



Administration
Department of
Social Services

TESTIMONY

Robert Doar, Commissioner
Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services

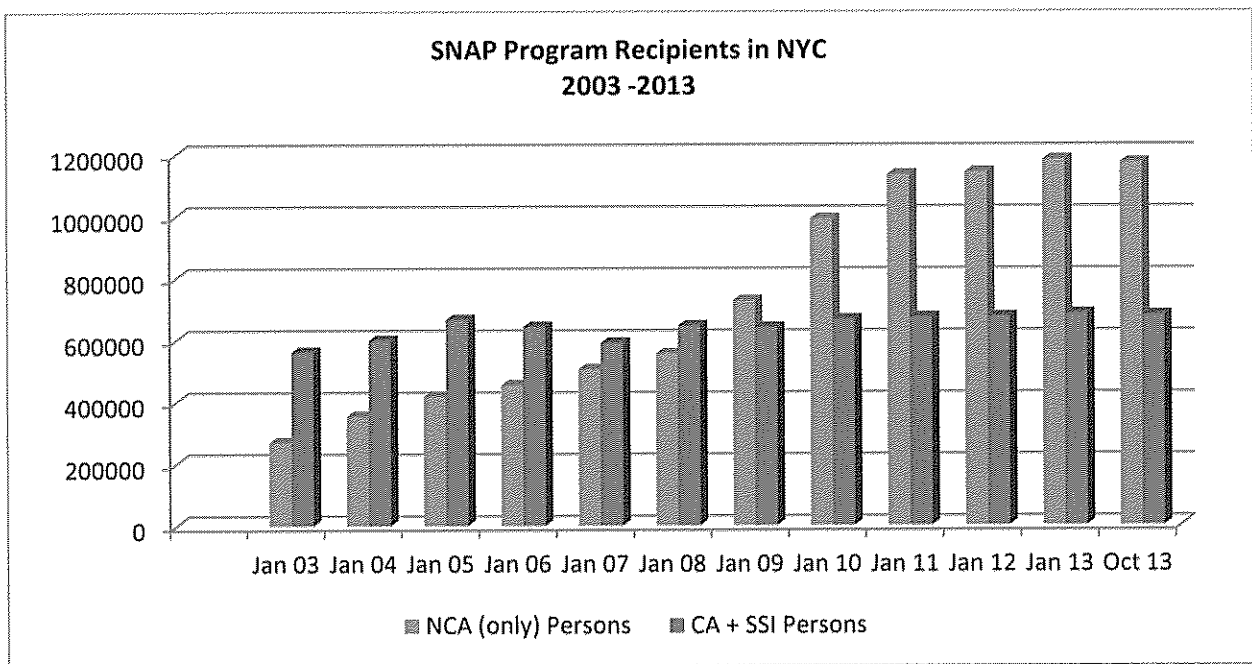
Oversight:
**New York City's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance
& Emergency Food Assistance Programs**

*New York City Council
General Welfare, Women's Issues, and Health Committees*

November 25, 2013

Good afternoon Chairwomen Palma, Ferreras, Arroyo and members of the General Welfare, Women's Issues, and Health Committees. As you know, I am Robert Doar, Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA). Joining me today are two key members of HRA's leadership team; Cecile Noel, Executive Deputy Commissioner of Emergency and Intervention Services, which administers our Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) and Gary Jenkins, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of our Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Chairwoman Palma, for your leadership in making the General Welfare Committee hearings over the years a setting for respectful, open and honest dialogue.

Of the many programs at HRA, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance program is one that has gone through significant changes. The front line and administrative staff at HRA along with community partners have made it possible to enroll and continue to serve more than 1.8 million recipients. Through their commitment and efforts, the Food Stamp Program caseload grew over the past decade by 102 percent, serving more working New Yorkers than ever before. Last year it accounted for over \$3.5 billion in benefits to residents in New York City. In addition, at this time a year ago as we all were responding to the aftermath of Super Storm Sandy, over \$72.5 million in automatic and manual replacement and disaster benefits were distributed to those impacted by the storm.



To conform to Stat/Federal practice, in 1/08 this report began including Food Stamp issuances for the Residential Treatment Services Center and Single Issuances.

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EFAP)

HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program's (EFAP) administers \$8.2 million that results in the distribution of 11.5 million pounds of food to 492 food pantries and community kitchens across the City. In addition, the City Council appropriated \$1.3 million in funds this year to be used for a special initiative that includes the purchase of frozen foods for food pantries and community kitchens.

Following Super Storm Sandy, FEMA granted EFAP \$1.2 million to be utilized for the procurement of additional food to be distributed in the storm's affected areas. This replenished the inventory of food that was distributed as part of our Sandy efforts. Within the first 3 weeks of the storm, EFAP distributed over half a million pounds of food to the affected areas of NYC. Emergency food programs that were recipients of these deliveries reported serving more than 700,000 persons from October 2012 to September 2013.

EFAP has also made significant inroads to improving the nutritional standards of all foods that are provided to their emergency food network. Since 2008, consistent with the City's guidelines, EFAP has ensured that all foods purchased with City funding meet sodium, sugar and trans fat standards that aim to reduce the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. In addition, now all emergency food programs funded by EFAP receive food stamp nutrition education services.

THE SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The Federal Landscape

As I am sure you are aware, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is a federal program and as such, subject to the laws and regulations of Congress and the Administration. For example, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2009, Congress increased the maximum monthly benefits by 13.6 percent. Then, in 2010 as part of the Child Nutrition Reauthorization, a bipartisan supported provision, accepted by the Administration was included which reduced the food stamp benefit in 2013 by \$2.5 billion in order to pay for school nutrition. This reduction of approximately \$10 per household member just went into effect on November 1st of this year.

We can also expect that Congress will make changes to the program as part of the present Farm Bill negotiations. These changes could include a pull back to some of the administrative changes of recent years that allowed for more people to qualify for the program or receive a higher benefit, an increased emphasis on employment and fraud prevention, and a broadened use of electronic benefit transactions (EBT) to purchase food delivered directly to the home.

Outreach into the Community

HRA participates with the federal and state governments to educate the general public about the Food Stamp Program's eligibility guidelines and assists with the application process through our Office of Outreach Services. In Fiscal Year 2013, outreach services were provided at over 980 individual events and we increased our services to immigrants and non-English speaking New Yorkers by partnering with 48 community-based organizations that primarily serve these groups. Outreach staff are on-site regularly at three community sites and monitor the activity at 76 community based organizations that provide facilitated enrollment, 51 which also provide recertification services. They also prescreened over 8,700 applicants. This past year we have also implemented a health campaign to educate New Yorkers about utilizing food stamp benefits to choose and prepare healthy foods.

The Administration of Benefits

Many of the changes to the Food Stamp Program have been about making the application process easier and more convenient for recipients. When I first presented at this hearing seven

years ago, we had just recently created a unified management structure to manage the Food Stamp-only offices and were in the process of implementing the paperless office process in all of our centers. At that time, an initial pilot to include community based organizations into the program's structure was just underway and showing good initial results. We were also getting ready to implement a pilot that would allow individuals to submit their application and supporting documents through the mail or by fax and interview over the phone. Similarly we had just begun rolling out, at two centers, the ability for recipients to recertify over the telephone instead of having the traditional office-based interview.

Now, most applicants can not only file an application by mail and fax but also online at ACCESS NYC (nyc.gov/accessnyc) and they can have their interviews done by telephone instead of coming into an office. This function, our Telephone Interview Processing Services (TIPS) was recently reviewed by staff from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) who were impressed by the customer service provided and saw it as a model for other states. The Council had strongly encouraged the use of a web-based application and now over 45 percent of all applications are submitted online. Some recipients can also recertify using an automated telephone system at any time of the day or night and all can request budget letters over the phone instead of coming into the office.

Re-Engineering to a Self-Service Delivery System Model

Overall Vision

Building off of all of these past improvements, we are now moving even closer to a self-service delivery model that is easier, faster, simpler and further protected from abuse. Our ultimate goal is for almost all applications to be submitted online (at home, at a community-based organization, or anywhere they can access the web) while providing the ability for recipients to access and manage their own cases through secure, online tools. After much planning across our Agency involving the streamlining of business processes, engagement of staff to make the working environment better, talking and visiting with other states that have done similar work, piloting and testing the major concepts, physical alterations to some of our centers, and securing a contract for needed technology upgrades, we are now well underway.

Self-Service Pilots

Since March of this year we have opened eight self-service centers in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program offices throughout the five boroughs that feature computer banks and available staff to assist individuals, if needed, with filing online applications. Once the application is completed, the applicant receives an appointment for a telephone or in-person interview. We have plans to open two more additional sites by the end of the year and these self-service centers are introducing more of our clients to how technology can simplify and expedite their interactions.

ACCESS NYC

Now and over the course of the next few years, we are building virtual client services center into the ACCESS NYC portal to allow clients to go online and perform self-service transactions beyond applying for benefits. Through secure client accounts, recipients will be able to upload and receive an electronic receipt for their documents, recertify, make requests to change basic case information, check the status of their case, and view their benefit amount and the next planned benefit payment.

Throughout this restructuring, we will continue to work with community-based and city agency partners to ensure that New York's most vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, disabled, and those with limited English proficiency, have assistance with the application and other processes if they need it. Towards this goal, we have naturally enlisted the support of our community-based partners and just last week met with a large group to encourage their participation in the effort.

Changing Role for Program Staff

This new model will transform how applicants and recipients interact with our Agency and as such, will also change the role and present duties of HRA staff. With a successful implementation, we envision an ultimate reduction by fiscal year 2017 of more than one thousand employees agency-wide as the need for coming into centers is further reduced. Some staff will be reassigned to the Telephone Interview Services locations and elsewhere in HRA. And, we plan to rely on attrition in order to avoid the need for layoffs and have already begun the process of leaving new vacancies open whenever possible.

Program Integrity

With the present increased participation in the program and our focus on automation, there are additional program integrity challenges. We want those who need the benefits to have access, but also for applicants to know that they must provide accurate information about themselves. We have significantly enhanced our efforts to fight fraud and abuse in on-going food stamp cases, but preventing it is even more cost-effective than detecting it after it occurs. We now have a front-end review team that uses data analytics to flag applications identified as having certain fraud risk factors so that they can be further reviewed. Also, in moving to an online environment and self-service model, we are focusing on smarter ways to prevent application errors, duplicate cases, and ineligible applicants. We plan to implement safeguards common to industries like banking and credit card companies that use questions to verify that the person on the other end of the internet connection is who they say they are and not someone who has stolen another person's identity or lives several states away.

We also have a team dedicated to finding and investigating retailers and recipients who traffic in benefits, usually small, independent retailers. This enhances our efforts to investigate current food stamp cases arising from data matches, data mining, and referrals from the public. As you can see, overall we are working very hard to protect government resources while further streamlining the process for applicants and recipients. I believe this combination has been key to our success and will be even more critical with every step further into reengineering our application process.

