

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE  
COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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November 21, 2011

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HELD AT: Emigrant Savings Bank  
49 - 51 Chambers Street

B E F O R E:

ANNABEL PALMA  
ALBERT VANN  
Co-Chairpersons

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## A P P E A R A N C E S

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

Louise Feld  
Policy Associate for Food & Economic Security  
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Rev. Ann Kansfield  
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Ahmed Tigani  
Vice President  
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Doreen Wohl  
Executive Director  
West Side Campaign Against Hunger

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

Good afternoon and welcome, I'm Annabel Palma, Chair of the New York City Council's General Welfare Committee, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my staff for preparing for today's hearing, Jennifer Gomez, Elizabeth Hoffman and Felicia Seale. The purpose of today's hearing is to examine the administration's efforts to insure that vulnerable New Yorkers and our city's struggling working families have access to food. According to the food bank for the City of New York, there are three million New Yorkers who experience difficulty affording food, an increase of 60% since 2003. In this city which houses so many symbols of hope and wealth, like the Statue of Liberty and Wall Street, it seems almost unimaginable that there are so many who struggle to provide food for themselves and their families. Considering the steady high rate of unemployment, the prevalence of low-wage jobs and the skyrocketing cost of health insurance, it isn't surprising that so many New Yorkers are struggling financially. From 2009 to 2010, 75,000 city residents crossed the threshold into poverty.

1  
2 According the Census Bureau there are now more  
3 than 1.6 million New Yorkers living below the  
4 poverty line, which translates into one in every  
5 five New Yorkers who need and rely on social  
6 services to survive. According to a survey  
7 conducted by the New York City Coalition Against  
8 Hunger, last year's demand for New York City's  
9 food pantries and soup kitchens grew by 6.8% in  
10 2010. This is in addition to the 20.8% increase  
11 we saw during the year of 2009. Furthermore, in  
12 2010, Federal stimulus funding for emergency food  
13 has helped the expansion of the food stamp  
14 program, which provided more than \$3.2 billion for  
15 food purchases in New York City, a \$450 million  
16 jump over 2009. The Coalition's new report is  
17 being released tomorrow, and we are eager to see  
18 if these numbers have continued to increase.  
19 However, it is important to note that the Federal  
20 funding that supported the expansion of these  
21 resources has now been cut, and I'm afraid that we  
22 will see a decline in people's ability to access  
23 food pantries, soup kitchens and food stamps.  
24 While reviewing the survey, and we'll join the  
25 food bank tomorrow, it is important for us to

1  
2 remember that, if the numbers do in fact decrease  
3 this year, they are not decreasing because people  
4 no longer need these benefits and services. They  
5 are decreasing because of lack of funding and  
6 resources. So that point, it is critical to  
7 highlight that we have already seen declines in  
8 food stamp participation in five out of at least  
9 ten in the last ten months. I find this decline  
10 unusual at a time when enrollment should actually  
11 be increasing, considering there are more poor  
12 people in the City of New York than ever before.  
13 Today we would like to hear from the  
14 administration as to why they believe these  
15 numbers have decreased, and what outreach efforts  
16 are being done to enroll eligible New Yorkers for  
17 the food stamp benefits that they need. Finally,  
18 the City Council has long been concerned about the  
19 administration's choice to require finger imaging  
20 of food stamp applicants. We have long believed  
21 that it is unnecessary to do this when folks are  
22 in the most need, and it creates a barrier for  
23 applicants and that in fact it deters people from  
24 accessing the resources that they need to survive.  
25 The administration believes the practice reduces

1 fraud, but we have yet to see any evidence that  
2 proves this is a cost-effective and a necessary  
3 practice. Today the Committee will hear about  
4 Intro 696, a local law that I introduced and will  
5 like ... and will require the Human Resources  
6 Administration to report to the Council an annual  
7 finger imaging report. The report would include  
8 the number of food stamp applicants who are not  
9 applying, and those who are not applying for cash  
10 assistance, the number of applicants who went  
11 through the finger imaging process, the number of  
12 cases of fraud detected by finger imaging, and the  
13 number of applicants HRA referred for criminal  
14 prosecution based on information obtained by  
15 finger imaging. And I just want to, you know,  
16 highlight that this is not a bill that is going to  
17 require for the administration not to use finger  
18 imaging, but a reporting mechanism so we're able  
19 to get accurate facts. Additionally, the report  
20 would include the amount of city tax levy funds  
21 spent on conducting finger imaging. Through this  
22 proposed legislation, we hope to gain  
23 clarification as to whether finger imaging is  
24 actually, as Commissioner Doar has recently  
25

1  
2 claimed, an effective way to save taxpayers  
3 millions of dollars. I now would like to turn to  
4 my Council Member, who is co-Chairing the hearing  
5 with me, for his opening remarks. But before I do  
6 that, let me just introduce Council Member Maria  
7 Del Carmen Arroyo from the Bronx, who sits on the  
8 General Welfare Committee, and Council Member Brad  
9 Lander from Brooklyn, who also sits on the General  
10 Welfare Committee, Council Member Foster from the  
11 Bronx, and Council Member Koppell, who has joined  
12 us as well. Yeah, all from the Bronx, right?

13 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Yes, thank you,  
14 Madam Chair. Good afternoon everyone, I'm Council  
15 Member Al Vann and I chair the Committee on  
16 Community Development. I'd like to thank Council  
17 Member Chairman Annabel Palma and the Committee on  
18 General Welfare for providing my Committee the  
19 opportunity to join this year's annual hunger  
20 hearing. She's already introduced my members,  
21 thank you, Chairperson Palma, Ollie Koppell, I'll  
22 be forced to. The 2010 increase in poverty for  
23 New York City outpaced the nationwide increase,  
24 pushing some 75,000 New Yorkers into poverty, and  
25 increasing the total number of city residents

1 living in poverty by 1.6 million. According to  
2 the United States Bureau of American Communities  
3 survey, as Chairwoman Palma indicated, there were  
4 20.1% of city residents living in poverty in 2010.  
5 Now, I think this is the highest level since the  
6 year 2000. The city entity established to  
7 implement innovative ways to reduce poverty in New  
8 York City, the Mayor's Center for Economic  
9 Opportunity, has developed a poverty measure that  
10 is more complex than the one used by the Federal  
11 government. CEO's poverty measure considers  
12 quality of life factors beyond income and size.  
13 According to CEO's measure, the 2009 poverty rate  
14 for the city was 19.9%, however, the center's  
15 Director of Poverty Research, Mr. Mark Levitan,  
16 anticipates that the rate will increase when CEO's  
17 newest poverty measurement for 2010 is released.  
18 As a matter of fact, in a report released in March  
19 of this year, CEO concluded that the poverty rate  
20 for 2009 would have been three percentage points  
21 higher without a surge in food stamps and tax  
22 benefits for low-income families. Their report  
23 credited Federal tax programs passed in 2009 and  
24 city efforts to enroll New Yorkers eligible for  
25

1 food stamps but who had not been receiving them.  
2 Without these policy initiatives, CEO calculated  
3 that approximately 250,000 more New Yorkers would  
4 have fallen into poverty at the peak of the  
5 recession. The Committee on Community Development  
6 shares a common interest with the Committee on  
7 General Welfare in examining the city's current  
8 efforts to insure New Yorkers have access to food.  
9 As the Chair of the Committee on Community  
10 Development, I am specifically concerned about how  
11 the administration has responded to the effects of  
12 the post-recession economy on New Yorkers by  
13 either lifting or keeping them out of poverty. In  
14 fact, the title for CEO's March report, "Policy  
15 Affects Poverty", really summarizes my concern  
16 very well. Today both Committees look forward to  
17 gaining a better understanding from the  
18 administration, advocates and providers of how the  
19 fight against hunger is progressing in our city,  
20 why food stamp participation has been fluctuating  
21 during the past several months, and the barriers  
22 that hinder the ability to decrease food  
23 insecurity. Thank you all, now I'll turn it back  
24 to our co-Chair, Council Member Annabel Palma.  
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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,  
3 Council Member Vann. Now I welcome Commissioner  
4 Doar's testimony.

5 MR. DOAR: Good afternoon,  
6 Chairwoman Palma, Chairman Vann, and members of  
7 the General Welfare and Community Development  
8 Committees, I am Robert Doar, Commissioner of  
9 Human Resources Administration. Joining me today  
10 are two key members of my leadership team: Cecile  
11 Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Office  
12 of Domestic Violence Emergency Intervention  
13 Services, which administers our Emergency Food  
14 Assistance Program, and Gary Jenkins, Assistant  
15 Deputy Commissioner of our Food Stamp Program.  
16 Together, Commissioners Noel and Jenkins represent  
17 the enormous effort New York City makes to help  
18 people in need of food assistance. Whether it is  
19 the disabled or the elderly, or low-income working  
20 single mothers and their children, the EFAP and  
21 the Food Stamp Program administered by HRA are  
22 there to provide vital assistance. I am extremely  
23 impressed by the results Cecile and Gary have  
24 achieved with these programs during the past  
25 twelve months. As we come before you today, we

1  
2 are all well aware of two facts: first, New York  
3 City has weathered the recent recession better  
4 than the rest of the country, and better than the  
5 city experienced during previous recessions; and  
6 second, we are still not back to the employment  
7 levels the city experienced in 2007. While we at  
8 HRA are not responsible for making the city's  
9 economy strong, we do insure that the EFAP and  
10 Food Stamp Program are as accessible and  
11 efficiently-administered as possible. The \$3.5  
12 billion in food stamp benefits issued in 2010, and  
13 the eleven million pounds of food distributed by  
14 EFAP to over 500 food pantries and soup kitchens  
15 were perhaps the most important ingredients in our  
16 city's support to struggling families during the  
17 recent recession. Although the Council may take  
18 issue with one or two of our approaches, overall I  
19 believe you will agree that the New York City Food  
20 Assistance Program serves as a model for the rest  
21 of the country, not only for the volume of  
22 recipients it serves and for the broad access to  
23 the program, but also for our use of technology  
24 that has greatly simplified administration and  
25 eased the process for recipients, and while

1  
2 maintaining all, while maintaining the public's  
3 confidence that their tax dollars are being spent  
4 appropriately. Due to a fundamental change in  
5 approach that moved the program from being only  
6 about serving the indigent, to one that also  
7 supports low-income workers, the Food Stamp  
8 Program has had an unprecedented caseload growth,  
9 since Mayor Bloomberg took office, and we are now  
10 providing benefits to more than 1.8 million  
11 recipients. The program has dramatically shifted  
12 since the beginning of the administration, and has  
13 grown from primarily serving those recipients on  
14 other government supports, welfare or SSI, to  
15 supporting low-income families, many who are  
16 working, but need additional support. In fact,  
17 the portion of the caseload of individuals who are  
18 not in receipt of cash assistance or Federal  
19 supplement security income benefits, has grown an  
20 astounding 429%. This shift in philosophy and  
21 demand required us to re-examine the way we do  
22 business. While the food stamp eligibility  
23 process for the cash assistance and SSI  
24 populations involved minimal visits to the food  
25 stamp office, those that are part of this new

1 caseload growth required much more direct worker-  
2 to-client interactions with the food stamp office.  
3 This means more traffic into the office, and we  
4 needed to find a way to improve the functioning  
5 and layout of our centers, simplify the  
6 application recertification process, and move as  
7 many functions from in-person to automation as  
8 possible. And we have already made a series of  
9 significant changes over the past several years,  
10 while others are in various stages of  
11 implementation. As you know, food stamp  
12 applicants in New York, unlike in many other parts  
13 of the country, can not only file an application  
14 by mail and fax, but also online and they can have  
15 their interviews done by phone, so they can  
16 dramatically reduce their time in the office.  
17 Some recipients can also recertify, using an  
18 automated telephone system, at any time of the day  
19 or night. Even with these tremendous advances, we  
20 are working to address the immediate and long-term  
21 demand on the centers. The reality is that the  
22 demand for services has outpaced our automation  
23 schedules. I am confident that some of the  
24 challenges we are currently facing related to  
25

1  
2 overcrowding that have been experienced at several  
3 of our centers will diminish once additional  
4 administrative and technological changes, which  
5 are underway, are fully implemented. However, I  
6 want to assure you that we are taking the crowding  
7 issues at our centers, especially in the Bronx,  
8 very seriously. To assist with this immediate  
9 demand, we have now received 102 new food stamp  
10 eligibility workers identified in last year's  
11 budget, and these staff have been trained and  
12 deployed to the offices with the most demand. We  
13 are also re-evaluating our space plan at several  
14 of the centers, and with minimal adjustments have  
15 been able to identify additional waiting room  
16 space inside the facilities. In addition, upon  
17 examination of the major demands on the centers,  
18 we realized that a 1,000 recipients were coming  
19 into the centers each day simply to obtain a  
20 referral for a replacement common identification  
21 card. We have raised this issue with the state,  
22 and are working together to identify a creative  
23 solution. Presently though, we have implemented a  
24 centralized replacement card referral process for  
25 Brooklyn and Queens that is in closer proximity to

1  
2 the state's card center in Brooklyn. This means  
3 the recipients will be able to bypass their  
4 assigned center for a referral. This is easier  
5 for the client, and will lead to less traffic in  
6 the centers. We anticipate very shortly piloting  
7 a similar process for some of our Bronx centers.  
8 Just underway for a month, recipients now have the  
9 ability to call a centralized number to request a  
10 budget letter on their case be generated and  
11 mailed to their residence, rather than having to  
12 come in to their local center. This measure has  
13 the potential to reduce the traffic at the centers  
14 by an estimated 9,500 clients each month. Also,  
15 the online application process through accessnyc  
16 that was initiated last year is being fine-tuned  
17 so that the underlying telephone interview system  
18 can handle increased demand. As part of this  
19 effort, we are working closely with the state, so  
20 that New York City recipients can benefit from  
21 both accessnyc web page, as well as the state's  
22 mybenefits website. Our goal is that applicants  
23 will continue to apply for food stamps through  
24 accessnyc, which allows them to also identify  
25 other benefits and services in the city for which

1  
2 they may be eligible. They can then turn to the  
3 state's mybenefits website to create a user  
4 account and obtain up-to-date information about  
5 their food stamp benefits, including finding  
6 account activity and balances, and making personal  
7 identification number changes. This will greatly  
8 relieve the demand on our centers, and I know we  
9 have been in conversations with staff of the  
10 Committee and with staff from Speaker Quinn's  
11 office, so that we can work together in promoting  
12 this change. Another means of reducing the need  
13 to come into a center has been through our  
14 partnerships with community-based organizations.  
15 In 74 locations citywide, applications can be  
16 taken and submitted to our office on behalf of  
17 applicants. In fact, we recently received a  
18 United States Department of Agriculture Hunger  
19 Champion award for our partnership with the food  
20 bank that significantly improved service.  
21 Together we instituted a mediation model between  
22 our application processing centers and the  
23 community groups who take applications. The work  
24 of these organizations has not only reduced the  
25 traffic into our offices, but also has allowed New

1  
2 Yorkers to apply for food stamps in settings that  
3 may be more convenient as well as more familiar to  
4 them. Our food stamp and nutrition outreach  
5 program staff also has a presence at least once a  
6 week in five community-based organizations, to  
7 help families submit applications and participates  
8 in numerous community events every month. We also  
9 have four community coordinators who meet with an  
10 average of 70 community boards, community-based  
11 organizations and staffers at elected officials'  
12 offices each month and share the different ways to  
13 receive food assistance. In many ways, New York  
14 City's food assistance programs have stepped ahead  
15 of the Federal government in recognizing the  
16 importance of nutrition. For example, through  
17 City Council and HRA funds, our EFAP program  
18 initiated and has continued a frozen food pilot to  
19 further improve the nutritional content of EFAP  
20 commodities. EFAP has also made nutritional  
21 changes to its \$8.2 million in annual food  
22 purchases, and now their entire inventory meets  
23 all of the New York City food standards. The  
24 program has also incorporated nutritional outreach  
25 into many soup kitchens and pantries in their

1 network to better able improve the nutritional  
2 quality of the meals they provide. We have also  
3 worked with the city's Department of Health to  
4 offer Health Bucks. Through Health Bucks, food  
5 stamp recipients at 65 participating farmers'  
6 markets receive coupons worth \$2 to purchase fresh  
7 fruits and vegetables for every \$5 they spent at  
8 the market with their EBT card. Those markets  
9 that participate in the program have significantly  
10 increased EBT sales and the program has  
11 contributed to a significant increase in the  
12 number of farmers' markets in low-income  
13 communities over the past several years. Also,  
14 during the last re-authorization of the food stamp  
15 program, Congress made a strong statement by  
16 changing the name of the program to the  
17 Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, to  
18 emphasize nutrition. We were hopeful that  
19 significant changes will be made to the program,  
20 to not only incentivize, but to also require, like  
21 the Women Infants and Children program, that some  
22 nutritional standards be built into the program.  
23 However, with nearly 40% of New York City public  
24 school children being overweight or obese, and the  
25

1  
2 billions of dollars that obesity cost the state  
3 and localities every year, we could no longer wait  
4 for the Federal administration, and as you know,  
5 we submitted a request to the USDA to prohibit  
6 sugary beverages from purchase in the food stamp  
7 program for a three-year trial. Unfortunately,  
8 the USDA, showing a remarkable lack of  
9 imagination, denied the request. Hopefully, the  
10 national debate our proposal generated, and the  
11 support we received from national nutritional  
12 experts from across the country, will result in  
13 meaningful changes to the program during the next  
14 Federal re-authorization. All of the initiatives  
15 I have described have been accompanied by our  
16 continued emphasis on payment accuracy, efficient  
17 administration, and protecting government funding  
18 from fraud and abuse. When I appeared at this  
19 hearing last year, I explained that I was  
20 concerned about our error rate rising due to the  
21 demand placed on our workers. In fact, the White  
22 House Office for Management and Budget is also  
23 concerned, and has identified the food stamp  
24 program as a high-error program, based on improper  
25 payment information. Here in the city, we took a

1 series of actions over the course of the year,  
2 including additional staff training and oversight,  
3 and greater focus on case reviews on eligibility  
4 decisions, in order to reduce our error rate.  
5

6 Following this effort, I am pleased to inform you  
7 that the most recent food stamp payment accuracy  
8 rate shows that clients received correct benefits  
9 95.6% of the time, making the payment error rate  
10 4.3%. although food stamp benefits are paid for  
11 with Federal tax dollars, for which New Yorkers  
12 contribute a disproportionately higher share, over  
13 62% of food stamp administrative costs are paid  
14 with city tax levy dollars, and while the state  
15 may supervise the program, they withdrew all  
16 support for local administration in 2009. The  
17 city contribution is now \$217 million, with the  
18 Federal government reimbursing us for the  
19 remaining amount. This is a significant  
20 investment on behalf of the City of New York. And  
21 finally, I want to reiterate that a program of the  
22 magnitude of New York City's must be managed with  
23 integrity, to preserve the confidence and  
24 credibility of the taxpaying public. The practice  
25 of requiring applicants for assistance to provide

1  
2 a finger image in order to prevent the issuance of  
3 duplicative benefits is a simple and effective way  
4 to insure that government dollars are spent on  
5 eligible individuals and families. In fact, this  
6 technology is emerging in hospitals across the  
7 country as a more effective tool in patient  
8 registration. Other identifying information may  
9 pull up a dozen patients or food stamp applicants  
10 with the same name, but simply put, their  
11 fingerprints will never be identical. This past  
12 year, using finger imaging technology, the state  
13 identified 1,919 duplicate non-cash assistance  
14 food stamp cases in the city. Some of these  
15 duplications may be inadvertent or due to human  
16 error, and some may be an attempt to take  
17 advantage of the system. The simple process of  
18 finger imaging generated a savings of more than  
19 \$5.3 million in actual and/or potential  
20 misappropriated benefits through a city investment  
21 of approximately \$182,500 annually. Finger  
22 imaging in New York City has kept an average of \$3  
23 million a year in Federal dollars from being  
24 wasted. I would like to be clear, it is not  
25 prosecuting individuals for fraud, it is about

1 preventing and deterring fraud in the first place.  
2 That is why I have serious concerns regarding  
3 Intro 696 that suggests the only focus on finger  
4 imaging should be to identify and prosecute fraud.  
5 Although we could further investigate when a match  
6 occurs, generally we are satisfied to stop the  
7 process at that point. We think that this is a  
8 better approach than making an automatic referral  
9 to law enforcement agencies. Also, when judging  
10 the value of finger imaging, it is necessary to go  
11 beyond a narrow focus on the cases of fraud, and  
12 to also look at the ability to deter multiple  
13 applications by the same person, prevent the  
14 issuance of duplicate benefits, while also not  
15 disregarding the state-generated figures on cost  
16 savings. Its role as a deterrent will be even  
17 more necessary as the system moves toward applying  
18 and interviewing remotely. Without it, our  
19 ability to verify that an applicant is not  
20 stealing someone else's identity and using their  
21 social security number and name to obtain benefits  
22 for themselves will be greatly diminished.  
23 Finally, as we administer the food stamp program  
24 on behalf of the state, and as such we are  
25

1 required to uphold the integrity of the program.  
2 Focusing on program integrity, while continually  
3 streamlining and simplifying the eligibility  
4 process, has been a winning combination. In  
5 addition to the series of USDA awards and grants,  
6 there has been a steady increase in access and  
7 participation in the program, as measured by the  
8 Federal government. Using the United States  
9 Department of Agriculture's program access index,  
10 in 2010 New York State had the highest rate since  
11 reporting began of 78.1%, almost 30 percentage  
12 points higher than the low of 48% in 2004. New  
13 York City contributed a great deal to this  
14 increase, as the growth in our food stamp caseload  
15 outpaced the rest of the state during the same  
16 time period. Applying the same methodology, the  
17 New York City program access index is almost 85%,  
18 even when using the more refined USDA  
19 participation rate that factors in program  
20 eligibility requirements, New York City's  
21 participation rate for 2009, the most recent  
22 available data, was 70%, also the highest ever  
23 calculated. At this time I look forward to the  
24 Council's questions.  
25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you,  
3 Commissioner. We've been joined by Council Member  
4 Ruben Wills from Queens. I want to ... I have, of  
5 course, questions, and I know that my colleagues  
6 do as well. But I'll ask a few and turn it over  
7 to Council Member Vann for his questioning and  
8 then we'll continue from there. In your testimony  
9 you, on the program integrity, you speak of the  
10 reason we use finger ... in being able to use finger  
11 imaging, although other than Arizona, New York  
12 City is the only other state that continues to use  
13 it, your error rate was 4.37%. what is the  
14 overall national error rate when someone applies  
15 for food stamps and we either catch duplicative  
16 cases or fraud? I know the 4.37% is- -

17 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) The 4.37%  
18 is the quality, the QC rate on payment accuracy  
19 that the Federal government, the state government  
20 and we do together every month, and is a good  
21 rate. The rate has lowered nationally over the  
22 past four or five years quite dramatically, we're  
23 hopeful that our rate will be lower than the  
24 national rate- -

25 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

1  
2 So nationally, the rate is ... the error rate is  
3 lower than New York City's?

