can have  
20 those Grab and Go meals. And so, is it an option for  
21 groups if they prefer it and even if they didn't  
22 include it as one of their planned activities in the  
23 last RFP, is it an option that you'll allow them to  
24 still provide those grab and go's?

25

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1  
2 ANYA HERASME: So, older adult centers are  
3 required by the Older American's Act to provide  
4 congregate meals. However to accommodate the food  
5 needs of older adults during the pandemic, we did  
6 grab and go options were allowed at present. The  
7 Grab and Go meal service has officially ended.  
8 However, the OAC's who did widely make the Grab and  
9 Go a permanent fixture of their other food delivery  
10 programs, they are able to meet a wider range of food  
11 needs for older New Yorkers. We do recognize the  
12 importance of congregate meals and how they combat  
13 issues like social isolation. However, we're also  
14 committed to alleviating food insecurity among older  
15 adults whenever possible.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEE: Okay, thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Council Member Lee.  
18 We've also been joined by Council Member Stevens and  
19 I have a couple of more questions. On average, could  
20 you tell us what the dollar amount of monthly  
21 benefits lost for city SNAP recipients after the  
22 ending of the federal SNAP increase program?

23 JILL BERRY: On average, a household size of one  
24 lost about \$100 and a household size of four lost  
25 about \$200.



1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: \$200? Okay. Have all SNAP  
3 recipients in the city seen their benefits decrease  
4 since the change became effective?

5 JILL BERRY: Yes, every SNAP recipient was  
6 receiving an emergency allotment and every SNAP  
7 recipient has lost that emergency allotment.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Was there any information to  
9 - was there any attempt to communicate that to  
10 recipients? I ask because just yesterday I was doing  
11 constituent services, which I love. It's my first  
12 passion and I love doing constituent services but a  
13 senior citizen came in and she was freaking out and  
14 she was like, "Diana, they decreased my food stamps.  
15 I don't know what's going on." And so, I had to sit  
16 there and explain to her why this had occurred and  
17 what we were doing to try to you know rectify this  
18 and you know she should pray and you know hopefully  
19 we would get a response from the state or the federal  
20 government you know sometime soon but you know I  
21 wonder if that was a fluke or what communication does  
22 HRA have with its clients to inform them that these  
23 changes are happening because that's a pretty big, I  
24 mean especially if you have a bigger family. That's  
25 a big you know dip in the amount of funds that are

1 coming in for food. So, people should plan  
2 accordingly.

3  
4 JILL BERRY: Yeah, absolutely. The state sent  
5 letters to all the recipients. We advertised it  
6 through our CBO's. We put it on our hold message for  
7 Infoline. So, we did try to reach people as many  
8 ways as possible through mail notices, through CBO  
9 partners making communications and hold messages on  
10 Infoline.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do you happen to have a flyer  
12 or something that you're posting that we can maybe be  
13 able to share?

14 JILL BERRY: Yes, yes, absolutely.

15 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah, I think it would be  
16 helpful. And lastly, what is HRA proactively doing  
17 to bridge this gap for New Yorkers who are not  
18 receiving decreased allotments? What outreach is HRA  
19 doing for people to have their applications reviewed  
20 in case that they are eligible for an increase  
21 benefit?

22 JILL BERRY: Obviously, we are reviewing every  
23 application and recertification as they come in.  
24 Clients have the opportunity to submit changes to  
25 their case at any time and we have six-month mailer

1 again as an opportunity to submit any changes you  
2 have, so we can reevaluate your eligibility for SNAP  
3 benefits.  
4

5 The other thing we're doing is it's really too  
6 soon at this point because the benefits just ended at  
7 the end of February but we're monitoring our pantries  
8 very carefully that receive the CFC funding to see if  
9 they are experiencing any uptick. We haven't seen  
10 that yet but it is something that we are watching  
11 carefully.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry if I missed this  
13 and it was asked before but regarding the, so I know  
14 that when the pandemic, EBP program ended, there was  
15 some communication about there being a summer program  
16 right for school aged children.

17 So, will families see an increase throughout the  
18 summer and what is HRA because if I read the question  
19 correctly and again, I'm sorry if it was read before  
20 and I didn't catch it. It says you know; we know the  
21 importance of these benefits - how important these  
22 benefits are to families struggling with hunger and  
23 New York State has not yet submitted a plan to the  
24 USDA for PEBT for the summer of 2023. What  
25

1 conversations are you having with OTDA to ensure that  
2 families will have access to these federal dollars?  
3

4 JILL BERRY: I know that the PEBT program is very  
5 popular. I believe it provides benefits to families  
6 with kids in school. It is a state OTDA program that  
7 is administered directly by the state and does not  
8 flow through our agency.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I mean, are you having  
10 conversations with them, seeing as how this will  
11 impact New Yorkers receiving benefits?

12 JILL BERRY: We can follow up and find out.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay, just out of curiosity,  
14 because I know that we have this whole workforce  
15 shortage and it dawned on me that HRA has a workforce  
16 development kind of arm. It's not a huge arm but  
17 there's an arm there, right? Has there been any  
18 opportunity presented to existing clients to  
19 participate in any of the workforce - bless you.  
20 What is going on this room? Everybody is sneezing.

21 Have they been invited to participate in  
22 conversations to apply for these positions? These  
23 available positions?

24 JILL BERRY: Yes, absolutely, in addition to the  
25 job fairs that we're doing with City Council members,

1 with DCAS, we are also doing job fairs for these  
2 positions through our business link arm. That is the  
3 arm that does the job seeking for our clients. We  
4 have another business link fair, job fair  
5 specifically for our open frontline positions next  
6 week and we're doing them at least monthly. It's  
7 really important. It's important, it's a population  
8 that wants jobs, that needs jobs. These are our  
9 clients and they have lived experience. Who better  
10 to deliver our services than those clients  
11 absolutely?

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: They understand the  
14 application process better than anybody and little  
15 answers to it. Is there any coordination with HRA  
16 and DOHMH regarding the Groceries to Go program?

17 JILL BERRY: We are aware of the program,  
18 absolutely.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: But there's no coordination  
20 in terms of - I mean I'm not as well versed on that  
21 program but my understanding is that you know if the  
22 New Yorkers that are lower income would qualify for  
23 certain credits that they could use for purchasing  
24 food, for paying for delivery and that seems like  
25 maybe something that would benefit SNAP recipients.

1 Is there any intention of ensuring that you're  
2 communicating that to SNAP recipients, so that  
3 they're aware that this program exists? I'm just,  
4 I'm always curious about you know the way that the  
5 different agencies work you know collaboratively, so  
6 that we're integrating you know each program and into  
7 the - one program into the other seamlessly and that  
8 doesn't always happen that way, so just curious.

9  
10 JILL BERRY: Yeah, so, absolutely we're  
11 collaborating, we're talking. DOHMH is going to have  
12 to talk more about how they are implementing that  
13 particular program but we absolutely participated in  
14 conversations early on about SNAP recipients, what  
15 level of benefits they get currently. We also talked  
16 a lot about who is not eligible for SNAP benefits and  
17 asked that they also consider that population as a  
18 potential recipient for this program or any program  
19 that they're running. But you would have to ask them  
20 how they ended up operationalizing.

21 We also assisted with submitting a waiver request  
22 for the program so that SNAP recipients who are  
23 participating in the program don't see a reduction in  
24 their SNAP benefits.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Awesome. Okay, that's good.  
3 That's good information. I had another question,  
4 okay? Does HRA track where the bulk of applications  
5 are coming from by borough, by district?

6 JILL BERRY: We can absolutely breakdown  
7 applications by borough and district. I don't have  
8 that with me but we do have that information.

9 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, I'm curious because when  
10 we started to receive calls, my office started to  
11 receive calls from several of my colleagues regarding  
12 the slow down and the processing of applications, a  
13 lot of those calls were coming from the Bronx. And I  
14 thought it was kind of weird that they were all  
15 coming from the Bronx and then it dawned on me, well  
16 no, you shouldn't feel weird right because as a  
17 representative, you know I represent two boroughs and  
18 even though there is severe poverty involved and I  
19 did see long lines in East Harlem as well, it was  
20 nothing compared to what I was seeing in the Bronx,  
21 part of my district.

22 And so, that really worries me because I, you  
23 know I'm thinking ten years from now, like what do we  
24 do today that you know ensured that the next pandemic  
25 didn't you know completely obliterate that community

1 that we left them, that are off and you know, I just,  
2 I wonder if there's again in coordinating services  
3 with other city agencies and when we're making  
4 decisions in terms of how we're funding food pantries  
5 that are now maybe you know maximizing you know their  
6 resources because the need is higher, the demand is  
7 higher right then the resources that they have.  
8 Like, does that level of coordination to your  
9 knowledge happen?  
10

11 JILL BERRY: I'm sure that we could do better on  
12 some of that coordination but one of the process  
13 improvements that we made that I mentioned earlier  
14 did try to get at that at least within our own  
15 program of making sure that staff could process  
16 applications from any borough for any district so  
17 that everybody is helping everybody out and no one  
18 borough or district is suffering with a longer wait  
19 time than any other.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Well, I mean, if there's  
21 someone here from the Administration, I would like to  
22 put in a plug that you know I agree that we need to  
23 get rid of rats but I don't think it's a bad idea to  
24 have a food czar that's making these connections.  
25 Somebody who's job it is right, to make sure that



1  
2 there's interconnectivity between the programs and  
3 services that we're providing, so that there are no  
4 gaps in service. And with that, unless anyone has  
5 any other questions? Any of the colleagues? No,  
6 okay. Well, thank you so much for being here today  
7 and we'll continue to have these conversations I'm  
8 sure. It was really nice hearing from the  
9 Administration today and look forward to more  
10 dialogue in the future. Thank you.

11 JILL BERRY: Thank you all.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Hi everyone, my name is  
13 Aminta Kilawan and I am going to be calling on panels  
14 today from member of the public. Our first panel,  
15 which is going to be an in-person panel will be  
16 comprised of MJ Okma, Dickran Jebejiah, Camila Gomez,  
17 and Rachel Sabella.

18 And I want to remind everyone that all public  
19 testimony will be limited to two minutes and for  
20 those that are going to be joining us on Zoom, I want  
21 to remind folks on Zoom that there will be a few  
22 seconds of delay before you are unmuted by a member  
23 of our staff before we can hear you.

24 Our next panel is going to be a virtual panel and  
25 I'm going to call up that panel just so you all are

1 aware, so you be prepared for the next panel as well.

2 So, this current panel is going to be comprised of MJ  
3 Okma, Dickran Jebejiah, Camila Gomez, and Rachel  
4 Sabella, and also Sharon Asherman, if Sharon is here.  
5

6 This first panel will also – you will also be on  
7 that panel and then the virtual panel that will  
8 follow this panel will be comprised of Emilio  
9 Tavaréz, Jane Jang, Leah Eden and Debipriya  
10 Chatterjee. Alright, you may begin in whichever  
11 order you decide.