INTRO. NO. 1194: ASSESSING AND TRACKING FOOD INSECURITY

Before ending, I would also like to briefly address the Council's proposal for the Administration to fund a new annual survey on food insecurity at the community district level. Currently, as you know, the USDA reports on food insecurity at the national level. The measure is based on an annual supplement to the Current Population Survey, which is administered by the U.S. Census Bureau. The survey includes a series of 10 questions for households without children and 18 questions for households with children about whether they have enough money for adequate food. American households are determined to be "food insecure" if they respond positively to any combination of three or more of the statements on food insecurity. The 10 statements on the survey range from the least severe such as, "we worried that our food would run out before

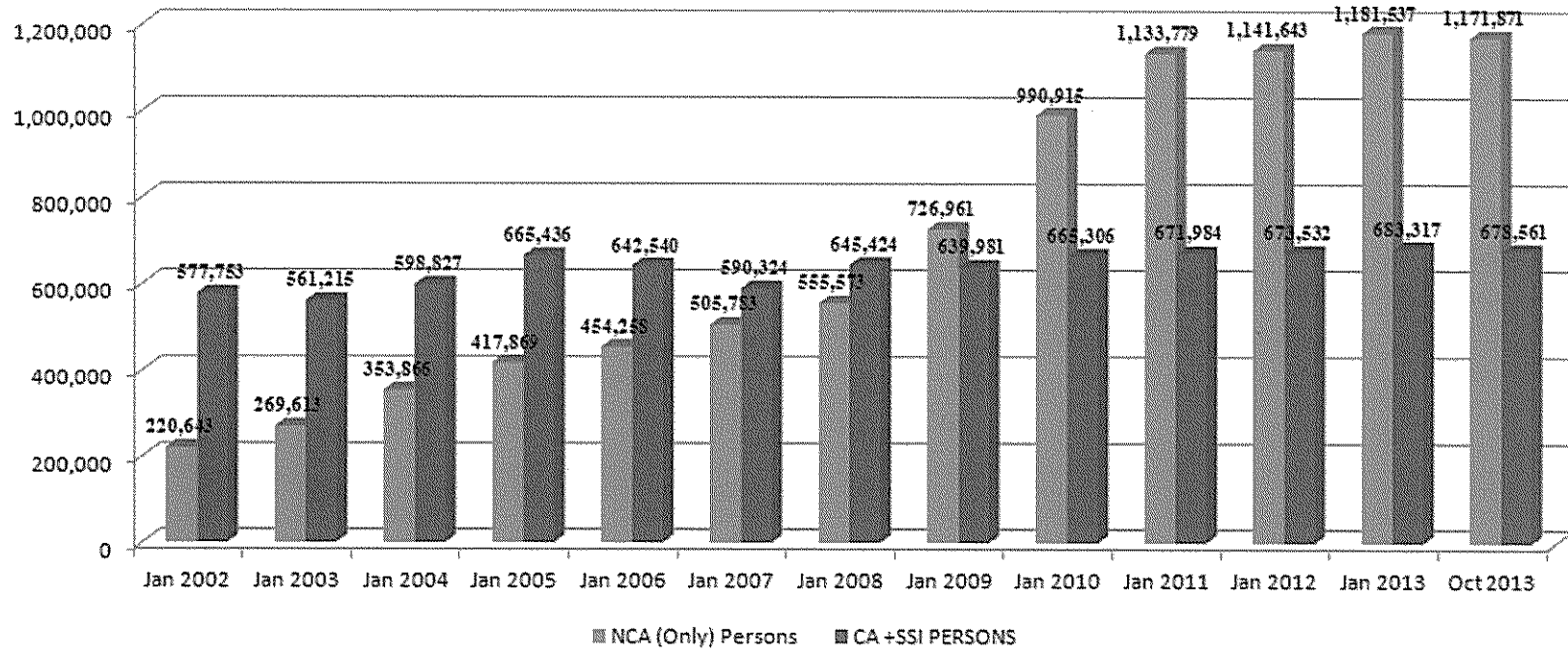
we got money to buy more”, “the food we bought just didn’t last and we didn’t have money to get more”, and “we couldn’t afford to eat balanced meals” to more severe conditions such as “we skipped meals because there wasn’t enough money for food” or “we ate less than we felt we should because there wasn’t enough money for food.” The additional questions for households with children refer specifically to the children in the household. The sample size for the survey is large enough to be representative at the national level, but too small for one-year estimates at the City level.

I also want to be clear about what the food insecurity measure is not. The USDA provides very clear guidance that the food insecurity measure is a household measure and not that of individual hunger. It therefore does not do a good job assessing the adequacy of our emergency food program, for example, because it measures whether the household has enough economic resources for food not whether individuals in the household are hungry.

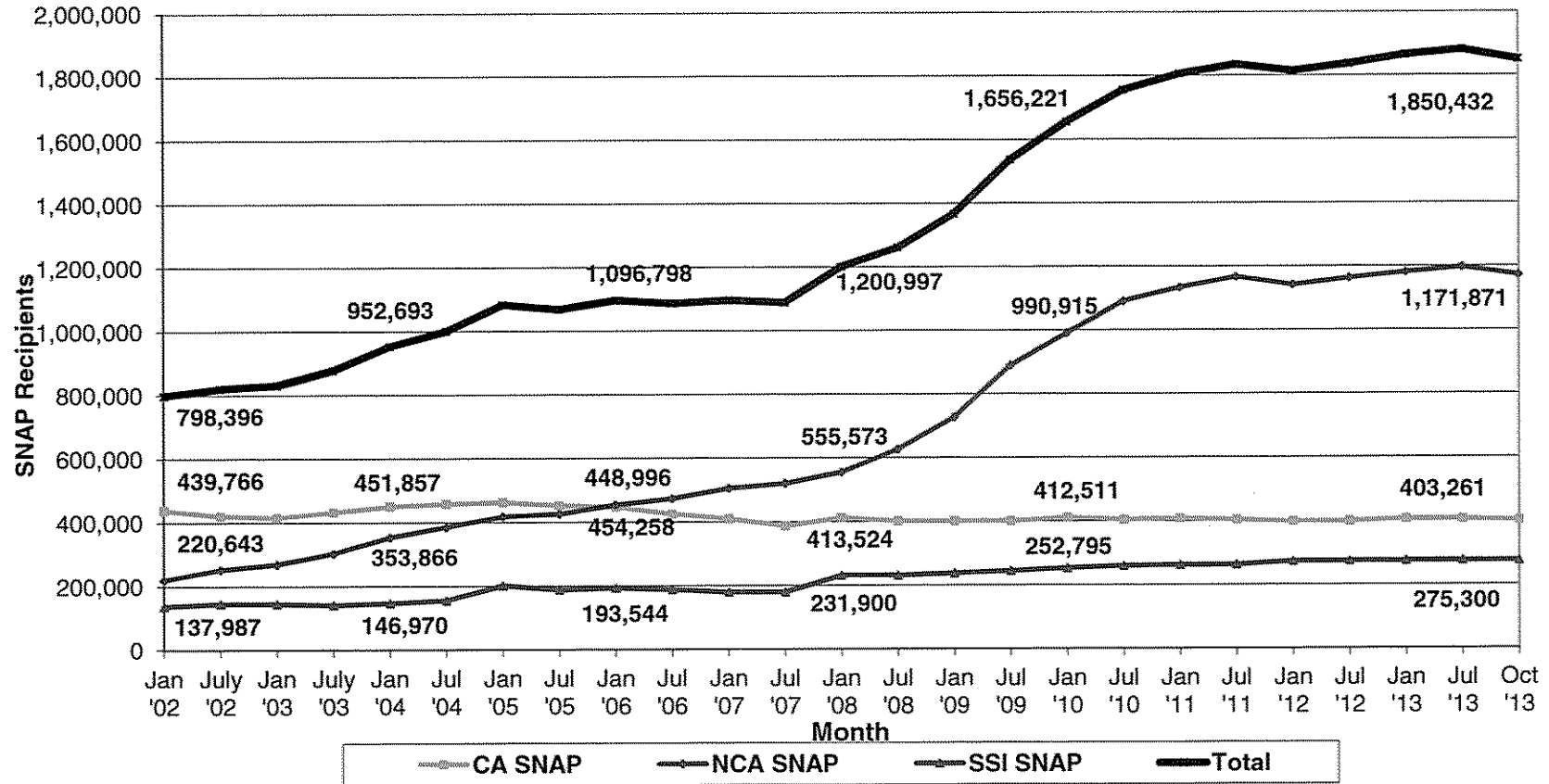
Although there may not be one measure that presently drills down to the question of food insecurity in neighborhoods across the City, by examining the present measures on both food insecurity and present poverty measures, we have the ability to make informed policy decisions. One potential consideration is that a survey of the scope needed for this proposal could cost as much as one million dollars, depending on how it is executed. All of these issues must be taken into consideration as the City contemplates a new local measure.

At this time I look forward to the Council’s questions.

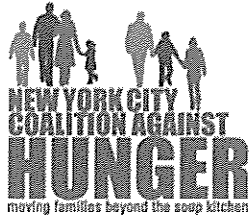
SNAP Program Recipients in NYC 2002 - 2013



NYCSupplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Recipients 2002 - 2013



*CA SNAP caseload includes individuals receiving SSI who are living in a SNAP household that includes both SSI and CA



**Testimony of Joel Berg, Executive Director,
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
Before the New City Council Committees on General Welfare, Women's
Issues, and Health Regarding Int. 1194,
In relation to Assessing Food Security
November 25, 2013**

Introduction and Summary:

Good afternoon. My name is Joel Berg, and I'm Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. My testimony today is on behalf of the more than 1,100 soup kitchens and food pantries in New York City, and the approximately 1.4 million New York City residents who, even before Sandy hit, lived in homes that couldn't afford sufficient food. I thank Chairs Palma, Ferreras, and Arroyo and the rest of the membership of the committees for holding this hearing. We also want to once again thank Council Speaker Quinn and her outstanding staff for their stellar leadership on hunger and food issues

We are pleased to strongly support of Int. 1194 in relation to Assessing Food Security, although I would suggest one slight technical correct to the language.

I am also pleased to provide a number of specific suggestions for how Mayor-Elect de Blasio can work with the Council to reduce hunger and food insecurity in New York, mostly by implementing plans he has previously proposed to increase utilization of existing, federally-funded, nutrition assistance programs. We also strongly support the Mayor-elect's proposal to implement universal pre-k, noting that such a policy not only aids education, but also provides nutritious meals to children at a vital stage in their development.

Background: New York City's Structurally Broken Economy, Soaring Poverty, and Unconscionable Inequality Result in Significant Food Insecurity

While the poverty rate in the U.S. stayed essentially flat at a very high plateau in the U.S over 2011 and 2012, poverty increased by five percent in New York City, according to recently released data from the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. One in five New Yorkers now live below the federal poverty line – \$19,090 for a family a three – equaling 1.7 million impoverished residents, a number greater than the entire population of the city of Philadelphia.

Yet, according to *Forbes*, over the last two years, the collective net worth of the city's 53 wealthiest billionaires rose from \$210 billion to \$277 billion – a 31 percent jump. In contrast, the municipal budget for the entire City of New York (which pays for City parks, roads, schools, firefighters, police, health protections, social services, etc.) is now \$70 billion, meaning that the 53 wealthiest New Yorkers now have four times the money of the entire City budget.

Median household annual income in the City is now \$50,895 and a person working full-time at the current minimum wage in New York of \$7.25 per hour would earn \$15,080. That means that the 53 wealthiest New York City billionaires now have as much money as five million average families and 17 million minimum wage workers.

This new data provides proof positive that New York City is indeed extraordinarily divided by income and that we do have two entirely different cities co-existing side-by-side. When a few dozen billionaires have more money than five million average New York families, it is clear that our economy is no longer the engine of opportunity that previously enabled so many New Yorkers – including my grandparents and great-grandparents – to advance through hard work and determination.