4 MR. DOAR: We have been a little  
5 bit above the national error rate in the previous  
6 years, I don't know where we're going to end up at  
7 the end of this year, but- -

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)  
9 Even though we were using finger imaging to try to  
10 catch them.

11 MR. DOAR: I think, Councilman,  
12 your ... the finger imaging process is not intended,  
13 necessarily, to prevent quality control errors,  
14 which are really more about how the case worker  
15 and the client work out what the appropriate  
16 budget is. Finger imaging- -

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)  
18 So, I'm sorry, Commissioner, because I'm really  
19 trying to understand if finger imaging is part of  
20 that process, and- -

21 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Finger  
22 imaging- -

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing) ...  
24 I walk into the office and I'm finger ... and I'm  
25 going through the application and I'm finger-

1  
2 imaged, and there's an error in my application  
3 process, or they find that I tried to go apply two  
4 or three times, then- -

5 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) They're  
6 really two different measurements, they're  
7 unrelated to each other in many respects. The  
8 first, the quality control error measurement is  
9 about whether the budget is calculated correctly,  
10 and the finger imaging method is to make sure that  
11 someone does not get duplicate benefits. So  
12 really, the prevention benefit of the finger  
13 imaging stops the process before a client gets  
14 into the more detailed discussion of what the  
15 appropriate budget is. So I don't really feel, I  
16 never felt that the two were as directly-related  
17 as some others have thought. To me the real  
18 measurement that is important is the program  
19 access measurements, and these other states that  
20 have recently given up finger imaging, their  
21 program access statistics were much, much worse,  
22 much worse, than New York City's, and they have to  
23 do- -

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)  
25 So they just made it that much more difficult for

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people- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) They had five or six or seven other things wrong with their program that were so severe it was time for them to make a change. The remarkable thing is, we have, I think, very strong participation rates, compared to most other large states, and yet we still do finger imaging as a method to preserve the integrity of the program and to avoid duplicate benefits.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So in ... and we've ... I know we've had this, these conversations before, so in doing the initial process, wouldn't a social security number be sufficient to stop anyone from having duplicate multiple cases?

MR. DOAR: No, I ... social security numbers often lead to duplicate names and are often transposed incorrectly, they are not anywhere near as effective a method of up-front detection of potential duplicate entries. It's just ... there isn't anything that's as effective as this. It works and it has prevented us from issuing, as I said, on the average of about \$3 million a year.

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I'm just having  
3 a ... I'm having a hard time, I guess, grasping  
4 this, since other states are using them and it  
5 seems to be working for them, and therefore moved  
6 away from the idea of using finger imaging, but- -

7 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) I can't, I  
8 would not speculate about whether the other  
9 states, Texas, California, or any other state, is  
10 doing a good job of preventing duplicate benefits.  
11 The Federal government, the President's Office of  
12 Management and Budget, identified the food stamp  
13 program as an at-risk benefit payment program for  
14 improper payments. And that would lead one to say  
15 that this is something that is worth taking  
16 seriously.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Now let me ask,  
18 in terms of duplicate cases or someone coming to  
19 the food stamp administration office with the  
20 intent to commit fraud, has that number increased  
21 from ... increased or decreased from last year? How  
22 many recipients you would say you caught trying to  
23 commit fraud?

24 MR. DOAR: It was about ... well,  
25 it's about 1,200 that was in the last full year

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2 period of time. And that's about in the same  
3 range it's been in previous years, I don't know  
4 that it's really gone up or not. And I do want to  
5 caution about the use of the word fraud. The  
6 purpose is to prevent fraud, if we find somebody  
7 who is somehow having benefits somewhere else,  
8 some other part of the city, and the finger image  
9 catches that, and they don't receive any food  
10 stamp benefits, they haven't committed fraud, in  
11 my judgment. I don't think that would be worthy  
12 of a referral to a prosecutor.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So let's ... then  
14 let me say, how many people we here in the city  
15 have caught with the intent to commit fraud, or we  
16 stopped from committing fraud?

17 MR. DOAR: It's about 1,200, I have  
18 the list, I can give it to you. I gave it to you,  
19 we are happy to give it to you, it's about 1,200  
20 in the past full year, that we have from the  
21 state.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And in all  
23 those cases, in the 1,200, in the list of 1,200 or  
24 plus that you submitted to the Committee, were all  
25 those cases someone coming in intentionally to do

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something?

MR. DOAR: No, it was- -

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

Or was it an administrative- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) ...

sometimes it's inadvertent, sometimes they forgot that their case had not ... had closed, or had not closed. Sometimes it's due to perhaps an error on one of our offices, where they thought the program had been ... their case had been closed, but we had not successfully done that. There are ... so in every case it's not necessarily an instance of purposeful attempt to take advantage of the program. And then of course there are people that are deterred from purposely trying to take advantage of the program, because of the existence of the finger imaging test.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: When someone leaves, let's say, the Bronx, and goes to another county or to another state, have ... do we ... how quickly do we know their transactions, benefits in that other part of the- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) The country or the state?

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Right.

MR. DOAR: We don't- -

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)  
If they still have an active case here in the  
city?

MR. DOAR: I would say that's not  
something the Federal government and state  
governments have done well. It takes time, and  
often people are allowed to receive benefits in  
two states or two localities for a period of time  
before it's caught. I'd be happy to go back and  
do further research on that, but I ... my judgment  
is that that cross-jurisdiction sharing of data is  
not one of the great successes of these programs.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And in the  
beginning of your testimony, you spoke about the  
level of unemployment not being what ... or the  
level of employment not being what they were in  
2007, and we know that, you know, a lot of the ... a  
lot of folks have lost their jobs and still are  
not able, haven't been able to find jobs. And so  
I'm just curious to know, in terms of who's coming  
into the office. Let's say, are we seeing more  
families walking in, are we seeing more single

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2 people walking in, are we seeing people who we  
3 consider able-bodied, and you know, are not part  
4 of a program, like ... I want to try to distinguish  
5 who are ... who we're seeing more of coming into the  
6 ... our food stamp offices at this time.

7 MR. DOAR: As a general rule over  
8 the past ten years ... well, five or six years,  
9 there have been a growing number of people who are  
10 not associated with another benefit program.  
11 They're not on SSI, they're not on cash  
12 assistance, and they may have never been on  
13 another benefit program. So there is definitely  
14 growth of people who are ... have not previously  
15 been on assistance. The number of people who are  
16 working has grown in some categories, and in other  
17 categories it's remained the same. But the main  
18 fact is that the gross number has grown. We are  
19 at, as you know, 1.8 million is the largest number  
20 of recipients in the food stamp program, and I  
21 think that's because it's shifted away from being  
22 a program that was for welfare recipients and SSI  
23 recipients, to a program that is more of a work  
24 support for low-income working people, and that's  
25 due to work of the City Council, and work of Mayor

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2 Bloomberg's office and my colleagues here, sharing  
3 that information about the program, that it is a  
4 program that shouldn't come with a stigma, that  
5 it's something that people should take advantage  
6 of to make their wages go further. And of course  
7 the EBT card has made the use of the food stamp  
8 benefit much easier. So it's a much different  
9 program than it was in the past, I think a much  
10 better program, but I can't break down the  
11 demographics in any significant way, except that  
12 to say that, for instance, on program access, the  
13 percent of eligibles who are taking advantage of  
14 the program who are African-American is higher  
15 than it is for whites, and it's higher for  
16 Hispanics than it is- -

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

18 So- -

19 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) ... for  
20 whites as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: In the agency  
22 you don't have a team of staff members who can  
23 actually pinpoint how many ... who's like coming  
24 through the doors now, in terms of demographics?  
25 You're just, you're not- -

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2 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) No, no, I  
3 could go back and give you more details, I don't  
4 have them at the tip of my hands.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Oh, okay.

6 MR. DOAR: We look at that.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I would  
8 appreciate that.

9 MR. DOAR: I think I've given you  
10 some general thoughts about it, but I would be  
11 happy to do a further review and report back to  
12 you.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So I'm  
14 interested in what percentage of the people who  
15 are receiving food stamps now, and if you don't  
16 have the number with you, I'll appreciate you  
17 submitting it to the Committee, are like  
18 unemployed.

19 MR. DOAR: Sure, I'd be happy to  
20 give that to you. I do have ... we will be happy to  
21 put that together ... unemployed, yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Are unemployed  
23 and then how many of those will fall under the  
24 policy that is considered able-bodied.

25 MR. DOAR: Okay, a-bods. That's

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about 46,000.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, and so that pool of 46,000 people that are considered able-bodied and are now receiving benefits, are they being linked to ... are they being required to work, are they being linked to jobs, what kind of jobs are they being linked to, are we tracking them?

MR. DOAR: Yes, as you know, in New York City for able-bodied adults without children, mostly single individuals, who are not disabled and do not have children in the household, we do have a requirement that they be referred to work programs, and we are doing that, and we ... our slot availability for the back-to-work programs isn't as great as we'd like it to be, so we can't do everybody all at once, but we're doing that on a regular basis and calling people in, and helping them, or trying to help them, move toward employment.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: What kind of unemployment opportunities we've sort of seen lately, in terms of different opportunities that were available to this population? Is there a

1  
2 definite change in industries or are we seeing  
3 more retail jobs, are we seeing more, you know,  
4 sustainable jobs?

5 MR. DOAR: The ... one of the  
6 remarkable things about the New York City economy  
7 is that there is a great fluidity among the series  
8 of jobs that are at the lower end of the wage  
9 scale. So, retail, health care, sometimes  
10 education, social services, hospitality, those are  
11 areas where we have had success in placing people  
12 in employment, even during difficult times. And  
13 that continues to be true.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, I'm going  
15 to let Council Member Vann ask a few questions,  
16 and then I know that I have a few more to ask.

17 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Yes, thank you,  
18 Chairperson. Good afternoon again, Mr. Doar. The  
19 Federal benefits programs, such as SNAP, for  
20 instance, have they helped to reduce or stem the  
21 tide of the city's poverty rate, and is so, can  
22 you tell us how?

23 MR. DOAR: Well yes, as you stated  
24 in your opening statement, Council Member, the  
25 CEO, under the Mayor's leadership, developed an

1  
2 alternative measure for poverty that, unlike the  
3 official measure, took into account the value of a  
4 Federal benefit program like food stamp benefits  
5 in determining whether folks are below or above  
6 the poverty line. And the CEO has found that the  
7 food stamp program is enormously effective as part  
8 of that series of income supports that are  
9 available to low-income families, so effective  
10 that even with the CEO's higher threshold, that  
11 is, higher poverty line you have to cross, the  
12 percent of children in poverty, children are often  
13 beneficiaries of Federal benefit programs that we  
14 administer at HRA, is lower under the new measure  
15 than it is under the official measure. So, and to  
16 some extent, as you know, Council Member, we're  
17 sort of the ... we implement or administer programs  
18 designed at the Federal level, and these programs  
19 are largely designed to help families with  
20 children in them, and I think this new measure  
21 shows that in the area of families with children  
22 in them, because of the benefit programs that we  
23 administer, we've made, I think, good progress.  
24 We've got to do more, we're not there yet by any  
25 means, but we've made some progress. What it also

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2 shows is that single individuals without children  
3 who are not eligible for the ITC and get a much  
4 lower food stamp grant, and often aren't eligible  
5 for Medicaid, and who have been sort of left out  
6 of the Federal benefit programs, are not touched  
7 as effectively, and there needs to be work done  
8 there.

9 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Good. Has any  
10 of the research done by CEO, has it influenced  
11 your policy in the way you administer SNAP?

12 MR. DOAR: Well, we first wanted to  
13 make sure they counted every last dollar of  
14 assistance we provided correctly, and that played  
15 a big role in making sure they got the number  
16 right. No, it has influenced in that it's  
17 confirmed for me my feeling, long-standing  
18 feeling, that programs that support and supplement  
19 work are effective, and I think, while there are  
20 many people on food stamps who are not working,  
21 some of them can't, or some of them are elderly,  
22 but some who aren't and should, to a large extent  
23 there is a growing number of people who are  
24 working and also using the food stamp benefits to  
25 make their wages go further. And I wish wage

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2 rates were higher, I don't think they should be  
3 mandated higher, but I wish our economy produced  
4 more high-wage jobs. But since it doesn't, what  
5 we do at HRA is deal with what's in front of us,  
6 and providing additional food stamp benefits to  
7 families who are eligible is one of the things we  
8 can do.

9 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Yeah, are we  
10 doing ... are there any barriers, let's say, for  
11 enrolling veterans into the SNAP food stamp  
12 program? And how many veterans are enrolled, are  
13 receiving food stamps?

14 MR. DOAR: I can't think of any  
15 specific barriers involving veterans, but I will  
16 research that for you, Council Member, and I don't  
17 know the number. But we can research that as well.  
18 And I will forward it to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Okay, I look  
20 forward to that. I have more questions, but I'll  
21 go back to the Chair, who may want to go from  
22 there.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.  
24 We've also been joined by Council Member Gale  
25 Brewer. Council Member Arroyo.

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2 CHAIRPERSON VANN: Council Member  
3 Arroyo, would you suffer a brief interruption?  
4 There's one question I wanted to ask before.

5 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member  
6 Arroyo can ask questions after.

7 CHAIRPERSON VANN: I thought you  
8 said Gale. Thank you. In your counterpoint with  
9 the Chairperson, dealing with the finger imaging,  
10 and you indicated that the number of people that  
11 were prevented from, I guess, actually  
12 perpetrating fraud, and it came to around 1% of  
13 the number who are actually involved in the finger  
14 imaging program, at the cost of ... a total cost of  
15 \$182,000 and some change.

16 MR. DOAR: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON VANN: And quick  
18 mathematics would suggest that it comes out to  
19 about \$152 per person, and I'm wondering, since  
20 it's 1% or less that it affects, and that 1%, as  
21 you say, may be inadvertent, whether it's error of  
22 the agency or the failure to fill out the form  
23 properly, or whatever, I'm wondering if that  
24 really is cost-effective, given that- -

25 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Well,

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2 Council Member, they may cost about \$150 per math  
3 ... your math, I trust your math on the cost per  
4 duplicate case received, but since certification  
5 periods are for a year, and we calculate the  
6 average benefit amount, say \$200 or whatever the  
7 average benefit amount, it comes out to \$5 million  
8 in benefit payments that would have gone out had  
9 we not caught the duplicate. So I think it is  
10 cost effective, it may be Federal money, but it's  
11 still taxpayer money. And then there's also the  
12 extent to which, having it deter people who might  
13 think they can get duplicate benefits, from trying  
14 to take advantage of us. So I do think it is cost  
15 effective, and since the apparatus of finger  
16 imaging, the contract, the equipment, the  
17 employees of the contractor, are in place due to  
18 state law associated with cash assistance, where  
19 it's a legal requirement, we think the additional  
20 cost associated with finger imaging food stamp  
21 applicants is not prohibitive.

22 CHAIRPERSON VANN: So you think the  
23 program is so successful, and it may very well be,  
24 but is it a little disturbing that no other city  
25 in our state and maybe what, one or two other

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2 states perhaps, in the nation, how do you grapple  
3 with that reality?

4 MR. DOAR: Well, I, you know, I ... I  
5 like to be different, Council Member, I think it's  
6 okay to be different from the rest of the country,  
7 the rest of the country isn't always so great.

8 And we feel that ... what we feel is important and  
9 has been true for the last period of time is that  
10 there hasn't been at least an anger, an animosity  
11 and a resentment at HRA, at our employees, and at  
12 those of us who administer these programs, because  
13 people in New York seem to feel that we do what we  
14 can to make sure we're not taken advantage of.

15 And I don't know that we always do as much as we  
16 should, but we do a lot, and I don't want to lose  
17 that confidence that the program has achieved over  
18 the years by giving up a simple method that has  
19 not prevented historic growths in the program, and  
20 that does save Federal taxpayer dollars. So other  
21 states, as I mentioned, the two ... New York City is  
22 a very large food stamp program, so we represent a  
23 bigger proportion of the food stamp program  
24 gradually. Texas and California gave it up  
25 because they had really bad food stamp programs,

1  
2 and they were under a lot of pressure from the  
3 Federal government to raise participation rates,  
4 and they have more work to do than just the giving  
5 up of the finger imaging.

6 CHAIRPERSON VANN: All right, I  
7 have a feeling that other members are going to  
8 arrive at this issue in other ways.

9 MR. DOAR: Yes.

10 CHAIRPERSON VANN: As I yield, I'd  
11 like to recognize two members of our Committee, of  
12 my Committee, who have come in, Council Member  
13 Melissa Mark-Viverito, and Council Member Diana  
14 Reyna. Madam Chair.

15 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member  
16 Arroyo.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Thank you,  
18 co-Chairs. Thank you, Commissioner, for your  
19 testimony, and I have a couple of questions around  
20 first, the Intro 696, and I'm going to go back to  
21 your testimony and bring it back to what's the big  
22 deal, we're asking for a report. But wait, on the  
23 program integrity portion of your testimony, you  
24 indicated that you have reduced the error rate  
25 significantly. You actually seem to be real proud

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of it, yes?

MR. DOAR: Well, we think we've made some progress. We had, a year ago at this time, error rates, that is, the percent of budgets that are calculated that were wrong by a dollar amount, a material dollar amount, was higher than it had been in previous years. I think we- -

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

(Interposing) That would have allowed a recipient to receive a larger benefit or a smaller benefit?

MR. DOAR: Both ways. Yes, it could be either way.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So is it ... okay, so can we see what that percentage or that rate was?

MR. DOAR: It was 7.61%.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Up or down?

MR. DOAR: The percentage in the previous year, we had an error rate of 7.61- -

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

(Interposing) No, no.

MR. DOAR: Oh, how many were up?

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: That the recipient would have received more benefits

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because- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) I would  
have to go- -

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:  
(Interposing) But for the error, or less of a  
benefit but for the error.

MR. DOAR: (aside) Is that what it  
is, they all would have received more? Are you  
sure about that? Okay. We can research the QC  
data to see if there is a breakdown of how much of  
that 4.37 current percent error rate was due to a  
calculation of the benefit higher, and how much  
was due lower. I don't have that here, and I  
don't know that I get that from the report, but I  
will check that.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay, and  
if you can attempt to include in that how long a  
recipient went without the appropriate level of  
benefits because of the error.

MR. DOAR: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.

MR. DOAR: We would be happy to do  
that.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: So the

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error is either not enough or too much benefits.

MR. DOAR: Exactly.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And we're not talking about that they were receiving benefits when they were not eligible at all.

MR. DOAR: That also.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Is that part of it as well?

MR. DOAR: It's also part of it, yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay, so you can add that number, that rate in there as well.

MR. DOAR: Sure.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You also lump in to error ... well, the past year, using finger imaging technology, the state identified close to 2,000 duplicate non-cash assistance food stamp cases in the city. That's not a whole lot. Some of those duplications were inadvertent, due to human error, or an attempt to take advantage of the system. Where do those 2,000 cases fall in respect to those three different categories that you've included in your testimony? And more

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2 importantly, you know, how many did you identify  
3 that were attempting to take advantage of the  
4 system?

5 MR. DOAR: I don't have that number  
6 for you, and I have to go look at those numbers,  
7 but I just wanted to acknowledge that we ... that  
8 sometimes it is due to an inadvertent  
9 misunderstanding or mistake on the agency's part  
10 or it could be due to someone who thought that  
11 they could- -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:  
13 (Interposing) A mistake on the agency's part,  
14 because the worker- -

15 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) May not  
16 have closed the case.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: ... may not  
18 have closed the case, or did not process the right  
19 paperwork, so individuals were in the system when  
20 they shouldn't have been.

