

## <u>Testimony of Kate MacKenzie, Executive Director, NYC Mayor's Office of</u> Food Policy

Before the New York City Council's Committees on Contracts, Economic Development, and Small Business Oversight Hearing on the Role of Small Businesses in Shelter Food Procurement.

### **December 12, 2023**

Good morning, Chair Won, Chair Farías, Chair Menin, and members of the Committees on Contracts, Economic Development, and Small Business. My name is Kate MacKenzie, and I am the Executive Director of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy. Joining me today are my colleagues from the Department of Social Services, the Mayor's Office of Contract Services, the Mayor's Office of Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises, and NYC Health + Hospitals. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the city's efforts to equitably provide nourishing meals to asylum seekers, as well as individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and how various agencies are utilizing local small businesses, in particular Minority and Women's Business Enterprises (M/WBEs) in doing so.

To start, I would like to explain the role that Mayor's Office of Food Policy has played in the provision of food through the hotels functioning as shelters as well as the asylum seeker emergency sites. As a Mayor's Office, we advise agencies on the strongest program considerations and practices that achieve the Administration's goals related to food policy. As such, we encouraged adherence to City food standards, prioritization on cultural food options, equity, and reporting requirements of Executive Order 8. That is, the types of meal provision we offer should model existing program provisions to the greatest degree possible. For example, in our traditional shelter system, three meals a day are provided, with the requirement that one meal is a hot meal. It was important to keep that requirement to maintain a standard service, as well as adherence to our food standards, and ensuring vendors submit menus for review.

In addition to providing nutrition and meal service guidance, MOFP worked closely with MOMWBE, SBS, and MOCS to identify and maximize small business opportunities for meal provision. This required getting very clear on the services needed, so an appropriate scope of work could be identified for the Requests for Proposal that H+H developed. Specifically, that means preparing breakfast, lunch, and dinner that meet food and nutrition standards, packaging



them and transporting them to various sites. Given that scope, businesses that could complete the work could be considered. For the hotels serving as shelters for asylum seekers, DHS leveraged its existing contracts with vendors who provide meals, and notably two of the three prime vendors are M/WBE certified.

Under the leadership of Mayor Adams and First Deputy Mayor Wright, the MOMWBE has taken several proactive steps to increase M/WBE participation. These include weekly meetings at City Hall, with agencies involved in food and other procurements for Asylum Seekers. The objective of these meetings is to review upcoming procurements to ensure that M/WBE contracts are being maximized, whether as prime or sub-contractors. The Mayor also issued Executive Order 34, which strengthened M/WBE utilization on emergency contracts.

Additionally, in collaboration with MOFP, HPD, H+H, DHS, MOCS, and SBS, MOMWBE hosted an outreach event to introduce prime vendors to M/WBE vendors. This effort resulted in subcontracting opportunities for M/WBEs. When H+H issued its most recent food procurement in September, MOFP posted that opportunity on our website. Additionally, on October 2nd, MOFP co-hosted an opportunity room on food procurement at the largest-ever Annual Citywide M/WBE Procurement Fair at the Barclays Center. We shared a calendar of agency food RFPs with vendors, the food and meal requirements in the NYC Food Standards, and data requirements under EO 8 of 2022 (Good Food Purchasing). MOFP created materials for businesses to understand the city's food needs and requested feedback on M/WBEs' experiences doing business with the City.

While health, nutrition, and equity are important values that we are committed to advance through food, so is a thriving food economy and supporting the diversity of food businesses across the 5 boroughs. MOFP released a report to outline recommendations to support more M/WBE businesses with City contracts. As noted, my colleagues here from the Mayor's Office of M/WBEs convene a weekly meeting for agency chief contracting officers and their teams to ensure M/WBEs are utilized across all procurements, including food where there's substantial M/WBE vendor availability and capacity.

To that end, I'm pleased to share the M/WBE utilization within Asylum seeker food contracts: As of November 30th, the total value of prime food contracts for Asylum Seeker operations stands at \$463,408,171.50. Of this amount, \$284,185,212.00 was awarded to M/WBE, achieving a record-breaking 61% M/WBE utilization rate.



In particular, I'd like to highlight Rethink Food, a non-profit organization, that has partnered with 12 restaurants and small businesses as sub-contractors. Another vendor, Kommissary, a M/WBE, has over 150 staff members. It is 98% Minority-employed and 100% staffed by local talent.