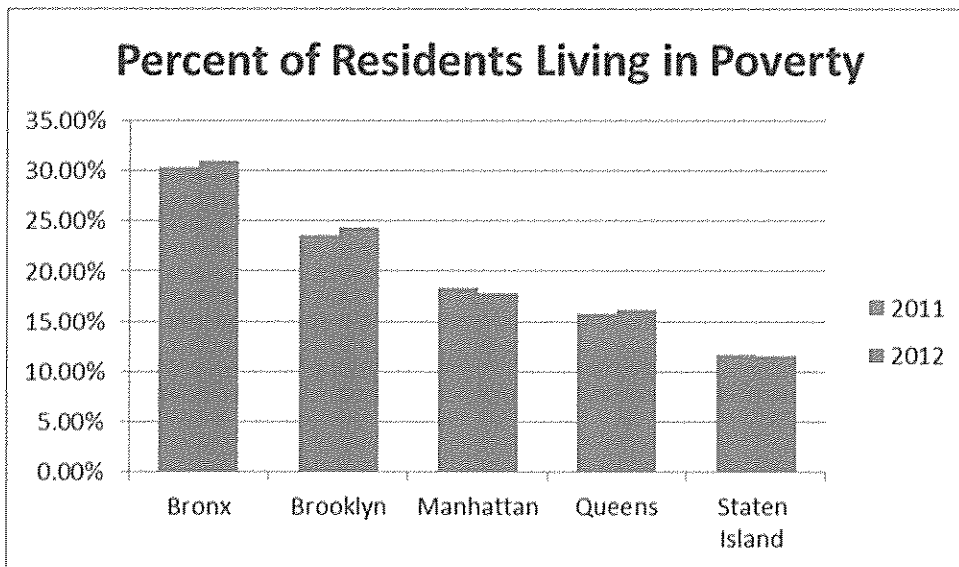
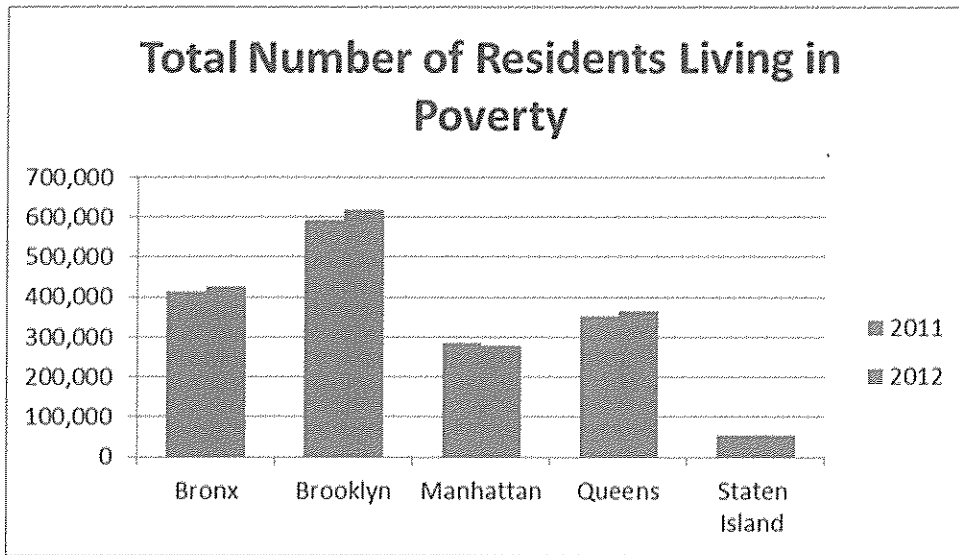
The very trends that are increasing poverty – flat wages, high rates of unemployment and underemployment, and sky-high rents – are the same ones that are eviscerating the middle class. These trends can only be reversed by an entirely new set of federal, state, and city policies.

The Gini Index of inequality is now .538 for all of New York City and .596 for the borough of Manhattan, compared to .483 in El Salvador, .475 nationwide in the U.S., .472 in Mexico, and .364 in Sri Lanka. The higher the Gini Index, the greater the inequality, meaning the city's inequality continues to be greater than that of developing world nations like Mexico and Sri Lanka. The Big Apple is now the inequality capitol of the world and the poster case for the vanishing middle class. While we should always be proud that we lead the world in culture, finance, and fashion, we should be ashamed that we outrank developing nations in inequality.

As the charts below demonstrate, over the last two years, the number and/or the percentage of people in poverty rose in three of the five boroughs. Bronx has a poverty rate of 31.3 percent, and a child poverty rate of 44.5 percent, meaning almost one third of residents in the Bronx are poor and almost half of all children in the Bronx live in poverty.

While Bronx County still has the highest poverty rate and child poverty rate out of any urban county in the U.S, the poverty hike in Queens – formerly a bedrock middle class borough – is staggering. This new data proves yet again that soaring poverty and a disappearing middle class are truly a city-wide problems that require citywide solutions.

The term “deep poverty” refers to households earning less than half the poverty rate, or below, equaling less than \$9,545 annually for a family of three. While other cities (including Philadelphia) have a somewhat higher percentage of people in deep poverty than New York City, the Big Apple has, by far, the largest raw number – 764,294 or 201 times the capacity of the Metropolitan Opera House.



If a full-time worker supported one or more children on a salary at the current minimum wage in New York, the family would live below the poverty line. The state’s minimum wage rate is scheduled to rise to \$9 per hour by 2016, but if a single parent with two children earned that much, the family would still be below the poverty line.

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger deeply supports the ideal of “opportunity capitalism,” in which people who work hard and play by the rules are able to advance economically, generate wealth for the economy as a whole, and build a better life for their children and grandchildren. However, we are worried that the economy is increasingly being governed by “crony capitalism,” in which personal wealth is generated largely through insider dealing and extra tax cuts which harm the economy as a whole, while cutting off avenues of opportunity for the middle class and those striving to enter the middle class. When so many

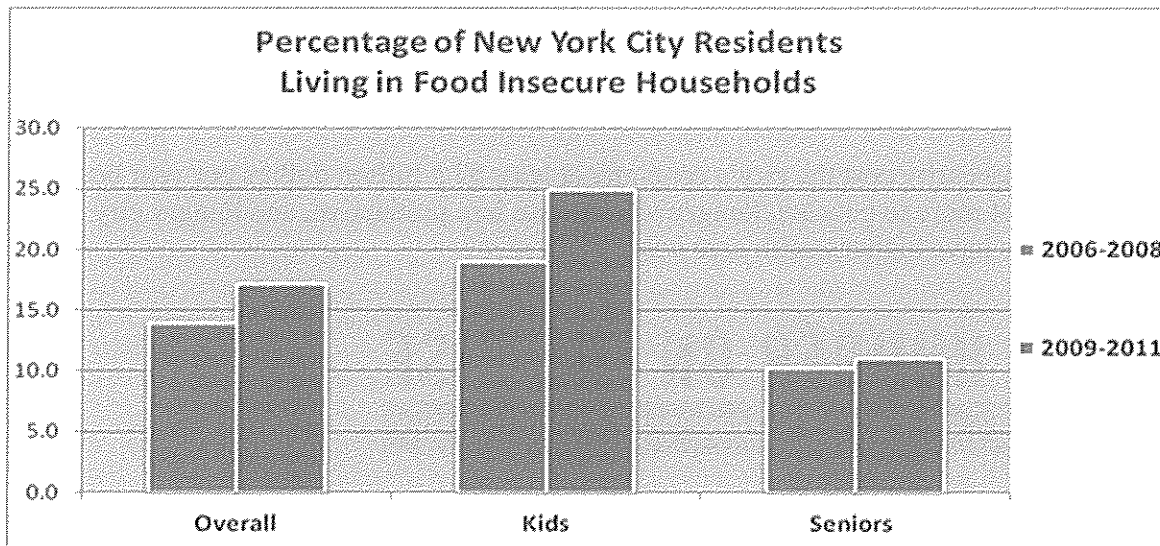
citizens are too poor to afford the basic goods and services produced by the private sector, the economy is dragged down as a whole. Thus, reducing poverty and hunger is a prerequisite for rebuilding the middle class and restoring America's economic competitiveness.

The city's official unemployment rate was 8.6 percent in August of 2013, much higher than the State rate of 7.6 percent and national rate of 7.3 percent. Bronx County has, by far, the state's highest unemployment rate at 11.9 percent.

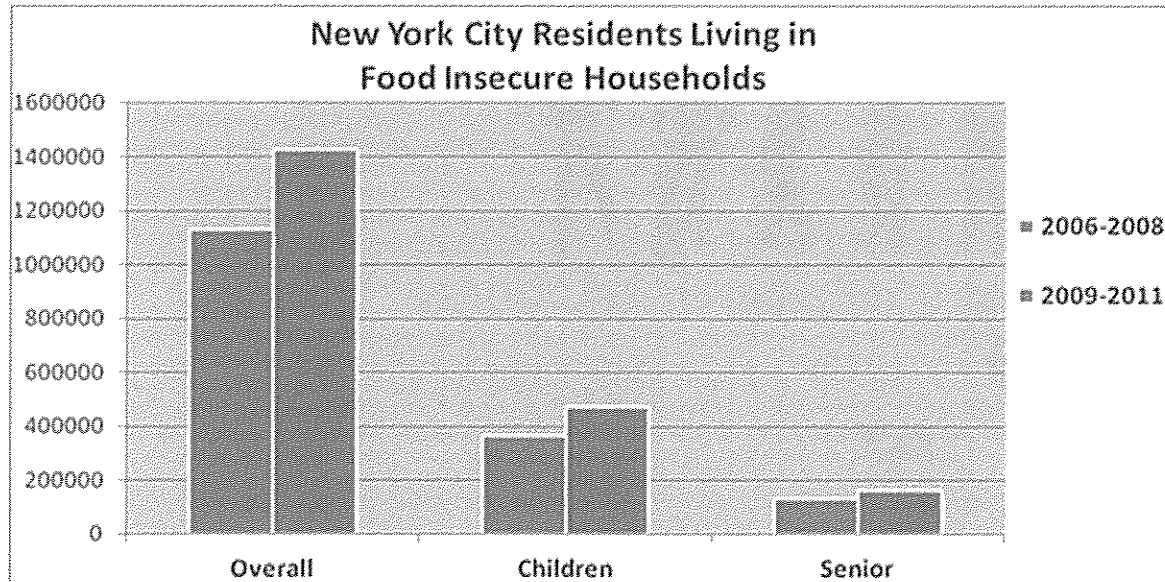
But, high as the local unemployment rate is, it doesn't even account for the large number of New Yorkers who have stopped looking for work. A more comprehensive way to consider the true level of unemployment in the city is to consider the labor force participation rate, which measures the number of people who are actually employed. The labor force participation rate was 59.1 percent citywide and 51.3 percent in the Bronx, which means that, of people 16 years and older, about 40 percent citywide and 50 percent in the Bronx were not in the civilian labor force at all. Even accounting for the reality that some of those not working are full-time students, full-time parents, people who are too disabled to work, and people who are retired, the numbers still demonstrate that the actual number of people who want to work in the city, but can't find jobs, dwarfs the official unemployment rate.

Given that poverty, unemployment and under-employment are the main causes of domestic food insecurity and hunger, it is no surprise that hunger and food insecurity soared citywide even before Superstorm Sandy, and have likely surged since then, according to data collected and compiled by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. Before the storm, more than 1.4 million New Yorkers – one in six – lived in households without enough food, determined by the federal government to be food insecure, a new record high since the federal government started formally measuring the problem in 1997. One in four of the city's children – nearly half a million – lived in households that lacked sufficient food. One in 10 seniors struggled against hunger. These problems will worsen significantly if massive federal nutrition assistance cuts already scheduled for November 1, as well as other massive cuts proposed in the federal Farm Bill, become reality.

Since 2006, food insecurity and hunger in New York City have worsened by every measure. The percentage of overall New Yorkers who are food insecure, including children under 16, and seniors over 60, increased significantly.



The raw numbers of food insecure New Yorkers, children, and seniors also soared.



While most developed, Western countries have essentially eliminated hunger and food insecurity, both are surging in New York City, despite the city's concentration of extreme wealth.

The childhood hunger numbers are particularly disturbing. During 2008-2010, fully 474,000 NYC children lived in food insecure homes, in which the family could not afford a full supply of food throughout the year. This represents a 37 percent increase from 1995-1997, when only 294,000, or 15 percent, of the city's children lived in such households. For people who are not experts in hunger and poverty work, it might be hard to believe that 26 percent of the city's children currently face food insecurity. The child food insecurity numbers compare closely to the federal government's child poverty numbers, which indicated a 24.8 percent child poverty rate citywide in 2011. The highest child poverty rate in any urban county in the entire U.S. was found in the Bronx, at a staggering 44.4 percent. The fact nearly half of all children in the Bronx live

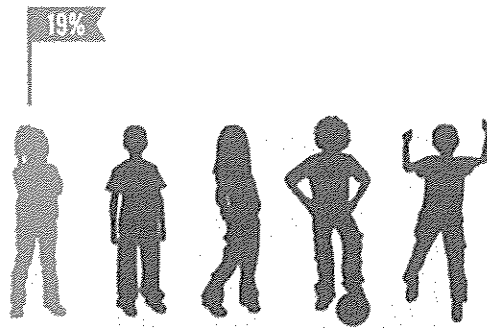
in poverty proves a stark rebuttal to those, including Mayor Bloomberg, who trumpet the supposed strength of the city's economy. All this data further proves that the city's economic and social policies are failing in fundamental ways.

Hunger and food insecurity cost the city's economy at least \$2.5 billion dollars per year because hungry children cost more to educate, hungry workers are less productive, and hungry city residents of all ages have higher health care costs.