12 MJ OKMA: Good morning Chairs. My name is MJ  
13 Okma with Sage. We run a network of LGBTQ+ Older  
14 Adult Centers throughout New York City. A recent  
15 report from Williams Institute found that LGBTQ+  
16 elders are 60 percent more likely to be experiencing  
17 food insecurity than their non-LGBTQ+ peers.

18 This is due to a lifetime of compounding  
19 discrimination combined with barriers to addressing  
20 nutrition services, including lack of family support,  
21 shame in seeking assistance and rejection in feel of  
22 judgement from service providers. While there's no  
23 comprehensive data specifically to New York City,  
24 Sage has witnessed high rates of food insecurity  
25 among our participants, disproportionately among

1 elders of color and transgender elders. To work to  
2 address this crisis, Sage has partnered with Loved  
3 One's Food Pantry to operate an LGBTQ+ affirming pop-  
4 up food pantry out of our older adult centers in  
5 Midtown Manhattan, Harlem, the Bronx and Brooklyn.  
6 This pilot program has already fed over 400  
7 households. Food insecurity also effects close to  
8 half the people living with HIV in the United States  
9 and a number of New Yorkers aging with HIV is rapidly  
10 growing due to advances in medicine and overall  
11 shifting of age demographics. It is estimated by  
12 2030 72 percent of New Yorkers living with HIV will  
13 be over the age of 50.

14 Numerous studies have directly linked food  
15 insecurity among people living with HIV to suboptimal  
16 treatment adherence and increased transmission risk.  
17 In fact, food insecurity among older adults with HIV  
18 makes them 29 percent less likely to achieve vital  
19 suppression needed to be undetectable and  
20 untransmutable. Steps can be taken to address this  
21 crisis, including collecting and publishing data on  
22 food insecurity rates, among LGBTQ+ older adults in  
23 New York City. This can be done in part by  
24 requesting and analyzing sexual orientation and  
25

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1 gender identity data collected by the New York State  
2 Government through the behavioral risk factor  
3 surveillance system. We also recommend investing in  
4 LGBTQ+ affirming food pantry program, such as our  
5 partners at Loved Ones Food Pantry and prioritizing  
6 HIV interventions that incorporated targeted food  
7 assistance strategies for older people living with  
8 HIV.  
9

10 Thank you Chairs for your leadership. Sage  
11 really values our partners with City Council and  
12 looks forward with working with you on these issues.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You can jump right in,  
14 whoever wants to go next.

15 CAMILA GOMEZ: Alright, hi folks. Thank you  
16 Chair Ayala, Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy and every  
17 member of the Committee on General Welfare, the  
18 Committee on Aging and the Subcommittee on Senior  
19 Centers and food insecurity for your time and  
20 consideration. My name is Camila Gomez and I am here  
21 on behalf of God's Love We Deliver. New York City's  
22 leading provider of medically tailored home delivered  
23 meals and nutritional counseling for people living  
24 with severe or chronic illnesses.  
25

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1           Made with zero starters, fillers, or  
2  
3       preservatives, our meals are prepared in our kitchen  
4       and delivered directly to clients homes. The  
5       medically tailored meal model is an intervention  
6       designed to support people living with severe and  
7       chronic illnesses.

8           Meal plans are tailored to the medical and  
9       dietary needs of the client by a Registered Dietician  
10       Nutritionist, MTM's as we like to call them, improve  
11       health outcomes, lower cost of care and increase  
12       patients satisfaction. Medically tailored meals can  
13       make all the difference for those who we call the  
14       sickest of the sick or the five percent of patients  
15       who are creating 50 percent of health care costs.

16           As part of the MTM intervention, along with the  
17       provision of medically tailored meals, our clients  
18       receive unlimited nutritional counseling sessions  
19       from our team of RDN's in an effort to provide  
20       ongoing support to clients.

21           We believe that being sick and hungry is a crisis  
22       that demands an urgent response for New Yorkers  
23       living with complex illnesses. God's Love is the  
24       only service that stands between them and hunger.  
25       Each year, God's Love continues to grow and meet the

1 demand. Last year alone, we delivered over 3.2  
2 million meals to over 10,500 New Yorkers living with  
3 severe illnesses along with their dependents and care  
4 givers.  
5

6 This year, we are on track to deliver 3.6 million  
7 meals and have seen a 33 percent growth in meal  
8 deliveries in the first half of FY23. Now, in our  
9 38<sup>th</sup> year of service, we have been a longstanding  
10 lifesaving resource for New Yorkers who are living  
11 with serious illnesses and facing hunger. Food  
12 insecurity impacts an individual's ability to follow  
13 medication plans, control chronic conditions and  
14 receive timely medical care.

15 Furthermore, malnourishment increases a person's  
16 likelihood to be readmitted to the hospital after a  
17 first hospitalization by 50 percent. We also saw a  
18 widespread increase in food insecurity during the  
19 corona virus pandemic and its impact on our  
20 communities health.

21 Every year we see an increase in demand for our  
22 services across the five boroughs. We target  
23 outreach to the most underserved communities with  
24 greater health disparities to remove barriers to  
25 equity and health and wellbeing.

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1  
2 As our life saving services improve the health  
3 outcomes of the increasing number of New Yorkers who  
4 need our services, we kindly ask the Committee to  
5 support our FY24 speakers request for \$250,000 in  
6 discretionary funding to support the increased  
7 provision of medically tailored home delivered meals  
8 and for those of you who have joined us at God's Love  
9 in the past, we thank you. Like, Chair Hudson, it  
10 was wonderful to have you and for those of you who  
11 haven't had the chance to join us, we hope you will  
12 soon. Thank you.

13 RACHEL SABELLA: I'm just going to keep it going.  
14 Good morning, my name is Rachel Sabella, I am the  
15 Director of No Kid Hungry New York or Share our  
16 Strength. We're a national organization working to  
17 end childhood hunger and especially, I am focused on  
18 the one in four children in New York City that  
19 currently face hunger. I want to first say thank you  
20 to the Chairs. Thank you to the members for being  
21 here today. It was really striking, the  
22 accountability that you were putting on the  
23 Administration and doing the follow-up questions,  
24 asking them, making sure they are showing what is  
25 really happening.

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1 We are in a hunger crisis. We have been in one  
2 for a long time. While we may not see the lines as  
3 much in the media, you all know what's out there. We  
4 see it each and every day. So, I want to thank you  
5 for having this robust hearing. I especially want to  
6 thank the staff for all the work that they put into  
7 this. I have a long-written testimony. I've also  
8 been Tweeting up a storm. You'll see yourselves  
9 tagged in there about this but I want to cover a few  
10 things that may not have come up yet today and also  
11 clarify something that you pushed on and they didn't  
12 give you a real answer on.  
13

14 So, number one, I do want to focus on the one in  
15 four children in New York City that could face  
16 hunger. As hearings continue, as budgets and  
17 conversations continue, we urge you to keep the  
18 Department of Education accountable. It's because of  
19 this Council that there is a breakfast after the bell  
20 program that is supposed to be in every New York City  
21 public school. We want to make sure they are pushing  
22 that even more making it easier for children to  
23 access those no cost meals. We were thrilled as an  
24 anti-hunger community to see the Speakers State of  
25 the City that highlighted the importance of the



1 summer meals program and the work that the Council is  
2 going to do to ensure that these programs are on  
3 every corner of your district. You know the parks  
4 where children hang out. You know those  
5 neighborhoods and continuing to work with them during  
6 the summer, which we call the hungriest time of the  
7 year is going to be critical in this.

9 So, I thank you for that and I look forward to  
10 working with you. I want to highlight the question  
11 on pandemic EBT. I'm pretty sure all of your offices  
12 have gotten a lot of calls over the time and I'm  
13 going to be quick. I just want to give clarity on  
14 this. About those benefits and about that awareness.  
15 Right now, New York State has not yet submitted their  
16 plan and yes, the Administration was correct, that it  
17 has to come from OTDA but what we need is  
18 accountability. We want to make sure that the  
19 Mayor's Office, HRA and the Council is making sure  
20 that the most robust plan that will give eligible  
21 families extra benefits this summer when we know  
22 there SNAP benefits have been reduced happen.

23 So, while we know HRA does not administer that  
24 program, they have a voice and can be advocates in  
25 this and we really thank you for pushing on it and

1 the work you can do. My last word I will say here  
2 and I thank you for this is the accountability. We  
3 need the Council's voice. With SNAP under attack at  
4 the federal level, with them looking at increased  
5 work requirements, we heard remarks Monday morning in  
6 New York City that would have a devastating impact on  
7 New Yorkers facing hunger.  
8

9 We want to work with you. Continue to work with  
10 the Administration and ensure we are helping those  
11 New Yorkers struggling. Thank you.

12 DICKRAN JEBEJIAH: Good afternoon Chairs and  
13 fellow Committee and Subcommittee members. Thank you  
14 for taking the time to hold this hearing. My name is  
15 Dickran Jebejiah and I am the Food Policy Manager for  
16 the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty. Met  
17 Council is one of America's largest Jewish charities  
18 and we operate the country's largest kosher emergency  
19 food network.

20 In total, our ten programs support over 320,000  
21 New Yorkers a year. As COVID-19 emergency  
22 declarations vanish, SNAP emergency allotments and  
23 for 1.7 million New Yorkers and donations dissipate,  
24 we want to thank this Council and the members present  
25 today for their support of emergency food programs.

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1  
2 By calling for \$60 million of baseline funding for  
3 community food connections, this Council has shown  
4 its dedication to our work in the communities we  
5 feed. At Met Council we play a unique role in New  
6 York's emergency food space. We offer exclusively  
7 Kosher and Halal emergency food. While we serve  
8 anyone regardless of race, ethnicity or religion, we  
9 also ensure communities with specific cultural needs  
10 have the food resources they deserve. CFC providers  
11 some of the most flexible and comprehensive funding  
12 we can access. It offers a robust product list that  
13 includes over 70 Kosher certified products. This is  
14 significantly more than what is available from USCAT  
15 FEP.

16 And then we have a men's gratitude for CFC. We  
17 also must note a few flaws. As of this morning, the  
18 CFC vendor website still does not offer any certified  
19 Halal protein. Halal certifications are essential  
20 and this lack of certified products means that  
21 providers serving Muslim communities must spend  
22 private dollars purchasing products routinely  
23 available to most CFC pantries.