21 MR. DOAR: Correct.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay. So  
23 it's important for us to understand the  
24 distinction of those three, the numbers, and now  
25 I'm going to come back to Intro 696.

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MR. DOAR: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: And I preface my questions with, we're just asking for a report. And I'm really at a loss ... well first, I take it you're not in support of the legislation.

MR. DOAR: I am not.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: You're not. So we're asking for a report that I think can help inform this body in regards to how we deal with our city agency as it relates to the policy, the fingerprinting and others, other things that may come out of that report. I'm not clear why helping us understand this better is something you would be opposed to.

MR. DOAR: I'm not, I'm not opposed to it, and you know, I've testified on this subject many times, and I've been very forthcoming with information and statistics about the use of finger imaging and the cost, many times, as has the state when they've been here as well. What concerns me is item number little three, in subparagraph F of the proposed bill, where you ask us to give you the number of cases of fraud detected by finger imaging. And then number little four,

1  
2 the number of applicants referred for criminal  
3 prosecution based on the information obtained.

4 And my concern there is that you're making this  
5 about a criminal prosecution, and a fraud, when  
6 it's really more about a prevention measure to  
7 prevent an inappropriate payment.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Right, but-

9 -

10 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) And that's  
11 why I oppose this legislation.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay, but  
13 Commissioner, you use as one of the three  
14 components of your duplicate cases as those taking  
15 advantage of the system. So obviously, it is of  
16 concern to you too. So I think interpretation of  
17 what the intent of this legislation is may require  
18 further conversation, because I'm not sure that  
19 this Council would encourage anyone to take  
20 advantage of any system that seeks to provide  
21 services to those in need.

22 MR. DOAR: I- -

23 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:

24 (Interposing) And that those who get the services  
25 the city provides truly need them, and we should

1  
2 set them aside for those who, but for those  
3 services, would not have a good quality of life.  
4 So I think it's unfortunate that your  
5 interpretation of this legislation has gone in the  
6 direction that you've taken it. I just urge us to  
7 discuss it further, because that I do not believe  
8 is the spirit of what this legislation seeks to  
9 accomplish.

10 MR. DOAR: I don't think it is  
11 either, and that's what I was concerned about.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: I'm not  
13 defending it because the prime sponsor is here.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: No.

15 MR. DOAR: No, and I want to just  
16 say, what I'm a little concerned about is that if  
17 we were pushed into a situation where every time  
18 we found a duplicate, we'd make an automatic  
19 referral. And I don't think that's necessary,  
20 we've prevented ... an automatic referral to a law  
21 enforcement agency, and I don't think that's what  
22 you meant, and that's what our concern is.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: It's not the,  
24 as Council Member Arroyo has said, it's not the  
25 intent of the bill at all.

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MR. DOAR: But it is.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But when we continue to hear that finger imaging, one of, you know, we continue to hear that it is to deter people from committing fraud, you know, it's important then for us to know how many of these duplicate cases that HRA continues to find ... to find or to cite that with the intention of committing fraud, and I think that will, you know, really help us understand that, you know, the people that are coming to seek these services are not coming in with the, you know, one, don't get treated, or feel as if they're criminals walking in the door, and that, you know, we're not thinking of them in that way.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Just one more question, Madam Chair, and I'll wrap up. And we can tag team this, if you'd like, I really enjoy doing that. Commissioner, of the ... how many individuals get fingerprinted?

MR. DOAR: It's hundreds and hundreds of thousands.

COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: How many ... finger imaging is, I guess, a very sensitive kind

1  
2 of thing, how many individuals have to get called  
3 back in to get re-imaged because their prints or  
4 the image was faulty in some way?

5 MR. DOAR: We don't know the answer  
6 to that, I'd have to go look at that, I don't hear  
7 that that is a problem. It's a fairly ... we don't  
8 use ink, it's not an ink process, it's a mirror  
9 image on a ... two fingers on a device that the  
10 state provides, and I don't ... I've not heard of  
11 the call-ins- -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO:  
13 (Interposing) The accuracy rate of the system, and  
14 what's the ... how many individuals have to come  
15 back because the image is poor, or whatever?

16 MR. DOAR: I'll look into that, I  
17 don't ... it's not an issue that I've heard, but  
18 we'll look at it.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: They don't  
20 usually complain to you, they complain to us.

21 MR. DOAR: Okay.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER ARROYO: Okay.  
23 Thank you, Madam Chair.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.  
25 Before I let Council Member Lander ask his

1  
2 questions, I want to ... Commissioner, how much  
3 money did the agency spend on finger imaging last  
4 year? It's about \$183,000?

5 MR. DOAR: \$183,000.

6 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And that's  
7 \$30,000 more than we spent last year, or?

8 MR. DOAR: I don't know.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Is that a  
10 reduction?

11 MR. DOAR: I can't ... I don't know  
12 what I reported last year.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Can- -

14 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) They're  
15 saying it's about the same.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: It's about the  
17 same.

18 MR. DOAR: And we calculated,  
19 because we ... again, because the finger imaging  
20 apparatus has to be in place for the cash  
21 assistance program, we do a calculation based on  
22 the sort of prorated share of the use of the  
23 technology for food stamps.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So the money we  
25 spend, you're claiming it's about the same, but

1  
2 the number of cases have doubled? Duplicate,  
3 duplicate cases, in the HRA website for 2010, I  
4 believe it is, it states that the amount was about  
5 \$183,000 the agency spent, and that 2,000  
6 duplicate cases were detected and eliminated. And  
7 so from that, from, you know, we ... I'm interested  
8 in, and this Committee is interested in, knowing  
9 how many of those cases -- and I know you said  
10 you'd get that to us -- were actually human error  
11 versus someone coming in with the intention. And  
12 so now I think my curiosity is how, you know, my  
13 curiosity is, really is to know how many of those  
14 cases were actually people coming in with the  
15 intent other than, you know, getting services they  
16 really need, because now you have an increase in  
17 cases that were duplicates.

18 MR. DOAR: I have ... I am going to  
19 go back and look at that. I do want you to  
20 understand though, that we don't conduct a follow-  
21 up investigation as to what is the motivation.

22 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Then even if  
23 it's human ... even if it's on the side of the  
24 worker?

25 MR. DOAR: Well, we fix it, we

1  
2 figure out what the issue is, we resolve it, but  
3 we don't ... to go the next step of determining  
4 whether there was fraud in the heart of the  
5 applicant is not something that we do. We move on  
6 to the next case, because we have prevented the  
7 duplicate issuance, and- -

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing)

9 But then from what I'm seeing and reading from the  
10 website is that every year the numbers are still  
11 increasing, so then we need to figure out why are  
12 those numbers increasing.

13 MR. DOAR: Okay. I would be happy  
14 to look at that. I think it may be due to the  
15 fact that the caseload is increasing, but I'll  
16 take a look at it.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thank you,  
18 Madam Chair, thank you, Commissioner, for being  
19 here. And I do want to thank you for being here  
20 and for the work that the agency does, and  
21 acknowledge that there are many things that we  
22 agree on in the food stamps program, and that we  
23 all are glad that both the numbers and the  
24 percentages are up since the beginning of this  
25 administration. Obviously the finger imaging

1  
2 disagreement matters, and it matters  
3 substantively, but I do want to start by saying  
4 that now, before I get into the heart of my  
5 questioning, I guess I want to build a little on  
6 what the Chair and Council Member Arroyo were  
7 asking. Am I to take it from your testimony that  
8 if we were to amend this legislation to include  
9 that you report how many cases of duplication were  
10 identified by finger imaging, then you would  
11 support the bill? You can say we referred no  
12 cases for fraud, you can give us how many cases  
13 were referred for duplication, and the only reason  
14 I've heard you state for opposing the bill would  
15 be removed. So will you support the bill with  
16 that addition?

17 MR. DOAR: Well, I've got ... this  
18 administration is a big administration, and I  
19 don't want to speak for the entire Bloomberg  
20 administration without checking about the drafting  
21 of the bill. That is my principal objection. I  
22 also think there's an implication that HRA has not  
23 been forthcoming with this information, and we  
24 have, in the past. So that's another concern that  
25 I have, there's sort of a- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

(Interposing) We ask for a lot of information, believe me, we don't always assume that it's based on bad faith.

MR. DOAR: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So, all right, well I hope that's true. I mean, I want more than the information, I would like you to stop finger imaging, as I think you know.

MR. DOAR: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I think you know the Council would in general, but at least providing this information and not opposing a bill designed to get it by adding one more statistic, perhaps we could resolve that right here, so.

MR. DOAR: One less.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Hmm?

MR. DOAR: The fraud question would be- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

(Interposing) Well, I don't know why you wouldn't also tell us how many you would have referred for fraud. If you want to tell us there's roughly 2,000 referred for duplication and none referred

1  
2 for fraud, that should give people comfort, that  
3 most of the errors were administrative, that's not  
4 demonizing anyone.

5 MR. DOAR: The worry that it would  
6 lead to the agency- -

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:  
8 (Interposing) We would like to know if there was  
9 fraud.

10 MR. DOAR: ... pursuing,  
11 unnecessarily deploying resources to determine  
12 whether there was fraud.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: You've  
14 articulated the rationale that preventing  
15 unnecessary duplication is the whole point of the  
16 policy.

17 MR. DOAR: That's true.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So I don't  
19 know why you wouldn't be happy to give us- -

20 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Oh, I'm  
21 happy to give that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ... a report  
23 that said we did this much duplication prevention  
24 and no fraud referral. That's what you're saying  
25 today is the value of the policy. So it seems

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like the report would achieve the same.

MR. DOAR: Again, the issue ... the existence of the words in the legislation, "referral for criminal prosecutions and fraud", troubled me. So I would be happy to talk about statistics about duplicates, it's asking the agency to keep track of, as if it's a record that may be held against them, the number of criminal referrals, makes me a little nervous.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I mean, I'm not suggesting that you are withholding information that you should be referring for criminal prosecution, but I feel fairly certain that if that happened, and it wouldn't be ... the problem wouldn't be that you hadn't reported the number to the City Council, so.

MR. DOAR: Okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Anyway, let me get to the heart of my questions, which really honestly aren't about the bill, but are about the policy. And it's not ... I mean, the reason for me it's not academic, and, you know, I know you share this goal, we want every possible family who is eligible for food stamps getting food stamps right

1  
2 now in New York City, and the numbers have gone  
3 up, but there are still so many people in New York  
4 who are eligible who aren't getting it, and I want  
5 to do everything we can to get there. So now my  
6 first question is, I guess in past years I've  
7 noticed that the percentage of work-eligible  
8 working families is a good deal lower than the  
9 percentage of overall families. So I wondered, do  
10 we know what the percentage of working families  
11 that we think are eligible who are receiving it,  
12 and where does that stack us up nationally?

13 MR. DOAR: I don't have that with  
14 me, I didn't bring the percentage ... if the  
15 percentage participation rate for working  
16 families, so I don't have it, I'm afraid I don't  
17 have that, and I'd have to go look at that. I do  
18 have ... I did cite the participation rates, as I  
19 know them, for the city, using both the official  
20 USDA methodology and the one they use to award  
21 bonuses, and there they're at the highest rates  
22 they've ever been, for the general population.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Yes, so- -

24 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) But I will  
25 go back and- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

(Interposing) And they have gone up, which is- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I mean, the numbers that I have, and I'm open to they're being wrong, so I'll welcome additional ones, is that with working families we're only at about 48%, and that that still puts us in the lower quarter of states nationally. I'm sure it's come up, I know we're focused on working families, if you can get back to me on the statistics and any information that you think, I'd be glad- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Yes, I would, and I did see that statistic, and I will be interested in it myself.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay. So I guess it seems to me there are three variables here in figuring out whether this policy is worth it. First, how many people are deterred from getting food stamps as a result of finger imaging. We have to establish what we think, a best guess at that number so we can know how many families aren't getting it, and what money we're losing as a result of those people not getting it. Second,

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2 how much duplication it actually prevents, and  
3 third, how much it costs us to prevent that  
4 duplication. So I want to ask just a couple more  
5 questions about each of those things. And I guess  
6 the first, and to me it really ... I put them in  
7 that order, because to me the most important  
8 question that we have, I don't see any information  
9 on, is how many people are deterred from signing  
10 up for food stamps as a result of finger imaging?  
11 Now, there are numbers out there as well, you're  
12 probably aware the Public Advocate has given us  
13 testimony today that suggests it's 30,000  
14 families, nearly 30,000 families, and that's based  
15 on an Urban Institute study from a couple of years  
16 ago that estimates there's a 4.3% reduction, and I  
17 guess what I want to start by asking is, what's  
18 your estimate? How many people do you believe are  
19 deterred as a result of this policy?

20 MR. DOAR: Well, I don't think that  
21 Urban Institute study is very good, it's several  
22 years old.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So, how  
24 many?

25 MR. DOAR: And ... well, I don't

1  
2 really know, I was concerned about it, as I  
3 mentioned before, with regard to sometimes some  
4 may say that members of minority groups might be  
5 more likely to be concerned about a finger imaging  
6 requirement than members of non-minority groups.  
7 That's not true, the participation rates in the  
8 food stamp program for African-Americans are  
9 higher, significantly higher, than they are for  
10 Hispanics. And for Hispanics they are higher than  
11 they are for whites. So that's not an issue. The  
12 study that you cite is a study that I don't really  
13 think is applicable here, and didn't take into  
14 account all the other changes to the program. So  
15 I have a hard time ... and of course we always, we  
16 promote the program, we talk about it, we work  
17 with community-based organizations, I just don't,  
18 I just don't know that this issue of people  
19 saying, because of that single requirement, I'm  
20 not going to go get this assistance that I need  
21 and I'm eligible for. I just don't know that ... I  
22 don't know how much it is, and I don't know that  
23 anyone knows how much it is.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But I mean,  
25 so look, I'll be honest, I'll accept and I believe

1  
2 that there are some people who get duplicative  
3 food stamps, whether intentionally or they just  
4 forget, so some amount of that happens. Are you  
5 saying that you don't think that anyone is  
6 deterred from getting food stamps as a result of  
7 finger imaging? Or are you saying that you're not  
8 sure how to calculate how many people are not  
9 getting food stamps as a result of finger imaging?

10 MR. DOAR: I just don't know that  
11 it ... I can't think ... I don't think it's a  
12 reasonable response to the circumstance, that you  
13 would not come in because of that requirement  
14 alone. And we've done so much, and the numbers  
15 that we've achieved now are historic highs, I just  
16 don't ... you know, I ... we people who ... I sometimes  
17 say to Council members and others who bring this  
18 up, tell me their names, I'll call them up, I'll  
19 bring them ... you know, we'll make the machine ...  
20 we've made the ... we've made it easier to use the ...  
21 to come in at different offices at different  
22 times.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Is that ...  
24 if there's openness to trying to actually  
25 genuinely do some research, a study, a survey, to

1  
2 go back to Urban Institute to look at some  
3 assumptions and figure out a better look together  
4 at what the rate is that we think this deters  
5 participation, I'm glad to do it. I don't have a  
6 list in my office, but I mean- -

7 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) Yes, I  
8 would be happy to talk about it, maybe, and you  
9 may not be comfortable with this, but maybe we  
10 should ... and we do promote the availability of the  
11 benefit, maybe we should directly address that  
12 issue in our promotional materials, so that we're  
13 very up-front about it, and we have- -

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

15 (Interposing) Well, because what I was thinking, I  
16 don't know if you know Community Service Society,  
17 for example, every year does their unheard third  
18 study, which is probably the most extensive survey  
19 of low-income people anywhere in the country,  
20 certainly in New York City. It's a blind poll,  
21 they use, you know, very sophisticated  
22 methodology. We could, you know, maybe they could  
23 start asking this question, which is, have you  
24 ever applied, and if not, were you deterred, and  
25 if so, you know, for what reason. I think that

1  
2 the reason ... I mean, I don't know that the  
3 Commissioner and a Councilman going into, you  
4 know, into line and asking people would be the  
5 best, but.

6 MR. DOAR: Well, I would say that,  
7 you know, there are studies about reasons for not  
8 applying that go to issues about some people would  
9 just rather not.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And- -

11 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) And some  
12 people do, and I think this will be a relatively,  
13 in the scale of reasons why people who are  
14 eligible don't apply, I do predict that this will  
15 be a relatively low one, very low.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, but  
17 we ... you've taken care of a lot of them already,  
18 which I give you credit for, but we've got to keep  
19 going, and I only have one study right now, and it  
20 says 4.3%.

21 MR. DOAR: Well.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And the  
23 truth is, if it were a tenth that, it would still  
24 be at about what you're saying is saved in  
25 duplicate food stamps, so- -

1  
2 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) You're not  
3 counting the deterrence, though. Because there  
4 are, I mean- -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:  
6 (Interposing) You can't have deterrence ... you  
7 can't take deterrence on the duplicate side, and  
8 anyway, not grant it ... anyway, so.

9 MR. DOAR: I see your point.

10 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So move to the  
11 next question, Council Member.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: All right.  
13 Well, I guess, so and I do want to ... of the \$5.3  
14 million, I guess I also want to ask the question,  
15 how much of that do you think would ... so I  
16 recognize that you are not comfortable with the  
17 ways ... for New York that the way that the other  
18 states detect duplication, but I ... you're not  
19 saying that 5.3 ... I assume you're saying that \$5.3  
20 million is the total amount of duplication that  
21 you found, so- -

22 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) We're  
23 saying that if those cases that we discovered that  
24 were duplicate and prevented the issuance of  
25 benefits, had received benefits for a year, the

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total value of those benefits would be \$5 million.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: But don't some of those, you can say none of those would have been found through the methods that other states use to prevent duplication?

MR. DOAR: I grant you that some may have been found, but they might have often been found after the fact, six months later. That's the worst way to detect a problem, is when you miss it in the front door, and then you have to find it later, go through a list, look at a match, give it to a caseworker. Then you've got multiple names where matches have- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:  
(Interposing) But all the other states, I mean, they still make some effort to prevent duplication, right?

MR. DOAR: I think they do, and you know, there is a national debate about the food stamp programs getting, growing so dramatically, and it is ... and I think that efforts like what we do here help protect it from those charges, which are a problem.

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I guess I

1  
2 could ... if Governor Perry is no longer making that  
3 charge, I'm not so worried that we're going to  
4 lose the debate on how stingy we can be.

5 MR. DOAR: Well, Governor Perry's  
6 participation rate was awful, and not anywhere  
7 near as high as ours.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And I am  
9 proud to live in New York City- -

10 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) There you  
11 go.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: ... and have  
13 you and the President giving out food stamps.

14 MR. DOAR: That's right.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: I'm just  
16 saying that I'm not that worried that we're going  
17 to lose the food stamps program to allegations of  
18 fraud and duplication if even Governor Perry has  
19 given up this method.

20 MR. DOAR: Well.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Anyway.

22 MR. DOAR: Don't be so sure.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: My last ...  
24 so I guess I think we are deterring a lot of  
25 people, and the only information I have says that

1  
2 it's a lot, I'll be glad to get better. I think  
3 even the amount of what it's saving is overstated,  
4 because even giving \$5.3 million, you've got to  
5 believe some meaningful percent of that would be  
6 found by what other states are doing. So even if,  
7 you know, Urban Institute is off by a factor of  
8 ten, and you're doing twice as good as every other  
9 state, we'd still be better off, we'd have fewer  
10 hungry people and we'd have more money in New York  
11 City as a result of the food stamps. I was going  
12 to ask a couple of questions about the cost of the  
13 program too, but those have been asked and there  
14 are others here. So I'll come back around for a  
15 second turn, if that's okay.

16 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

17 Council Member Brewer.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

19 I know you have some model programs, and I'm just  
20 wondering if you could give us an update as to how  
21 they're working, in terms of food stamps. Because  
22 you, in the past, you did this great thing where  
23 you were letting people almost sign up at the non-  
24 profit, and then they could get a date when they  
25 could go to the office, cutting down on the wait

1  
2 time, etc., etc. So it was a very different  
3 experience than what has happened before.

4 MR. DOAR: Cecile, I would like her  
5 to update that, those programs fall under her- -

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

7 (Interposing) That's what I mean by model, so go  
8 ahead.

9 MS. NOEL: Good afternoon, Council  
10 members, my name is Cecile Noel, and I'm Executive  
11 Deputy Commissioner for HRA, and I'd like to  
12 answer your question by beginning with that we  
13 have, currently have 74 what we call CBO POS  
14 locations, those are community-based organizations  
15 that have our paperless office systems that are  
16 allowed to essentially submit an application  
17 package through to the agency and to be evaluated  
18 and then followed up with an appointment for a  
19 telephone call to do an interview. So many of  
20 those programs are run by big CBO's, food bank,  
21 Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty, they all  
22 are operating, we think, very good programs that  
23 offer folks who would like to apply for food  
24 stamps an alternative location to coming into our  
25 centers. These are locations that are familiar to

1  
2 them, that will also be able to service them in an  
3 environment that is very comfortable to them. so  
4 we think that these are all great opportunities  
5 for partnership.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So do you  
7 think the numbers have gone up partly because of  
8 that kind of situation?