CHILD HUNGER ON THE RISE

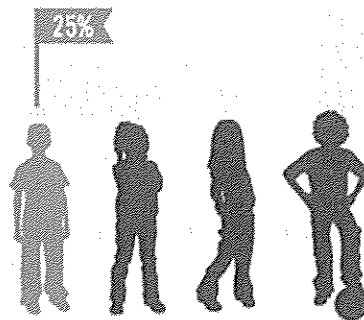
NUMBER OF NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN LIVING IN FOOD INSECURE HOMES

2006 - 2008



From 2006-2008, 1 in 5 NYC children lived in food insecure homes.

2009 - 2011

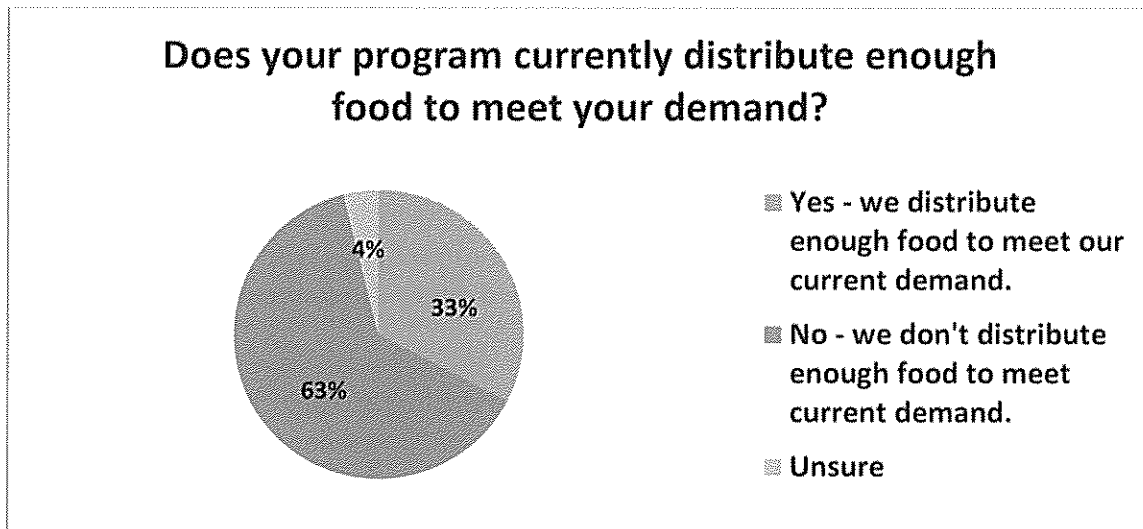


From 2009-2011, 1 in 4 NYC children lived in food insecure homes.

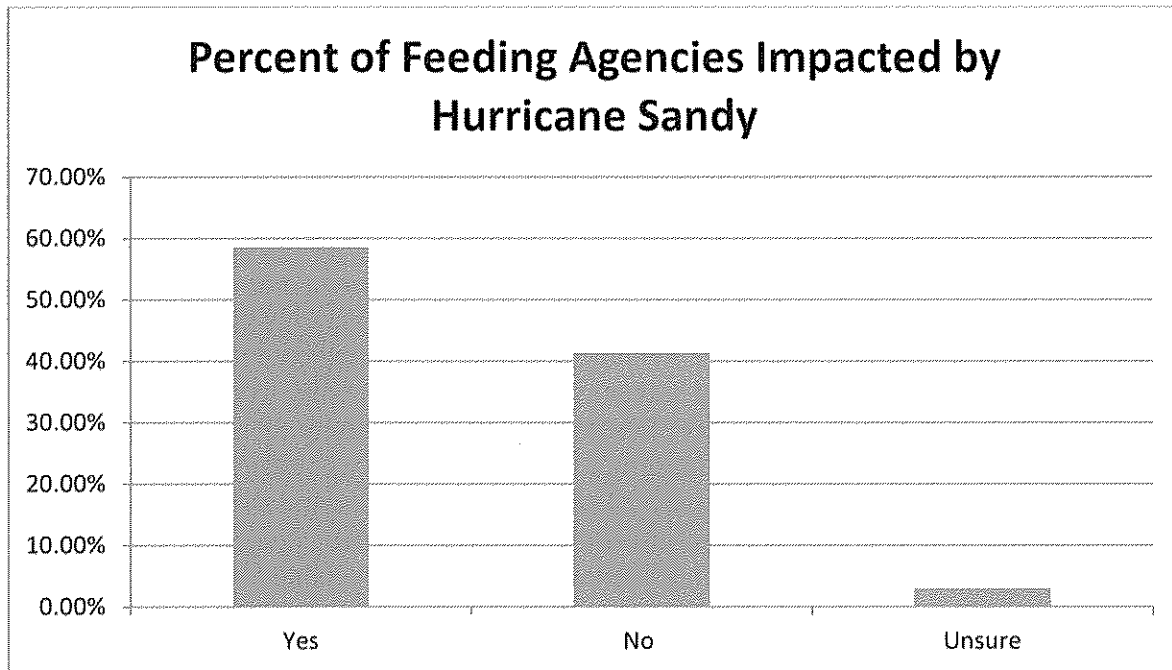
USDA DATA ANALYZED BY NEW YORK CITY COALITION AGAINST HUNGER ©NOVEMBER 2012

There are more than 1,100 non-profit soup kitchens and food pantries citywide that distribute a mix of government and privately-donated food to try to fill in the gaps in the anti-hunger safety net. In 2012, before Superstorm Sandy, pantries and kitchens citywide faced a five percent spike in demand, on top of increases of 12 percent in 2011, 7 percent in 2010, and 29 percent in 2009.

Almost 11 percent of the City’s pantries and kitchens who responded to a 2012 survey said they knew of a food pantry, soup kitchen, or brown bag program that shut down or closed for business in the past year. 69 percent of agencies reported a decrease in government / public funding for food. While some programs may have closed because of staffing or other administrative reasons, decreases in funding for feeding programs were likely the main cause of the closings. In fact, the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) which is administered through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) was cut by 40 percent last year and has remained at the decreased level throughout the current funding cycle. (Funds for this vital program were further cut by sequestration). This source of funding is a tremendous resource for Emergency Food Providers (EFPs) and its decrease had a drastic impact on their ability to meet the needs of low-income and impoverished New Yorkers. Furthermore, approximately 53 percent of the respondents reported a decrease in private funding for food. Even though many of the staff and volunteers at EFPs are low-income themselves, 34 percent of EFPs reported their staff or volunteers sometimes use their own personal money to fund their feeding programs. As a result, as the chart below demonstrates, 63 percent of feeding agencies were unable to distribute enough food to meet current demand, up from 62 percent in 2011 and 51 percent in 2010.



Superstorm Sandy made the situation even worse. In a post-Sandy survey conducted by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, as the chart below demonstrates, more than half the responding agencies said they were impacted by the storm.



Pantries and kitchens that were directly impacted experienced a number of problems with operating their programs. Over 35 percent of agencies reported food ruined either due to direct wind, water, and/or a loss of power. A large number of agencies, almost 75 percent, were forced to close or limit their hours of operation.

Agencies that were directly impacted experienced a number of problems with operating their programs. Over 35 percent of agencies reported food ruined either due to direct wind, water, and/or a loss of power.

A large number of agencies, almost 75 percent, were forced to close or limit their hours of operation. Although many were back to pre-storm service as of November 16th 2012, some were not. An enormous amount of food aid poured into the city in the weeks following the storm, but dried up, even as the poverty and hunger needs remained. The Paul Ryans' of the world need to understand that non-profit charities cannot possibly meet the need created by failed economic policies and massive social service cut-backs.

Ignoring those realities, federal lawmakers are subjecting federal nutrition assistance programs to the worst attacks on them in decades.

The city's food pantries and soup kitchens faced particularly severe cuts in funding through the federal FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), which suffered through both long-term, multi-year budget cuts as well as through more recent budget cuts as a result of sequestration.

The sequestration is also slashing funding for the nutrition assistance that pregnant women and infants get from the WIC program and that seniors receive through meals-on-wheels.

To make matters even worse, all 1.8 million New York City residents who rely on SNAP (formerly food stamps) lost some of their already meager benefits on November 1st. The average family of three lost \$29 per month, more than 20 meals monthly. The city's economy is losing more than \$200 million in federal aid in the next year.

On top of all that, the House and Senate passed Farm Bills further slashing SNAP by another \$40 billion and \$4 billion, respectively. Insane. Immoral. We hope the Council continues to play a forceful leadership role in opposing such cuts.

Support for Int. 1194

We strongly support Int. 1194. We agree with Mayor Bloomberg's mantra: "If you can't measure it, you can't manage it." Accurate data on hunger and food insecurity is absolutely necessary for the formulation and implementation of effective public policies and program.

As noted above, the federal government does already collect food security data each year, and it is analyzed at the city level by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger. The City government should be required to also conduct that analysis and report the results to the public. Thus, we would recommend that this legislative language be clarified that the City would fulfill its obligations if it analyzes and reports on existing federal data. If the City chooses to also collect its own data, that should be encouraged, but not required, particularly if the funding required to collect new data was taken out of other vital programs.

Support for Universal Pre-K as a Strategy to Combat Child Hunger

We strongly support the Mayor-elect's proposal to marginally raise taxes on the wealthy to pay for universal pre-k.

But what about the argument that increasing wealth at the top is a chief source of tax revenue needed to fund vital services? That's not true.. Most analyses of tax payments by the wealthy focus only on income taxes, which are marginally progressive, and ignore sales and residential property taxes, which are generally regressive.

When total tax burdens are considered, the wealthiest New Yorkers pay less into the system than everyone else. According to the Fiscal Policy Institute, in 2010, the top one percent of earners in the city (households earning more than \$567,253 annually), earned 37 percent of the city's income, and paid only 28 percent of the tax revenues. Yet the lowest 20 percent of households (earning below \$9,131) earned the same percentage of the city's income as the percentage of the city's taxes they paid. The next lowest 20 percent (earning below \$20,440) actually paid a greater share of taxes than their share of income.

Even if the modest tax hike proposed by Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio to pay for universal pre-k – an increase in the city income tax rate from 3.9 to 4.4 percent only for those with incomes over \$500,000 annually – were to become law, the wealthiest would still pay a share of taxes far lower than their share of income. Not only does pre-k boost the educational achievement of children and enable parents who can't afford nannies to go to work, it provides nutritious

breakfast and lunches to hungry kids at one of the most vulnerable times in their lives. That's why the New York City Coalition Against Hunger strongly supports the Mayor-elect's universal pre-k proposal.

Mayor-elect de Blasio's Anti-Hunger Proposals

Mayor-elect de Blasio has previously proposed that significantly reducing hunger and improving food security, mostly by implementing plans he has previously proposed to increase utilization of existing, federally-funded, nutrition assistance programs. He has proposed that the City:

- Ensure that people applying for nutrition benefits do not face delays when they apply, an often confused and bureaucratic process highlighted by delays during the after-math of Sandy.
- Streamline SNAP applications by working with Albany to simplify the application process for food assistance programs, including a streamlined application for the elderly.
- Take full advantage of state and federal initiatives and waivers — including working for a 36-month recertification period, instead of one year — and expand options that enable individuals to apply for programs simultaneously.
- Ensure that all HRA staff members have access to fax machines, Xerox machines, the Internet, computers that can accept online applications, and other appropriate technologies.
- The city needs to expand media and public outreach campaigns to increase participation in all income and food assistance programs. As the city undertakes major outreach to sign up individuals for Medicaid and other Affordable Care Act programs, outreach staff hired for that effort should also be signing qualifying individuals for other assistance programs. Data sharing among all programs needs to be improved to speed approval and identify people who are eligible but not participating in other programs.
- Expand pilot projects that sign up people online at community-based organizations. The New York City Coalition was an original partner with the City in the launch of the Paperless Office System (POS) Project which has enrolled 16,000 in SNAP and more than 2,500 people in Medicaid as of April 2012. It should expand to additional nonprofit sites, so trusted CBOs in every neighborhood and community can help sign up eligible people and households for income, health and nutrition programs.
- Make free school lunch available to all public school children at most city schools by taking advantage of the new Community Eligibility Option (CEO) for low-income school districts. This program would take advantage of the federal Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which the DOE has failed to do. This allows schools to replace the current inefficient, application-based system for school lunches with a paperless data-driven system that allows students to eat free of charge and free of stigma.