24 Another issue with CFC has been the pricing of  
25 fresh products. While we are grateful for the

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1 incorporation of more fresh produce and protein into  
2 CFC, the prices of these products are often much  
3 higher than they are on the open market. This  
4 pricing causes emergency food programs to prioritize  
5 shelf stable products, rather than the fresh food New  
6 Yorkers want. It also causes an over reliance on  
7 private funding because CFC pricing simply does not  
8 add up.  
9

10 Met Council and our partners and colleagues  
11 continue to serve more New Yorkers now than at any  
12 point in the history of our organizations. While the  
13 pandemic may be over for many, the lasting economic  
14 effects and persistent inflation brought on by COVID-  
15 19 remain part of the daily lives of our community  
16 members. We fully support the Council's request of  
17 \$60 million for CFC and we hope to see continued  
18 support for emergency food programs going forward.  
19 Thank you for holding this hearing today.

20 SHARON ASHERMAN: Good morning or should I say  
21 good afternoon. Thank you Council Chair and Council  
22 Members and the representatives.

23 I'm the Director of the Older Adult Center in the  
24 Riverdale Y and I'm representing the AMPOC NORC and  
25 the Riverdale Y's new beginning older adult center.

1 And I kind of want to bring you a view from the boots  
2 on the ground. Since I know that you know the  
3 statistics and that you also know the finances and  
4 the data, it's been very clear to me that everybody  
5 is very informed and newer questions to ask of NYC  
6 Aging and the Department of Social Services.  
7

8 Currently, the Riverdale Y's older adult services  
9 serve Riverdale [UNIDENTIFIED 01:43:19], Kings Bridge  
10 and Van Cortlandt Village. A guide the pandemic, we  
11 were delivering 230 meals to vulnerable elderly.

12 Currently, we serve 80 meals a day at our adult  
13 service center and deliver another 40 Meals on Heels,  
14 which was an addition to Add and Grow and add on to  
15 our contract.

16 We deliver these meals daily to residents of the  
17 communities who are unable to attend the center. We  
18 also host a food pantry, where we distribute self-  
19 stable Kosher pantry bags for mid-Council to 130  
20 older adults each month.

21 I know that you're aware of how food prices and  
22 food insecurity is increasing as prices rise and  
23 benefits are curtailed. I've worked in this field  
24 for 20 years and have observed first hand changes in  
25 our communities because of the high cost of food. I

1 also believe that I have a unique perspective as a  
2 witness to a changing demographic in a neighborhood  
3 which is not often thought of as needy.  
4

5 When I started working at Riverdale 11 years ago,  
6 I knew there were poor struggling older adults in our  
7 neighborhood. I believe the way they were, the last  
8 tenant in a rent stabilized apartment or people who  
9 had over spent their means. I guess that maybe five  
10 percent were SNAP eligible. Little did I know I was  
11 extremely wrong. I was shocked to find out that  
12 nearly 25 percent of our older adult center members  
13 were SNAP eligible and that few had applied for or  
14 were even aware that they were eligible for benefits.

15 This is before the pandemic. In North Riverdale,  
16 there are several lower income developments and many  
17 people living for 50 years in the same rent-  
18 controlled apartment. I found the statistics  
19 particularly alarming because unlike residents in  
20 targeted neighborhoods, our low-income older adult  
21 residents were clearly not receiving the benefits  
22 they were entitled to.

23 There's a stigma to being poor and food insecure  
24 and it turns out the stigma is even greater in a  
25 neighborhood where people assume that you have money.

1  
2 Neighborhoods like Fieldston, a Bronx enclave to the  
3 rich are just a few blocks away from Kings Bridge and  
4 therefore income is not discussed among our  
5 populations. Members do not want to be seen talking  
6 to a social worker or asking for financial help.  
7 Older adult center evens the playing field for these  
8 members, allowing all regardless of income and  
9 establishing a safety net where hot daily meals and  
10 monthly pantry packages are available without stigma  
11 to older adults.

12 Our Meals on Heels program, which is unique, run  
13 by volunteers and stem from our pandemic food  
14 delivery programs reaches the socially isolated  
15 financially needy adults.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Can you – yeah, I’m sorry,  
17 we’re going to need you to wrap. You can submit the  
18 entire testimony.

19 SHARON ASHERMAN: I can submit it, yes. Thank  
20 you very much again for your support. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We’re going to  
22 limit our questions, not because we’re being rude or  
23 insensitive. I want to thank you for first and  
24 foremost, not only for being here but for all of the  
25 work. I know that in my district, I wouldn’t have –

1 I would never survive without you know the support of  
2 all of the programs here to date. But we have 27,  
3 well we have seven other panels and we have under an  
4 hour to get them through, so thank you so much.  
5

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this panel and  
7 just to reiterate for members of the public.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Oh, sorry. We've also been  
9 joined by Council Member Restler.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And just to reiterate,  
11 members of the public will be limited to two minutes,  
12 however, if you do have written testimony that you'd  
13 like to submit, it will be reviewed in full by  
14 Committee Staff and that can be submitted to the  
15 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing  
16 by emailing [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

17 So, I'm now going to call on our next panel. Our  
18 next panel will be a virtual panel comprised of  
19 Emilio Tavaréz, Jane Jang, Leah Eden and Debipriya  
20 Chatterjee. And so, we will begin now with Emilio  
21 Tavaréz.

22 EMILIO TAVAREZ: Yeah, thank you so much for this  
23 opportunity My name is Emilio Tavaréz and I am the  
24 Policy and Research Director for Hunger Free America.  
25 We are a nonprofit organization based in New York



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1 City and we focus on providing SNAP and WIC  
2 prescreening and enrollment assistance citywide. So,  
3 we help older adults, families and individuals access  
4 lifesaving nutrition assistance to allow them to put  
5 food on the table and also improve their nutrition.  
6 So, I'm honored to testify today on behalf of  
7 approximately 1.3 million New Yorkers that are 65 and  
8 over specifically and really talking about the needs  
9 of their community to better access these programs.  
10

11 My background is in social work, so I have direct  
12 experience helping a lot of different households  
13 apply for a variety of benefits, not just SNAP and  
14 WIC but workforce assistance, housing assistance,  
15 CHEAP, DRIE, SCRIE, all of those programs I have  
16 direct experience with and I can tell you what the  
17 frustration is with a lot of people in how  
18 complicated it is having to go in person to multiple  
19 different offices, basically fill out the same work  
20 and sort of follow that you know, that wait time,  
21 that phone call. It's very time consuming and also  
22 emotionally taxing for people to have to tell their  
23 story over and over again. And so, I just, in the  
24 context of this hearing, I think it's important to  
25 increase the amount of data sharing that is done

1 between city agencies. So, we've highlighted how the  
2 My City Portal has been launched but it only includes  
3 childcare program. And so, we would really love to  
4 see that expanded to include all of the programs in  
5 DSS as well as DFTA. I think home delivered meals,  
6 shopping online, using SNAP online, being able to  
7 apply online. People will always need in-person  
8 services but I just think it would help greatly  
9 people to be able to apply one time all the things  
10 that they're eligible for and avoid all of the  
11 repetitive you know waiting in different government  
12 agencies. So, thank you for this opportunity and  
13 hope to continue the conversation.  
14

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Emilio for  
16 your testimony. And now, we'll call on Jane Jang.  
17 Over now to Jane.

18 JANE JANG: Thank you, Council Members, for  
19 allowing me to testify today. My name is Jane Jang.  
20 I am a Grants and Advocacy Coordinator from the  
21 Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York,  
22 Inc..

23 Founded in 1973, KCS is the oldest and largest  
24 Korean nonprofit organization assisting underserved  
25 communities across the New York City area. AAPIs

1 demonstrate the highest poverty rate of all ethnic  
2 groups in New York City, with one in five of them  
3 living in poverty. Low-income levels lead to a  
4 decline in individuals' ability to acquire food.  
5 Accordingly, a 2022 report by NYU Center for the  
6 Study of Asian American Health found that access to  
7 food was Asian Americans' top concern over the  
8 pandemic years.  
9

10 To help maintain the health and well-being of  
11 underserved communities coping with food insecurity,  
12 KCS Flushing Older Adult Center provided 64,803 meals  
13 to Flushing-based older adults. Our Corona Older  
14 Adult Center provided 20,907 meals to Corona-based  
15 older adults. Our Home-Delivered Meal Program has  
16 delivered 73,077 meals as of February 2023. It is on  
17 pace to deliver 109,616 meals by the end of FY23.

18 In addition to providing affordable and  
19 nutritious meals, KCS Older Adult Centers' Nutrition  
20 program has been holistically fulfilling meal service  
21 needs unique to AAPI older adults, such as ethnic  
22 food, language access and accommodations for  
23 disabilities. Naturally, demand for our meal services  
24 across AAPI communities has only increased in the  
25 past few years. We have been meeting this increased

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

9  
10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has  
11 expired.

12 JANE JANG: We are struggling to sustain our  
13 program. Therefore, KCS asks that an equitable share  
14 of city funding be allocated towards our Nutrition  
15 program our request such that every AAPI New Yorker  
16 will be able to lead nutritionally balanced and  
17 lives. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Jane for your  
20 testimony. We'll now call on Leah Eden for  
21 testimony. Over now to Leah.

22 LEAH EDEN: Hi, thank you so much to the Chairs  
23 and to the members for holding today's hearing. My  
24 name is Leah Eden, I am the Executive Director of  
25 Equity Advocates. We fight for root causes of food

1 inequity through policy and systems change and since  
2 the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've  
3 convened the New York City Food Policy Alliance, a  
4 multisector group of 75 food system stakeholders from  
5 across the city, including frontline CBOs working to  
6 address food insecurity and strengthen the food  
7 system.  
8

9 So, I'm here to thank the Council for its support  
10 in making investments in the emergency food system  
11 and ensuring timely access to critical benefits like  
12 SNAP, as many today have spoken about. But I'm also  
13 here to really urge the Council to intentionally  
14 invest in community driven long-term solutions to  
15 food insecurity that also work towards creating  
16 ownership models and wealth creation for historically  
17 marginalized communities across the entire food  
18 system.

19 So, when thinking about how to sustainable  
20 address food insecurity, the city should be  
21 partnering with and supporting community food help  
22 models, like university and Corporate Health Food  
23 Project, community owned food retails, which is the  
24 Central Brooklyn Food Co-op as ways to leverage  
25

1 existing and growing community owned food, health,  
2 farming and retail infrastructures.  
3

4 The Council can also increase funding for its  
5 Worker Cooperative Business Development and community  
6 Land Trust Initiatives as ways to support worker  
7 cooperatives in the food space and its critically  
8 needed access to land for farming and gardening.

9 Another way to invest in community driven solutions  
10 to food insecurity is to strengthening our city's  
11 urban agriculture sector and specifically investing  
12 in funding to train this next generation of  
13 successful farmers. We can do that by expanding the  
14 DOE's agriculture, Food and Natural Resources TTE  
15 programs and investing in local training programs -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You time has expired.

17 LEAH EDEN: Like Farm School New York City.  
18 Thank you. We'll submit additional written testimony  
19 with more detail but we definitely appreciate the  
20 opportunity to share today.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Leah, thank you for  
22 your testimony. I'll now turn it over to Debipriya  
23 Chatterjee. Over now to Debipriya.