While the figures and examples I mentioned reflect direct contracts, we know M/WBE participation is significantly greater when considering sub-contractors associated with other food-related DHS, HHC, and HPD-leveraged contracts. For example, DHS is working with Whitsons to bring in new M/WBE subcontractors, and HPD is doing the same with its Prime vendor for asylum seeker work. Also, due to the complexity of human service contracts, MOMWBE and agencies are working hard to have a better line of sight into the myriad of M/WBE subcontracts performing food and meal provision for both Asylum Seekers as well as in agencies' standard services.

And, I will remind the Council, due to Local Law, both Emergency and Human Services contracts are exempt from M/WBE goals. Despite these exemptions, our collaborative efforts with city agencies involved in food procurement for Asylum Seekers have resulted in remarkable success in promoting M/WBE participation. This achievement reflects the City's unwavering commitment to ensuring that small businesses, especially M/WBEs, fully participate in the procurement of food for the Asylum Seekers.

The city has served the more than 150,000 asylum seekers who have come through our system since last spring, but with hundreds of people arriving daily and over 67,200 migrants still currently in the city's care, New York City is left responding to this humanitarian crisis without the level of support needed from other levels of government to manage this national crisis. We have undertaken substantial efforts to ensure culturally responsive, healthy, and equitable food service provision across all sites, including across all sites, including asylum seeker emergency sites and emergency overflow hotels.

Intro 964 would require MOFP to develop and implement a plan to prepare farmers' markets in the city for use in winter weather. Farmers markets are essential to NYC, and the Administration supports their growth and viability in a myriad of ways. However, MOFP questions the need for a winterization plan. Grow NYC and other market operators have managed winters for more than 50 years. At this point, we do not offer support for this legislation and would like to



engage with the Council to understand more about the desired impact and utilization.

I would like to thank the City Council for its leadership and its partnership in addressing and improving food access in our city. From ensuring emergency food resources, to expanding food education in our schools, addressing diet-related diseases, and building out infrastructure at Hunts Point and other food hubs throughout the boroughs, we value your commitments to advancing Food Forward NYC, our 10-year food policy plan.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to address any questions or concerns you may have.

# NYS LATINO

#### NYS LATINO RESTAURANT BAR & LOUNGE ASSOCIATION

**December 12, 2023** 

### New York State Latino Restaurant Bar & Lounge Association (NYSLRBLA)

Before the

### New York City Council Committees on Economic Development, Contracts, and Small Business

#### Regarding

### Oversight Hearing on the Role of Small Business in Shelter Food Procurement

Good afternoon all — thank you to Council Committee Chairs Menin, Won, and Farias and the entire committees for the opportunity to share testimony today on the role of small business in shelter food procurement. I am Sandra Jaquez, President of the New York State Latino Restaurant Bar & Lounge Association (NYSLRBLA), which is a nonprofit organization representing the interests of hundreds of Hispanic, minority, and immigrant-owned restaurants and nightlife venues throughout New York City.

As an organization deeply rooted in the community, our members want to participate in the shelter food procurement process in the City, especially given our expertise in providing culturally competent food. However, the shelter food procurement system is flawed and oftentimes cuts us out of the process. While there is an effort to involve small businesses in shelter food procurement, more needs to be done to ensure those businesses willing and able to provide for the community have access to city contracts. The current system for this type of procurement is incredibly bureaucratic and complex which prohibits many of our members from participating. There needs to be greater education and transparency into the procurement process to prevent wasted resources, like our members, from being cut out of the process.

For every dollar spent at a small business in New York City, seventy cents remains in the community. The same cannot be said for corporate food suppliers. By having small businesses provide the food to shelters, not only would our most vulnerable receive better and more appropriate food but it would provide an opportunity for significant economic impact in our local communities.

We thank the committees and the entire City Council for their attention to this matter. Our members are eager to assist and provide food to those in the shelter system, and we look forward to continued partnership with the Council and relevant agencies to ensure this procurement process is accessible for small businesses. Thank you for your time.



## New York City Council Finance Committee Oversight Hearing on the Budget Plan December 11, 2023

**To**: The Honorable City Councilman Justin Brannan

From: Elisha Rhodes, Executive Director, Center for Racial Justice in Education

Date: December 11, 2023

Dear Councilman Brannan,

For over 20 years, we at the Center for Racial Justice in Education (CRJE) have worked alongside educators and students to dismantle patterns of racism and injustice in their schools and communities. Since 2021 alone, CRJE has guided over 7,000 educators and leaders in deepening their understanding of race, racism, and the impact of racial bias—including their own unconscious biases—on youth. Grounded in our mission to train and empower educators to dismantle patterns of racism and injustice in our schools and communities, we envision a world where all young people learn and thrive in racially equitable, liberating, and empowering educational spaces.