- Ensure that City’s welfare-to-work program emphasizes job creation, job training and education, while stopping efforts to divert individuals from accessing cash assistance.

The New York City Coalition Against Hunger enthusiastically supports as those proposals and very much looks forward to working with the new Mayor and the Council to implement them.

Other Ways the Mayor and the Council can Work Together to Fight Hunger

We are pleased to provide a number of specific suggestions for how Mayor-Elect de Blasio can work with the Council to reduce hunger and food insecurity in New York, mostly by implementing plans he has previously proposed to increase utilization of existing, federally-funded, nutrition assistance programs.

Those proposals are all highly compatible with Food Secure New York City, our comprehensive plan to create jobs, reduce poverty, improve nutrition, slash hunger, and strengthen food systems in all five boroughs of the City. The plan is summarized below and the full plan is available at <http://www.nyccah.org/foodsecurenyc2018>

I. Generate living wage jobs citywide, launch a food jobs initiative, and slash poverty.

- Enable one or more adults in distressed households to obtain and keep living wage employment.
- Push for federal, state, and city legislation to increase wages and request business leaders to voluntarily create jobs and raise wages.
- Launch economic development activities in all neighborhoods across the five boroughs focused on creating a large number of new, living wage jobs in a variety of sectors.

Launch a comprehensive “Good Food, Good Jobs” initiative to capture more of the \$30 billion spent by NYC residents, annually, on food.

- Make food jobs a central component of the city’s job creation strategy.
- Grow, process, and manufacture more food right here in NYC.
- Provide more and better-targeted seed money to food jobs projects, bolster food processing, expand community based technical assistance, and invest in urban aquaculture.
- Fix welfare reform to focus on creating living wage jobs and reducing poverty.
- Enact an assets empowerment agenda.

II. Ensure an adequate nutrition assistance safety net and boost upward mobility by expanding access to SNAP, school breakfast, WIC, and summer meals benefits.

- Enable all eligible people to obtain the multiple benefits for which they are eligible through a single, easy-to-complete, application, available online in paper form, and by phone.
- Launch a comprehensive effort to increase the number of eligible families – especially working families – who receive SNAP. Participation should be increased to 90 percent by the end of the next Mayoral term.
- Make it a top priority to provide free breakfast to all New York City school children by ensuring that every school provides either in-classroom or grab-and-go breakfast.
- Mandate universal, free school lunches.
- Make it a priority to continue to improve both the taste and nutritional quality of school lunches and breakfasts.
- Enact an action plan to dramatically increase the use of federally-funded summer meals.
- Enact an action plan to expand the use of federally-funded after-school snacks and suppers.
- Enact an action plan to increase the use of WIC benefits by eligible pregnant woman and infants.
- Ensure adequate funding and support for the city’s Emergency Food Providers (EFPs).
- Ensure that senior meals programs are adequately funded.

III. Create a public/private food policy council coordinated by a strengthened, fully-staffed City Office of Food, Hunger & Nutrition Policy.

- Create and fully-staffed City Office of Food, Hunger & Nutrition Policy. The new office will implement a public/private Food Policy Council.
- The office will enable the city to upgrade its data collection and reporting to include key hunger-related data on areas including; food insecurity, SNAP, child nutrition programs, senior meals, and soup kitchens and food pantries.
- The office will receive a clear mandate to incorporate food policy issues into all City planning and programming activities.

IV. Guarantee access to affordable, nutritious food in every neighborhood, starting with pilot “food and nutrition zones.”

- Alleviate food deserts by implementing a comprehensive plan to ensure an adequate supply of nutritious, diverse, convenient, affordable food, and clean and free drinking water, in every neighborhood of the city.

- Expand the green cart program.
- Work with key stakeholders to implement one or more Food and Nutrition Zone(s) to saturate the targeted neighborhood(s) with every possible food access, anti-hunger, nutrition, obesity-reduction strategy known.
- Develop a “food access index” to take into account both the physical availability, and economic affordability of, nutritious foods.

V. Bolster mutual self-interest between consumers who eat food and the people who grow, pick, process, manufacture, warehouse, and sell food.

- Lead a comprehensive, multi-sector initiative to ensure that producers benefit from reductions in hunger and improvements in nutrition.
- Ensure New York consumers benefit from a vibrant regional food production and manufacturing sector.
- Increase the use of SNAP and WIC at Farmers’ Markets.

VI. Improve the sustainability with which food and food-related packaging is created, distributed, consumed, and disposed.

- Work with the state to lead a comprehensive multi-sector initiative making regional food production and distribution more environmentally sustainable.

VII. Better prepare the city for the food-related impact of disasters.

- Provide the funding and technical assistance necessary to help food pantries and soup kitchens undertake infrastructure and capacity building activities. This will improve their everyday operations and ability to respond to future disasters.
- Lead an effort to help food stores in areas hard-hit by Superstorm Sandy to “Build Back Better” with healthier food choices.
- Commit to fully-utilizing all federal nutrition related disaster aid in the event of any future disaster.

VIII. Comprehensively use AmeriCorps national service participants and community volunteers to advance all of the above goals.

- The next Mayor should make Civic Corps a centerpiece of the city’s anti-hunger strategy.
- The next Mayor should promote www.hungervolunteer.org and other tools to improve the way that New Yorkers volunteer to fight hunger.



Testimony of Kate MacKenzie, MS, RD, Director of Policy and Government Relations
New York City Council Joint Hearing
of the Committees on General Welfare, Women's Issues, and Health
November 26, 2013

Int 1194-2013 A Local Law to amend the New York City charter and the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to assessing food security.

T2013-7133 Oversight - Hunger in NYC

Good afternoon Chairpersons Palma, Ferreras and Arroyo. Thank you for holding this hearing today to address hunger in NYC and to discuss Intro 1194. As you know, these are very hard times for hungry and food insecure New Yorkers. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you what City Harvest is seeing and what we are doing about it. Additionally, I'd like to offer some suggestions for actions the City can take to respond to the growing demand and need for emergency food. I will conclude with considerations for the proposed legislation on assessing food security.

Hunger and Food Insecurity

On Saturday, City Harvest distributed more than ~~XXX~~^{20K} pounds of acorn squash, cabbage, grapefruit, onions, and sweet potatoes at our Mobile Market in Washington Heights/Inwood at the Dyckman House. This market has nearly doubled the number of people it serves since opening in November 2011. Tomorrow, we have two Mobile Markets in the Bronx. Two weeks ago we established a mobile market at St. Mary's Houses, which is available to all residents of zip code 10463 and have already enrolled nearly 500 residents. The longest standing market in Melrose consistently serves more than 500 households twice a month. These farmers market style free food distributions are also in Northwest Queens, Bed Stuy, and Stapleton. At each market, residents begin lining up hours before the opening, despite the weather conditions, which is a clear visual of just how challenging it is for many of our neighbors to put healthy food on the table. Between June and September, there was a 27% increase in the number of new families seeking food at our Melrose Mobile Market in the South Bronx – and longer lines have become the norm at the markets in each of our Healthy Neighborhoods. To help satisfy the growing demand, earlier this month we opened a second Mobile Market in the South Bronx and our program plan calls for a new market in Queens in early 2014. As a result of this increased need, City Harvest is committed to an immediate 15% increase in the amount of food that we will distribute through the Mobile Markets in the coming months.

Over the last five years, the need for emergency food has skyrocketed. New York State has seen a 40% increase in food insecurity since the early 2000's.¹ Four of the five boroughs saw an increase in food insecurity this past year:

- Bronx: 23% of people are facing food insecurity (up from 20%)
- Brooklyn: 20% of people are facing food insecurity (up from 18%)
- Manhattan: 16% of people are facing food insecurity (up from 13%)
- Queens: 14% of people are facing food insecurity (up from 13%)
- Nearly one in four NYC children lives in a food insecure household.²

¹ Coleman-Jensen, Alisha, Mark Nord, and Anita Singh. Household Food Security in the United States in 2012, ERR-155, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, September 2013.

We've examined data on the number of visits made to our network of soup kitchens and food pantries and the findings are quite alarming. For example, programs in the Bronx have seen 72% more visits now than they did five years ago, while partners in Brooklyn have seen a 42% increase. In this time, City Harvest has risen to the challenge – more than doubling our annual food deliveries in response to the needs of our neighbors.

The recent SNAP cuts you have heard about have begun to impact the people we serve. On November 1, nearly two million New Yorkers saw a cut in their monthly benefits by an average of \$30-\$50 per household. In the days leading up to the cuts, City Harvest worked with our network of soup kitchens and food pantries to spread the word about the looming decrease in benefits. By November 4, we had already received numerous calls from New Yorkers who didn't know how they were going to make ends meet. For many, the initial reaction may likely be to skip meals and/or cut back on their food to provide for their children. However, in the coming weeks and months, we expect to see the full impact of these cuts as more people turn to the emergency food programs that City Harvest serves.

With long-term unemployment benefits set to expire on January 1, and the potential for much larger SNAP cuts on the table as part of the Farm Bill negotiations in Congress, we're bracing for a substantial increase in demand. We've already committed to increasing our Mobile Market distributions and are closely monitoring the need at soup kitchens and food pantries to determine how best to further respond. We also know that private charity cannot and should not shoulder this weight alone. NYC funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program has been flat for years. SNAP participation remains grossly high. While the SNAP issue is a Federal issue, City Hall and City Council should be very vocal in expressing their opposition to these cuts. It is not just people that are and will continue to suffer, but business as well. Forming broad and diverse coalitions of partners to influence decisions in Washington is sorely needed.

Assessing Food Security in Food Metrics Report

City Harvest is pleased to see the call for assessing food security. The Food Metrics report is a phenomenal resource that transparently provides key information useful in planning and programming, and we commend the Council for ensuring its production. That said, we wish to advise the Council on the complicated process of obtaining information on food security, as it is far from simple.

One of the most frustrating and challenging things about working to address hunger and food insecurity is that it is so difficult to measure. It is a condition that is subjective, when so many other conditions, from diseases like obesity and heart disease, to status's like poverty and graduation rates are objective. Here is

² Gundersen, C., E. Waxman, E. Engelhard, A. Satoh & N. Chawla. Map the Meal Gap 2013: A report on county and congressional district level food insecurity and county food cost in the United States in 2011. Feeding America, 2013

an example. Each year, the U.S. Census Bureau includes an 18 question supplement to the monthly Current Population Survey. USDA's Economic Research Service sponsors the annual survey and compiles and analyzes the responses. The 2012 food security survey covered 43,942 households comprising a representative sample of the U.S. civilian population of 122 million households. Each question asks whether the condition or behavior occurred at any time during the previous 12 months and specifies a lack of money and other resources to obtain food as the reason. Voluntary fasting or dieting to lose weight are thereby excluded from the measure. The series includes three questions about food conditions of the household as a whole and seven about food conditions of adults in the household and, if there are children present in the household, an additional eight questions about their food conditions. The food security status of each interviewed household is determined by the number of food insecure conditions and behaviors the household reports. Households are classified as food secure if they report no food-insecure conditions or if they report only one or two food-insecure conditions. They are classified as food insecure if they report three or more food insecure conditions. Households are classified as having food-insecure children if they report two or more food-insecure conditions among the children. Food-insecure households are further classified as having either low food security or very low food security. The very low food security category identifies households in which food intake of one or more members was reduced and eating patterns disrupted because of insufficient money and other resources for food. Households without children are classified as having very low food security if they report six or more food-insecure conditions. Households with children age 0-17 are classified as having very low food security if they report eight or more food-insecure conditions, including conditions among both adults and children. They are further classified as having very low food security among children if they report five or more food-insecure conditions among the children (that is, if they respond affirmatively to five or more of questions 11-18). Low and very low food security differ in the extent and character of the adjustments the household makes to its eating patterns and food intake. Households classified as having low food security have reported multiple indications of food access problems and reduced diet quality, but typically have reported few, if any, indications of reduced food intake. Those classified as having very low food security have reported multiple indications of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to inadequate resources for food. In most, but not all households with very low food security, the survey respondent reported that he or she was hungry at some time during the year but did not eat because there was not enough money for food.ⁱ

Suffice to say, this is a very complex process and requires a large sample size and resources to complete.