24 DEBIPRIYA CHATTERJEE: Thank you, Chairpersons  
25 Ayala, Hudson, and Mealy and to the members of the

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1 General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to  
2 testify. My name is Debipriya Chatterjee, and I am a  
3 Senior Economist with the Community Service Society  
4 of New York. It's long-time nonprofit organization  
5 dedicated to promoting economic opportunity for low  
6 and moderate-income New Yorkers. We use research,  
7 advocacy, and direct services to champion a more  
8 equitable city and state.  
9

10 Today my testimony is going to focus on the state  
11 of food insecurity in New York City. For twenty  
12 years and continuing, CSS has been conducting a  
13 unique survey of opinions and hardships facing low-  
14 income New Yorkers in its Unheard Third Survey. So,  
15 every survey, we ask people the following questions:  
16 Did you receive free food or meals from a food  
17 pantry, soup kitchen, meal program, family, or friend  
18 because you didn't have enough to eat? Or did you  
19 often skip meals and go hungry because there wasn't  
20 enough food to buy food? Based on their yes or no  
21 responses, we gauge the extent of food hardship.

22 In 2022, 30 percent of all respondents said they  
23 experienced food hardship. Over half of low-income  
24 New Yorkers endured food hardship in 2022. So, among  
25 those making less than 200 percent of the poverty

1 level, over half of them endured some sort of food  
2 insecurity.

3  
4       Around 20 percent of these households endured  
5 severe food hardship. Meaning they either sought out  
6 free food or they went to bed hungry. Food  
7 insecurity is at a crisis level for the city's  
8 Hispanic and Latinx residents: 60 percent of low-  
9 income Hispanic reported experiencing severe food  
10 hardship. And almost 48 percent of women reported  
11 experiencing severe food hardship.

12       We know that the rate of casualty of food  
13 insecurity of the children whose physical and mental  
14 and cognitive development can be impaired by lack of  
15 adequate nutrition and yet, 61 percent of low-income  
16 households with children reported food hardship.

17       We include all of these statistics in our full  
18 report that you can read up on our website, it is  
19 until next week but happy to share with members of  
20 the Committee here. A lot has been made about the  
21 determination of the emergency allotments and SNAP,  
22 so I'm not going to go into it because -

23       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

24       DEBIPRIYA CHATTERJEE: I just want to finish by  
25 saying that the City Council should pressurize the



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1 state budget still in the making to expand the Empire  
2 State Child Care Credit and increase the minimum  
3 wage. These have been proven to really dramatically  
4 reduce food insecurity on a long-term basis. Thank  
5 you for this opportunity. Thank you.

6  
7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Debipriya and  
8 thanks to this entire panel for your testimony. I'm  
9 now going to call the next two panels. The next  
10 panel is going to be an in-person panel comprised of  
11 Maria O'Hada, Stacey McRae, Brianna Paden-Williams,  
12 and Vik Bensen. And this panel will be followed by a  
13 virtual panel comprised of Helen Jang, Mary Archana  
14 Fernandez, Jeremy Caplan, Matthew Josbiach and  
15 Davinder Singh. You may begin when ready.

16 MARIA O'HADA: Yes, good morning. My name is  
17 Maria O'Hada. I'm a kitchen aid of Center Square or  
18 the Adult Center at Greenwich House. Thank you to  
19 the Chairs and fellow City Council Members for this  
20 opportunity to testify today. Greenwich House had  
21 been around for 120 years. We provide services that  
22 support people in New York City of all ages.

23 We do this providing programs in education,  
24 health services and services for older adults.  
25 Greenwich House has five centers in Manhattan for

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1 older adults. We help members with social  
2 activities, learning and staying healthy.  
3

4 I have worked as a Kitchen Aid for six years. I  
5 hear from people every day who are having a really  
6 hard time and do not have enough food to eat. Just  
7 last week, a woman asked me if I had any leftovers  
8 because she didn't have enough food for dinner. It  
9 was heartbreaking. I gave her rice and vegetables,  
10 which is all I had.

11 If we had more funding for meals, our seniors  
12 would have more to eat during lunch, which is the  
13 only meal some have all day. If we had more funding  
14 for meals, seniors would have more to eat during  
15 lunch.

16 Across our other adult center, we serve about 250  
17 meals a day, five days a week. Many of our members  
18 arrive in the morning and stay all day until we  
19 close, because they crave community and social  
20 connections. On Friday's we used to provide frozen  
21 meals so that seniors have food to eat over the  
22 weekend when our centers are closed. However, we no  
23 longer have funding for this. So many seniors are  
24 saving portions of their weekly lunch to eat over the  
25 weekend.

1           The city should consider increasing the funding  
2  
3 for meals to ensure we can provide seniors with more  
4 quality, nutritious food. We are only currently  
5 funded to serve lunch but know if we could serve  
6 breakfast, it's not – and even dinner, there would be  
7 no shortage of demand. Overall, no more funding for  
8 meals the opportunity to serve breakfast and snack  
9 and frozen-to-go meals for the weekend would make a  
10 big difference in the life of the members who are  
11 experiencing food insecurity. Greenwich house  
12 appreciates the New York City Council for working to  
13 address food insecurity for all of the community  
14 members.

15           I thank the Committees for the opportunity to  
16 testify today. Thank you very much.

17           CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

18           STACEY GAY MCRAE: Hi, good afternoon. My name  
19 is Stacey Gay McRae and I am a Kitchen Aid at  
20 Greenwich House, Our Lady of Pompeii Older Adult  
21 Center. Thank you to the Chairs and fellow City  
22 Council Members for this opportunity to testify  
23 today. Greenwich House provides older adult  
24 services, arts and education programs and health  
25 services for over 20,000 New Yorkers annually.

1 Our Lady of Pompeii is one of five older adult  
2 centers in Manhattan, offering our members vital  
3 social, educational, physical and cultural resources.  
4 As a Kitchen Aid, I worked with many older adults who  
5 rely on our lunch service as their only meal for the  
6 day. Data shows that poverty rates increased for  
7 older adults in 2021 while the cost of living  
8 continues to rise.  
9

10 So, many people tell us they can't afford  
11 groceries and that their SNAP benefits don't go as  
12 far as they used to. Unfortunately I have seen how  
13 changes in these programs can have a devastating  
14 impact on their ability to access the food they need  
15 to stay healthy, nourished and age with dignity. One  
16 of the most critical issues that I have witnessed,  
17 they are only funded to serve lunch. This vulnerable  
18 service is a lifeline for our seniors and one meal a  
19 day is not enough to sustain them all day. This can  
20 have a profound effect, impact on their overall  
21 health and wellbeing.

22 I serve lunch to our members every day and I get  
23 to the know them. They are like family. When we are  
24 closed over the weekends, a lot of our members tell  
25 me they don't have access to much food until we open

1 again. For example, last week I was sitting at the  
2 front desk with a member when a member arrived early  
3 for lunch to ask if there will be any extra food  
4 available. I told him I wasn't sure but that he  
5 could stand in line after meal service ends. He  
6 joined a long line of others in need of more food.  
7 Luckily that day, we had more rice available to offer  
8 but that was just not the case every day.

9  
10 On days, some days there are no extras. I  
11 witnessed members eating only half of their lunch  
12 meal and saving the rest for dinner. If we had more  
13 funding for meals, we could offer each member more  
14 food to help sustain them through the day. If we had  
15 funding for a proper breakfast and snacks that would  
16 help us better meet the needs of our community.

17 It concerns me greatly to think of what our  
18 members will do as summer approaches and the  
19 temperature rise making it more difficult for them to  
20 commute to our center for lunch or grocery stores.  
21 If we had funding to provide frozen meals per  
22 weekends, it would help them a great deal.

23 Overall, more funding per meal. The opportunity  
24 to serve breakfast and snacks and the ability to  
25 provide more frozen meals for weekends would really

1 help our community. Thank you to the New York City  
2 Council for working to address food insecurity for  
3 our older community members and thank you to the  
4 Committees for the opportunity to testify today.  
5 Thank you.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. You know my uncle  
8 worked at that church for many, many years. You just  
9 reminded me.

10 STACEY GAY MCRAE: Wonderful.

11 BRIANNA PADEN-WILLIAMS: Hi, I'm Brianna Paden-  
12 Williams. I am the Communications and Policy  
13 Associate at Live On New York. Thank you for the  
14 opportunity to testify today. Live On New York's  
15 members represent more than 110 community-based  
16 nonprofits, many of which are here today including  
17 Greenwich House, KCS, Riverdale Y, as well as Sage  
18 and others that provide critical services, which  
19 allow us all to thrive in our community as they age.

20 And for many older New Yorkers, food security  
21 remains a harsh reality of daily life with more than  
22 200,000 older New Yorkers relying on food pantries  
23 for much of their nutritional needs. And while food  
24 insecurity among older adults has been exacerbated  
25 due to the pandemic, coupled with rising cost over

1 the past year, we know that community-based  
2 organizations, including older adult centers and home  
3 delivered meal providers have been essential to  
4 ensuring older adults do not go hungry and have food  
5 on the table.  
6

7 In addition, we know SNAP benefits have been  
8 critical in the fight against food insecurity for  
9 low-income older adults, yet only about half of older  
10 adults who qualify for SNAP benefits are currently  
11 receiving them.

12 And so, to address some of these chronic issues  
13 that many have addressed today, we recommend the  
14 following: Firstly recognizing the operation of  
15 older adult centers and home delivered meal programs  
16 that have provided nutritional meals for older  
17 adults. We know this work wouldn't be possible  
18 without the tireless work of human service  
19 professionals like the ones up here today. And so,  
20 we join our partners in calling for the city to just  
21 pay all human service workers a livable wage with the  
22 6.5 percent COLA for all human services contracts.

23 Also, the city must recognize how inflation costs  
24 have impacted older adult centers and home delivered  
25 meals providers, excuse me, and invest an additional

1 \$64.8 million to meet the existing needs of providers  
2 and this includes funding to address the inflation  
3 costs for home delivered meals as well as congregate  
4 meals.  
5

6 In addition, we're asking the city to invest \$4  
7 million to fully fund holiday and weekend meals  
8 that's not currently covered through the city. And  
9 lastly, the city should work to expand SNAP benefits  
10 for older adults and we know the under utilization of  
11 SNAP benefits is really a major problem among older  
12 adults and New Yorkers. With that, I know more  
13 information can be found in my written testimony but  
14 thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

15 VIK BENSEN: Hi, thank you for the opportunity to  
16 testify today. I am Vik Bensen, the Policy Analyst  
17 at City Meals on Wheels. City Meals works with the  
18 network of home delivered meal providers to fill the  
19 gap in the city's HDM program by funding the  
20 preparation and delivery of meals on weekends,  
21 holidays and emergencies to homebound older adults,  
22 alongside additional services. The network of meal  
23 providers has seen an increasing need for their  
24 services for many years, which was compounded by a  
25 pandemic that had an outsized impact on the same



1 population they serve. The nutrition program serving  
2 older adults including SNAP and HDM have long been  
3 inadequate. National data from 2018 shows that 66  
4 percent of HDM and 54 percent of congregate meal  
5 recipients reported these meals provide a majority of  
6 their daily food and half of SNAP participants  
7 receiving HDM reported they do not always have enough  
8 money or benefits to buy the foods they needed.  
9

10 In response to COVID-19, federal relief bills  
11 funded expansions but had an impact on food  
12 insecurity for older adults through local programs  
13 like get food and Grab and Go alongside increased  
14 SNAP benefits. Now, federal and local temporary  
15 emergency programs have ended, returning programs to  
16 prepandemic operations despite continuing need for  
17 investment. High inflation has decreased purchasing  
18 power, effecting both food insecure older adults and  
19 the providers who serve them. Increased costs are  
20 straining meal providers and without increased  
21 funding in the FY24 budget, we could see cuts in  
22 these necessary nutrition programs like HDM and  
23 congregate meals.