On behalf of the thousands of educators we partner with across New York City, we would first like to ask: Why 15? And why are we not being consulted and informed about where programming and services will be cut?

Programming and services provided by nonprofit organizations have already been reduced as a result of the cuts announced in November, with devastating rippling effects on the communities they serve. These cuts disproportionately affect low-income communities of color who rely the most on these services.

We are particularly concerned about the cuts to racial equity initiatives, afterschool programs, and youth services. In the wake of the pandemic, racial inequalities in education that have persisted for decades have deepened. The proposed budget cuts will only further exacerbate these disparities. School districts with the highest percentages of students of color, who have historically had the lowest per-pupil expenditures, have seen their expenditures decline at a faster rate than other school districts. Asian-American and White students are almost twice as likely as their Black and Hispanic peers to earn grades of "proficient" in ELA in grades 3–8; the gap is even greater in math. Persistent segregation in New York City Public schools has maintained racial isolation for students of color. Despite the racial diversity of the city's school-aged population, 73% of middle schools have a single race in the majority. Students with the highest needs are concentrated in districts with the fewest resources. Black and Brown students are in urgent need of academic and social-emotional support. Teacher turnover has increased drastically, especially for Brown and Black teachers. Schools are in dire need of resources to support their Black and Brown students and to support teachers in remaining in the profession.



Nonprofit organizations touch every vital aspect of daily life - from public education, health and human services, cultural enrichment to language access. The additional 5% planned cuts in January would be detrimental to the continued running of these community programs. That's why the Center for Racial Justice in Education joins over 225 organizations in the #WHY15 campaign to ask for transparency and inclusion in the City's budget. We call on the City to partner with the nonprofit sector and work toward creative solutions - not hinder us further. The City cannot withstand a 15% cut to its budget, and any additional cuts to the nonprofit sector will only undermine the public safety, health, and wellbeing of New York City.

### We ask that the City:

- Provide analysis for #WHY15 percent cut is necessary
- Be transparent about the upcoming program and service reductions
- Establish a City Council Committee on Nonprofits

Thank you for your consideration.

In solidarity,

Elisha Rhodes Executive Director

Center for Racial Justice in Education

Testimony by Jonathan Forgash, Executive Director. Queens Together jonathan@queenstogether,org

#### Regarding

New York City Council Committees on Small Business, Contracts, and Economic Development Oversight: The Role of Small Businesses In Shelter Food Procurement

Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to speak today on this issue. I am Jonathan Forgash, founder and executive director of Queens Together, a restaurant-driven food relief organization.

We started our work in March 2020, just as COVID-19 was shutting down NYC. Restaurants were closing, people were losing jobs, getting sick, and going hungry. We built a system to raise money and pay restaurants to do what they are already licensed to do; provide culturally fresh meals to the public.

We utilized this system to build a "boots on the ground" emergency response food relief program and small business empowerment initiative. To date, Queens Together has helped feed over 400,000 people and supported hundreds of restaurants. Today, our business model supports multi-cultural mom-and-pop restaurants on the road to success and partners with them to provide meals to neighbors facing food and economic insecurity.

The small business restaurant community of Queens is perfectly situated to provide culturally appropriate fresh-made meals to shelters across the city. Not only can we match restaurants based on cultures and dietary needs, but our model directs the flow of funding to local restaurants which will then uplift the local economy by way of jobs, goods, and services.

We see this work as community building. Successful small business entrepreneurship is a pathway to the middle class for families across New York City. These businesses are also a source of job creation and prosperity in their communities. The Queens Together model has a 5X impact on the community. With every dollar spent on food relief:

- 1. Food is provided to people in need.
- 2. Small business restaurants benefit.
- 3. Jobs are supported.
- 4. The local economy grows.
- 5. Tax revenues increase.

As a former chef and caterer, I know the power of providing people with compassionate culinary care. I also know the importance of providing goods, services, and jobs in a community. As someone who works hand in hand with restaurants and community groups across our borough, I see the importance of familiar, culturally rich meals to people struggling for normalcy and a sense of home in a new land.

Thank you for allowing me to speak with you today.

Jonathan Forgash Queens Together December 12th, 2023

NYC Council Testimony -Shelter Food Procurement Hearing

Speaker: LaToya Meaders - CEO, Collective Fare + Collective Food Works Inc.

Speech Time: 2 minutes 38 seconds

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for providing me and the many other dedicated food service professionals this platform to share our passion and experience towards these endeavors.