Alternatively, Feeding America has recently conducted research that pulls from existing census data sets (poverty, unemployment, median income, % African American, % Hispanic, home ownership) to arrive at a very close predictor of food insecurity. This approach is much less labor intensive and still gives a valid

estimate of food insecurity. What's more is that this data is available at the county and even sub-county level, which enables variation and disparities to be pronounced. This is the data that City Harvest relies on to give a city level perspective on food insecurity. This data is attached.

City Harvest is deeply interested in working with the Council and Administration to determine an appropriate methodology for assessing food insecurity. It is an important indicator to track, and to respond to from a policy and programming perspective.

Again, thank you for your attention to these urgent matters and for all your work on to improve the lives and conditions of low-income New Yorkers.

Kate MacKenzie, M.S., R.D
Director of Policy and Government Relations
kmackenzie@cityharvest.org
646-412-0652

ⁱ DeNavas Walt, C., B.D. Proctor, & J.C. Smith. Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2012 (2013). U.S. Census Bureau.

Map the Meal Gap (MMG)

MMG provides county level food insecurity figures by looking at key indicators such as poverty and unemployment.

Key message: No county in America is free from food insecurity

FOOD INSECURITY RATES 2009-2011												
Location	% Food Insecurity (all)			# of People (est)			% Food Insecurity (child)			# of Children (est)		
	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011	2009	2010	2011
South Bronx	25.7	23.6	28	61,512	57,061	67,265	36.6	n/a	n/a	28,590	n/a	n/a
Bronx Overall	21.2	20.1	23.2	292,320	275,030	319,060	31.8	29.1	30.6	124,760	106,000	113,320
Bed Stuy	24.4	25.5		39,397	40,013	44,742	25.6	n/a	n/a	11,320	n/a	n/a
Brooklyn Overall	18.4	18.4	20.4	467,340	454,190	507,190	25.1	22.7	23.6	160,340	133,620	140,750
Washington Heights/Inwood	20.7	16.4		41,264	32,734	43,911	39.1	n/a	n/a	18,590	n/a	n/a
Manhattan Overall	14	13.1	16.3	226,190	206,770	259,340	24.9	21.3	22.2	64,930	50,670	53,250
North Shore	12.4	11.2		26,847	20,019	24,778	20.3	n/a	n/a	11,020	n/a	n/a
Staten Is. Overall	11.7	11.4	10.1	56,490	53,060	46,910	21	18.3	17.5	24,060	19,850	19,080
NW Queens	-	12.9		-	46,073	27,591	-	n/a	n/a	-	n/a	n/a
Queens	13.2	12.7	14	300,580	279,670	310,140	21.2	18.8	19.5	104,460	85,540	89,850

Background

- Poverty and unemployment are key predictors of food insecurity
- Holmes, Mississippi has the highest Food Insecurity rate (83%)

Child Food Insecurity

- National child food insecurity rate is 22%, or nearly 1 in 4 children
- County level food insecurity ranges from a low of 5% (Bowman County, North Dakota) to a high of 46% (Zavala County, Texas)
- Child food insecurity is more pervasive in rural areas than in urban areas

Other

- Food insecurity disproportionately affects minority communities
- The national per-meal cost found in MMG 2013 was \$2.67 (derived from food expenditures reported by food secure individuals to ensure that the result reflected the cost of an adequate diet).

Adult Food Insecurity

County	ST	Population	Food insecurity rate ¹	Estimated number food insecure individuals (rounded)	Income within the food insecure population ³			Cost-of-food index	Weekly food-budget shortfall per food insecure person ⁴	Total food-budget shortfall reported by the food insecure in 2011 ⁵	Weighted cost per meal ⁶	The "Meal Gap"
					% below SNAP threshold of 130% poverty	% between 130% and 185% poverty	% above Nutrition Pgm threshold of 185% poverty					
Bronx	NY	1,374,593	23.2%	319,060	71%	14%	15%	1.0861	\$ 15.59	\$ 150,845,080	\$ 2.90	52,015,545
Kings	NY	2,486,119	20.4%	507,190	59%	21%	20%	1.0562	\$ 15.16	\$ 233,174,240	\$ 2.82	82,685,901
New York	NY	1,588,257	16.3%	259,340	54%	13%	33%	1.4644	\$ 21.01	\$ 165,313,010	\$ 3.91	42,279,542
Queens	NY	2,213,977	14.0%	310,140	49%	20%	31%	1.0562	\$ 15.16	\$ 142,582,970	\$ 2.82	50,561,337
Richmond	NY	466,034	10.1%	46,910	43%	13%	44%	1.1348	\$ 16.28	\$ 23,172,280	\$ 3.03	7,647,617
Service Area Total	NY	8,128,980	17.7%	1,442,640	58%	18%	24%	1.105	\$ 15.85	\$ 693,810,330	\$ 2.95	235,189,942

Child Food Insecurity

County	State	Food insecurity rate (full population) ²	Population under 18 years old	Child food insecurity rate ²	Estimated number food insecure children (rounded)	Food insecure children likely income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance ³	Food insecure children likely NOT income-eligible for federal nutrition assistance ³
Bronx	NY	23.2%	370,593	30.6%	113,320	68%	32%
Kings	NY	20.4%	595,321	23.6%	140,750	69%	31%
New York	NY	16.3%	239,406	22.2%	53,250	61%	39%
Queens	NY	14.0%	460,943	19.5%	89,850	66%	34%
Richmond	NY	10.1%	109,060	17.5%	19,080	58%	42%
Service Area Total	NY	17.7%	1,775,323	23.4%	416,250	67%	33%

FOR THE RECORD

Testimony of the Hunger Action Network of NYS Before the New City Council Committees on General Welfare, Women's Issues, and Health Regarding Int. 1194, In relation to Assessing Food Security

November 25, 2013

(www.hungeractionnys.org, 64 Fulton St., #801, NY NY 10038 - 212 741-8192)

My name is Mark Dunlea and I am Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network of NYS. Hunger Action Network, founded in 1982, is a statewide membership organization of direct food providers, faith groups, advocates and other individuals whose goal is to end hunger in New York State.

We appreciate the opportunity today to testify about the issue of hunger in NYC. Today is our annual Thanksgiving Action Against Hunger. Thanksgiving is the one time during the year when the community comes together to ensure that no one goes hungry. Unfortunately, hunger is a 365 day a year problem. The solution to hunger is economic justice, not more charity. We need a stronger safety net, more jobs, higher wages, universal health care (single payer Medicare for All, not insurance mandates), affordable housing, and living wage jobs. We need a Human Resources Administration whose focus is helping end hunger, not deny assistance to needy families on the grounds that tough love will make them find jobs that don't exist.

Earlier this year Hunger Action Network compiled a Food Policy Agenda for NYC. It can be found on our website. (<http://www.hungeractionnys.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/NYCFoodPolicyAgenda-Final-3.pdf>). We have copied the section of hunger and healthy food below. We have also included a copy of our outline on food actions the Mayor needs to take in the first 100 days.

In addition to overhauling HRA, we need to mandate that schools participate in the school breakfast program and to enact a free universal lunch program. We need \$15 million for emergency food (EFAP). We need to increase funding for Health Bucks. We need food democracy in NYC - with an inclusive Food Policy Council and the adoption of a formal Food Plan for the City. We need much stronger actions to combat the massive problem of wage theft that steals a billion dollars a year from low-income workers in NYC. We need a far more expansive and higher living wage law. We need a much larger public jobs program, both for welfare participants and all un- and under-employed New Yorkers.

Support for Int. 1194

We strongly support Int. 1194. It requires the City to establish a set of indicators to assess and track the level of food security in the city, including but not limited to a survey of persons in the city regarding their level of food security, and shall prepare and present a report on such indicators to be included in the annual city food system metrics report required pursuant to section 3-120 of the code. Accurate data on hunger and food insecurity is absolutely necessary for the formulation and implementation of effective public policies and program.

The federal government does already collect food security data each year. The City's survey should build upon and improve the federal data collection. going into more depth on issues such as how the households experience and respond to hunger. More analysis should be done with respect to government funding for emergency food and nutritional programs, analyzing whether they are reaching those most in need. Barriers to accessing food should be identified. Information related to health and nutrition should also be collected.

A Food Justice Agenda for Mayor de Blasio's First 100 Days

1. Appoint a Deputy Mayor for Food and create and fund an independent Food Policy / Systems Council. Adopt a New York City Food Plan as provided for in Section 197-a of the City Charter
2. Mandate breakfast in the classroom in all schools.
3. Enact free universal school lunch (<http://www.lunch4learningnyc.org/>). Increase the nutritional value and quality of school meals by enhancing kitchen staff skills and increasing kitchen capital investment, so more tasty meals, that our children will want to eat, can be made from scratch, with more fresh, local ingredients.
4. Use the City's food purchasing power to improve the nutritional quality of the meals it serves and support regional, New York, farms by aggressively employing regional preference and freshness criteria in food purchasing for meal service by City agencies, including the Department of Education. Establish a short term goal that 25% of the food purchased by city government is local
5. Make it a goal to reduce hunger in NYC by 50% in the first year, 75% during term. Increase funding for emergency food (EFAP) to at least \$15 million. Simplify - and integrate - the application process for SNAP and other public benefits. Increase funding for initiatives such as Health Bucks.
6. Enact policies to assist in preserving preserve farmland in the regional, New York, food shed. (see Securing Fresh, Local Food for NYC and the Hudson Valley, Scenic Hudson)
7. Be a national spokesperson in defending SNAP. Push for the Farm Bill to increase - not cut - funding for SNAP. Support a farm bill that promotes healthy food, supports family farmers and food workers, protects the environment, and reduces hunger. (<http://foodbillnyc.wikispaces.com/>)
8. Support sustainable Re-development of Hunts Point . Provide the neighborhood with a new outlet for fresh fruit and vegetables provided by regional farmers. Jobs should be provided to the local residents and the impact of transportation and air quality on the neighborhood needs to be reduced. Establish a NYC Wholesale Farmers Market.
- 9 . Sign an Executive Order implementing the Transitional Jobs Bill passed by the City Council in 2000 but ignored by the prior Mayor. Create at least 10,000 jobs.
10. Appoint an HRA Commissioner committed to ensuring that New Yorkers are able to access safety net benefits they are legally entitled to, and who is committed to helping welfare participants become employable including embracing access to job training and education. Admit that workfare and the Work First approach has been unsuccessful in improving employability. Significantly reduce the rate and practice of sanctioning.
11. Increase access to healthy foods. Extend cost-effective SNAP EBT processing capabilities to more farmers' markets and other food providers, including Green Carts, increase Health Bucks funding, and supplement Farmers Market Nutrition Program funding.
12. Make it a priority to eliminate the \$1 billion annually in wage theft. Support safe working conditions, availability of paid sick days, health benefits, and the right to organize for every City food chain worker. Request state legislation to enable NYC to establish a higher minimum wage for all NYC workers.

13. All publicly funded food processing and distribution (FRESH, EDC) should ensure that beneficiaries:
- provide adequate food health and safety precautions
 - require or provide subsidies for local procurement (mentioned in #9a)
 - support local labor movement
 - provide living wages

Manufacturers receiving public funds should have to sign on the Manufacturer's Code of Conduct developed by Brandworkers International and the administering agency to agree to transparency in the award process.

For More Info: A Food Policy Agenda for NYC. (http://www.hungeractionnys.org/?page_id=2330)

Food Democracy

Food democracy promotes an inclusive way to change the food system in the belief that citizens can, and must, affect food policy decisions that affect them. A principle challenge to food democracy in New York City is the creation of a mechanism to actively engage New Yorkers in advocating healthful, environmentally sustainable, and economically and socially just food policies.

Creating a New York City Food Policy Council, with adequate resources and citizens' input, is critical.

Recognizing the lack of opportunity for civic engagement in the prevailing models of food production and consumption, food policy councils are convening across the country. During the last few years, the number of local and regional Food policy councils has doubled to well more than 200. Food policy councils convene multiple food system stakeholders (producers, processors, distributors, government and consumers) to provide a forum for the comprehensive examination of a food system, its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges.