24 The city should permanently expand older adult  
25 nutrition programs locally and to fully address food

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1 insecurity for older adults, the city should make the  
2 following investments: We echo the same \$64.8  
3 million ask in the FY24 budget to address  
4 inflationary costs at HDM and OAC programs and a \$4  
5 million ask in the FY24 budget for our city meals  
6 weekend meals to fill the gap in the HDM program for  
7 weekends and holidays. We also ask for flexibility  
8 in OAC contracts to permanently offer Grab and Go  
9 meals at older adult centers and to increase HDM  
10 funding to include additional meals for clients  
11 needing more than one meal a day. And finally, in  
12 the absence of continued federal SNAP emergency  
13 allotments, the city should continue supplementing  
14 SNAP payments to maintain increased purchasing power  
15 for SNAP recipients. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you to this entire  
18 panel for your testimony. I'll now call on our next  
19 panel. Our next panel is going to be a virtual  
20 panel. Again, that panel will be comprised of Helen  
21 Jang, Mary Archana Fernandez, Jeremy Caplan, Matthew  
22 Josbiach(SP?) and Davinder Singh.

23 And I will now call on Helen Jang for testimony.  
24 Over now to Helen.

25

1  
2 HELEN JANG: Hi, good afternoon members of the  
3 New York City Council Committee on Aging. My name is  
4 Helen Jang, Senior Director of KCS Older Adult  
5 Centers and I am here today to testify on behalf of  
6 Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York.

7 KCS older adult centers have been providing  
8 culturally appropriate meal services and other  
9 crucial assistance to older adults since 1986.  
10 During Fiscal Year 2022, we served over 100,000  
11 ethnic Meals on Wheels and over 100,000 in person and  
12 Grab and Go meals. However, the pandemic and the  
13 hate crime have exacerbated food insecurity among  
14 older adults, especially among homebound older adult  
15 immigrants who rely on community resources like ours.

16 As a frontline service provider, funded under New  
17 York City Aging and City Meals on Wheels, we have  
18 been first hand the severe food insecurity  
19 experienced by many older adults in community. We  
20 provide not only daily nutritious meals to homebound  
21 older adults and congregate meals and Grab and Go  
22 options to those who can travel to our centers. But  
23 also, case management for heavily [INAUDIBLE  
24 02:11:18] clients, wellness checks, education  
25

1 recreation and other information referral to reduce  
2 social isolation and increase social connection.

3  
4 To continue providing these essential services,  
5 we urgently need more funding. Inflation and rising  
6 food cost and nutrition standards, especially the  
7 ethnic meals have made an increase and difficult to  
8 maintain quality programs.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has  
10 expired.

11 HELEN JANG: Home delivered meal services and  
12 providers have been directly impacted by rising cost  
13 of raw food and transportation and one of the current  
14 weekend meal reimbursement rate of \$2.15 and rice per  
15 meal if not sufficient. The cost of rice, actually  
16 the rice is main source of grain for ethnic food.  
17 Lost of Asian, like American older adults and family  
18 members has increased over 66 percent as of today.

19 In addition, we are facing challenges in staff  
20 retention due to the rising costs of guests because  
21 of insurance repair costs as well as increasing cost  
22 of health insurance premiums. We cannot -

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has  
24 expired.

25 HELEN JANG: Young people.

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1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Helen for your  
3 testimony. And again, just as a reminder for folks,  
4 you can absolutely send your full-length written  
5 testimony to us and we will review it in its entirety  
6 at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov) within 72 hours of this  
7 hearing.

8 Just a little bit on a time crunch just because  
9 we have another hearing here at 1:00 and we have so  
10 many people that are left to testify. And now, I  
11 will turn it over to Mary Archana Fernandez for  
12 testimony.

13 MARY ARCHANA FERNANDEZ: Good afternoon Deputy  
14 Speaker Ayala and Council Members on General Welfare,  
15 Aging and Subcommittee on Senior Centers and Food  
16 Insecurity. My name is Mary Archana Fernandez and I  
17 am the Director for Family Support Services SACSS,  
18 Salvation Council for Social Services. We are a  
19 community-based organization located in Flushing  
20 Queens. Our major focus areas are health care access  
21 and awareness, senior support and food security. As  
22 a multiservice agency that provides a range of  
23 services from connection to benefits to food pantry,  
24 we're able to see how barriers to accessing benefits  
25 impact food insecurity. In 2015, we started the

1 first salvation food pantry in New York City where  
2 salvation immigrants could get access to food that is  
3 culturally relevant to them, such as [INAUDIBLE  
4 02:14:14], Halal wheat Flour and basic spices.  
5

6 We started this pantry after one of our senior  
7 clients shared with us that she received disclosed  
8 orders in SNAP benefits as her income of \$1400 is  
9 considered access. She shared that she visited a few  
10 food pantries but none of them had food that she  
11 could eat. SACSS is in Flushing Queens, which is  
12 extremely diverse. Over the years our food pantry  
13 has grown to serve other ethnicities and after  
14 talking with our clients, we now try to stock food  
15 that is culturally relevant to other communities as  
16 well. For instance we sell flour used to make  
17 dumplings for our Chinese clients and a variety of  
18 beans to our Hispanic clients.

19 During the pandemic, we began home delivering  
20 groceries to homebound and immune compromised  
21 individuals. Today, we serve over 1,750 households  
22 each week to our curbside food pantry and home  
23 delivery of groceries. Many of the people that come  
24 to our food pantry are immigrants and seniors who do  
25 not have access to SNAP benefits and are experiencing

1 tremendous food insecurity. With increasing  
2 inflation and the ending of emergency SNAP benefits,  
3 we've been hearing from clients that they miss that  
4 SNAP money. They're anxious about where they will  
5 get food from. Immigrant seniors do not receive in  
6 SSI benefits due to history or integrating to get all  
7 the documentation that is required by HRA and other  
8 agencies to complete a benefit application. Clients  
9 often share that they must choose between eating a  
10 healthy and nutritious meal or pay rent and  
11 utilities.  
12

13 Thank you. I will be submitting our written  
14 testimony. Thank you so much.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Mary for  
16 your testimony. I will now turn it over to Jeremy  
17 Caplan. Over now to Jeremy.

18 JEREMY CAPLAN: Hi, good morning Chairs. Thank  
19 you for the opportunity to testify. I'm Jeremy  
20 Caplan, Executive Director at Encore Community  
21 Services. We provide more than 500,000 meals a year  
22 and when the COVID-19 crisis struck, we proudly  
23 facilitated 1.2 million recovery meals in three  
24 boroughs.  
25

1 Limited security is a very convoluted problem  
2 particularly for New Yorkers. Our common  
3 understanding often fails to capture its adversities.  
4 New Yorkers face financial constraints and we all  
5 know isolation and loneliness contribute to hunger.  
6 Many older adults lack caregivers or a support  
7 network to ensure that they receive regular  
8 nutritious meals. And we also know that our public  
9 assistance programs are labyrinthian and difficult to  
10 navigate. It's important for all of us to develop a  
11 broader understanding of what food insecurity really  
12 is. For example, just the other day I received a  
13 voice message from one of our home delivered meal  
14 clients. The voice message was from an older woman,  
15 my guess is in her mid-80's. She went on to  
16 compliment the chef for the veggie burger that she  
17 received that day but then she said and I quote, "I  
18 was just assigned a home health aide. Thankfully  
19 after having to wait 100 years." And she asked us if  
20 we could also deliver the home health aide a meal  
21 because her home health aide was hungry.  
22

23 Our work cannot deliver that home health aide a  
24 meal unfortunately but what we do hope is to receive  
25 adequate funding from our city contract to continue



1  
2 to make the delivery for the veggie burger, which  
3 supplements does not supplant other forms of  
4 assistance. I urge the Council to consider this when  
5 negotiating with the Administration. A four percent  
6 PEG to social services agencies is unacceptable. The  
7 administration should not balance the city's budget  
8 by making sweeping cuts to essential nonprofit  
9 organizations, which are the undisputed social safety  
10 net for New York City.

11 Instead we should be increasing funding for the  
12 social safety net.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time has expired.

14 JEREMY CAPLAN: Our community services endorses  
15 the \$64.8 million proposed by Live On New York. We  
16 cannot afford to do this to our aging population.  
17 Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify. I  
18 will submit more of my written testimony.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Jeremy. Thank you  
20 very much for your testimony. We'll now turn it over  
21 to Matthew Jasbiach for testimony.

22 MATTHEW JASBIACH: Hi, thank you so much for the  
23 opportunity to submit testimony on rethink these  
24 efforts, combat food insecurity and support frontline  
25 community-based organizations and our city's small

1 businesses. My name is Matthew Jasbiach, I'm the  
2 founder and CEO of a New York City based non-profit  
3 with a mission to create a more sustainable and more  
4 equitable food system. Currently we operate in 32  
5 Council Districts across all five boroughs and make  
6 more than 50,000 meals every single week.  
7

8 As many of the other people here have mentioned,  
9 we've seen the drastic cuts effect the people that we  
10 serve every single day and we are looking to the City  
11 Council to support our work that we have written in  
12 our testimony and in the interest of time, we will  
13 just submit the rest through our written testimony.  
14 Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Matthew. Thank you  
16 for your testimony and now, our final panelist in  
17 this panel will Davinder Singh. Over now to  
18 Davinder.