9 MS. NOEL: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I obviously  
11 have one in my district, so I am familiar with  
12 them.

13 MS. NOEL: Yes, we believe that  
14 those numbers have gone up, in terms of community,  
15 individuals utilizing these programs more, and as  
16 we go out, we certainly publicize the fact that  
17 they're there, and the opportunities for  
18 submission are there, and again, these are 74  
19 programs.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Are you  
21 going to expand that, or not, or you don't know?  
22 Are there other programs to which you could  
23 expand?

24 MS. NOEL: We are currently looking  
25 at how to make many of these programs even more

1  
2 robust, in terms of maximizing what they are doing  
3 currently, and certainly as opportunities present  
4 themselves, we will evaluate new programs for- -

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

6 (Interposing) Could they do the finger imaging  
7 onsite, or does one have to do it elsewhere? How  
8 does that work?

9 MS. NOEL: One has to follow up  
10 elsewhere for the finger imaging. They do not do-

11 -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

13 (Interposing) But in other words, you make the  
14 phone call, get the appointment, and then go for  
15 the finger imaging.

16 MS. NOEL: They submit the  
17 application, the application is evaluated, then  
18 they are given an appointment for the interview on  
19 the telephone, and after that process, then the  
20 finger imaging would follow.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And there's  
22 no way to do it offsite, that's my question.

23 MS. NOEL: Excuse me?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: There's no  
25 way to do it offsite, in other words, there's no

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way to do the finger imaging at the 74 CBO's.

MS. NOEL: Currently, no.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is that something that could be done in the future? Because people would be more likely ... I'm not going to get into, you know, I'm not changing this Commissioner's mind, forget it. Somebody else can do that. But the issue is, can people do it in a more comforting situation, like the 74 CBO's, like even though most of the CBO's don't believe in it, I know that too. But the issue is, that might help people feel more comfortable, and more people would come in. Because people are deterred by the finger imaging, they tell me, we know that, it's a fact. So I'm wondering if it's technologically possible to do 74 CBO's, or some portion of them, finger imaging, down the line.

MR. JENKINS: Good afternoon, I'm Gary Jenkins, Assistant Deputy Commissioner for HRA food stamp program. Currently an applicant can complete the finger imaging process at any of our community job centers or food stamp centers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

MR. JENKINS: In addition to

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Saturday hours.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. No, that's good, I'm just saying the extra West Side campaign against hunger, they'd like to do it there.

MR. DOAR: Yeah, let me say, here's the key ingredient there, Council Member, would be the state's willingness to do that, because they hold the contract.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Have they been asked?

MR. DOAR: That's a good idea, we should raise it with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MR. DOAR: I would like to ... I will take that back to them.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so we can ask the state if they would allow that, with obviously proper training, etc., etc. Second, green markets, it's thanks to the Speaker and you, lots of green markets take food stamps, but I think they need more publicity that they take food stamps. Is that something that you could work on? In other words, some of the green markets, because

1  
2 I happen to be a green market addict, so I go to a  
3 lot of them, and yes, there are some using, but  
4 there are some where you can't find the, whatever  
5 that machine is called.

6 MR. DOAR: The terminal.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, the  
8 terminal. It's expensive, you know,  
9 comparatively, so they don't like push it, because  
10 they don't have the money for the outreach, blah,  
11 blah, blah. So I'm just wondering if you could do  
12 more listing, it's on the green market site, as to  
13 where food stamps are taken. But I'm just saying-  
14 -

15 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) I think we  
16 could do that.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: ... we could  
18 do more.

19 MR. DOAR: And I know the Mayor's  
20 Food Policy Coordinator is here today, and we'll  
21 take that back to her.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Kim needs  
23 to do more work on that issue.

24 MR. DOAR: Yes.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and

1  
2 then the other question I have, is there any ... or,  
3 I know you mentioned databases, that's another  
4 thing I'm kind of crazy about. So the question  
5 is, what are you doing, because that would help,  
6 perhaps, on the bigger issue of do we need to do  
7 finger imaging, on this data issue, database  
8 platform. In other words, you stated correctly  
9 that it's hard to know who's where, duplicate,  
10 state, you know, I'm familiar with that issue. Is  
11 that something that's being addressed or is that  
12 just a long-term, the state having a listing, of  
13 other states having in process, all that stuff.

14 MR. DOAR: Yes. The Federal  
15 government is conducting work group meetings about  
16 something called interoperability, the sharing of  
17 data is being strongly encouraged, especially with  
18 the rollout of the Federal Health Care Bill.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

20 MR. DOAR: As you know, Deputy  
21 Mayor Gibbs leads a unit group called HHS Connect.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

23 MR. DOAR: That's talking about the  
24 sharing of data and the cleansing of data, so  
25 there are efforts underway to try to get the data

1  
2 be shared more widely and more effectively. That  
3 is something the state is not, honestly, providing  
4 a lot of leadership in that regard, but they have  
5 other issues. But, so there is some talk about  
6 that, but I don't think that they've led to an  
7 ability to really get on a real-time basis  
8 evidence of a duplicate as quickly as finger  
9 imaging.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and  
11 then just finally, maybe you have this number, and  
12 maybe it was given earlier, but if you talk about  
13 those, the one percent, whatever the number is,  
14 who either don't apply or some guesstimate, do we  
15 have some number as to what it would bring in to  
16 the bodegas and the grocery stores and so on?  
17 Because one of the reasons, as you know, that we  
18 sell this program is -- and you know better than I  
19 -- is how much it brings to the City of New York.  
20 So do you have some guesstimate on if we didn't do  
21 finger imaging, God forbid, from your perspective,  
22 then what would be the ... what we could bring into  
23 the City of New York? Because we do think some  
24 more people, it's debatable how many, would sign  
25 up. Do you have any sense of that number? I know

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it's not your favorite number, but.

MR. DOAR: No, it's not my favorite number, but I could provide an estimate of say, the additional food stamp benefits that could come into the City of New York if our participation rate went from an historic high of 84% to an even greater high of 90%.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

MR. DOAR: Yes I could.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I appreciate that. And then the seniors, do you think that they're signing up, and we also have seniors not signing up for SCRIE, so it's not just the food stamps, but because they don't get a lot from it, and I think they do not like to be finger imaged, it's like another term, it's not something they're comfortable with, that's why if it was in the neighborhood, you might have more. But do you have any sense of your numbers whether seniors is one of the groups that's not signing up in the numbers that you would like, or is it not broken up like that?

MR. DOAR: I can look, I don't have that here, I can look. We do have, you know, the

1  
2 automatic enrollment from the SNIP program, which  
3 is one of the great things New York City does for  
4 people on SSI who are at home, where we match the  
5 database and send them a card in those cases.  
6 And, but I don't know about seniors generally.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

8 Okay, thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

10 Commissioner, we've been, in preparing for the  
11 hearing, we heard from advocates in terms of HRA  
12 material that is translated from English into  
13 other various languages, and some complaints from  
14 people who need services, that this material may  
15 be a little difficult to understand, so I just  
16 want to know in terms of who's in charge of  
17 translating the material? Is it translated from  
18 English word for word into another language? Is  
19 it, you know, what grade level- -

20 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) I'm very  
21 interested in that, yes, that is a subject that I  
22 would like to know a lot more about. Kathleen  
23 Carlson is in charge of our Constituent Affairs  
24 office, and we have an immigrant ... a language  
25 access particular unit focused on that, and so I

1  
2 would like to know about that. We've worked very  
3 hard to make our translations as broad as possible  
4 with regard to the number of languages, and  
5 available, but if we're not getting the  
6 translations correctly, I would really like to  
7 follow up on that.

8 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: So Kathleen  
9 from DOE is in charge of doing- -

10 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) She has  
11 that under her, and I would like her to either  
12 reach out to you and find out what the- -

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing) I  
14 would appreciate that, I think we- -

15 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) That would  
16 be great.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We need to  
18 figure out at what education level this material  
19 is getting translated, because I know a lot of  
20 folks are not sort of understanding what the  
21 material is calling for.

22 MR. DOAR: Okay.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: And one day  
24 while I was out on medical leave, you were having  
25 an interview on NY1, and you mentioned to Errol

1  
2 Louis, I believe, that some folks were left with  
3 these balances at the end of the month in terms of  
4 benefits, and it just sparked my curiosity, into,  
5 you know, knowing if you have a number of, like  
6 what's the percentage of recipients who are left  
7 with a balance, and what's the average on those  
8 balances, and is there any particular reason, you  
9 know, for the comment other than just to highlight  
10 that some people may just be saving, or using  
11 their money wisely not to go hungry?

12 MR. DOAR: No, I don't know what  
13 the ... I can't remember the context of how that  
14 came up. I do know the context of me bringing it  
15 up is that I had just recently seen it, so it was  
16 on my mind. It's a pretty preliminary review, we  
17 took a snapshot in time, maybe we should do it a  
18 couple of more times and see how often it occurs,  
19 and really work on it to make sure we've got a  
20 very solid study. But it did show a surprising  
21 level of benefit amounts still on, not a big  
22 percent, but a percent, of people who are in the  
23 program, and we're not exactly sure what it means,  
24 and the dollar amounts weren't that much. So I  
25 would be, maybe I shouldn't have spoken about it

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2 until I really had worked on the study in greater  
3 detail, but it is something that maybe we can  
4 refine and then come and brief you on. What it  
5 meant to me was that the program was being used,  
6 at least by some families, not as a resource to  
7 use in crisis, a real serious crisis, where the  
8 minute the dollars were placed on the EBT card,  
9 they needed to go out and get food because they  
10 were very hungry, which could be the case. But  
11 instead for these families, it was being used as a  
12 regular aspect of their income supplementation in  
13 their household, given the fact that they're out  
14 of work or they're working less than they used to,  
15 and the wages aren't as high as they would like  
16 them to be.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But then we're  
18 not looking at it, or we won't look at it in the  
19 future as these people don't need this, but just  
20 making a wiser family pattern.

21 MR. DOAR: Yes, I don't ... you know,  
22 I regret talking about that study before I was  
23 really ... fully understood all the implications,  
24 and I'd like to go back and look at it, and then  
25 come back and talk to you.

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2 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I would  
3 appreciate that. Council Member Lander, do you  
4 have another question? No? Council Member Steve  
5 Levin has joined us, and I know he had a few  
6 questions.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,  
8 Madam Chair, thank you, Commissioner.

9 MR. DOAR: Council Member.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And this is  
11 probably ... I apologize, I had a meeting, and I  
12 apologize for missing your testimony, and this may  
13 have been asked already, but what do ... other  
14 states that don't use finger imaging, have you  
15 consulted with them about their best practices,  
16 how they ... I know that you ... I read your  
17 testimony, I know that it's not all about fraud,  
18 but how do they, how do they minimize fraud? How  
19 do they deter fraud? Are there any other states  
20 that had a finger imaging program and then gave it  
21 up, and what was their ... why did they do that?

22 MR. DOAR: Well, it's been very  
23 well publicized that both California and Texas  
24 have fairly recently decided not to do it. They  
25 had particularly bad participation rates,

1  
2 especially Texas, and had many ... in my judgment,  
3 many things wrong with their programs, besides  
4 whatever this problem, whatever ... whether this  
5 caused them a problem. So I have not, I can't say  
6 that in the time since I've been at HRA that I've  
7 consulted with them about their methods of  
8 preventing duplication. I believe we have a very  
9 effective, the most effective method of preventing  
10 duplication, and despite the concerns raised by  
11 the Federal government, they have allowed us to  
12 continue it, and the same is true of the state,  
13 and so I haven't felt the need to consult with  
14 them on what methods they have. I do honestly  
15 believe that every time Gary or a member of the  
16 food stamp program staff, and I think ... I think  
17 people in New York agree with me on this, go to  
18 one of these conferences with other states, that  
19 New York City is in many, many, many ways, in most  
20 ways, viewed as the model and a leader in this  
21 program. There's no question about that.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How many  
23 states, do you know off the top of your head, how  
24 many states do it and how many states don't?

25 MR. DOAR: Arizona does it, I'm

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told, and then there's New York City.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I wouldn't use Arizona as ... I mean, they have- -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:  
(Interposing) I'm not related to the governor.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: So it's just us and Arizona.

MR. DOAR: That's correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: We identified 1,919 duplicates through this process.

MR. DOAR: In the last full year for which we have the data.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How ... I mean, there's ... you do not believe that we would have been able to find those 1,919 duplicates- -

MR. DOAR: (Interposing) No, I don't believe there is another method- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:  
(Interposing) ... through another process?

MR. DOAR: I do not believe, I've said that to Council Member Lander, I do not believe there is a process as effective, or ... and I think this is the most effective process, finger imaging is a very effective way, real-time, of

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2 detecting a duplication. It is true that  
3 duplicate benefits have been a problem in New York  
4 City in the past. It is true that, and I know, I  
5 think you recognize it, it is conceivable that  
6 people will, given an opportunity, take advantage  
7 of a program, and so we want to have things in  
8 place that both preserves the program and also  
9 gathers a sort of reputation for integrity.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Let me ask a  
11 hypothetical question.

12 MR. DOAR: Sure.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: If the  
14 technology did not exist for finger imaging, what  
15 process would you use to guard against  
16 duplication?

17 MR. DOAR: Well, real-time, my  
18 experience in social service is that what ends up  
19 happening is, you gather the information about a  
20 particular case and you submit it, and then the  
21 real-time feedback on it is spotty. That would be  
22 the hope, is that you'd have something like that,  
23 a verification of a social security number. But  
24 even then, you don't know whether the person who  
25 gave you the social security number and gave them

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2 the right name, is the person they're supposed to  
3 be. And you don't ... and so I just don't feel that  
4 there is a method as effective, and I'd be happy  
5 to go into detail about it, but the other methods  
6 are not as effective.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Of those  
8 1,919.

9 MR. DOAR: Yes.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How many of  
11 those had duplicate social security numbers?

12 MR. DOAR: I don't know. I don't  
13 know.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Or do you  
15 have a sense of- -

16 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) I could go  
17 look and find out.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Generally, I  
19 mean, 50%, 75%?

20 MR. DOAR: I don't know.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: 80%?

22 MR. DOAR: I don't know.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: My thinking  
24 is, you know, I'm curious whether or not you could  
25 just catch dupes by entering a social security

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number.

MR. DOAR: Yeah, you can't do it as effectively as with a finger image.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: There's a ... I mean, there's a question of how much you're leaving on the table, Federal dollars, due to the fact that ... I mean, I believe, I think it's a reasonable, logical conclusion to draw that there are people that are being deterred, and so we're leaving Federal dollars on the table. I wanted to ask just about the issue of work requirements for food stamps. I know that we had a hearing not too long ago about cash assistance, with regard to work requirements, and it is established that those requirements may be met by finishing ... for younger adults, by finishing high school, GED, two-year college. Are those requirements, are those work requirements met through ... for food stamps through that, through educational endeavors?

MR. DOAR: The ABOD requirement, that is, the work requirement for able-bodied adults without dependents, involves work, it involves a minimum number of hours of work or work

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2 activity or participation in a back-to-work  
3 program. I can't remember what we do with regard  
4 to 19-year-olds in the ABOD program, ABOD  
5 recipients, for education, because that's the  
6 exception that you discussed, that they be allowed  
7 to finish high school education.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: No, there's  
9 two- to four-year ... I mean, I think with regard to  
10 cash assistance it goes up to the age of, is it 20  
11 or is it, right?

12 MR. DOAR: Twenty? For cash  
13 assistance? Okay. Well, I'd have to look at that  
14 with regard to ABODs, I don't ... I want to be sure,  
15 and so I don't know the answer to that. (aside)  
16 Do you think it's the same? We think it's the  
17 same, but we want to check it.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Because the  
19 individuals that are of that age, that do not meet  
20 those, you know, that don't have those educational  
21 credentials, they could ... so, if somebody is a  
22 high school graduate or has a GED, they could meet  
23 their work requirements for food stamp eligibility  
24 by going into, enrolling in a two-year college  
25 program, is that right?

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2 MR. DOAR: No, I don't think so. I  
3 don't think that's right. Let me go back, I want  
4 to ... this was not a question ... with regard to  
5 youth and ABOD requirements, this is not something  
6 that I have, and I would like to get that and  
7 forward that to you.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Because, you  
9 know, if we have people in the city that could  
10 meet these requirements through going back to  
11 school, I think that we should be encouraging them  
12 to do that.

13 MR. DOAR: We'd have to see what  
14 the ABOD issue ... I will check into that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,  
16 Commissioner. Thank you, Madam Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.  
18 Council Member Lander has more questions to ask.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Yeah, just  
20 on the cost of the program, the \$180,000 that you  
21 cited, that's city dollars, state dollars?

22 MR. DOAR: City.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: And are  
24 there state dollars involved as well?

25 MR. DOAR: Not in food stamp

1  
2 administration in New York City, there's no state  
3 dollars involved in the cost of the program. Is  
4 that correct, right?

5 MR. JENKINS: Yes.

6 MR. DOAR: So no, the state, the  
7 state, over the last couple of years, has given up  
8 its support of the administration of the food  
9 stamp program, and it's principally a local  
10 requirement. So it's the Federal ... so we ... but we  
11 are allowed to claim a percentage of our costs,  
12 including the cost of finger imaging, to the  
13 Federal government. So they pay a percentage and  
14 we pay a percentage.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: So I guess,  
16 just in trying to figure out what it really costs,  
17 I mean, partly because you ... there was a much  
18 higher number a few years ago that the  
19 administration gave the Council, and partly  
20 because the state contract before they ceased  
21 doing it, with ... I'm going to mess up the name of  
22 this French defense contractor, was I think north  
23 of \$6 million a year. And so if it was costing  
24 the state \$6 million a year for a statewide  
25 program, half of which is in New York, to do

1  
2 finger imaging, then either the state was getting  
3 bilked by a French defense contractor, which is an  
4 entirely plausible scenario, there's been a  
5 radical improvement in technology, or it's costing  
6 us more money. So I just, I don't know if you  
7 have some input as to what.

8 MR. DOAR: Remember that the cost  
9 of the program ... I think the cost you're citing  
10 are the total costs associated with the program  
11 for cash assistance recipients as well, is that  
12 right?

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Maybe there  
14 was a unit ... a finger imaging contract which  
15 covered cash assistance as well as food stamps.

16 MR. DOAR: That's definitely true,  
17 yes. So they have a built-in cost they have to  
18 have, statewide, because of the legal requirements  
19 in the cash assistance program. Then we do it in  
20 the city for food stamps, and then what we do is  
21 we determine the extent to which the program is  
22 used for non-cash-assistance-receiving food stamp  
23 recipients, and then we pro-rate it so we account  
24 for their cost in the CTL contribution to the  
25 total cost of finger imaging in the city. And I'd

1  
2 be happy to show you the math, I don't have it  
3 right here, but that's how it's done.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Okay, I  
5 mean, I will be happy to see the breakdown again.  
6 I mean, to me and the Council members Brewer and  
7 Levin got at this again, it really is these three  
8 things that we need to do the math on: how many  
9 people are not getting food stamps as a result of  
10 finger imaging and what's that costing us; how  
11 many are we preventing duplication on through  
12 finger imaging that we couldn't have through other  
13 things like social security checks; and how much  
14 is it really costing us to do. And if we really  
15 had all those numbers, well, I believe we would  
16 stop doing it, but at least we would be having a  
17 conversation about a common set of data.

18 MR. DOAR: Well, I think we have  
19 the cost, we have the savings and- -

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:  
21 (Interposing) We don't have the savings, because  
22 you couldn't tell us what percent of those would  
23 likely have been caught through other methods. It  
24 has to be some, otherwise they should just stop  
25 doing the social security verifications in the

1  
2 other states, they could save money there. All  
3 right, thank you, Madam Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.  
5 We've been joined by Council Member Gentile from  
6 Brooklyn and Council Member Rodriguez from  
7 Manhattan. Council Member Levin has one more  
8 question?

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Actually  
10 two. How many ... I didn't see them, that's why ...  
11 how many cases of fraud are there? Of those  
12 1,919, how many of those are actually fraud?

13 MR. DOAR: We don't ... we had a long  
14 discussion about this issue prior, Council Member.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: All right,  
16 I'm sorry.

17 MR. DOAR: We don't- -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:  
19 (Interposing) We're not supposed to say fraud,  
20 Council Member Levin.

21 MR. DOAR: Yeah, we don't ... we are  
22 interested in preventing fraud, not prosecuting  
23 fraud, and with the duplicates, the finger imaging  
24 process is intended to prevent it, we do not make  
25 automatic referrals of every time- -

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COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

(Interposing) You don't make automatic, do we make any referrals at all?

MR. DOAR: I believe in the past we've, on certain cases the finger image issue has led to a referral, but it's not ... it should not be viewed as the purpose of the program, and I think I've testified before, it's very rare.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay, so ... but there has been one referral?

MR. DOAR: Oh yeah, there have been referrals, where finger imaging- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:  
(Interposing) Several.

MR. DOAR: An issue with finger imaging has led to a concern about fraud that raised some eyebrows, but by and large, if you're stopped before you receive the benefit, you haven't committed fraud. You didn't get any money.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I'm just wondering how many.