Councils enable different actors in the food system and government to learn more about what each does and to consider how the actions of each impact others in the food system. The councils also provide a mechanism to develop specific policy objectives, e.g., reducing the incidence of hunger, expanding rural economic development, and improving the administration of programs. And, also they may provide a forum to discuss emerging issues such as local foods, direct marketing, small and medium-scale rural farms, and urban agriculture.

There are different models for food policy councils. Regardless of the model, it is important to ensure transparency, inclusiveness and strong citizen support; adequate staffing resources for the work; and, some mechanism to link with the local government.

The government creates some food policy councils with formal membership by various government agencies; such councils may have some formal decision making role while also fostering interagency cooperation and usually have some advisory board representing a wide range of stakeholders.

Other food policy councils are established as an independent nonprofit organization to provide advice to the local government on food policy issues. Such councils usually seek some form of relationship to the local government (e.g., the Mayor and other elected officials appoint some of the members of the council).

Many food advocates feel that a nonprofit model may be the best for New York City, especially in light of its dynamic food industry and food policy movement. Many feel that there should also be related food policy councils established in each borough.

The Council should assist in the development and adoption of a New York City Food Plan as provided for in Section 197-a of the City Charter. The plan would formally provide direction to city agencies on food policy issues, such as outlined in this agenda.

Support for Universal Pre-K as a Strategy to Combat Child Hunger

We strongly support the Mayor-elect's proposal to marginally raise taxes on the wealthy to pay for universal pre-k.

End Hunger, Improve Healthy Food Choices (from a Food Policy Agenda for NYC)

Improve access to SNAP; adopt universal school meals with stronger nutritional standards; breakfast in classroom mandate; increased funding for EFAP and Meals on Wheels; food planning for emergencies.

All city residents - especially our most vulnerable, the disadvantaged, the young, and the aged - must have access to ample, affordable, healthful, sustainable, and culturally meaningful food. By healthful food we mean fresh, nutritious, minimally processed foods including: fruits; vegetables; whole grains; fat-free or low-fat milk and milk products; lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs, and nuts; and foods low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt, and added sugars.

The lack of access to healthy food options and over-access to high calorie, low nutrient foods, has serious health consequences for New Yorkers. Persistent poverty and unemployment have significantly contributed to hunger, which remains an on-going problem in our city. We support the agenda of groups such as the New York City Coalition Against Hunger and the Economic Justice and Social Welfare Network to reduce poverty through targeted job creation (including expanding transitional jobs for welfare participants and WPA-style public jobs), improving the administration of the Human Resources Administration (include access to cash assistance and reducing sanctioning), and higher wages. HRA needs new leadership that embraces the goal of improving the quality of life for low-income New Yorkers and recognizes the daily challenges such households face in NYC.

Since the recession started in 2007, the number of individuals using emergency food programs has increased by more than 60%. A recent survey by Hunger Action Network found that more than 2/3 of the programs have experienced a drop in food donations while almost all (89%) report an increase in demand. More than 20% of the guests are seniors, while more than a third are children and a third the working poor. The biggest reasons driving households to emergency food programs are high rents, lack of jobs and low wages.

School food programs have the potential to reduce hunger and food insecurity as well as play a role in reversing childhood obesity and improving nutrition. Yet, New York City has the lowest school breakfast program participation rate among large cities in the country, even though the program is free in most schools. The city's optional breakfast in the classroom program has been effective in increasing participation but only a limited number of schools and classrooms presently participate. In addition to increasing access and nutritional quality, attention must also be paid to making the food choices attractive to students so they will eat it.

We support the Lunch for Learning campaign. School food advocates have crunched the numbers to show

how the City can take advantage of new federal rules to provide free school lunches to all NYC school students for just an extra \$20 annual investment per student. The additional \$20 million city investment will bring in \$59 million of additional federal and state funding. This compares to the current \$345 million cost to run the city's school lunch program. It would also result in: 120,000 additional students eating school lunch; and, 1,000 new jobs created. The program would increase participation. More students will eat school lunch meaning better nutrition for all. More attention can also be made improving the attractiveness / taste of the school meals so that children will eat it. Universal free school lunch will also help schools by eliminating costly and labor intensive paperwork for schools. There would be no need for schools to collect family income applications. No need for school staff to identify students by income at the point of meal service. A universal free school lunch program would eliminate stigma. There would be no income identification of students in the lunchroom or anywhere else.

Farmers markets offer additional opportunities for low-income residents to access fresh, local food. The city is to be commended for having established the Health Bucks program to subsidize the use of SNAP at farmers markets. The city has also worked to make it easier to use SNAP benefits at farmers markets.

The city has adopted nutritional standards for foods they purchase. This should be continued and strengthened, and expanded to include local foods. The city should expand efforts to promote healthy and local food choices by private institutions, such as the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative.

New York City should develop a plan to end hunger - to make sure that all its residents have enough to eat. Frances Moore Lappe, author of *A Diet for a Small Planet*, has written "Hunger is not caused by a scarcity of food but a scarcity of democracy." In "A City that Ended Hunger" (<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/food-for-everyone/the-city-that-ended-hunger>) she describes how the city of Belo Horizonte, Brazil declared food a human right and developed and implemented a plan to provide healthy, affordable food to low-income residents.

"The city developed dozens of innovations to assure everyone the right to food, especially by weaving together the interests of farmers and consumers. It offered local family farmers dozens of choice spots of public space on which to sell to urban consumers, essentially redistributing retailer mark-ups on produce—which often reached 100 percent—to consumers and the farmers. Farmers' profits grew, since there was no wholesaler taking a cut. And poor people got access to fresh, healthy food."

The city also makes good food available by offering entrepreneurs the opportunity to bid on the right to use well-trafficked plots of city land for "ABC" markets, from the Portuguese acronym for "food at low prices." The city started three large, airy "People's Restaurants" (Restaurante Popular), plus a few smaller venues, that daily serve 12,000 or more people using mostly locally grown food for the equivalent of less than 50 cents a meal.

Specific Recommendations

Strengthen Access to SNAP (food stamps) and Other Nutrition Programs

- a. Simplify the application process for food assistance programs, including a streamlined application for the elderly. Take full advantage of state and federal initiatives and waivers (e.g., the able bodied waiver for SNAP). Allow for a 36-month recertification period instead of one year. Continue efforts to enable individuals to apply for programs simultaneously.
- b. Install new leadership at HRA that is more responsive to the needs and realities of low-income New Yorkers. Provide adequate staffing, training and supervision to enable HRA workers to fulfill their mission. Overhaul the City's welfare to work program with more emphasis on job creation, job

training and education. Stop efforts to divert individuals from accessing cash assistance. Reduce the excessive use of sanctioning, especially since HRA is often at fault.

- c. Expand media and public outreach campaigns to increase participation in SNAP and other nutrition programs, including providing city funding to supplement other government program outreach efforts.
- d. Assist low-income individuals in accessing fruits and vegetables by: increasing funding for Health Bucks; continuing to expand participation of farmers markets in the SNAP and Health Bucks programs; providing supplemental city funding for the Farmers Market Nutrition Program Coupons provided to low-income seniors and WIC participants; and providing financial assistance so that farmers markets, Green Carts, food coops and CSAs are equipped with cost effective EBT transaction processing capability.

Increase School Meal Participation While Improving Nutritional Quality

- a. Enact universal school meals. Make free school lunch available to all public school children.
- b. Mandate that schools provide healthful breakfasts in the classroom (and "grab and go" model in hallways) to all public school children. Better work with teachers and school staff, including education regarding the benefits of school meals participation.
- c. Develop a K to 12 food literacy curriculum. Short-term, integrate food and nutrition into school curricula by working with science teachers, physical education teachers, parents, and local institutions with a focus on building the skills to purchase and prepare raw foods; incorporate this information into outreach materials and activities with parents and local institutions.
- d. Expand the DOE's "garden to cafe" programs by better integrating the program into the school meals program and providing increased opportunities for schools to procure fruits and vegetables from external food outlets including community gardens, food banks, food pantries, retail outlets, local farms, etc. Incorporate fresh produce into healthy meals on "harvest days" at least once a month. Engage parents, community members, and local institutions in these efforts. Incorporate fresh produce into healthy meals on "harvest days" at least once a month.
- e. Help make food choices in school more appealing to students. Expand support for programs such as Wellness in Schools and Cornell's Food and Brand Lab. Strengthen existing school wellness committees through a school district-wide cabinet that includes wellness committee representatives, SchoolFood staff, principals, custodians, parents, teachers, students, and local organizations. The New York City Department of Education's Office of School Food should collaborate with nutrition experts, community members, interest groups and parents to improve the nutritional output of food items that result in healthier school menus.
- f. Provide capital investment and staff training to increase schools' capacities to cook whole foods. Improve the quality of school meals, including improving nutrition standards by: making salad bars available every day; adopting Meatless Mondays; serving only whole grain pasta, bread, and rice; expanding eligibility for the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Snack Program to ensure students eat at least one fresh fruit daily; ensuring that vegetables are served fresh (frozen if possible, minimize use of canned foods to raw ingredient form). Eliminate sweetened milk.
- g. Provide public access to school food ingredient lists, including nutritional information and food sources and source locations.
- h. Continue efforts to expand the reach of after school and summer meal programs by increasing the number of summer meal sites (e.g., pools, libraries) and improving outreach efforts, particularly in low-income areas.
- i. Expand efforts to make drinking water readily accessible through water fountains and ensure that water is available to accompany meals and snacks in schools and childcare facilities. In schools, expanding the School Food water jet program; ensure that water is available during after school hours and during non-instructional school time programming.
- j. Eliminate the sale of junk food in schools. Strengthen enforcement of existing state restrictions on

- such sales in schools. Improve the nutritional value of New York City DOE's Chancellor-regulated competitive food items sold in vending machines in public schools and institute stronger oversight over items sold. Examples of healthy choices include: low-fat yogurt, nuts, and fruit.
- k. Integrate food action and justice into the city's high school public service requirements and create an on-line list of food and food justice-based community service and senior project opportunities.
 - l. Work with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services to inform the development of revised standards that address obesity prevention and address overall health and nutrition issues in child day care as well as increase the nutritional value of food provide in childcare settings.

Increase Funding for Emergency Food Programs

- a. Provide adequate funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) (e.g., \$15.4 million for food in 2013, an increase of \$7 million from present funding); index funding for EFAP to inflation; switch to food ordering flexibility (including expanding access to fresh produce); and create a Human Resources Administration emergency food program advisory council.

Strengthen and increase Funding for Senior Center Congregate and Home Delivered Meals.

- a. Build in an annual inflation factor to provide healthy food, a variety of menus, and the provision of therapeutic meals for senior center congregate and home-delivered meals.
- b. Fund senior center breakfast programs under the Older Americans Act (OAA).
- c. Restore the Sixth Congregate Meal Weekend Program which, in the past, provided a single take home weekend meal from Senior Centers for low income, older adults, and conduct a public awareness campaign to promote the Sixth Congregate Meal Weekend Program, senior center meals, and home-delivered meals.
- d. Collaborate with nutrition experts to improve nutrition education and budgeting in senior centers.

Promote Public Health and Food and Nutrition Education

- a. Expand food and nutrition education campaigns through public service announcements, subway advertisements, and social networks and distribute more nutrition education materials through emergency food programs. Promote awareness of the nutrition guidelines set for bulk purchasing by the Food Bank For New York City as recommended guidelines for donated food items.
- b. Expand funding for culinary training provided to children, youth, families, and seniors focusing on whole, unprocessed foods.
- c. Encourage employers to promote nutrition education, wellness, and healthy eating practices in the workplace. Promote the consumption of healthy food instead of junk food through public awareness campaigns and education.
- d. Reduce the number of fast food restaurants in food deserts as other cities have done. Potential steps include eliminating fast food retailers' eligibility for Industrial Commercial Abatement Program (ICAP) funding; placing a cap on the number of outlets; and restricting the development of new fast food restaurants in certain areas (e.g., within 500 feet of schools in food deserts).
- e. Eliminate unhealthy food messaging in city owned facilities.
- f. Require that children's meals offered at restaurants with toys or other incentives meet the nutritional standards of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.
- g. Increase the availability of city water in parks and other public spaces.
- h. Create a program similar to Seattle's Farm to Table Program to help connect city-supported licensed childcare facilities and city-supported senior meal programs with local farmers to integrate fresh, local produce into meals served to children and seniors.
- i. Require that family care centers have nutrition requirements for meals and prohibit parents from

bringing in sugar sweetened beverages and junk food.