My name is LaToya Meaders, and I am the co - founder of Collective Fare, a hospitality services company with two eateries located in Brooklyn, and the founder of Collective Food Works, a nonprofit organization with a focus on sustainable, culturally relevant local food systems, nutrition access for families, and the development of green workforce pathways.

From April of 2020 to the present, alongside partners such as ReThink, my company has provided well over 3 million healthy, nutritious meals and counting for New Yorkers in need and those seeking asylum in our city. We have also created over 250 jobs and training opportunities through these efforts.

My partnership with ReThink has allotted my company and organization the space and the resources to provide these services and opportunities, but more importantly, the time to focus on delivering high-quality, culturally relevant food and delivery services, as well as provide the ability for those in our employ to grow and thrive through skills training, certifications, and quality compensation at a minimum of \$17 per hour.

It's no secret that New York City has been overwhelmed by the influx of migrants seeking asylum and in need of critical resources. Opening 210 emergency shelters, 17 of which are large-scale humanitarian relief centers, as well as launching initiatives such as Project Open Arms to get children enrolled in our public school system and the Asylum Application Help Center in the city of New York, which assist in getting many the documentation needed to begin work so that they too may provide for their families and contribute to our city.

However, This story is not new to our city; it is the foundation on which it was built.

The continued benefit of empowering partnerships between organizations such as Rethink and small businesses like Collective Fare is crucial in ensuring that New York City residents and those here seeking asylum will be fed, employed, educated, and trained, which can ease the demand on its current institutions. Like the many who have come before, they can ultimately create a powerful cycle of prosperity for those who have decided to make New York City their home.

Once again, thank you for letting me speak to you all today. Thank you for giving New York City businesses a voice.







### Brain Food The Smart Kitchen 111 Court St Brooklyn NY, 11201

## The New York City Council General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City Tuesday, December 12th, 2023, 1 P.M.

TO: The Contracts Committee, Small Business Committee, Committee on Economic Development

FROM: Ali Ahmed, Brain Food the Smart Kitchen

DATE: Tuesday, December 12th, 2023

Good afternoon, and thank you to the NYC Council for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Ali Ahmed, and I am the owner and operator of Brain Food The Smart Kitchen. We proudly operate in Brooklyn and specialize in crafting affordable healthy food that isn't just kale and quinoa. I have had the privilege to work with Rethink since March of 2020. They saved my business from closing by allowing me an opportunity to cook meals for numerous CBO's then & now helped me grow my business by doing the same for asylum seekers.

Through this partnership, we've made over 500,000 meals in this program. We have been able to expand our team, hiring over 25 individuals from the very communities we serve. This not only strengthens our business but also uplifts local residents by providing employment opportunities. Our employees receive competitive hourly rates ranging from 18-25 dollars per hour.

Working with Rethink has not only allowed us to grow our business but has also made a huge difference in our lives as business owners. Yes it has given us financial stability, enabling us to pay back all the loans from the Covid era, but more importantly it has pushed us to be better and more responsible with how we give back our communities. We would like to thank Rethink for planting the seed of philanthropy in us and showing us how we can make a difference in our own way. I'm proud to say that seed has grown into a beautiful tree with many branches now. For instance every Wednesday for the past 3 years on 34st we feed 200-400 homeless and migrant families hot meals fully funded by our business and PCNY partners. Mayor Adams himself comes to volunteer almost every week and has helped take this project to the next level.

Collaborating with Rethink has taken away the biggest barriers of entry for small businesses to be able to get involved with this kind of contracting work, the paperwork, the administrative tasks, and the lawyer fees. By taking care of that, Rethink empowers us to do what we do best—cooking food the community will love.

I'd like to end by saying, this program works. This method of using small restaurants for large contracts is no longer a theory but a proven model that works. Rethink has hand picked the most resilient, resourceful, reliable group of small business partners that will not let you down. Allowing small businesses like ours to participate not only keeps the funds hyper local but it helps us get through unsure times with guaranteed work. This model can be applied and expanded to DHS and Health and Hospital initiatives. This approach is a win-win, keeping the money in NYC while addressing the needs of anyone in need of food. Thank you for your time today.

### **The New York City Council**

# Contracts, Small Business, Economic Development Committee Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City Tuesday, December 12th, 2023, 1 P.M.

TO: The Contracts Committee, Small Business Committee, Committee on Economic Development

FROM: Angel Sanchez, Chefscape Kitchen DATE: Tuesday, December 12th, 2023

Good afternoon NYC Council, my name is Angel Sanchez, and I am the Executive Chef at Chefscape Kitchen. We have had the honor of working with Rethink to produce meals for migrant shelters over the last 10 months.