19 DAVINDER SINGH: Thank you Deputy Speaker Ayala,  
20 Chair Hudson, Chair Mealy and all of the members of  
21 the Committees for providing us this opportunity to  
22 speak in front of you today. My name is Davinder  
23 Paul Singh, I'm here today on behalf of India Home.  
24 A non-profit organization founded by health care  
25 professionals dedicated to serving South Asian

1 Seniors in New York. India Home leads the city's  
2 largest and mostly sickly older adult center programs  
3 aimed at improving the quality of life of immigrant  
4 seniors living in Queens and beyond.  
5

6 Since our inception, we have touched the lives of  
7 over 5,000 plus older adults through our holistic and  
8 cultural competent programs that judge congregate  
9 meals, older adult center services, case management,  
10 mental health services, advocacy and educational  
11 recreational activities. There are many issues our  
12 adults face. Food insecurity in particular is an  
13 issue that can have serious physical and emotional  
14 consequences. Many of our older adults already have  
15 poor health increased just with anxiety. For those  
16 who experience food insecurity access the food  
17 assistance program like banks, school meals, SNAP and  
18 others can be crucial in helping them meet their  
19 basic needs.

20 We have demand for our services. We have  
21 expanded to add two more adult, older adult centers  
22 making it a total of six centers that we have. We  
23 face difficulties with funding to provide congregate  
24 meals across all six centers despite the need. For  
25 example, our center in Jamaica, we serve low-income

1  
2 older adults and they've allowed our service to have  
3 a more nutritional meal at least once a day. Another  
4 one of our older adults fell and can't cook anymore  
5 so two days a week their spouse comes to our center  
6 depending on our daily meals.

7 After COVID, some older adults would like to eat  
8 at home, however, the Department of Aging does not  
9 allow Grab and Go meals, which continues to  
10 insensitive to their needs. There are many older  
11 adults that face similar issues and resources are  
12 limited. Even though resources are running thin, at  
13 India Home we are working extensively to make sure we  
14 provide as much as we can for our older adults.  
15 Rising food costs make it hard to afford nutritional  
16 meals, especially when it comes to culturally  
17 competent meals. In addition, there's an undeniable  
18 high demand for the services we provide. Also, 200  
19 percent increase since 2019.

20 With an increase in demand, it is necessary to  
21 ask for an increase in funding to expand some of our  
22 programs like case management, so we can get more  
23 older adults the -

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has  
25 expired.

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1  
2 DAVINDER SINGH: So, we will leave more  
3 information in the written testimony, which we will  
4 submit. Thank you for your time and cooperation and  
5 we look forward to working with you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Davinder and thank  
7 you to this entire panel for your testimony. I'm now  
8 going to call on the next two panels. The next panel  
9 which is going to be an in-person panel will be  
10 comprised of Rebecca Valdez, Erin Reddan, Judith  
11 Secon, and I apologize if I'm mispronouncing your  
12 names, and John Scott.

13 And then the following panel, which will be a  
14 virtual panel will be comprised of Bobby Branigan,  
15 Karen Carp, Tanisha Grant and Megan Eisenberg.

16 ERIN REDDAN: Hi, good afternoon. My name is  
17 Erin Reddan and I'm a Regional Manager at Emblem  
18 Health Neighborhood Care. And we have submitted  
19 written testimony for your consideration, which I  
20 will provide an overview of today.

21 On behalf of Emblem Health, I would like to thank  
22 Chair Hudson, Chair Ayala and Chair Mealy and the  
23 member of the Committee on Aging, the Committee on  
24 General Welfare, and the Subcommittee on Senior  
25 Centers and Food Insecurity for holding this hearing.

1 Emblem Health Neighborhood Care is a nonprofit  
2 operating 13 centers where we provide free, in-person  
3 and virtual support, access to community resources,  
4 and health and wellness classes to all community  
5 members in English, Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, and  
6 Haitian Creole. Addressing food insecurity and  
7 providing access to healthy food and nutritional  
8 guidance are some our key priorities. We have  
9 partnered with other organizations such as New York  
10 Common Pantry, La Jornada, and the Campaign Against  
11 Hunger to bring food pantry events and farmers  
12 markets to our Chinatown, Crown Heights, East New  
13 York, Harlem and Jackson Heights locations. We  
14 provide culturally competent classes, such as plant-  
15 based eating 101 and discover a heart healthy diet,  
16 and our care team is trained to assist with accessing  
17 SNAP benefits.

18  
19 In addition to our ongoing programming, we also  
20 host special resource days, such as our Healthy  
21 Eating Habits event being held at our Crown Heights  
22 location today, which includes a cooking  
23 demonstration, farmers market, health check-ins, A1c  
24 screenings and blood pressure screenings. In 2022,  
25 we served over 61,000 individuals with nearly one in

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1 three individuals being over the age of 65. This  
2 makes us uniquely positioned to help address the  
3 challenges that older adults are facing including  
4 issues like food insecurity, loneliness and social  
5 isolation. We also address digital literacy through  
6 our free cell phone and tablet literacy classes and  
7 we strongly support the Introduction under  
8 consideration today.  
9

10 Our impact could be further enhanced through the  
11 Council's support and we have submitted requests for  
12 your consideration for local and initiative funding  
13 focused on access to healthy food and nutritional  
14 education, geriatric mental health and supporting our  
15 seniors.

16 Combatting food insecurity in New York City  
17 requires a coordinated effort to ensure all  
18 communities especially the most vulnerable have  
19 access to fresh food, nutritional guidance and  
20 support. Emblem Health Neighborhood Care hopes to be  
21 a constructive partner and resource the City Council  
22 to accomplish these goals. Thank you.

23 REBECCA VALDEZ: Hello, okay. Thank you Chairs  
24 and members for holding today's hearing and the  
25 opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is

1 Rebecca Valdez and I am here on behalf of Corbin Hill  
2 Food Project. We're a food justice, nonprofit and  
3 social enterprise that supplies fresh food to those  
4 who need it most. Our programs subsidize the cost  
5 and delivery of fresh produce through SNAP, GusNIP,  
6 and other grants. Our vision is to build an aligned,  
7 equitable, and resilient food system by and for our  
8 communities. Our efforts are concentrated in Harlem  
9 and the South Bronx and we're serving 25-60 families  
10 across each of our 11 sites, weekly or bi-weekly.

12 Along with our partners, which include but not  
13 limited to: Fortune Society, Harlem Wellness Center,  
14 Philip Randolph Houses, Brotherhood Sister Sol,  
15 Amsterdam Together, Parents Supporting Parents and  
16 Bronx Health Reach, our focus is on the last mile  
17 delivery, or moving fresh food directly to meet  
18 people where they are at, in safe spaces. A  
19 challenging feat in a diverse city that contains so  
20 many communities within communities.

21 Many we serve are invisible and historically  
22 excluded, whether they are the immigrants, elderly,  
23 home-bound, displaced by gentrification, or formerly  
24 justice-involved. Our small organization leverages  
25 deep partnerships to pool our collective resources,



1 assets, and relationships to ensure our community is  
2 well fed, healthy, relevant, and medicinal food in a  
3 way that engenders dignity, choice, and joy.  
4

5 We acknowledge the tremendous efforts for food  
6 access to address food insecurity, and the need to  
7 continue funding free food. This larger system  
8 however, measures success simply by volume and  
9 poundage of free food that's dropped into a  
10 communities via fly by, which reinforces dependency  
11 on the free food industrial complex without  
12 addressing the root causes of food insecurity. We  
13 are here to advocate for systems change.  
14 Specifically, beyond the cost of purchasing local  
15 food, investments must also sufficiently cover the  
16 logistical challenges and lack of infrastructure as  
17 well as the people that support efforts to move food.  
18 We ask the City Council for its continued support for  
19 community-driven, community-based food systems  
20 including large investments for building capacity and  
21 infrastructure, so organizations like ours and our  
22 partners can continue our work long-term. For its  
23 funding that's flexible and can create an alternative  
24 system that is self-sustaining, community controlled  
25

1 and builds community wealth. Thank you for your  
2  
3 time.

4 JUDY SECON: Hi, I'm Judy Secon. I'm the Deputy  
5 Executive Director of New York Common Pantry and I  
6 want to thank you all for holding these hearings and  
7 for your commitment to those of us who work in the  
8 food insecurity field. New York Common Pantry is  
9 dedicated to addressing hunger and promoting dignity,  
10 health, and self-sufficiency. We operate in over 250  
11 community partner sites throughout the city and offer  
12 four interconnected programs. Our Choice Pantry and  
13 Mobile Pantry, Help 365 Case Management and Benefits  
14 Assessment, Our Nutrition Education and our senior  
15 program, known for us as Nourish.

16 In the past year, our programs have provided more  
17 than nine million meals, over nine million pounds of  
18 food, assisted in accessing over six million in  
19 benefit dollars, and we've served nearly 600,000  
20 program visitors.

21 We are on track to serve over 10.5 million meals  
22 this year and over 650,000 visits. We understand by  
23 being on the ground every day, how devastating food  
24 insecurity is to the mental and physical health of  
25 those experiencing it, and how much it impacts the

1  
2 quality of life in the communities it impacts. Food  
3 insecurity must be properly addressed with on-going  
4 adequate funding and infrastructure support, not just  
5 as a response to whatever crisis is happening. There  
6 recent crises have left an overwhelming number of  
7 families struggling to make ends meet, but even  
8 before that there was an unacceptable number of food  
9 insecure people in the city, and those of us  
10 addressing the problem have to struggle to get the  
11 needed resources.

12 SNAP cuts, the latest crisis, will increase the  
13 need at an unprecedented rate over the next year and  
14 it is also unknown what other cuts may be facing with  
15 the new Farm Bill. During this past March, when SNAP  
16 cuts went into effect, we saw a 35 percent increase  
17 in our pantry use versus the previous March. Our  
18 Choice Pantry in the Bronx experienced a 44 percent  
19 increase in individuals served.

20 We appeal to you to provide much-needed support.  
21 We appreciate your help and your request to increase  
22 the amount for the CFC and we urge the city to also  
23 help us with our contracts that will allow for  
24 escalation clauses, so we can continue to pay our  
25

1 staff appropriately and to meet the needs of those we  
2  
3 serve. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Judy and thank you  
5 everyone for your testimony. I just want to make  
6 sure John Scott is not here. Alright, thank you to  
7 this panel for your testimony.

8 I'll now turn to the next panel which will be a  
9 virtual panel and will be in the following order:  
10 Bobby Brannigan, Karen Carp, Tanisha Grant and Megan  
11 Eisenberg. Over now to Bobby Branigan.

12 BOBBY BRANNIGAN: Hi, my name is Bobby Brannigan.  
13 I am the Co-founder and CEO of Mercato. We're proud  
14 to be a partner with the city to launch our Groceries  
15 to Go program. It's a ground breaking program that  
16 provides low-income New Yorkers with monthly credit  
17 to cover the cost of groceries in their local  
18 communities and bring these groceries to their door.