MR. DOAR: It's a handful. It's less than ten.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Less than  
3 ten, okay.

4 MR. DOAR: Over, you know.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: More than  
6 three and less than ten.

7 MR. DOAR: Yeah, not many. It's  
8 not the purpose of the program.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I  
10 understand.

11 MR. DOAR: And to think it as being  
12 the purpose of the program I think is a mistake.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I'm not  
14 insinuating that, but I just want to know, I  
15 wanted to quantify this.

16 MR. DOAR: Good.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: The ... and  
18 this may be something that was asked as well, the  
19 Council's 2010 Food Works report estimated \$54  
20 million in foregone Federal benefits. You dispute  
21 that number.

22 MR. DOAR: Due to this? Due to  
23 finger imaging?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: According to  
25 our report. According to the 2010 Council's Food

1  
2 Works report, based on the number of low-income  
3 individuals receiving Federal benefits in New  
4 York, the city is losing \$54.4 million each year  
5 in foregone Federal benefits. That's according to  
6 our report, our Food Works report.

7 MR. DOAR: I- -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

9 (Interposing) You dispute that dollar amount.

10 MR. DOAR: Yes, I ... because I'm not  
11 familiar with it, I would dispute it, I'd want to  
12 really research it. Is it due to finger imaging  
13 only? You read it, I couldn't hear it exactly.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: That's what  
15 our report indicates.

16 MR. DOAR: I would- -

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:

18 (Interposing) I'll follow up with a letter, but I  
19 would like some clarification on whether or not  
20 HRA disputes that or whether you agree with that.

21 MR. DOAR: And I want to remind you  
22 that the number of food stamp dollars being  
23 brought into the city currently, and during 2010,  
24 is more than three and a half billion dollars, it  
25 is the most significant assistance program we have

1  
2 for people during the recession, and I think given  
3 the size of the program, we should do what we can  
4 to make sure it's not taken advantage of.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: So one last  
6 question. Of ... how many New Yorkers would qualify  
7 for food stamps?

8 MR. DOAR: I don't have the exact  
9 number, but it's ... we're at about, using one  
10 measure we're at about 84% I think, almost. So if  
11 we're at 1.8 ... 84% of eligibles, so if we're at  
12 1.8 million, you could figure out how much more  
13 there is. But again, some people who are eligible  
14 do not choose to apply, for their own reasons.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay, thank  
16 you, Madam Chair, thank you, Commissioner, I  
17 appreciate it.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay, I think  
19 where Council Member Levin was reading from was  
20 the briefing report, and it has to do with low-  
21 income individuals actually not receiving  
22 benefits. But- -

23 MR. DOAR: (Interposing) We don't ...  
24 okay, I hadn't seen that.

25 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Yeah.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I'm pretty  
3 sure that's the number that's actually pulled from  
4 just using the Urban Institute 4.3% that I cited  
5 earlier, and that it's just run on that.

6 MR. DOAR: Oh, and we definitely  
7 could chat about that later.

8 MR. JENKINS: We talked about the  
9 Urban Institute report, and we don't think it's  
10 right.

11 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But I- -

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN:  
13 (Interposing) I apologize, Commissioner.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Again, I want  
15 to thank the administration for coming to testify,  
16 as always, the staff will follow up with some of  
17 the requests that were made by myself or any  
18 member who wanted additional information, and I  
19 know that before this hearing we had ... we told the  
20 staff that some of these questions were going to  
21 be raised, so I really appreciate, Commissioner  
22 Doar, if when the staff follows up, we get the  
23 answers to the questions that were raised, and we  
24 will continue to work together to make sure that  
25 people are actually being encouraged to access

1  
2 these, and, you know, aren't being kept from  
3 services that we should be rendering and that they  
4 really, really need. Again, thank you for your  
5 testimony. Our next panel, Kate MacKenzie, Kate?  
6 Kate, City Harvest. Nicholas Freudenberg, from  
7 City University, and Joel Berg, New York City  
8 Coalition Against Hunger. Three. And you may  
9 begin.

10 MS. MacKENZIE: Good afternoon, and  
11 thank you for providing us the opportunity to  
12 speak to both the introduction on the report for  
13 finger imaging, as well as hunger in New York  
14 City. I am going to very briefly summarize my  
15 points in the interest out of respect for my  
16 colleagues who are also here spending their  
17 afternoon with us, and summarize my points and  
18 make a few recommendations. Of course, we really  
19 want to commend the Council for all of the work  
20 that they have done to address both food, hunger  
21 and insecurity in New York City. We would be in a  
22 far worse place than we are right now without the  
23 works that are included in Food Works, the EBT and  
24 green markets, the Council's support of the food  
25 pantry initiative, and also of course the

1  
2 emergency food through EFAP. I also, you know,  
3 again, no surprise, City Harvest really supports  
4 the introduction to ask for a report on finger  
5 imaging, and we really do hope that it will lead  
6 to a ban on the practice overall. It was really  
7 great to see the Council take some action on the  
8 proposed deficit reduction plan that is unlikely  
9 to reach conclusion within the next 48 hours, and  
10 I'm sure that my colleagues will speak to some of  
11 the details, while they may not reach a  
12 conclusion, we have fair belief that the proposals  
13 set forward by the Agricultural Committee will  
14 roll over into a farm bill and there are some  
15 serious implications for SNAP about beneficiaries  
16 in New York City, and we ask the Council to pay  
17 particular attention to those as well as other  
18 programs that will be impacted through that  
19 legislation. I also want to ask the Council to  
20 consider an additional hearing, I know there have  
21 been hearings in the past, around breakfast in the  
22 classroom, with some colleagues in the room,  
23 including United Way, Coalition Against Hunger,  
24 the Food Bank and others, we're part of the Hunger  
25 Free Communities Consortium, a USDA grant and City

1  
2 Harvest is particularly involved in the breakfast  
3 in the classroom component. It is incredibly  
4 difficult to reach principals to talk about this  
5 tremendous program that's an opportunity to  
6 schools and to the city and to, most important,  
7 children in our school system. Principals need  
8 some kind of incentives, schools need an  
9 incentive, and the chancellor really needs to make  
10 this a priority across the city. I also really  
11 want to support the Council's work on addressing,  
12 and I know it will continue to address, SNAP and  
13 the program attributes as well as the challenges,  
14 but I have a color copy in my remarks that really  
15 outlines the number of food insecure in the  
16 boroughs that are not eligible for SNAP and still  
17 food insecure. You know, so Council Member Palma,  
18 in your district, 33% of the food insecure do not  
19 qualify for SNAP, and they are still really,  
20 really troubled with lack of food. Council Member  
21 Vann, in your district that number is 43% of food  
22 insecure individuals who are still food insecure  
23 but not eligible for SNAP, in Manhattan it's 51%,  
24 Queens 57%, and in Staten Island 66% of people who  
25 are not eligible for SNAP, but still in need of

1  
2 food resources. City Harvest stands ready and  
3 willing to meet the rising demand for food, of  
4 those who are both eligible for Federal programs,  
5 as well as those who are not. We recently  
6 completed a strategic plan to position us to meet  
7 the rising demand that the city is experiencing.  
8 Many of you are aware that we have just opened our  
9 first facility, food rescue facility, in Long  
10 Island City, that has both freezer, refrigeration  
11 and dry storage, as well as an operating  
12 demonstration kitchen for nutrition education to  
13 occur, and that will enable us to double the  
14 amount of food that we're currently rescuing and  
15 delivering to reach upwards of 60 million pounds  
16 within the next five years. In addition we in  
17 fact in most of your districts here operate our  
18 healthy neighborhoods program, which really looks  
19 at going beyond emergency food. We know that  
20 emergency food is direly needed in the city, and  
21 that's not going to go away any time in the near  
22 future. It is our hope and our vision, however,  
23 that in the foreseeable future people will not  
24 need to rely on emergency food, and will have  
25 access to healthy, affordable food that's in high

1  
2 demand in these communities. We really want to  
3 thank the Council for their continued support in  
4 making this vision a reality, and encourage you to  
5 stay the fight within the finger imaging  
6 requirements for food stamp recipients.

7 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: Good  
8 afternoon, and thank you for this hearing. I'm  
9 Nick Freudenberg, Distinguished Profess of Public  
10 Health at City University of New York, School of  
11 Public Health at Hunter College, and I'm  
12 testifying today about the role of food stamps, or  
13 SNAP, in the lives of City University of New York  
14 students and the importance of reducing deterrence  
15 to food stamp enrollment among this population.  
16 CUNY enrolls about 270,000 degree students and  
17 another 240,000 non-degree students, and many of  
18 our students come from families and communities  
19 that face economic and social hardships that all  
20 low-income New Yorkers face. Since a college  
21 education is the surest ticket out of poverty, and  
22 offers lifetime health protection, New York City  
23 policy should maximize the chances for qualified  
24 students to earn a college degree. And obviously  
25 food insecurity can be a significant deterrent to

1  
2 successful academic achievement. Today I present  
3 the findings from a study on food insecurity among  
4 CUNY students that my colleagues and I completed  
5 last year. The study is based on a telephone and  
6 web-based survey of a random representative sample  
7 of 1,086 CUNY undergraduate students that was  
8 carried out by the Baruch College survey research  
9 center. We found that overall 39.2% of CUNY  
10 students in our sample, about two in five,  
11 reported that they experienced some degree of food  
12 insecurity in the past twelve months, and we used  
13 standard measures to assess food insecurity.  
14 Applying this rate to the estimated enrollment of  
15 undergraduate students in CUNY, it's about 100,000  
16 CUNY students experience some level of food  
17 insecurity, a really shocking figure. About twice  
18 as many students reported that they often or  
19 sometimes worry that they wouldn't have enough to  
20 eat, or wouldn't have enough money for food, as  
21 reported that they often or sometimes went hungry,  
22 because of lack of money, that was 22.7%,  
23 suggesting that the highest level of food  
24 insecurity is less common than lower levels, but  
25 both figures are unacceptably high. Some

1  
2 populations of CUNY students had significantly  
3 higher rates of food insecurity than others. For  
4 example, black and Latino students had almost 1.5  
5 times the level of food insecurity than white  
6 students, and students reporting household incomes  
7 of less than \$20,000 a year, which is about a  
8 quarter of all CUNY students, were twice as likely  
9 to report food insecurity as those with higher  
10 household incomes. We also asked students about  
11 their use of food stamps and other food assistance  
12 programs, and despite the high levels of food  
13 insecurity, only 7.2% of students reported using  
14 the services of a food pantry or any other food  
15 assistance program in the last twelve months.  
16 Only 6.4% of CUNY students reported receiving SNAP  
17 benefits, even though 18% thought they were  
18 eligible, and 16.6% had previously applied for  
19 this benefit. Among students currently receiving  
20 food stamps, 63% reported food insecurity, a  
21 shocking number, again, suggesting that for almost  
22 2/3 of the recipients, food stamps were not  
23 sufficient to provide food security. Among those  
24 who ever applied for food stamps, 40% are  
25 currently receiving SNAP benefits. This suggests

1  
2 that about 16,000 to 17,000 CUNY students were  
3 receiving food stamps in Spring of 2010 when we  
4 did the survey. In addition, 24% of our sample  
5 has been rejected for food stamps, they told us.  
6 Thus, an estimated almost 10,000 CUNY students  
7 have been turned down for food stamps. Of those  
8 who were denied, 40% reported that they weren't  
9 sure why they had been turned down. Among those  
10 denied food stamps, 36% believed the program had  
11 made an error in turning them down, and of those  
12 who had received food stamps in the past, but were  
13 no longer receiving them, 29% reported that they  
14 failed to re-certify, and 14% reported that they  
15 were cut off because they failed to meet re-  
16 certification requirements. Students listed many  
17 reasons for not applying for food stamps relevant  
18 to the hearing today. Of those who did not apply,  
19 55% reported that they didn't need food stamps,  
20 42% reported that they didn't know how to apply  
21 for food stamps, 29% felt that it was a handout,  
22 28% were too embarrassed to apply, 23% perceived  
23 too many obstacles, and 12% reported that the  
24 application process was overwhelming. Sadly, we  
25 didn't ask direct questions about finger imaging,

1  
2 and so we can't present data on that. However,  
3 our data show that a substantial portion of CUNY  
4 students who appeared to be eligible for food  
5 stamps based on their income, did not apply  
6 because of the deterrence they experienced or  
7 perceived. More than 60% of those who have never  
8 applied for food stamps reported personal incomes  
9 of less than \$15,000 for their household, as did  
10 54% of those who reported being turned down or  
11 denied for food stamps. Providing low income and  
12 food insecure CUNY students with food stamps is  
13 one of the wisest investments New York City could  
14 make for educational equity, economic wellbeing,  
15 health and common decency. I strongly support the  
16 various changes identified in Intro #696 as  
17 important steps in the right direction of  
18 facilitating enrollment of eligible New Yorkers,  
19 including the students of City University of New  
20 York into the SNAP program, New York City's and  
21 the nation's strongest bulwark against hunger and  
22 food insecurity. Thank you.

23 MR. BERG: Good afternoon, I'm Joel  
24 Berg, Executive Director of the New York City  
25 Coalition Against Hunger, and I'm submitting this

1  
2 testimony on behalf of more than 1.4 million New  
3 Yorkers who live in households that can't afford  
4 enough food. Thank you, Chairpeople, for holding  
5 this vital hearing. Do you recall in the 1950's  
6 there was a certain politician who went around  
7 saying, "I have this number of Communists at the  
8 State Department, it's an exact number". Then  
9 when he got to actual hearings, when people with  
10 the legal ability to ask specific questions about  
11 where's the list, how many are there, where are  
12 they and what are their names, we want to root  
13 them out by sundown, all of a sudden, oh, I don't  
14 have a list. I don't expect to agree with  
15 everyone in government, we have difference in  
16 values. I do expect as a taxpayer, and I know the  
17 City Council expects, some straight talk.  
18 Commissioner Doar has said repeatedly over the  
19 last few years that the main reason we have finger  
20 imaging is to root out fraud. In fact, before  
21 this very Committee in 2006, he said he could  
22 verify 31 cases of fraud. How is it that the city  
23 used to find actual fraud and doesn't even ask any  
24 more? Either one of two things is true: either  
25 the city is soft on fraud, or real fraud doesn't

1  
2 exist. I'll let them answer. Let me be clear,  
3 let me read from something that the Commissioner  
4 posted on the website of HRA just a few days ago.  
5 "One of the ways HRA has managed to maintain a  
6 high accuracy rating is by finger imaging clients  
7 when they apply for food stamps." He said  
8 something similar inside City Hall the other  
9 night. In fact, in his written testimony today,  
10 he said something nearly identical, and yet when  
11 pressed, today he said error rate and finger  
12 imaging are "unrelated to each other", not  
13 directly related. Unbelievable. Now, let me ask  
14 you this logical question. If supposedly the  
15 reason we have finger imaging is it deters people,  
16 that not getting your benefits deters people from  
17 doing it, what would be a bigger deterrent than  
18 prosecuting people if they're found breaking the  
19 law? Now this city prosecutes City Council people  
20 for using their First Amendment rights, the city  
21 prosecutes turnstile jumpers, the city has  
22 prosecuted HRA employees who have stolen millions  
23 of dollars from the city, are you telling me that  
24 they're not even going to ask, they're not even  
25 going to find out if there's real fraud? Now, you

1  
2 asked about the study of the City Council Food  
3 Works, Commissioner Doar was asked about that very  
4 study the other night on Inside City Hall. He  
5 said, "I haven't seen it". Well today, he hadn't  
6 seen it, hadn't heard of it. That's a standard  
7 response, "I haven't seen it, because I haven't  
8 read what's on my desk". HRA has previously  
9 contracted with the Urban Institute to conduct  
10 research, why is this one report that they don't  
11 like all of a sudden wrong? Now, the reason the  
12 Commissioner when pressed didn't want to talk  
13 about error rate is, as we pointed out, the error  
14 rate in New York City is higher, higher than the  
15 rest of country's. So if finger imaging keeps  
16 down the error rate, then we should have a lower,  
17 not higher, rate. Urban Institute said it reduces  
18 participation, USDA says it reduces participation,  
19 the First Lady's Office of the United States has  
20 said it reduces participation, the City Council's  
21 report has said it reduces participation. We have  
22 produced massive evidence to HRA of real-life  
23 people who it reduces participation, and yet for  
24 them, "Oh, I've never met someone, I've never  
25 heard of someone, that's just not really

1 accurate." In fact, I'm submitting for the record  
2 today a letter I received, and I believe it was  
3 also addressed to Speaker Quinn, by a man  
4 infuriated that his 95-year-old grandfather was  
5 told that he had to come into a city office to get  
6 finger imaged. The Commissioner didn't know today  
7 the percentage of working families in New York  
8 State that get food stamps, I do. According to  
9 USDA, it's 48%, 40 states are ahead of New York.  
10 So he ... look, I go to at least two conferences of  
11 hunger leaders every year. I want to know what my  
12 colleagues around the country are doing better  
13 than me. I know some of you meet other  
14 legislators from around the country, I know the  
15 better of you want to know what your colleagues  
16 are doing. To hear that my appointed  
17 representatives don't give a hoot what's happening  
18 in 48 states that we couldn't possibly learn from  
19 another state, that we couldn't possibly learn  
20 from upstate New York, we couldn't possibly learn  
21 from all these states that have lower error rates  
22 and higher participation rates than New York, is  
23 really startling, particularly when last year at  
24 this very hearing, Commissioner promised Council  
25

1  
2 Member Lander that he would scour the country to  
3 try to find those facts. The Commissioner's claim  
4 that a crime hasn't been committed until you get a  
5 benefit just isn't true. It is a Federal crime  
6 that if you submit a false application. So at the  
7 moment they sign that, if it was true fraud it  
8 would be prosecutable. They haven't prosecuted  
9 because it doesn't exist. The Empire Justice  
10 Center is about to release a report that out of  
11 the fair hearings that have appealed found due to,  
12 brought due to finger imaging, 97% have been won  
13 by the applicant, 97% have been won by the  
14 applicant. The Commissioner also didn't answer  
15 today, even though the Chair asked him, why his  
16 food stamp participation had gone down in five of  
17 the last ten months, and I will just close by  
18 saying, the reason we need a law is that the data  
19 hasn't been sane, I did not hear a coherent answer  
20 to Council's question of how this cost \$6.4  
21 million statewide, yes, there's cash assistance,  
22 but cash assistance is just a scintilla of the  
23 caseload, the vast majority of the caseload is  
24 food stamps, there is no way it can cost \$6.4  
25 million statewide and \$180,000 here, especially

1  
2 when the Commissioner testified just a few years  
3 ago it was \$800,000. I've just got to say, we  
4 need a little facts brought to the measure, and  
5 I'll close with this. You hear the Mayor say  
6 data, data, data, data, if you can't measure it,  
7 you can't manage it. Well, what are they afraid  
8 of? What are they afraid of? Maybe they don't  
9 want to measure it, because they don't want to  
10 manage it. Maybe the politics of saying fraud,  
11 fraud, fraud, and I have to close one point of  
12 personal privilege, because I was attacked, and  
13 the Speaker was attacked, by the New York Post,  
14 although being attacked by a Murdoch organization  
15 for morality is sort of like being attacked by  
16 Lindsay Lohan for sobriety.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Join the  
18 club, Joel.

19 MR. BERG: What's that? He said I  
20 was race-baiting because I pointed out a factual  
21 matter, that we don't do this upstate where the  
22 caseload is more likely to be white, we do it in  
23 New York City, where the caseload is more likely  
24 to be non-white. I never said, as the  
25 Commissioner implied, that non-white people are

1  
2 less likely to want to do this, although there's  
3 no doubt that legal immigrants are less likely to  
4 do this. What I said, it's never been factually  
5 disputed, they don't do it in North Dakota, they  
6 don't do it in Vermont, they don't do it in  
7 upstate New York, they do it in New York City, and  
8 it's electronic stop-and-frisk. Just as that  
9 assumes criminality and they rarely find anything,  
10 this assumes criminality and they rarely find  
11 anything, this isn't about commonsense good  
12 government, this is about politics on the back of  
13 poor people. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you. You  
15 have a question, Council Member?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I just want  
17 to ... I want the three of you to conjecture what  
18 the rationale is, why do you think that HRA is  
19 doing this? Why do you think that they're so  
20 stubborn about this? I'm curious what your  
21 thoughts are, what could explain this? Because, I  
22 mean- -

23 MR. BERG: I can't read people's  
24 minds. I have heard through the grapevine, I have  
25 no idea whether this is true, that Bloomberg LLP

1  
2 finger images people, and that the Mayor believes,  
3 what's the big deal, it happens at my agency. We  
4 saw the Post, so it happens for city employees,  
5 yeah, what's the big deal. And by the way, if you  
6 saw the New York Times the other day, they're now  
7 finger imaging people in Afghanistan, that's a  
8 really great model to follow. And this is the  
9 point, is first of all a vulnerable, low-income  
10 person doesn't exactly have the same confidence  
11 that an employee of Wall Street, or even the city,  
12 has. But number two, it misses the real point, in  
13 those places you're finger imaged at your  
14 workplace. You heard all this testimony about how  
15 great it is that you don't have to go to a city  
16 office to apply any more, this is the only thing  
17 that forces people to apply. And so, you know, I  
18 also say I can't tell because I've asked for  
19 meetings with the Mayor for a decade to discuss  
20 this, I've never so much as gotten a letter  
21 returned. I'd love to discuss this him directly,  
22 because if he applied his own business sense to  
23 this, he would clearly understand this is a  
24 colossal, phenomenal waste of money that makes  
25 City Time seem almost good spending compared to

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it.

PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: And my concern is about the consequences, not the intent. I have no notion what the intent is, but the consequences are clearly to deter people who need this benefit, and that's what our focus should be on.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I'm just ... the reason is that, in order to try to change their minds, it's always good to try to figure out what their intent is.

MS. MacKENZIE: And I really do believe that there is an eye towards economic efficiencies, but as each member, I believe, asked today to have a comparison to other techniques, I haven't seen it, and to me and to City Harvest, the issue really is, and I'm particularly speaking as a General Welfare hearing, the issue of human dignity and respect far surpasses the need right now for economic efficiencies.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member Lander?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Yeah, thank  
3 you for all the work that your organizations do,  
4 not just for being here today, but of course for  
5 that as well. So I'm optimistic that with, you  
6 know, under the Chair's leadership we'll pass this  
7 bill, and we'll have some data from them, but I  
8 think it's clear that we are going to need to take  
9 some next steps to get data on deterrence, and so  
10 I just want to think a little, you know, the Urban  
11 Institute, you know, I take them as the gold  
12 standard nationally for things like this, and so  
13 the idea that you can just dismiss it without  
14 taking it seriously doesn't make any sense. At  
15 the same time, it might be worth our thinking  
16 together about how to do some additional surveying  
17 in New York. I think actually we may something  
18 from someone later in this hearing who heard what  
19 was said earlier in the hearing and can give us  
20 some anecdotal evidence of deterrence, but if we  
21 can think about how to make that anecdotal  
22 evidence a little more precise, you know, then  
23 we'll be in a position of much more clearly, not  
24 even just to go to the moral argument, but I think  
25 even if, as I said, Urban Institute was off by

1  
2 like 80%, economically we would still be better  
3 off enrolling more people than we would with this  
4 so-called reduction of duplication. So I look  
5 forward to working on that. Thank you, Madam  
6 Chair.

7 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member  
8 Brewer.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just have  
10 a question about CUNY. Obviously with you and Jay  
11 and all the wonderful people at CUNY, there's a  
12 big effort on immigration. Is there any similar  
13 effort on the issue of food stamps, meaning how to  
14 make it easier, local sign-ups, etc., etc., so  
15 that people would participate, doing as much as  
16 possible on-campus, not having to go off-campus,  
17 because they are working, have families and are  
18 busy?

19 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: That was  
20 really the intent of our survey, to inform such  
21 efforts, and in the last year and a half or so,  
22 City University has established single-stop  
23 programs, benefits enrollments at our community  
24 colleges, and that is, I think, an important first  
25 step towards enrolling CUNY students. And our

1  
2 group, the Healthy CUNY Initiative, has been  
3 working to do food stamp enrollment drives on CUNY  
4 campuses, and we're hoping to roll those out in  
5 the spring semester.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right,  
7 so the centers are there, the one-stop centers,  
8 but the publicity for this particular benefit will  
9 start in the spring, is that what you're saying?

10 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: I'm saying,  
11 and to be clear, I'm here testifying as a  
12 researcher, not as a representative of the  
13 administration.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, I  
15 understand that, but Jay Hershenson, I assume,  
16 would be involved, if it was to be CUNY-wide.

17 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: Absolutely.  
18 And the initiative that did this survey and has  
19 been participating, called the Healthy CUNY  
20 Initiative, is planning to do food stamp  
21 enrollment drives in the spring semester, yes.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, thank  
23 you very much.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: I just have a  
25 quick question on the CUNY study. The students

1  
2 were ... how were they asked to participate? Did  
3 the CUNY administration find them, or they were  
4 asked to sign up?

5 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: This was,  
6 we had the Baruch Survey Research Center telephone  
7 and email students, and we developed a list from  
8 the CUNY central administration of a  
9 representative sample of CUNY students, it was  
10 matched on age, gender, race, ethnicity, number of  
11 years enrolled in school and so on, and then the  
12 survey research center first sent them an email to  
13 invite them to respond, and then actually called  
14 them up. And the final sample of 1,000 students  
15 was then matched to look exactly like the  
16 undergraduate students at City University. So  
17 we're pretty confident that it is representative  
18 of all 250,000 then, 270,000 now, undergraduate  
19 students at CUNY.

20 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: But we don't  
21 know in terms of these 1,086 students like the  
22 demographics breakdown, where they're from?

23 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: Oh yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: You have.

25 PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: We do know.

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CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay.

PROFESSOR FREUDENBERG: And it was selected to be exactly the same as CUNY as a whole.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay. Thank you, thank you so much for your testimony. Council Member Vann has a question.

CHAIRPERSON VANN: Actually this is a point of clarification, I'm not on General Welfare, so the term I may not be familiar, being hungry and being food insecure, what's the distinction? Can somebody clarify that for me?

MS. MacKENZIE: It's a question of large debate, and essentially to make it very easy, food insecurity is asked by the State Department of Agriculture ... the U.S. Department of Agriculture, it's the, you know, inability ... the questioning of where your next meal is going to come from, or just the uneasiness about food. What am I going to ... how am I going to feed my kids by the end of the month, having that uneasiness determines that someone is food insecure.

MR. BERG: If I may just quickly, I

1  
2 worked at USDA during the Clinton administration  
3 when this methodology was first announced. Food  
4 insecurity basically, as Kate says it correctly,  
5 is people choosing between food and rent, people  
6 rationing food, people having an uncertain supply  
7 of food. And during the Clinton administration,  
8 there was a sub-category of that that was  
9 described as hunger, that today the Bush  
10 administration subsequently stopped using the term  
11 "hunger" and they started calling it "very low  
12 food insecurity", so it would be ultra-wonky that  
13 under Federal terms hunger is basically a sub-set  
14 of the broader category of food insecurity,  
15 although honestly, when elites talk about being an  
16 hour late for their fancy dinner, they use the  
17 term hunger, so I think it's fairer to say that  
18 all 1.4 million people who live in homes that  
19 can't adequately repeatedly afford enough food,  
20 most human beings would consider that hunger, even  
21 though it's not a Burkina Fasso level, it's  
22 unacceptable in a city with 57 billionaires.

23 CHAIRPERSON VANN: I tend to agree  
24 with all that's been said. Just one point, most  
25 of my life in political life, in government, I've

1  
2 been trying to influence government that we need  
3 to invest in prevention, and most of the time we  
4 are denied because you can't quantify prevention.  
5 I mean, commonsense tells us something, experience  
6 tells us something, but you cannot build a  
7 quantifiable case that if I invest that ... all  
8 right, I can measure "the benefit", though we know  
9 it's a saving, and so on, and so forth, so I'm  
10 looking at the city's attempt to quantify, what do  
11 you call it, deterrence. How do you quantify  
12 deterrence? How can they say that, you know, so  
13 and so numbers were deterred? How do we say that?  
14 Commonsense tells me, you know, and experience,  
15 but so I have this conflict, and I'm trying to  
16 work out, and maybe you can help me.

17 MR. BERG: I'll just say two quick  
18 things about that, Council Member. You can't  
19 prove a negative, so I can't prove that my  
20 testifying here prevented a meteorite from hitting  
21 the Emigrant Bank Building, but I'll take that  
22 bet. The fact of the matter is, until a few years  
23 ago, until a few months ago, 46 states didn't  
24 finger image, four states did, and there is not an  
25 iota of evidence that the 46 that didn't had

1  
2 higher rates of duplication than the four that  
3 did, so I think the facts really speak for  
4 themselves. On the other hand, they don't have an  
5 iota of evidence that true duplication was caught.  
6 The Commissioner said today, oh, you can't check  
7 social security numbers in real time. I don't  
8 believe that's a factual statement. Any of us who  
9 have used a database, if you have social security  
10 numbers in a database, you can check it just as  
11 rapidly as you can a duplicate finger image. The  
12 laws of physics apply for social security numbers  
13 the same way they do for images. So they don't  
14 have any facts, we have an Urban Institute study,  
15 we have a Food Works City Council study, so I just  
16 urge you to go on the facts that are in the  
17 record.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

19 Thank you all for your testimony, and for your  
20 help in helping the Committee prepare for today's  
21 hearing. Our next panel is Chirada Stampas from  
22 Food Bank for New York City, Lori McNeil from  
23 Urban Justice Center, and Mark Dunlea from Hunger  
24 Action Network. I'm sorry, Triada, I  
25 mispronounced your name, sorry. And since I

1  
2 mispronounced your name, Triada, you get to go  
3 first, I apologize again.

4 MS. STAMPAS: Thank you, Chair  
5 Palma, Chairperson Vann, members of the Committees  
6 on General Welfare and Community Development, my  
7 name is Triada Stampas, I'm Director of Government  
8 Relations and Public Education at the Food Bank  
9 for New York City. In the interest of time, I  
10 submitted lengthy testimony, I'm not going to take  
11 you through every point. So to kind of get down  
12 to brass tacks, with respect to Intro 696 of 2011,  
13 the Food Bank supports and hopes for the swift  
14 passage of that legislation, and hopefully one day  
15 an end to the practice of finger imaging in this  
16 city. And I wanted to take a moment to kind of  
17 call your attention to some other very urgent and  
18 real threats to the food stamp program that are  
19 going on right now, and that's at the Federal  
20 level. While the Congressional super-committee  
21 announced today that they have failed to come up  
22 with a plan, the leadership of the House and  
23 Senate Agriculture Committees, which are the  
24 committees with jurisdiction over the food stamp  
25 program, have put together a plan that would cut

1  
2 \$4.2 billion from the food stamp program over the  
3 next ten years, and while that is not going to end  
4 up in the super-committee's plan, because the  
5 super-committee isn't going to come up with a  
6 plan, this is the year that the farm bill is going  
7 to be re-authorized and the leadership of both  
8 committees with jurisdiction over the farm bill  
9 have put out a proposal for billions of dollars of  
10 cuts in food stamps, and that is extremely  
11 troubling. I thank the City Council, the Speaker,  
12 Chairwoman Palma, for sending a letter to the  
13 super-committee just last week, calling on the  
14 super-committee not to make any cuts to nutrition  
15 assistance programs, and I ask for continued  
16 advocacy, we are looking at billions of dollars in  
17 cuts to food stamps, it is a proposal that would  
18 eliminate the ability of states to coordinate home  
19 energy assistance, the HEAT program, Home Energy  
20 Assistance program, with the food stamp program,  
21 in such a way that in New York City it would  
22 deprive about 90,000 households in public housing  
23 of about ... of more than a \$100 in food stamp  
24 benefits a month each. So that is going to have a  
25 real impact in New York City if it does come to

1  
2 pass. There have been other threats to both SNAP  
3 and to the Federal Emergency Food Assistance  
4 program throughout the Federal budget and deficit  
5 reduction processes, I anticipate that there will  
6 continue to be threats as the farm bill is  
7 negotiated out. And so I ask that you remain  
8 engaged and aware and, you know, the Food Bank  
9 would be happy to provide information and  
10 assistance and work with you to fight changes in  
11 these programs that would be detrimental to people  
12 in New York City. The other thing I wanted to  
13 point out and thank the City Council for, is your  
14 continued leadership on fighting hunger and  
15 working to improve the Federal programs, but also  
16 local programs. The City Council funding that  
17 goes towards food stamp outreach, it is critically  
18 important and continues to be important. Despite  
19 the high, high numbers of food stamp recipients in  
20 New York City today, we continue to find that  
21 outreach makes a difference, outreach gets more  
22 people on, there are more people out there who are  
23 eligible for benefits, who when they know about  
24 them and know how to apply, do so. So we  
25 certainly have not saturated the market yet, and

1  
2 will continue to put the funding that you provide,  
3 and other funding for food stamp outreach, to very  
4 good use. Just recently we completed a project  
5 jointly with the Medicare Rights Center, to target  
6 low-income seniors for both food stamps and  
7 Medicaid benefits. We identified a population of  
8 about 16,000 seniors, mailed them all, called  
9 about 2/3 of them, and at the end of the day,  
10 5,000 more seniors are now receiving food stamps,  
11 who were eligible all along and didn't know, as a  
12 result of that project. So I just point out, your  
13 money is being put to good use, outreach works,  
14 outreach matters, and will continue to matter, and  
15 so thank you for that. And I think that concludes  
16 my very brief remarks today.

17 MS. McNEIL: Good afternoon, I'm  
18 Lori McNeil from Urban Justice Center Homelessness  
19 Outreach and Prevention Project, and I appreciate  
20 this opportunity to testify. I, like my  
21 colleague, submitted some more in-depth testimony,  
22 but I would like to just really center on a couple  
23 of key aspects of that testimony. We released a  
24 report several months ago called "Case Closed",  
25 which really looked at the prevalence of errors in

1  
2 the receipt of public assistance in New York City,  
3 and what we found wasn't a big surprise, but it  
4 was a way to document some of the errors and the  
5 prevalence, or the magnitude, of the errors that  
6 were occurring in New York City with respect to  
7 public assistance. And of course, food stamps is  
8 a public assistance program as well. So we  
9 released the report, and we also were able to  
10 supplement this report with a new report that's  
11 come out from OTDA, or new statistics that were  
12 just released from OTDA about fair hearings  
13 relative to New York City. Last year there were  
14 140,000 hearings (sic) that occurred in New York  
15 City by OTDA's estimates, which I believe are  
16 pretty conservative, 83% were ... I'll do it in the  
17 reverse. 13% were either categorized as correct  
18 when made, or were affirmed by an administrative  
19 law judge, so what that means is, 120,000 public  
20 assistance errors were made in New York City last  
21 year, and many of them were made relative to food  
22 stamps. What we know about finger imaging is that  
23 provides one more opportunity or site where errors  
24 can occur, and it's been heavily documented that  
25 receiving public assistance in New York City is

1  
2 rife with errors. What we also know is that there  
3 is a relationship between the amount of  
4 requirements that anything, but certainly public  
5 assistance, that the more requirements that you  
6 have, the more likely that you are going to see  
7 decreased participation. So to suggest that  
8 having an extra requirement does not impact  
9 participation is just erroneous. I mean, when you  
10 have another like finger imaging, for example,  
11 many things can go wrong with that requirement.  
12 People can go and be finger imaged, but it's not  
13 posted that they actually went. They may go  
14 during their lunch hour and maybe run out of time,  
15 so they're not able to finish that requirement.  
16 So to suggest that it doesn't have any impact is  
17 just ludicrous. Also, to have an argument that's  
18 based on the premise of deterrence without having  
19 any data to suggest -- I'm talking about HRA now -  
20 - without having any data to suggest that's in  
21 fact true, is at the very least a faulty  
22 assumption. Anything can be measured  
23 quantitatively, we can measure value systems, we  
24 can measure emotions, we can measure religiosity,  
25 we can measure anything, but so to suggest that

1  
2 it's not measurable, again, is a false assumption.  
3 These things can be measured, you can look at  
4 programs that require and programs that don't  
5 require finger imaging, something that was  
6 suggested earlier. So this is data that can be  
7 obtained, it's not that difficult to do, and I  
8 think that it needs to be the basis for how we're  
9 going to move forward, in addition, of course, to  
10 passing 626 (sic), which we fully endorse, and  
11 with the new work requirements coming down the  
12 pike with able-bodied adults without dependents,  
13 we're going to see a lot more errors around food  
14 stamps, a lot more people experiencing case  
15 closures, and a lot more people being food  
16 insecure with those new benefits. So I think that  
17 if we have something that we can do something  
18 about, and the Council certainly is moving in the  
19 right direction, and I applaud your efforts, I  
20 think that it makes all the sense to move forward  
21 with that, and so we at Urban Justice Center fully  
22 support this bill. Thank you.

23 MR. DUNLEA: Hi, my name is Mark  
24 Dunlea, and I'm Executive Director ... (sound cuts  
25 out) Oh, it's not on. So the rest of the state

1  
2 has dropped finger imaging because they've  
3 basically not found cases of duplication and it's  
4 a waste of money, and New York City should join  
5 that as well. One of the things that really ...  
6 I've worked for Hunger Action Network for 26  
7 years, and one of the things that has most stunned  
8 me over that time is that every survey we've ever  
9 done of guests at emergency food programs find  
10 that only about half of them are actually  
11 receiving food stamps or SNAP benefits, even  
12 almost all of them are income-eligible. And when  
13 you ask them why, why aren't you getting food  
14 stamps, since your income indicates you're  
15 eligible, a lot of times it's because of  
16 sanctioning, which is some of the problems that  
17 Lori was talking about with error rates at HRA. A  
18 lot of times they're in the process of waiting for  
19 their applications to be processed, and you know,  
20 it's supposed to be, you know, five days in  
21 emergency situations or 30 days normally, in  
22 reality it often takes quite a bit longer. But a  
23 lot of times people tell us, I will starve before  
24 I go to HRA again, it's a humiliating process,  
25 it's invasive, and I'll not subject my family or

1  
2 myself to that. And finger imaging is a big part  
3 of that, and it's another reason why it should be  
4 eliminated. We heard particularly about some of  
5 the problems with the farm bill as it's going  
6 through Congress at this point. Certainly the  
7 Lahey disconnect that they're trying to do is  
8 primarily aimed at New York City, and I hope that  
9 it in fact, you can stand up and try to help  
10 oppose that. It primarily impacts upon the people  
11 receiving public housing and other forms of  
12 subsidized housing, which would not otherwise  
13 qualify for the standard utility allowance. One  
14 of the other big concerns of the food stamps  
15 besides food stamp benefits not really providing  
16 adequate benefits, and we are very supportive of  
17 the number of the measures that Senator Gillibrand  
18 has advanced, including moving to the thrifty food  
19 plan, to the low-cost food plans, a little bit  
20 more reasonable standards, is a big problem in New  
21 York State is that the Federal government caps the  
22 amount of housing costs that you can deduct in  
23 calculating food stamp benefits. It's primarily a  
24 northeast issue, it doesn't impact upon the south  
25 or the southwest, so it's really important that

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2 New York State and New York City stand up on that.  
3 One thing we do get is in the farm bill, at least  
4 at the present moment, which is good and which New  
5 York City does take a lot of credit for, is that  
6 it would provide some incentives, about \$20  
7 million a year, to increase the value of food  
8 stamps that are redeemed at farmer's markets,  
9 which of course the city has already been doing  
10 with the Health Bucks program. This would provide  
11 some additional funding for that, but we certainly  
12 hope that regardless of what happens with the food  
13 stamp program, the farm bill, that in fact New  
14 York City tries to increase that. One of the  
15 groups that Hunger Action Network helped start a  
16 number of years ago and represents low-income  
17 residents of New York City is Community Voices  
18 Heard, and their real big concern with the food  
19 stamp program is in fact the implementation of  
20 workfare, which is relatively new, and I was  
21 actually surprised reading your City Council fact  
22 sheet before the hearing today, that that was  
23 actually an option, that was not something that  
24 was mandated, and because of the incredibly high  
25 rate of unemployment in New York City, especially

1 among low-income people, that in fact New York  
2 City could opt out of that. And I'm always  
3 stunned when I hear Commissioner Doar make the  
4 argument that in fact there is not much  
5 unemployment for low-income people in New York  
6 City, because it flies in the face of reality, and  
7 nationwide the poorest 10% of Americans have an  
8 unemployment rate of over 30%, which is greater  
9 than it was during the Great Depression. So the  
10 idea that we're trying to push people into  
11 workfare, when in fact the city could waive it  
12 because of the high rate of unemployment, is  
13 something that I would certainly appreciate you to  
14 do. We heard a little bit before from City  
15 Harvest about the issue of the school breakfasts,  
16 I must say, I was very stunned when I moved to New  
17 York City a couple of years ago, because I always  
18 heard a lot of very positive things about the in-  
19 class breakfast program. And then I read the  
20 report from the Food Research Action Center at the  
21 national level, where pretty much New York City  
22 ranks either second or third worst in the entire  
23 country among large cities in the number of  
24 students participating in the school breakfast  
25

1  
2 program. And so how can that possibly be, with  
3 the school ... this really good in-classroom  
4 breakfast program, and that's when I discovered  
5 that the breakfast in the classroom program is  
6 voluntary rather than mandatory, and even after  
7 seven years it still has a very, very low rate of  
8 participation, and frankly, trying to contact  
9 individual principals to convince them after seven  
10 years to get into this program is not the  
11 solution. The Food Works report, in fact,  
12 supported a school breakfast mandate for the in-  
13 classroom program, at least among high-need  
14 schools, and we would certainly support that. To  
15 finish up, you know, if you're really talking  
16 about ending hunger in New York City, in the  
17 United States, unfortunately it seems like you  
18 have to end poverty to end hunger. Other  
19 countries have been able to end hunger without  
20 ending poverty, it doesn't seem possible in the  
21 United States to make that disconnect. And so  
22 then that boils down to jobs, and we need a lot  
23 more jobs. I know tomorrow you're having a  
24 hearing on the City Council Living Wage law, we  
25 certainly hope that's passed. I think it is just

1 ... it's not only shocking, it's immoral, that the  
2 richest 1% of New York City residents get 45% of  
3 the income and the greatest income disparity in  
4 the entire country is Manhattan, and that really  
5 calls for, you know, issues like raising the  
6 living wage and the minimum wage, but it also  
7 really calls for the whole reform of the tax  
8 system that the reality is in New York State  
9 overall, the poorest New Yorkers pay a higher  
10 percentage of their income for state and local  
11 taxes than, you know, Donald Trump does, and that  
12 is just not fair. So I really applaud the efforts  
13 the City Council is making to deal with some of  
14 the issues like finger imaging and, you know, the  
15 health box, but we do really need to deal with the  
16 broader problem of poverty and we really need to  
17 do a lot more about creating jobs. And one of my  
18 favorite issues to try to convince Brad to support  
19 us on is that, you know, New York State collects  
20 \$14 billion annually from the stock transfer tax,  
21 and then we rebate it immediately to Wall Street  
22 speculators, and you may remember, before the  
23 state took over the stock transfer tax and then  
24 started rebating it, that money from the stock  
25

1  
2 transfer tax was actually dedicated to New York  
3 City, not to New York State, and when they made  
4 that switch, they substituted a different revenue  
5 source to the city in exchange for the stock  
6 transfer tax, and that money is no longer provided  
7 to the city, so why not take the stock transfer  
8 tax back, and for \$14 billion you could fund about  
9 500,000 public work jobs paying \$16 to \$17 an  
10 hour, and that would do a lot to end hunger in New  
11 York State and New York City.