This work has allowed us to hire many employees during times of economic difficulties as well as provide thousands of meals to those in dire need. While on the surface this has been an amazing experience, I feel it's especially important to tell my story so you all can understand how much deeper this work goes for myself and many of my colleagues at Chefscape and Rethink.

I originally immigrated to New York from Mexico over twenty years ago. This journey was an incredibly difficult and taxing one. There were many nights I did not know where my next meal would come from. This is a feeling that is hard for anyone to understand who has not experienced it first hand. During my early days, months and years in America I had a dream to not only establish myself in America, but to truly embrace being American and experience the wealth of opportunities this country offers. For me this included hoping one day I would be able to give back for all the blessings I have received as a New Yorker.

This opportunity to help thousands of individuals and families is a situation I am all too familiar with. It has not only been the highlight of my career, but it has helped me fulfill my journey of embracing the American dream and maybe even more deeply, the New York spirit to its fullest.

I want to thank the New York City Council, Rethink, the other food providers and my coworkers for the work being done to support migrants arriving in this city with so little in their pockets but big dreams in their hearts. I know with this City's support they can go on to do great things as New Yorkers and hopefully one day Americans. I know they can because I was once them and I believe one day they will be me standing here giving back for the next generation of migrants. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



# The New York City Council General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing: Food Insecurity in New York City Tuesday, December 12th, 2023, 1 P.M.

TO: The Contracts Committee, Small Business Committee, Committee on Economic

Development

FROM: Elena Ristovski, Marlow Bistro & Catering

DATE: Tuesday, December 12th, 2023

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the New York City Council, thank you for the opportunity to address you here today. My name is Elena Ristovski, I am the Director of Operations & Programs at Marlow Bistro & Catering. We are located in Manhattan, but also operate Fandi Mata in Brooklyn.

I stand before you today not just as an individual, but as a small business who believes in the power of collective action and civic engagement to effect positive change. This is maybe the most important reason for our partnership with Rethink, the belief of rebuilding our community through collective work and support.

We first started contracting with the city when the pandemic happened in 2020, and it was because of one email which was sent to us from Rethink, bringing our attention to this opportunity. I remember thinking, "How can we compete for such a big contract, we are just a small business, where would we begin?" But, the culture of compassion, empowerment and solidarity that Rethink selflessly shared reminded us of everything we have and everything we are, and how our involvement in providing our food for the people in need can have a significant impact on their well-being. That led to a series of city contracts one after another, building confidence, agility, retaining staff, hiring new staff, all improvements that are necessary to fulfill and serve a city contract, and grow in our competitive and unpredictable industry.

In closing, I want to express my sincere gratitude for the chance to testify before you today and share how much contracts of this scale are important to small businesses like ourselves in providing a sense of long-term stability, planning for the future, investing in growth, and ultimately contributing to economic stability within the local community.

Thank you for your attention today!

Good afternoon, My name is Ana Cabrera, a restaurant partner for Brain Food. I want to thank the Small Business Committee, for extending this invitation and the opportunity to testify on The Role of Small Businesses in Shelter Food Procurement.

I appreciate Rethink Food for revitalizing small businesses, especially during the challenging times at the onset of the pandemic. When my restaurant faced the fear of losing all this expiring inventory, Rethink crossed our path with a mission to breathe new life into restaurants like mine.

I am privileged to witness stories from several viewpoints. Firstly, as a restaurant owner, I am honored to participate in a procurement process with NYC. Allowing small businesses to engage in such initiatives not only benefits us individually but also strengthens the community's economy. This, in turn, translates to more job opportunities and increased spending.

Secondly, from the viewpoint of my dedicated employees! It is work with a purpose and my team takes pride knowing we are contributing to someone's next meal.

Lastly, from the perspective of those receiving the meals, our new neighbors, the impact is immeasurable. It goes beyond providing sustenance; it is about nourishing the spirit and providing a sense of belonging. Our meals are a small but significant gesture in a foreign land.

Thanks to Rethink Food and the NYC Council, I am able to share these viewpoints. These stories tell of a community strengthened by collaboration, a workforce motivated by a sense of purpose, and individuals finding solace and support in the midst of uncertainty.

As we highlight the role of small businesses in shelter food procurement, I want to recognize Rethink Food's vision is flourishing. Together, let us continue to champion initiatives that not only sustain businesses but also nourish the human spirit and foster resilient communities.

Thank you.

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