19 Thanks for giving me the opportunity to testify  
20 today and your ongoing leadership in combating food  
21 insecurity and diabetes across New York City. Since  
22 launching the Groceries to Go program in 2021, we are  
23 proud to have built a scalable platform where there  
24 is more than 5,000 low income New Yorkers who are  
25 experiencing food insecurity, hypertension or

1 diabetes. Through our program, more than 350 local  
2 grocery stores have gone online, digitized their  
3 inventory, creating local jobs and bringing in  
4 hundreds of thousands of dollars of additional  
5 revenue.  
6

7 We believe that the key to healthy eating food  
8 access boils down to choice. Bringing more options  
9 to neighborhoods that lack healthy food access,  
10 recognizing New Yorkers independence and dignity and  
11 empowering New Yorkers to make smart and responsible  
12 choices for their families and their health. We are  
13 seeing this impact first hand. We're proud to say  
14 that a majority of participants, 62 percent are  
15 ordering fresh produce through the platform. We are  
16 also proud to announce that as of today, the USDA has  
17 approved our application to enable grocery stores  
18 accept not online.

19 We already have one store activated in Pittsburgh  
20 and will be launching the service with multiple New  
21 York City grocers in the next four to eight weeks.

22 To forwarding private public partnerships was  
23 critical to harnessing the power the balance and  
24 resources of the city to advance creative solutions  
25 for the most pressing problem facing the city. While

1  
2 our problem addresses an acute social need, we're  
3 also providing support and online infrastructure for  
4 350 local stores, which in turn creates local jobs  
5 and stimulates local community, making this program a  
6 powerful economic fly wheel.

7 Mercato is thrilled to be the city's partner on  
8 groceries to go and we look forward to partnering  
9 with the New York City to help spread the word to the  
10 constituents about -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you. Your time has  
12 expired.

13 BOBBY BRANNIGAN: The resources that help  
14 maximize our impact and reach even more New Yorkers.  
15 Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Bobby. Thank you  
17 for your testimony. I'll now turn it over to Karen  
18 Carp. Over now to Karen.

19 KAREN CARP: Good afternoon everybody. Thank you  
20 for having me on this panel. My name is Karen Carp,  
21 I am the President of Karen Carp and Partners. We  
22 are a food systems consultancy that I founded here in  
23 New York City in 1990. We work across sectors to  
24 improve access to healthy food, build local  
25 agriculture and food economies, develop sustainable

1 supply chains and to design educational programming  
2 focused on the Ag food and health jobs of the future.  
3 We're proud to count many of the organizations  
4 represented here today, as well as the Mayor's Office  
5 of Food policy as our clients.  
6

7 Throughout our history, we have sought to  
8 leverage the power of business to catalyze new  
9 thinking and approaches to reducing food insecurity.  
10 This ranges from supporting a cohort of food pantries  
11 to leverage their collective buying power, to  
12 purchase culturally appropriate food that provides  
13 choice and convenience for their clients and today,  
14 I'm working with Mercato to expand the Groceries to  
15 Go initiative to a broader audience across New York  
16 City.

17 This program is unique and can be thought of as a  
18 right to food initiative, so very important in these  
19 times of economic inequity. This program gives low-  
20 income consumers agency to make their own choices,  
21 which is an incredibly powerful element to the social  
22 and cultural and emotional aspects of reducing food  
23 insecurity. Thank you for allowing me to present  
24 today.  
25

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1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Karen for your  
3 testimony. Over now to Tanisha Grant for testimony.

4 TANISHA GRANT: Oh, it's me. Hello, my name is  
5 Tanisha Grant. I am the Executive Director and  
6 Founder of Parent Supporting Parents. When we talk  
7 about food insecurity, I see a lot of that in Harlem  
8 and Washington Heights where I do most of my work.  
9 We are a community-based organization, so we are on  
10 the ground every day providing meals, buying meals  
11 for people and partnering with nonprofits like Corbin  
12 Hill.

13 I want to say that we need ownership of our food.  
14 That you know this system that we have of food  
15 pantries and of you know community-based  
16 organizations like Black Voices Matter and Black  
17 Lives for – Riders for Black Lives, giving out food  
18 two, three times a week is not sustainable. Our  
19 communities want ownership and want to be able to  
20 have organic and fresh foods and vegetables. So, we  
21 ask that the power for food is being given back to  
22 the community, so that we can continue to partner  
23 with organizations like Corbin Hill to make a  
24 sustainable line of food for our community, so that  
25 we no longer have to be food insecure with our



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1 seniors, our families, our parents, our community  
2 members are starving for food.  
3

4 I also want to say something quickly about the  
5 SNAP. The fact that the SNAP benefits have stopped,  
6 the extra SNAP benefit has stopped, has put an  
7 enormous amount of pressure on our families to be  
8 food secure. We ask that City Council push the state  
9 and the federal organizations to make sure that those  
10 SNAP benefits come back and be permanent. People are  
11 desperate for good food. Thank you. I yield back.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your  
13 testimony Tanisha. Over now to Megan Eisenberg.  
14 Over now to Megan.

15 MEGAN EISENBERG: Thank you so much. My name is  
16 Megan Eisenberg, I'm the Director of Case Management  
17 for Services now for Adult Persons, INC. and I will  
18 be reading this testimony on behalf of the Chief  
19 Executive Officer Paula Moselle.

20 As many of you are aware, SNAP is a multi-service  
21 social services agency dedicated to addressing the  
22 needs of the ethnically and economically diverse  
23 older adult population in Queens County. SNAP covers  
24 half of the boroughs community districts through many  
25 of its programs and works closely with older adults

1 to improve their quality of life. Components of the  
2 services provided include hot congregate meals served  
3 in both of our older adult centers, health and  
4 wellness programs, education and recreation,  
5 socialization and case assistance for center members  
6 and seniors in the community at large.  
7

8 Services also include providing home delivered  
9 meals to frail homebound older adults who are part of  
10 our case management program. Recently, many clients  
11 are asking us if they can receive more than one meal  
12 a day due to the rising cost of food. Their  
13 inability to keep up with the rising cost of  
14 inflation and their increasing inability to prepare  
15 their own meals due to their poor health status. We  
16 have found that older adults are finding it much more  
17 difficult to manage on their fixed incomes. We  
18 started to see a rise in this issue during the COVID  
19 pandemic and continue to see this as an increasing  
20 challenge.

21 Case workers are finding that more seniors are  
22 coming in for financial assistance looking for  
23 solutions to manage from month to month. Inflation  
24 is causing them to become overwhelmed and unable to  
25 meet expenses and food stamps has become the number

1 one entitlement that seniors are applying for when  
2 they come in for assistance. Those who are already  
3 getting food stamps are finding that it does not  
4 stretch enough to keep up with the cost of living.  
5 Many seniors with dietary restrictions, such as  
6 diabetes or heart disease need to be more selective  
7 with their food choices but are unable to take proper  
8 nutritional care of themselves as cost for these food  
9 items are prohibited on their fixed incomes while  
10 trying to afford other household expenses.  
11

12 Many of the chronically ill individuals are  
13 purchasing less expensive food items, which are often  
14 nutritionally unhealthy with added salt, fat and  
15 fillers. Some clients have even resorted to eating  
16 fast food daily because it's economical.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you so much. Your time  
18 has expired.

19 MEGAN EISENBERG: Thank you. Our written  
20 testimony has been submitted. Thank you so much to  
21 the Council Members.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Megan. Thank you  
23 for your testimony. Thank you to this entire panel  
24 for your testimony. We're now going to move to an  
25 in-person panel. The next panelist will be Keith

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1 Carr and Nicole Hunt. Also, if there's anyone else  
2 in person who would like to testify, who we do not  
3 have a witness slip for, now would be the time to  
4 sign up to testify on this panel. Alright, you can  
5 begin whenever ready.  
6

7 Nicole, I think your mic needs to be turned on.

8 NICOLE HUNT: Good afternoon, hi, my name is  
9 Nicole Hunt. I'm Associate Director of Public Policy  
10 at the Food Bank for New York City. Thank you to the  
11 Chairs, to the Committee Members and Committee Staff  
12 for all the work you do to fight food insecurity and  
13 poverty.

14 Due to factors such as record inflation and the  
15 loss of pandemic assistance, New Yorkers are cutting  
16 back at the grocery store and increasingly turning to  
17 food assistance organizations. The number of visits  
18 to the food assistance network has increased 80  
19 percent in the past year with more than 1.2 million  
20 New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity.

21 At the same time, Food Assistance Network is  
22 rising to meet the increased need for food and other  
23 necessities of the newly arrived immigrants and  
24 asylum seekers to our city. As already addressed, in  
25 March nearly 1.7 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP

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1 experience a loss of a minimum of \$95 per month in  
2 grocery dollars. Some families lost \$260 per month  
3 and most dramatically, some older adults saw their  
4 monthly benefit drop to the federal minimum of \$23  
5 monthly or \$0.76 per day for food. We know that this  
6 is not sufficient.  
7

8 Last year, our community kitchen in West Harlem,  
9 Food Bank provided more than 75,000 prepared meals to  
10 older adults in our program and nearly 1.2 million  
11 meals to older adults through our food pantry  
12 service. More than 18 percent of New York City's  
13 older adult residents live below the federal poverty  
14 level, yet less than half of eligible older adult  
15 participate in SNAP.

16 Outreach and education is needed to ensure access  
17 to this critical benefit. When SNAP benefits are  
18 insufficient or unavailable, many New Yorkers seek  
19 assistance through the Food Assistance Network. Most  
20 of our members are not older adult centers. They are  
21 food pantries and soup kitchens. But a recent survey  
22 revealed that nearly 90 percent of our network is  
23 serving a higher percentage of older adults. What  
24 this means is that the services we provide that are  
25

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1 specifically for older adults are woefully  
2 inadequate.

3  
4 While not an explicit older adult service – oh,  
5 is that it? Oh, that went by much faster than I  
6 thought it would. I'll submit written. Basically  
7 just to fully fund the CBO's at the frontlines that  
8 are both providing food and connecting New Yorkers to  
9 all the assistance they are eligible for. You'll get  
10 lots more in my written. Thank you.

11 KEITH CARR: Testing. Good afternoon everyone.  
12 My name is Keith Carr and I am the Senior Manager of  
13 Policy and Government Relations at City Harvest.  
14 Thank you for holding this important hearing that not  
15 only talks about food insecurity but more importantly  
16 on the effect that it has on our most vulnerable  
17 population that's our seniors.

18 I won't go into – you can read in my written  
19 testimony about City Harvest response to the  
20 pandemic, as well as our response to the increased  
21 now with the cuts to the federal emergency SNAP  
22 allotments but I just want to share a few statistics,  
23 a snapshot of what we're seeing particularly from our  
24 senior populations at our food pantries and food  
25 distributions. The number of seniors served by City

1 Harvest Pantries has increased by over 77 percent  
2 compared to prepandemic levels and continues to  
3 increase. Seniors 65 years or older, are roughly 15  
4 percent of New York City's population but more than  
5 24 percent of Harvest Mobile Market participants  
6 identify as being seniors.  
7

8 Poverty rates are much higher for children than  
9 older adults including seniors, however, poverty  
10 rates have increased for seniors, while decreasing  
11 for all others between 2010 and 2021. And that's an  
12 ACS five-year estimate from 2021. The supplemental  
13 poverty measure indicates that millions of children  
14 and able-bodied adults without disabilities avoided  
15 even greater economic increase due to the child tax  
16 credit, earned income tax credits, pandemic  
17 unemployment benefits, changes to SNAP, school meals,  
18 millions of seniors on fixed income and income-based  
19 housing were ineligible for any of these programs, so  
20 the effect was compounded on them.