12 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Questions?

13 Comments.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER: Thanks to  
15 all three of you for all the work that you guys  
16 do. I would just say first, let's prevent them  
17 from canceling the existing millionaire's tax, it  
18 seems like maybe that's where we should focus  
19 between now and December 31<sup>st</sup> when we lose it, but  
20 I was very intrigued to hear that, you know, a lot  
21 of ... that Europe is looking at its stock transfer  
22 tax, and certainly if they're going to implement  
23 one, we should be looking at it back here again as  
24 well. So we have to persuade the Germans, though,  
25 as well as New Yorkers. Anyway, thanks to all

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three of you for all that you're doing.

MR. DUNLEA: Well, just on the stock transfer tax, my favorite topic, as you may remember- -

COUNCIL MEMBER LANDER:

(Interposing) Let me save that, we'll save that for another time.

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: We can have a side conversation on it, just because we still have one more panel to hear from ... oh, two more panels, sorry. But I want to thank you all for your testimony and for taking the time to again continue to keep us involved in what's going on, I really appreciate it. Our next panel is Carmine Rivetti from United Way, Louise Feld, Citizens Committee for Children, and Anthony Butler, from St. John's Bread & Life. You may begin your testimony.

MR. RIVETTI: Thank you, so my name is Carmine Rivetti, Associate Vice President at the United Way of New York City. I wanted to thank City Council for holding this hearing- -

CHAIRPERSON PALMA: (Interposing) Carmine, can you just make sure your microphone is

1  
2 on? I think it's on when the red light is on.

3 MR. RIVETTI: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Okay.

5 MR. RIVETTI: Yeah. So, sorry about  
6 that. So I just wanted to basically paraphrase  
7 the testimony submitted for the record, lengthier  
8 testimony, so as to preserve some time for other  
9 people to speak. So I wanted to start off with  
10 Intro 696, and again congratulate the City Council  
11 for putting forth the effort in the proposal. I  
12 think Council Member Lander, who just stepped  
13 away, summed it up the best for us. We  
14 essentially have one more report, one more  
15 document, and I think it will go a long way to  
16 really understanding the problem, and getting a  
17 sense of sort of the true impact that it's having,  
18 you know, as far as public policy and what that  
19 really means for cost savings and what the  
20 potential impact is to those recipients who are  
21 coming in to the program. The other piece that I  
22 wanted to talk a little bit about, and again it's  
23 before you in the full report, but a sense of  
24 growing urgency on the state of hunger in New York  
25 City, this past October United Way completed a

1 survey of 700 New York City adults to evaluate New  
2 York's attitude about the direct experience with  
3 hunger in a year where the effects of the  
4 recession have hit low-income households even  
5 harder. The results were staggering. Nearly two  
6 in three New Yorkers said that they were concerned  
7 that someone they know will need help paying for  
8 and getting food in the next twelve months.

9  
10 Though the issues span across ethnic lines, the  
11 survey illustrates that the problem of hunger is  
12 more of a concern amongst non-white households.  
13 Specific highlights raised are as follows: hunger  
14 has gotten worse. A substantial number of New  
15 Yorkers, 84, view hunger and poverty as an issue  
16 right next to jobs and unemployment. Despite  
17 significant efforts made by the city and local  
18 authorities to address hunger, 62% feel that too  
19 little progress has been made regarding hunger  
20 over the past several years. Access to healthy  
21 options: nearly 2/3 of adults in neighborhoods  
22 with higher rates of obesity and diabetes reported  
23 limited access to stores that sell fresh fruits  
24 and vegetables, two in five report almost no  
25 access to affordable and nutritious healthy foods.

1 Families are hit the hardest. New Yorkers  
2 rightfully assume that the folks visiting pantries  
3 are not those of yesteryear, hardworking families  
4 with children, seniors and working adults who  
5 can't afford food are meeting their hunger with  
6 pantry support. The bottom third are the most  
7 vulnerable. Those earning household incomes below  
8 \$25,000 are most vulnerable. 59% cited the issue  
9 of hunger as one of their major concerns. The  
10 economics of it all: 36% of New Yorkers reported  
11 that they had difficulty affording food or  
12 groceries in the past twelve months. That often  
13 means that they have to make difficult decisions  
14 between necessities as a whole, paying rent,  
15 clothing their children, medical expenses and  
16 keeping up with their utilities. Despite our best  
17 efforts, many families in our city continue to  
18 struggle. From our hunger survey we also learned  
19 that half of those surveyed want hunger and  
20 poverty to be a top priority of government. In  
21 fact, one in three New Yorkers said that they hold  
22 government accountable for taking action and  
23 addressing the state of hunger and poverty in New  
24 York. We share this view that government needs to  
25

1  
2 be more engaged, and are dismayed by the continued  
3 cuts from Federal government programs that would  
4 directly address the problem of hunger in New York  
5 City. Thank you so much for holding this hearing.

6 MS. FELD: Good afternoon, my name  
7 is Louise Feld and I'm the Policy Associate for  
8 Food and Economic Security at Citizens Committee  
9 for Children. CCC is a multi-issue child advocacy  
10 organization dedicated to insuring that every New  
11 York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.  
12 Thank you so much, Chair Palma and Chair Vann, for  
13 holding this hearing this afternoon, we'd also  
14 like to thank the Committees and the entire  
15 Council for all the work that you continuously do  
16 to try and combat food insecurity in our city. I  
17 have submitted written testimony, so I will  
18 summarize in the interest of time, and because my  
19 colleagues have so ably said so many of the  
20 arguments and the positions we'd like to state  
21 today. But what I do want to start out with is a  
22 bit of review of some of the data that was  
23 recently released by the U.S. Census Bureau that  
24 really shows how staggering the number of New  
25 Yorkers living in poverty, and of course facing

1  
2 accompanying food insecurity, really is. And not  
3 just how staggering it is right now and from 2010,  
4 which the data is from, but how much it's grown in  
5 recent years through the recession. So between  
6 2009 and 2010, there was a 7.4% increase in the  
7 number of New Yorkers who lived in poverty, and  
8 that meant ... the city's overall poverty rate  
9 reached about 20%, just over 20%. But even  
10 starker is the city's child poverty rate. The  
11 child poverty rate for 2010 in New York City was  
12 at 30%, that was an overwhelming growth of 10.8%  
13 since the previous year. And of course this  
14 number was higher in certain boroughs. For  
15 example, in the Bronx the child poverty rate was  
16 at 43%, in Brooklyn it was 34%, these numbers are  
17 really staggering. And we should also look at the  
18 1.8 million New Yorkers who receive food stamps,  
19 we've heard that number a couple of times today,  
20 but it's important to note that since 2008 there  
21 has been an increase of about 600,000 people in  
22 New York City who are receiving food stamps. So  
23 the numbers just continue to grow. The number of  
24 New York City families with children who receive  
25 food stamps has doubled since 2007, and now stands

1  
2 at about 30%, and one in every three New York City  
3 children lives in poverty. So it's no surprise  
4 that with these numbers we find that there is a  
5 growing number of children and families who are  
6 accessing the emergency food providers and  
7 emergency ... and food pantries, soup kitchens and  
8 also food stamps. So in discussing these  
9 statistics, we would also be remiss if we didn't  
10 mention that low-income New Yorkers face serious  
11 barriers in their efforts to access fresh and  
12 affordable food because of the lack of funds and  
13 also because of the absence of food retail options  
14 at which to shop, and this of course takes a  
15 serious toll on their health. So in the short  
16 term there are very high obesity rates, a study  
17 from 2009 shows that New York City public school  
18 students in grades K through eight, 18% of them  
19 were over-weight and 21% were obese, and high  
20 school students, 11% were obese and over 16% were  
21 over-weight. We also know that this food  
22 insecurity poverty takes a serious toll on  
23 children's academic achievements, the ability to  
24 focus in school, and therefore, like our  
25 colleagues who testified before us, we are

1  
2 incredibly strongly in support of the breakfast in  
3 classroom program, I do thank my colleague Kate  
4 MacKenzie from City Harvest for raising the issue  
5 that we would love to have more information, more  
6 hearings, on this particular program because we do  
7 find that it goes so far in combating food  
8 insecurity, yet is so under-utilized. I believe  
9 that there were no numbers that were presented.  
10 The latest numbers that we have are that it exists  
11 in three ... in just over 330 schools in New York  
12 City, however it is not citywide in most of the  
13 schools ... school-wide in most of the schools, in  
14 some of the schools it only exists as a pilot in  
15 one or two classrooms. It only exists school-wide  
16 in about 33 schools. So there's really a lot of  
17 room for expansion for such a vital program. The  
18 other thing about these numbers is that I think  
19 they provide really strong support for the bill  
20 that's being discussed here today, and of course  
21 my colleagues from many other organizations have  
22 spoken so eloquently about it, you don't really  
23 need me to go into further detail in the interest  
24 of time, but we find it unconscionable that there  
25 would be a perpetuation of a practice that

1 prevents at least 30,000 eligible New Yorkers from  
2 applying for food stamps, and that is the number  
3 that we know the Council has relied on and that  
4 our organization has relied on as well. Further,  
5 we really just want to commend the Council's work  
6 and for all of their programs to try and get  
7 people to food and food to people. For example,  
8 we would love to see the further expansion and  
9 incentivization of the use of EBT and WIC, use at  
10 farmer's markets, we know that there's been a lot  
11 of work to expand the use of EBT at farmer's  
12 markets and we'd love to provide support to see  
13 even more of that. Also, we would love further  
14 support for the green carts program through both  
15 the expansion of more EBT use at more green carts,  
16 there are only a few green carts that have the  
17 technology to accept EBT at those particular  
18 carts, it would be great to see an expansion of  
19 that. And also supports for vendors, so that they  
20 could locate in either community-based  
21 organizations or public-owned property year-round  
22 that's perhaps covered so they're not standing out  
23 in the, you know, there's a real drop-off, of  
24 course in the winter months, and we would love to  
25

1  
2 see supports for green cart vendors in deserts  
3 (sic), to be able to provide services to  
4 communities year-round. I just want to sum up  
5 with a note from our youth, so CCC does have a  
6 youth program that is comprised of children from  
7 all five boroughs, all different backgrounds, and  
8 they learn tools for advocacy and civic  
9 engagement. And after they've taken our advocacy  
10 course, many of them remain on to participate and  
11 pick a particular topic that they would like to  
12 advocate on, and the youth who participate in our  
13 youth action members were very moved by the topic  
14 of hunger this year because they know so many  
15 people, some of them, some of their own families,  
16 who are affected by the staggering numbers of  
17 people facing food insecurity. And so they're at  
18 school still, many of them, although if they knew  
19 I was testifying at 4:00 they might have come.  
20 But because they did not think that they were able  
21 to make it, they wrote a letter which we've  
22 attached to our testimony, which details their  
23 concerns, which details some of their feelings  
24 about food insecurity in New York City, and also  
25 provides strong support for the bill here today.

1  
2 So that is attached to our testimony, but overall  
3 I want to thank you for this opportunity to  
4 testify and the work that you do to fight food  
5 insecurity in our city.

6 MR. BUTLER: Good afternoon, my  
7 name is Anthony Butler, and I am the Executive  
8 Director of St. John's Bread & Life, and I too  
9 want to thank you for this opportunity to testify.  
10 I'm here not just as an advocate, but to represent  
11 the folks we serve. St. John's Bread & Life does  
12 half a million meals annually for hungry New  
13 Yorkers, through our site in Bed-Stuy, and also  
14 through our mobile soup kitchen that serves in  
15 Woodside and Jackson Heights and Coney Island and  
16 East New York and Brownsville. These are not just  
17 statistics that this finger imaging impacts, but  
18 people, our neighbors. We saw 25,000 folks last  
19 year, and through ... I want to commend HRA, alluded  
20 to their POS system, the paperless office system,  
21 it allowed us to enroll an additional 1,500 people  
22 in food stamps, bringing about \$3 million into the  
23 community. What HRA doesn't say is, we do their  
24 work for free, and they're outsourcing it with no  
25 real support. But it's been alluded to all day,

1  
2 the significant impact of hunger, I'm particularly  
3 here to testify against the finger imaging and  
4 anything that can move us forward in terms of  
5 removing it as a requirement for food stamps. It  
6 seems to me that, first of all as we've heard,  
7 statistically it's not a good anti-fraud device.  
8 Nobody else is using it in the country. It's a  
9 barrier, it seems to me, to participation in the  
10 food stamp program, denying, what I'm very much  
11 concerned about, it's denying people who are  
12 hungry the ability to access food, particularly in  
13 a dignified way. Because one of the bad things  
14 about running an emergency food program is, no  
15 matter how dignified, how good, it is, it's still  
16 not the best dignified way to do it. It's much  
17 better to allow people to go buy their groceries  
18 in the store, like we do. And I think we have an  
19 obligation for our fellow New Yorkers to provide  
20 our services in the most dignified way. It also  
21 causes, and I was reading an interesting survey,  
22 or a study in progress in America, in New York  
23 State hunger cost over \$9.2 billion in education  
24 and medical-related deficits. Additional monies  
25 had to be spent for health, and additional monies

1 had to be spent in education, because of hunger.  
2 And as I was thinking about all this, I wanted to  
3 relate a small story. About four years ago my  
4 wife had serious back surgery, had to stop  
5 working, and eventually had to go on disability.  
6 And we knew nothing about applying for disability.  
7 She went on the website, filled out this form,  
8 they called her and gave her seven different  
9 appointments, potential appointments, to have a  
10 phone interview, to find out which one was the  
11 most convenient for her. She does the phone  
12 interview, they collect all the information, they  
13 say, we'll have a decision in 45 days. About 30  
14 days later we noticed our bank account had more  
15 money in it, that's a nice little problem. We  
16 couldn't understand what it was, subsequently we  
17 got a letter two days later saying she had been  
18 approved for disability; no finger imaging, a  
19 hugely more expensive program, a hugely more ...  
20 greater level of benefits, and yet for a smaller  
21 program we use finger imaging because we're afraid  
22 of fraud. And I'm sure Social Security did all  
23 the anti-fraud they could, cross referenced  
24 everything. And it made me really wonder how a  
25

1  
2 government agency could do this. We use a device  
3 in New York City that is really, the finger  
4 imaging, it's used to detect criminality. Finger  
5 printing in our country detects criminality and  
6 fraud and badness. That is the purpose of it.  
7 And why do we do that to the poorest in our  
8 community, to the impoverished neighborhoods, to  
9 folks of color, when they didn't do it to my wife?  
10 Is it simply because there's a difference in  
11 middle class? Do we trust certain groups more?  
12 And it really made me wonder and I encourage the  
13 City Council to move forward even more strongly  
14 than just collecting the data. I think that's the  
15 first step, but to move more strongly in terms of  
16 getting rid of finger imaging, particularly in  
17 light of the recent statistics that one in five  
18 New Yorkers use emergency food, that's  
19 unconscionable. The new statistics, just reading  
20 the Wall Street Journal, of all places, one in  
21 four returning veterans are now using emergency  
22 food. So I encourage you and thank you for your  
23 work in bringing this to bear, it's been many  
24 years in terms of we've been fighting this, and I  
25 encourage you to keep up this work, so thank you

1  
2 for the time.

3 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you all  
4 for your testimony. Thank you. Our next panel,  
5 Reverend Ann Kansfield from Hungry People of New  
6 York, Maggie Dickinson, Greenpoint Reformed Church  
7 Food Pantry, and I believe Reverend Ann Kansfield  
8 is from Greenpoint Church as well, Ahmed Sidani,  
9 Manhattan Young Democrats, and Doreen Wong. And  
10 we've been joined by Council Member Jimmy Van  
11 Bramer, thank you for being with us. I'm sorry,  
12 Reverend, I should have said you're representing  
13 Hungry People of New York, you're actually from  
14 Greenpoint Church, so it's nice to see you, you  
15 can begin your testimony.

16 REVEREND KANSFIELD: I think I took  
17 that who you're representing a little too  
18 seriously. I wrote the hungry people served by  
19 the Green Point Reformed Church Food Pantry. Good  
20 afternoon, my name is Reverend Ann Kansfield and I  
21 serve as the co-Pastor at the Greenpoint Reformed  
22 Church in North Brooklyn. When I first came to  
23 the church, we often had people who came to us in  
24 need of assistance, sometimes asking for food. My  
25 partner and I live above the church, which means

1  
2 that we are particularly easy to be accessed by  
3 people who are in need. In the summer of 2007 our  
4 congregation studied our surrounding communities,  
5 we learned that Greenpoint had over a 30% poverty  
6 rate, and when we called 311 to find out about  
7 local food pantries in our zip code, we learned  
8 that there were none. This discovery led us to  
9 start a food pantry which now provides between 500  
10 and 600 bags of free groceries every Thursday.

11 Having graduated with honors from Columbia  
12 University, and having a seminary degree, I didn't  
13 think much about what managing a food pantry would  
14 involve, but let me assure you, figuring out how  
15 to provide food in the face of ever-increasing  
16 levels of need has taken every single bit of my  
17 ability, and I consider myself to be among the  
18 privileged of New York, most days I want to pull  
19 my short spiky hair out. It takes an incredible  
20 amount of administration and time, not to mention  
21 creativity and patience, while various levels of  
22 government provide grants that enable us to  
23 purchase food, there is next to no funding  
24 available to pay for the operational expenses of  
25 running a food pantry. In our case, the church

1 provides the pantry with a significant amount of  
2 space, most of the utilities, the phone and the  
3 internet, and the phone rings off the hook. I  
4 answer it, it rings in my house. \$9,000 of my  
5 \$22,000 annual salary is from a discretionary  
6 grant secured by Council Member Levin. The  
7 remainder of this is paid through private  
8 individual contributions. I am paid as if I were  
9 a part-time contractor, but in reality I spend  
10 well over 40 hours a week managing just the pantry  
11 alone. In the course of my lifetime, our society  
12 has decided that social and poverty-fighting  
13 programs worked best by making life more difficult  
14 for those in need. This hasn't solved the problem  
15 of poverty or hunger, in fact it has only gotten  
16 worse. One of the main responses to this urgent  
17 need has been the growth of a network of soup  
18 kitchens and food pantries, most of them  
19 affiliated in some way with a faith-based  
20 organization. For countless people who live on  
21 less and less, we represent the last stop toward  
22 economic abyss. The graphs that I passed out show  
23 how the downturn has affected our pantry, the  
24 number of people we serve continues to grow, and  
25

1  
2 thanks to an increase in funding, mostly  
3 correlated with the 2008 stimulus package, much of  
4 this growth we were able to receive increasing  
5 allotments of government food funding. But now  
6 that the stimulus money has run out and the USDA  
7 has cut discretionary funding for TEFAP, we've  
8 seen a profound decrease in food over the past six  
9 months. The city's TEFAP funding has not been  
10 able to make up for such a drastic decrease in  
11 food. The summer was particularly difficult, we  
12 had to turn away literally hundreds of our  
13 clients, because we had no food to give them. our  
14 pantry's experience is not unique, I've heard it  
15 from other pantry directors around the city that  
16 they had empty shelves, less food, and an  
17 increasing need all summer long. It's  
18 heartbreaking to turn families, seniors, children,  
19 homeless individuals, immigrants and the  
20 unemployed away, people who have come to rely on  
21 us week after week after week in order to avoid  
22 hunger. On behalf of the food pantries and soup  
23 kitchens in our city, I would like to ask you to  
24 consider the following changes to how our  
25 emergency food system operates. Number one, food

1 stamp benefits are a far more efficient way to  
2 insure that no one is hungry in our city, so  
3 please find ways to encourage more New Yorkers to  
4 receive food stamps. As a low-income New Yorker  
5 myself, I can attest to the miserable service at  
6 the HRA office, that's why I am so grateful that  
7 we can go and file our applications online, with  
8 the exception of the finger imaging. I had to  
9 take an entire day away from servicing the pantry  
10 clients in order to go down to the office, wait in  
11 line, and get finger imaged. This is off the  
12 script, but let me say, I consider myself a  
13 privileged white New Yorker, I don't like being  
14 finger imaged because it still creeps me out. I  
15 used to be a stockbroker, I got fingerprinted for  
16 that, that was like a badge of honor, because we  
17 all know what it means, you're going to be a  
18 criminal because you're a stockbroker. I didn't  
19 have a problem with that, but it still creeps me  
20 out over at the HRA office, especially with a  
21 woman who wasn't so kind about it, and just  
22 treated me like I was a cow, some kind of like  
23 cattle. Note the use of supercilious, though, I  
24 thought that was excellent. Please do away with  
25

1  
2 finger imaging, we don't finger images from  
3 corporate executives in order to receive tax  
4 breaks for locating their businesses in our city,  
5 who do we ask poor people who clean their offices  
6 to be fingerprinted in order to receive SNAP  
7 benefits. Three, please find a way to fund more  
8 of the operational costs, especially the salaries  
9 of food pantry managers, and if possible, please  
10 find a way to streamline the funding process so  
11 that pantry managers can focus on keeping up with  
12 meeting demand and not on paperwork. While we're  
13 grateful for the discretionary grant that we  
14 received from Council Member Levin, we've spent  
15 over 180 hours attempting to fill the paperwork  
16 needed to receive the check. I'm really bad with  
17 paperwork, I don't mean to take so long, but it's  
18 really hard. I don't know how others do it.