21 Seniors participate in SNAP at a lower rate. 70  
22 percent of eligible seniors participate in SNAP  
23 versus 82 percent of all households. This is  
24 particularly due to some seniors on fixed incomes and  
25 fixed income-based expenses either being eligible for

1 a smaller SNAP allotment, the process of documenting  
2 medical expenses, being just one more point, being  
3 too tedious, missing recertifications of their  
4 benefits and other barriers. Basically, the process  
5 of getting SNAP should not be a barrier to accessing  
6 benefits. Not having a smartphone shouldn't be a  
7 barrier and not having access to Wi-Fi or a computer  
8 should not be a barrier. So, we've highlighted some  
9 legislation that we are also in alignment with, with  
10 New York City Food Policy Alliance and others that  
11 have testified today that speak to all of these,  
12 particularly to seniors and we just ask that the  
13 Mayor increase the budget. It was heartening to hear  
14 what the Commissioner said about increases in the HRA  
15 employees but there's still work to be done because  
16 people shouldn't have to wait in line longer than 30  
17 days to find out if you're going to get assistance.  
18 And I've submitted my written testimony.

19  
20 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: I just have one question and  
21 thank you for sharing that. You listed a couple of  
22 factors that might contribute to the under enrollment  
23 of older adults in benefits programs. Like, lack of  
24 access to reliable Wi-Fi or devices. Are those the  
25



1  
2 only reasons you think contribute to this? Or are  
3 there other reasons that you might -

4 KEITH CARR: Yeah, I'd also say it's just and I  
5 know the Commissioner said that they do a good job of  
6 getting the word out. They're not doing a good job  
7 of getting the word out. The same way they didn't do  
8 a good job about the SNAP allotments. So, people  
9 were caught off guard. So, there just needs to be  
10 better communication with communities. Working in  
11 tandem with community-based organizations. Even the  
12 Department of Health is rolling out their new grocery  
13 program for people who are experiencing diabetes.  
14 But a lot of it is tied to the technology aspect.  
15 Like you have to have a smart phone or a tablet to  
16 participate in the program. So, what we've said,  
17 part of the New York City Food Policy Coalition,  
18 we've said that if you're going to roll this program  
19 out, you should offer to either purchase or let  
20 people use smart tablets or don't give them smart  
21 phones if you can't but at least the tablet, so they  
22 can access the program.

23 CHAIRPERSON HUDSON: Great, thank you so much.

24 KEITH CARR: Sure. Thank you.  
25

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you again for your  
testimony. We'll now turn to a virtual panel  
comprised of Imtiaz Hussain(SP?), Kevin Jones and  
Arif Sumanu(SP?). Over now to Imtiaz.

IMTIAZ HUSSAIN: Good afternoon Deputy Speaker  
Ayala, Chair Hudson and Council Members. Thank you  
for this hearing today. My name is Imtiaz Hussain.  
I'm the Senior Manager of Advocacy at United Way of  
New York City. Through provision, our food and  
operational support 200 food organization across New  
York City United Way of New York City serves  
approximately one million New York city men, women  
and children struggling to make ends meet and support  
the human service agencies that serve them.

Our manage to stem the root causes of poverty and  
create systems level change, so that everyone leads  
healthy and financially secure lives. In that  
spirit, last fall, we launched an emergency  
assistance and community needs fund to assess the  
most urgent needs of community partners working with  
asylum seekers.

To date, our fund has awarded approximately  
\$650,000 to 17 different community-based  
organizations across the city. We want to commend

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1 the City Council for its important Welcome New York  
2 City Initiative launched last month. This important  
3 effort leverages philanthropic and public funds to  
4 support the needs of New Yorkers in a variety of  
5 critical areas including legal services workforce  
6 development and food assistance among others.  
7

8 Over the past year, food providers have expanded  
9 their services to meet greater needs. As you all  
10 know, pantries tell us there no longer just a pantry  
11 as the strive to meet the needs of new New Yorkers.  
12 Pantries are serving in new ways to meet demand and  
13 they're stretching their capacity. With very limited  
14 resources to serve New Yorkers, including newly  
15 arrived migrants.

16 For example, one of our pantries in Bed Stuy has  
17 adopted a nearby shelter to better serve asylum  
18 seekers and meet their needs. One in the Bronx  
19 affiliated with the hospital got the typical limit  
20 pantry clearance to visit only once a month.  
21 However, people seeking asylum have even and been  
22 allowed to come in more often because they need  
23 additional care and services because their needs, as  
24 we all know are greater than regular clients.  
25

1  
2 We plan to share more information in our written  
3 testimony and in more details and we thank the City  
4 Council for uplifting the needs around food  
5 insecurity issues in our city, so that all New  
6 Yorkers can have access to nutritious, timely and  
7 dignified access to food. Thank you so much.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Imtiaz for your  
9 testimony. We'll now turn to Kevin Jones. Over now  
10 to Kevin.

11 KEVIN JONES: Good afternoon Chairs Ayala, Hudson  
12 and Mealy, and members of the City Council Committees  
13 on Aging and General Welfare. My name is Kevin Jones  
14 and I am the Associate State Director for Advocacy at  
15 AARP New York, which represents 750,000 members in  
16 New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to  
17 testify today.

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

1  
2 Additionally, the number of New Yorkers living  
3 below the poverty line increased by 37.4 percent over  
4 the past decade. And an estimated 21 percent of  
5 older adults in New York City live in poverty forcing  
6 them to make tough choices such as paying for rent or  
7 buying food and Black, Latino, and Asian American New  
8 Yorkers are even more likely to experience food  
9 insecurity and hunger. We need to invest more to  
10 support older adults, not less. This is especially  
11 true when it comes to food insecurity, particularly  
12 because the impacts of inflation, which has rapidly  
13 increased food prices, making it even harder to put  
14 food on the table. Over 2.2 million New York City  
15 residents are food insecure, which is roughly 25  
16 percent of the population.

17 Specifically, AARP is asking the city to increase  
18 the investment in home-delivered and congregate meals  
19 to meet rising inflation costs and increased demand  
20 for services. Expand the city's funding allocation  
21 for home-delivered meals programs to ensure that more  
22 eligible New Yorkers can access two meals per day,  
23 seven days per week, with culturally appropriate food  
24 options. Increase the per-meal reimbursement rate  
25

1 for meal providers, given that the city's funding  
2 currently does not cover the cost of these meals.  
3

4 Older New Yorkers built this city and made it  
5 great. Without real investment, we will leave our  
6 city's older adults behind. The over 1.8 million  
7 older adults living in New York City deserve better.  
8 Thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to  
9 speak today and for addressing this in your hearing  
10 and I will submit longer testimony in writing.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Kevin for your  
12 testimony. We'll now to Arif Sumanu for testimony.

13 ARIF SUMANU: Hi, good afternoon. I just want to  
14 say thank you to the Council for holding this meeting  
15 and allowing us to testify.

16 On March 1<sup>st</sup> of this year, millions of New Yorkers  
17 lost emergency— Oh, sorry, my name is Arif Sumanu  
18 and I'm with Grow-NYC. On March 1<sup>st</sup> of this year,  
19 millions of New Yorkers emergency SNAP benefits, a  
20 safety net crucial to fighting food insecurity. As  
21 food prices continue to reach historic highs, Grow  
22 NYC stands in solidarity with Anti-Hunger  
23 organizations and calls on our local elected  
24 officials to bridge the hunger gap by prioritizing  
25 critical food support in your budget and advocating

1  
2 for Congress to increase SNAP support in the upcoming  
3 2023 Farm Bill.

4 18 years ago, Grow NYC launched a national model  
5 for accepting SNAP EBT at farmers markets and we  
6 continue to support the expansion with SNAP. Last  
7 year, 2.4 million in SNAP was redeemed across Grow  
8 NYC 60 plus food access sites. Now we have  
9 identified an additional pathway to food access.

10 Shortly after emergency SNAP expired in March,  
11 Grow NYC's OTC Network, which started in 2021,  
12 expanded to include both Health First OTC and Plus  
13 and Humana. Partnering with private insurers helps  
14 Grow NYC connect communities coping with food  
15 insecurity to fresh locally grown foods and  
16 vegetables. This approach to promoting healthy foods  
17 and food choices and improving food access services  
18 that are a valuable model for other organizations.  
19 Communities that want to address food security  
20 further their cross-sector collaboration. Farmers  
21 markets OTC Network can make fresh local food more  
22 accessible to New Yorkers.

23 In 2021, \$300,000 was redeemed through Grow NYC's  
24 OTC program, equally remarkable our Grow NYC's  
25 efforts to support local farmers who grow and deliver

1 high quality foods to residents of New York City.

2 Both OTC and SNAP benefits at Farmers Markets are a

3 win-win solution that can support the health of

4 individuals and the livelihoods of regional farmers.

5 It is a model that can be and should be replicated in

6 other communities across the country.

7 In 2022, four million in nutrition benefits have

8 been redeemed at Grow NYC's food access sites, which

9 is a testament to how effectively these programs

10 connect under resourced communities to -

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Thank you so much. Your time

12 has expired.

13 ARIF SUMANU: Okay, I just want to say thank you

14 to the Council for your support in the past,

15 especially to Speaker and we look forward to working

16 with your offices hand and hand to expand equitable

17 food access.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Arif for your

19 testimony and thank you to this entire panel for your

20 testimony. At this time, if we have inadvertently

21 missed anyone who would like to testify in person,

22 please visit the Sergeants table and complete a

23 witness slip now. And if we have inadvertently

24 missed anyone who would like to testify virtually,

25



1  
2 please use the Zoom raise hand function and I will  
3 call on you in the order of hands raised.

4       Okay, seeing no one else, I'd also like to note  
5 that written testimony, which will be reviewed in  
6 full by Committee Staff may be submitted to the  
7 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing  
8 by emailing [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Deputy  
9 Speaker Ayala, Chair Hudson, we have concluded public  
10 testimony for this hearing.

11       CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you Aminta. Thank you  
12 to the rest of the staff and thank you to all of the  
13 advocates who came and waited and sat to testify.  
14 The information is actually really valuable and  
15 especially during our budget process where we really  
16 rely on your expertise to help us really pinpoint  
17 where we need to be redirecting our public dollars,  
18 your public dollars in a way that is truly meaningful  
19 to New Yorkers citywide.

20       I'm not sure if you wanted to anything? But with  
21 that, thank you all so much and have a good rest of  
22 your day. This hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

23  
24  
25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date           MAY 5, 2023