19 Number four, please lobby Congress, I know you all  
20 have friends who are Congress members, to increase  
21 the TEFAP funding and to maintain the current food  
22 stamp benefits level, and in the meantime, please  
23 try to increase EFAP funding to make up for the  
24 difference. So this one's a little weird and kind  
25 of complicated, but number five, when a food

1  
2 pantry like ours receives our EFAP funding through  
3 the Food Bank, we don't have any choice about the  
4 food that we receive or the date that we receive  
5 it on. I kind of describe it as manna from  
6 heaven, it just gets dumped on the front lawn or  
7 sometimes brought into the church. When we  
8 receive this thing called City Council funding,  
9 and I don't know the difference between City  
10 Council funding and EFAP funding, because it's  
11 both kind of the same, you either get one or the  
12 other from the Food Bank, we have a choice of  
13 foods and delivery dates. I can go and pick the  
14 foods that my people like, and get it in the  
15 quantities that are actually usable for us, it  
16 limits the number of fights that we have from  
17 people who think that somebody got something  
18 better. Please consider stipulating that the  
19 pantries have a choice about what foods that we  
20 can receive with our EFAP funding, and when the  
21 deliveries can be scheduled. It's in everybody's  
22 best interests that all New Yorkers have enough to  
23 eat, hunger levels make people ... force people to  
24 make choices that they otherwise might regret. No  
25 one should have to steal in order to get money for

1  
2 food, and as a city we've made so many strides to  
3 reduce crime, but the current unemployment and  
4 under-employment crisis that has only intensified  
5 in the past four years, is creating a situation  
6 where more and more New Yorkers are being pushed  
7 into desperate situations, and I feel may begin to  
8 make more desperate choices. One of these  
9 choices, I think, is going to be talked about by  
10 my friend and colleague, Maggie, here. But one of  
11 the guys who was a food pantry client of ours, who  
12 I really loved, his HRA case got totally messed  
13 up. He didn't have food stamps for months. While  
14 I was away he managed to get into the church, and  
15 he stole about \$2,000 worth of musical equipment  
16 from the basement. It was his first offense, he  
17 had never been in jail before, and it felt really  
18 horrible for everybody, and when I asked him, why  
19 did you do it, like did you stick it in your arm  
20 or snort it up your nose, he said, no, I had to  
21 eat. That's really what I used it for, just for  
22 food.

23 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you, I  
24 just want to get through the panel, and then you  
25 can ask the questions.

1  
2 MS. DICKINSON: Hi, my name is  
3 Maggie Dickinson, I'm also from the Greenpoint  
4 Reformed Church Food Pantry, and I did not submit  
5 testimony because I didn't really intend to give  
6 any. But I was really dismayed by Commissioner  
7 Doar saying that he didn't feel that finger  
8 imaging deterred people. And I run the food stamp  
9 outreach program at the Greenpoint Reformed  
10 Church, so basically what I do is, I answer  
11 questions about food stamps, I take people to the  
12 food stamp office and go through the process with  
13 them, I help them with the online application. If  
14 they have a problem with their food stamps, I  
15 liaise with the people, the case workers at the  
16 food stamp offices, to deal with minor problems,  
17 changes in budgets, people being cut off, people  
18 not getting their benefits in time. I just wanted  
19 to put a little bit of a human face on some of the  
20 statistics that we've heard, and I think the Urban  
21 Institute's numbers are probably right on the  
22 deterrence. In particular, we deal with a  
23 clientele that's largely elderly, we have a lot of  
24 older people come in, and I've had several older  
25 women who have come to me, who are living on

1 social security, who I've taken through the online  
2 application, and then when I describe to them what  
3 they have to do to complete the application,  
4 essentially going to the food stamp office,  
5 getting finger imaged, and putting in their  
6 documents, they've told me, no, I won't do it.  
7 I've spoken to them repeatedly, I've told them  
8 that I would go with them, this doesn't make them  
9 feel any better about it, and these women, I see  
10 them come in week after week to the pantry, they  
11 never miss a Thursday, they never miss a pantry  
12 bag. They come in on Mondays and get our bag  
13 lunches on Mondays, they come in every single  
14 Wednesday and eat dinner at the soup kitchen. I  
15 never see them miss a day, they're hungry, but  
16 they won't get food stamps because of the finger  
17 imaging, because they won't put themselves through  
18 that. I've also had people who have gone through  
19 the process and applied for food stamps, who have  
20 later on come back to me and said, I got this  
21 letter, I don't know what it means, they're saying  
22 that I'm eligible because there's been a mistake.  
23 And when I go through and look at it, it says  
24 there is no finger imaging record. So in these  
25

1 cases what I typically do is email the person at  
2 the food stamp office where they applied, and  
3 oftentimes what's happened is, the finger imaging  
4 record just goes lost somehow. These people have  
5 gotten finger imaged, but their cases aren't going  
6 through, because there are human errors. And  
7 these aren't human errors like these people are  
8 trying to defraud the system, these are human  
9 errors on HRA's part, that mean that people who  
10 need benefits are having them delayed, they're not  
11 getting them, they're being turned down, and in  
12 several cases people had to re-apply two and three  
13 times, to be able to get the benefits that they  
14 deserve. And this can go on for months for  
15 people, which means that in those months they have  
16 no benefits and no food to eat. Again, I see them  
17 all the time, because they're coming into the  
18 pantry and the soup kitchen where I work, and this  
19 is what people have to rely on in the interim.  
20 Finally, you know, when we talk about the  
21 deterrence factor, I think it's a really important  
22 one. There are people who aren't getting food  
23 stamps because of the finger imaging, but even for  
24 the people who do get food stamps who have to go  
25

1 through the finger imaging, I think there's  
2 something else we need to take into account, and  
3 that's the psychological distress that finger  
4 imaging can cause. So I just want to give you one  
5 more story, of a woman who I helped through this  
6 process, she was a middle-class lady, because of,  
7 you know, getting laid off and also some health  
8 problems, she was out of work for a long time and  
9 her unemployment ran out. So she was basically  
10 left with no income, and it was at this point that  
11 she said, okay, finally, I'm going to apply for  
12 food stamps. I had been encouraging her to do it  
13 for a couple of months, but she really didn't feel  
14 like she was ready to until her unemployment ran  
15 out and she was really in a desperate situation.  
16 So we went through the whole process, and when I  
17 talked to her about the finger imaging, she  
18 started crying, and telling me that she didn't  
19 want to do it, because it made her feel like a  
20 criminal. But she was in a desperate situation  
21 and so she had to. It took this woman literally  
22 getting to the end of her 99 weeks and having no  
23 income to overcome the psychological barrier,  
24 because she was in such dire straits. So I think  
25

1  
2 when Commissioner Doar says he can't imagine that  
3 this tiny thing would actually really keep people  
4 from applying, when they're in desperate need, I  
5 think one of the things that it does is that it  
6 makes people sort of get to the point where they  
7 are in totally desperate need before they go to  
8 apply, and there are lots of people who would be  
9 applying a lot earlier if the process wasn't so  
10 onerous, and that's finger imaging, but that's  
11 also, you know, the entire process. I also wanted  
12 to say, because I do take people through the  
13 process oftentimes, I was kind of mystified by his  
14 claim that somehow social security numbers could  
15 be falsified or people could be giving you wrong  
16 social security numbers and this was somehow  
17 inadequate in checking for whether or not there  
18 were not duplicate cases. It's as if he was  
19 making it sound like people only give a social  
20 security number and no other documentation, which  
21 simply isn't true. When people go to apply for  
22 food stamps, they're asked to give quite a bit of  
23 documentation, in fact some might say too much  
24 documentation. But part of it is, they need to  
25 have a photo ID along with the social security

1  
2 number. So if we're really worried about people's  
3 identities and checking their identities and  
4 making sure they're not giving you a false one, I  
5 think their driver's license with their photo on  
6 it should be sufficient, and I'm certain that's  
7 what they do in other states, and why they have  
8 this same sort of low numbers of fraud that we may  
9 have in New York City, but it's certainly not  
10 because of finger imaging, there's a lot of other  
11 documentation that goes along with that. So I'll  
12 leave it there.

13 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

14 MR. TIGANI: Good afternoon, Madam  
15 Chair, honorable members of the Committee on  
16 General Welfare and the Committee on Community  
17 Development, thank you for this opportunity to  
18 speak. My name is Ahmed Tigani, I am the Vice  
19 President of the Manhattan Young Democrats. We  
20 don't normally do ... we don't normally come to  
21 hearings and talk about policy issues, but over  
22 the last year what we've realized is that, talking  
23 about policy issues during election time is  
24 probably not the only time we need to talk about  
25 policy issues. All of us are very aware that our

1  
2 city is facing some dramatic changes, we are  
3 seeing budget cuts that are really affecting the  
4 people of this city, and we have some very strong  
5 opinions about how, as young people, the direction  
6 of the city is taking us somewhere where we might  
7 need to take a drastic course direction. I'm  
8 submitting these comments on behalf of the  
9 Community and Social Equity Committee of the  
10 Manhattan Young Democrats. As a quick brief, MYD  
11 is an all-volunteer organization, and the official  
12 youth arm of the Democratic Party in New York  
13 County. Our mission is to educate and activate  
14 young progressives and empower them to create the  
15 changes they want to see in their neighborhood,  
16 borough, state and country. The Community and  
17 Social Equity Committee unequivocally supports  
18 Intro 696, requiring that the Human Resources  
19 Administration report on the cost and  
20 effectiveness of its requirements that food stamp  
21 applicants be finger imaged. The practice of  
22 taking the finger images of applicants for food  
23 stamps is problematic for two reasons: the first  
24 and perhaps most obvious is its complete  
25 irrelevance in achieving the goal, that of fraud

1 prevention, for which its proponents claim it is  
2 necessary. As many other groups have and will  
3 point out, even USDA Undersecretary Kevin  
4 Concannon has called the practice not cost  
5 effective and pointed out simply matching names to  
6 social security numbers is far less costly and  
7 equally effective. In fact, in 2007, the year  
8 finger imaging requirements were implemented in  
9 New York, the city only discovered 37 cases of  
10 fraud, as was mentioned earlier, out of over a  
11 million people receiving food stamps in the city.  
12 The requirement's usefulness seems even more  
13 dubious when one considers that with Arizona, New  
14 York City is now the only place in the nation to  
15 employ the practice. The second, and perhaps most  
16 pressing, issue, is that finger imaging's proven  
17 record of preventing New York's most vulnerable  
18 families from receiving the assistance they need.  
19 The correlation between finger imaging  
20 requirements and the low rates of enrollment among  
21 eligible families has been well-documented. In  
22 2007, the four states that required finger imaging  
23 served 20% fewer people than did not. For the  
24 working poor, this jumps to 30%. In fact,

1  
2 considering how effective finger imaging is at  
3 excluding eligible participants with ... excuse me,  
4 without how unnecessary it is for preventing fraud  
5 calls the motives of finger imaging's proponents,  
6 including Mayor Bloomberg, into question. With  
7 all of this in mind, we firmly support the passage  
8 of Intro 696, our only complaint is that the bill  
9 merely requires the investigation of a practice  
10 that has already been so thoroughly discredited.  
11 While this bill is perhaps a necessary precursor  
12 to definitive action, we will not be satisfied  
13 until New York City ends the practice of finger  
14 imaging completely. As current and aspiring  
15 members of government and the larger civic  
16 community, it just seems like good policy. As a  
17 youth-based organization operating at the height  
18 of a recession that disproportionately affected  
19 employment opportunities for the youth, we also  
20 feel that this is in the best interest of both our  
21 members and our peers. And I'll just add one  
22 thing, I do believe that this is a management  
23 policy. My mother is a social worker at HRA, she  
24 comes and she tells me how over-worked and how  
25 serious the cases are that are coming her way, and

1  
2 how many more cases she has today than she had the  
3 day before, the year before that. It's an agency  
4 that has seen dramatic cuts and we ask them to do  
5 more at this time of high unemployment. So again  
6 I'll say, I believe this is a management decision  
7 that we are addressing, this is an administration  
8 decision that we're addressing, and this is a  
9 decision in policy that is being levied against  
10 the part of our society that is the least capable  
11 right now of being able to muster the resources to  
12 defend it, so it's upon us the advocates, and you  
13 our elected officials, to hopefully get to where  
14 we need to be. And finally I just want to thank  
15 the staff of this hearing, the sergeant-at-arms,  
16 this is my first time doing it and they were a lot  
17 of help, so I just wanted to thank you guys and I  
18 look forward to hearing more from you. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.

20 MS. WOHL: I think I've been coming  
21 down here for this hearing since 1993, so it's 18  
22 years, and we're still fighting the same battle.  
23 My name is Doreen Wohl, and I'm the Executive  
24 Director of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger,  
25 and I want to thank you for holding the hearing,

1  
2 it's enormously important. West Side Campaign  
3 Against Hunger is an emergency food program on the  
4 West Side of Manhattan that is set up like a  
5 supermarket, and where customers select their own  
6 food. And the customers also, we function as a  
7 customer cooperative, where customers assist in  
8 the daily operation of the store. Over the years  
9 since 1970, WSCAH has expanded services, in  
10 addition to providing three days' worth of healthy  
11 food a month, WSCAH provides social service  
12 counseling, linking families in need with  
13 entitlements such as food stamps and health  
14 insurance and child care, and legal, financial and  
15 employment training resources. WSCAH has  
16 eliminated barriers and serves people from all  
17 boroughs in New York City. Hunger is increasing,  
18 there's a graph that looks like this behind the  
19 first page of the testimony that clearly  
20 demonstrates the increase. Since 2008, the  
21 beginning of the recession, there is a 48%  
22 increase, in the last year alone there is a 17%  
23 increase. The greatest increase is amongst the  
24 seniors, 19% in the last year, 15% in parents with  
25 children, and 23% of adults without children. In

1  
2 2008 we were seeing 6,000 households a month, we  
3 are now seeing ... people a month, we are now seeing  
4 10,000 customers a month. At the same time as  
5 hunger is increasing, government funding is  
6 diminishing. The city at this time has the  
7 opportunity to reduce a government expense by  
8 eliminating finger imaging of food stamp  
9 applicants. New York City and Arizona, as it's  
10 been said, are the only two locations in the  
11 country that persist in finger imaging of food  
12 stamp applicants. All other areas have found that  
13 the expense and prejudice toward the poor is not  
14 justified. Finger imaging is an unnecessary,  
15 expensive, cumbersome process which deters  
16 eligible people from applying and gaining the  
17 benefits of food stamps. The reasons that they do  
18 not apply, one is fear, parents of children who  
19 are eligible are fearful of applying;  
20 recertification, food stamp people who are  
21 receiving food stamps, have to be recertified  
22 every six months, except for families, people who  
23 are on fixed income, which is usually people on  
24 disability or social security. Regardless of all  
25 that, finger imaging has to be repeated every

1  
2 year, and the delay factor that you spoke of so  
3 eloquently, because finger imaging is done by an  
4 outside agency that is not part of HRA, their  
5 records have to be sent over to HRA and routinely  
6 there's at least a two-week delay, and that's  
7 good, it could be much longer. It's regularly 45  
8 days before an applicant receives food stamps,  
9 rather than the 30 day requirement, which is in  
10 the regulations, resulting in a critical loss of  
11 the benefit. So I urge you to really take the  
12 opportunity when the city and the state and the  
13 Feds are all looking as a way of saving expense,  
14 save the expense of doing the finger imaging, and  
15 give the trust to low-income people who are  
16 probably more trustworthy than the very wealthy  
17 one percent.

18 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Council Member  
19 Levin had a question.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Oh thank  
21 you. I just wanted to ... my question was to Pastor  
22 Kansfield. I know that you're a food pantry and  
23 you're a soup kitchen, and I know that individuals  
24 that may have criminal records, you know, might  
25 seek assistance at your church. Have you

1  
2 encountered any fear amongst that population of  
3 finger imaging, not wanting to be, you know,  
4 afraid of being tracked by the city or the system,  
5 or would you, if you haven't encountered that  
6 explicitly, I mean, is it something that you  
7 suspect is there?

8 REVEREND KANSFIELD: I'm going to  
9 have Maggie answer most of that question, but I  
10 would say, among our clientele, one of the biggest  
11 groups of people who are afraid of finger imaging  
12 are actually Eastern European immigrants who are  
13 American citizens, who are just ... any kind of  
14 invasive government smacks of communism to them  
15 and they are extremely afraid.

16 MS. DICKINSON: And I would also  
17 just add, there are two immigrant populations in  
18 the neighborhood where our pantry is, so there are  
19 Eastern Europeans and then there are also a lot of  
20 people from Central and Latin America. And a lot  
21 of parents who are undocumented who have children  
22 who are citizens, are eligible to apply for food  
23 stamps for their citizen children, and are very  
24 afraid, even though they're exempted from the  
25 finger imaging, they're very afraid of the whole

1  
2 process, and I think just the fact that finger  
3 imaging exists and people know it and they talk  
4 about it to one another, even though mothers or  
5 parents of children who do qualify might not  
6 themselves need to be finger imaged, they don't  
7 know that. They don't know those rules, they  
8 don't know the subtleties of it, and so for them I  
9 think that is a huge deterrent, just the fact that  
10 it still exists, and they're afraid that they're  
11 going to be subjected to fingerprinting as  
12 undocumented people.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: All right,  
14 thank you, and I'll be there on Wednesday, by the  
15 way, Ann, Thanksgiving dinner.

16 REVEREND KANSFIELD: You can  
17 actually have a soup ladle, nobody else gets it,  
18 that's yours.

19 CHAIRPERSON PALMA: Thank you.  
20 Thanks, I want to thank the last panel for your  
21 testimony, it's really appreciated, the staff and  
22 myself, my colleagues, appreciate everyone's input  
23 and comments and the help that you provide in  
24 making sure we can continue to lend our voices to  
25 this ongoing fight. And, you know, before we end,

1 we are at that time of the year when, you know,  
2 many do things to feed their own souls, and I just  
3 ... I think I'd be remiss if I end this hearing  
4 without expressing that, you know, hunger is an  
5 ongoing issue, and we have hungry New Yorkers  
6 every single day, not just around the Thanksgiving  
7 holiday or the Christmas holiday, and so, you  
8 know, this is a fight that we will continue to  
9 make sure that we're part of and, you know, our  
10 goal is to make sure that no New Yorker goes  
11 hungry and we need to be doing that every single  
12 day. This hearing, you know, will continue to  
13 take place around this time of year, but it's not  
14 because this is the only time we're thinking about  
15 people who are less fortunate than we are, and so,  
16 you know, I want to thank Speaker Quinn for being  
17 so supportive on these issues that not many people  
18 like to talk about, being supportive on Intro 696,  
19 while it may not end finger imaging, but will give  
20 us a clear picture on why the administration  
21 continues to put a practice into place that hasn't  
22 ... or hasn't really detected any real fraud or to  
23 their contradiction, you know, will prevent it,  
24 but they're not looking to criminalize, you know,  
25

1  
2 prosecute anyone, and while, you know, our  
3 intention has never been to prosecute hungry  
4 people, it's always been, you know, don't  
5 criminalize them before they come into the door.  
6 And so, you know, I will continue to make sure  
7 that our voice are loud on the issue, and I want  
8 to thank my colleague, Council Member Vann, who  
9 has to go back to his district, for co-Chairing,  
10 and the members of the Committee for hanging out  
11 with me to the end, he usually does. And you  
12 know, when we leave here today and get through  
13 this holiday season, let's not forget that there  
14 will continue to be less fortunate people, and  
15 it's up to us to make sure that we are looking out  
16 for them. Thank you, this hearing is adjourned.

17

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Richard A. Ziats, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ December 19, 2011 \_\_\_\_\_