- j. Require GMO (Genetically Modified Organism) labeling of foods containing GMO ingredients sold in the city. Modify Executive Order No.122 of 2008 to require that foods containing GMO ingredients, hormones, and antibiotics be phased out of foods purchased and served by the city over a five year period.
- k. Increase taxes on the sale of soda and other sugary beverages.
- l. Adopt, update and expand many of the recommendations from the City's Anti-Obesity task Force (a number of them are included elsewhere in the Agenda.)

Ensure the Availability of Food in Emergencies

- a. Adopt a city emergency response plan which ensures access to healthy foods during and after severe weather events, with an emphasis on vulnerable and low-income populations. Establish funding for Emergency Food Providers to access in response to emergencies such as natural disasters.
- b. Promote emergency food safety guidelines to help consumers, food stores and restaurants determine if food is still "good" after an emergency, such as a prolonged electrical service outage.



MAIN OFFICE: 39 Broadway, 10th fl, New York, NY 10006, T: 212.566.7855 F: 212.566.1463
WAREHOUSE: Hunts Point Co-op Market, 355 Food Ctr Dr, Bronx, NY 10474, T: 718.991.4300, F: 718.693.3442

Testimony prepared by

Triada Stampas

for the

Committees on General Welfare, Women's Issues and Health

on

**Int. 1194-2013: A Local Law to Amend the New York City Charter and
Administrative Code, in Relation to Assessing Food Security**

and

Hunger in New York City

November 25, 2013

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon and thank you, Chairpersons Palma, Ferreras and Arroyo, and members of the Committees on General Welfare, Women's Issues and Health. My name is Triada Stampas and I am the Senior Director of Government Relations at Food Bank For New York City. Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council about Introduction 1194 of 2013, which would require the City to conduct an annual food security assessment, and about hunger in New York City.

As we approach the end of the current legislative session, Food Bank For New York City thanks you and your colleagues for your continued leadership and advocacy over the past four years to address the issue of hunger and ensure all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food. The City Council's consistent support for increasing enrollment of eligible households in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and expanding the in-classroom School Breakfast Program, as well as funding to expand the supply of food available at emergency food programs are especially appreciated and needed as the recession has left elevated levels of food poverty that four years of recovery have yet to bring down.

Food Bank For New York City works to end hunger and food poverty by increasing access to nutrition, education and financial empowerment. Approximately 1.5 million New York City residents rely on our programs and services. We distribute food and provide support services to approximately 1,000 emergency and community food programs citywide; manage nutrition education programs for schools and community-based organizations (CBOs); operate income support programs including SNAP outreach & enrollment assistance and one of the largest Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) programs in the country; and conduct research to inform community and government efforts to end hunger in New York City.

More than four years since the end of the Great Recession, indicators of need in New York – including poverty, food insecurity and unemployment – remain entrenched at high levels. Yet federal policymakers have allowed devastating cuts to SNAP benefits to take effect this month – **cuts that will deprive vulnerable New Yorkers of millions of meals.** In this context, this year's Congressional reauthorization of the Farm Bill, which sets policy and funding for the safety net of federal nutrition assistance programs, takes on added importance. Rather than restoring SNAP funding and strengthening the program, current Farm Bill proposals would deepen hunger for vulnerable New Yorkers with additional cuts to SNAP, as well as the potential for cuts to nutrition education programs for SNAP-eligible children, seniors and families.

Clearly, this year, protecting and strengthening our city's anti-hunger resources is particularly urgent. Food Bank urges an approach to City budget and policy that responds forcefully to this looming threat. My testimony will focus first on this broader context of hunger in New York City, and the need for a coherent and aggressive strategy to confront it – a strategy that governmental and nongovernmental players must share – before addressing the legislation on today's hearing agenda, Introduction 1194 of 2013.

NEW YORK CITY'S CURRENT ANNUAL MEAL GAP: 235M

Nearly 1.9 million New York City residents (almost one in five) rely on SNAP to keep food on the table, with a monthly household benefit that has been averaging near \$280 – or almost \$3.5 billion annually.¹

SNAP is our nation's first line of defense against hunger. A federal entitlement program, SNAP now provides food assistance to 47.7 million, or one in seven, Americans.² Available to any household that meets the eligibility criteria (most importantly, income and immigration status), SNAP is *countercyclical*, meaning when the economy shrinks, SNAP has the flexibility

¹ Food Bank For New York City analysis of SNAP participation and benefit data reported by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

² United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). August 2013.

to grow to meet rising need. SNAP enrollment in New York City first exceeded 1.8 million residents – approximately one in five – in December 2010 and has not dropped below that threshold since, evidence that recession has left elevated need in its wake.³

SNAP is highly targeted to reach people in need. A large majority, 85 percent, of SNAP households have income below the poverty level. One in five has no cash income whatsoever; for them, food stamp benefits are their *only* resource to purchase food. Nearly half of SNAP recipients (47 percent) are children.⁴

Despite SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs (like school meals, and the Special Supplemental Program for Women, Infants and Children, or WIC) nearly one in three New York City residents struggles to afford food, and approximately 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food⁵ – evidence that a meal gap remains.

The meal gap represents the translation of a food budget shortfall into a number of meals. Analysis by Feeding America finds an annual meal gap in New York City of 235 million meals.⁶ This is the number of meals that the resources of food-insecure New Yorkers fall short of providing on an annual basis.

Emergency food is our last line of defense against hunger. When cash, benefits and the generosity of family and friends have been exhausted, the emergency food network of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters is the resource of last resort for those struggling to keep food on the table. Approximately 37 million Americans rely on emergency food at some point over the course of the year.⁷

In New York City, approximately 1.4 million residents rely on the network of food pantries, soup kitchens and shelters across the five boroughs that provide emergency food to neighbors in need.⁸ This network, which relies heavily on unpaid volunteers to do its work, is already struggling to meet heightened levels of need that have persisted past the end of the recession.⁹ Since the start of the recession, 250 food pantries and soup kitchens across the five boroughs have closed their doors,¹⁰ leaving those remaining to confront elevated need. In 2012, nearly two thirds reported running short of food to meet the need.¹¹

Given these statistics, it should come as little surprise that the efforts of the emergency food network fall short of completely providing for the needs of food-impooverished New Yorkers. Indeed, after the last soup kitchen meal is served and the last pantry bag distributed, an annual meal gap of approximately 100 million meals remains.¹²

³ "HRA Facts." New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA). Monthly through September 2013.

⁴ *Characteristics of SNAP Households: Fiscal Year 2011*. USDA. September 2012.

⁵ *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

⁶ *Map the Meals Gap*. Feeding America. 2013.

⁷ Feeding America.

⁸ *Hunger's New Normal*. Food Bank For New York City.

⁹ By economists' definitions, the recession, which began in December 2007, ended in June 2009.

¹⁰ *Serving under Stress Post-Recession: The State of Food Pantries & Soup Kitchens Today*. (2012). Food Bank For New York City.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Food Bank For New York City estimate based on FEEDNYC data.

Even before benefit cuts, SNAP was not going far enough. In 2012, 42 percent of SNAP recipients were relying on emergency food – before a single SNAP benefit dollar was cut.¹³ In a city where food costs are considerably higher than average – and where competing costs of living, like rent and utilities, are higher than average as well – monthly SNAP benefits often fall short. Indeed, among participants at food pantries and soup kitchens who receive SNAP, 75 percent report their benefits do not last past the third week of the month.¹⁴ While it is too soon for system-wide data to be available, it is reasonable to anticipate that this month's reduction in SNAP benefits will drive even higher need at food pantries and soup kitchens – both among those already turning to emergency food for help, and for those who may find themselves in need of emergency food as a result of their reduced allotment.

While current efforts by emergency food providers narrow a 235-million meal gap to approximately 100 million, SNAP cuts are likely to drastically widen that gap beyond the point our city's current emergency food system can hope to address – more than 440 million meals annually.

NOVEMBER 1, 2013: 76M MEALS LOST

This November, sweeping cuts to SNAP benefits took effect, resulting in the estimated **loss of 76 million meals** for New York City residents. The cuts affect every SNAP recipient, resulting in an estimated annual loss in New York State of approximately \$224 million.¹⁵ A household of three will lose, on average, \$29 per month in SNAP benefits – or nearly \$19 million per month in New York City alone.

These cuts are the result of a deal struck in December 2010 in order to pay for a \$0.06 per meal increase in federal school lunch reimbursements as part of the “Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.” While the White House promised to work with Congress to restore the funds before the cuts could take effect, the promise was not fulfilled. The “Extend Not Cut SNAP Benefits” bill in both houses of Congress (S. 1635 and H.R. 3353) would restore the loss of benefits for the current federal fiscal year, but has not yet come up for a vote.

THE FARM BILL: 132 MILLION OR MORE ADDITIONAL MEALS LOST

The Farm Bill, reauthorized by Congress every five years, represents our nation's most significant investment to prevent hunger. Title IV, the Nutrition Title, constitutes nearly 80 percent of the spending in the Farm Bill and includes two key programs: SNAP and the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

Reauthorization negotiations provide an opportunity to strengthen anti-hunger programs; instead, leaders in both the Senate and the House of Representatives have been promoting bills that would cut SNAP and worsen hunger in New York City. A final bill is currently being negotiated in the Farm Bill conference committee. *Any* cuts to SNAP will deprive low-income individuals and families of much-needed food assistance and force more vulnerable New

¹³ *Hunger's New Normal*. Food Bank For New York City.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ “SNAP Benefits Will Be Cut for All Participants in November 2013.” Dean, Stacy and Dottie Rosenbaum. (2013). Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Yorkers into an emergency food network ill-equipped and under-resourced to meet additional need.

THE SENATE BILL

The Senate Farm Bill, the Agriculture Reform, Food and Jobs Act of 2013 (S. 954), contains a \$4.1 billion cut to SNAP benefits over ten years. This cut would impact residents of federally subsidized housing in 15 states, including New York.

In New York City, 190,000 households would experience a decrease in SNAP benefits as a result of this cut.¹⁶ They are residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing developments – where the average household income is approximately \$23,000¹⁷ – recipients of federal Section 8 vouchers, and others. The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance estimates conservatively that the loss of federal benefits across the state would be at least \$150 million per year. New York City households affected by this cut would lose \$90 to \$130 per month.

It is estimated this bill will result in the loss of 70-100 million meals in New York City in its first year alone, **increasing New York City's meal gap to as much as 411 million meals.**

This loss would not only harm vulnerable New Yorkers, it would have a broader economic impact as the buying power for food in many communities would be significantly decreased. It is estimated that every billion dollars cut from SNAP benefits results in the loss of nearly 14,000 jobs.¹⁸

THE HOUSE BILL

The Senate bill represents the low end of proposed cuts. In the House, the Federal Agriculture Reform and Risk Management Act (FARRM), H.R. 2642, includes nearly \$40 billion in proposed SNAP cuts. These cuts include those prescribed by the Senate, as well as elimination of benefits targeted to certain working families, seniors and unemployed, childless adults. Nationally, approximately 3.5 million SNAP recipients would lose benefits entirely. As a result of the loss of SNAP, more than 200,000 children will lose access to free school meals.

In New York City, these cuts would collectively result in the estimated loss of at least 100-131 million meals in New York City, increasing the meal gap to 442 million meals or more — **nearly double today's meal gap.** This bill additionally cuts funding for nutrition education for SNAP-eligible children, seniors and families by an estimated \$308 million.

It should be noted that both bills contain added funding for TEFAP and for community food security projects – and in both bills, the increase in meals from these programs is utterly dwarfed by the loss to SNAP.

BUDGET AND POLICY STRATEGIES TO PREPARE NYC

Congress's last day of business before its scheduled holiday recess is December 13, 2013. Decisions on SNAP cuts in the Farm Bill, as well as to restore the SNAP cut that took place in

¹⁶ According to analysis by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. Across New York State, approximately 274,000 households would be affected.

¹⁷ NYCHA Facts.

¹⁸ *The Economic Consequences of Cutting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*. Center for American Progress. (2012).

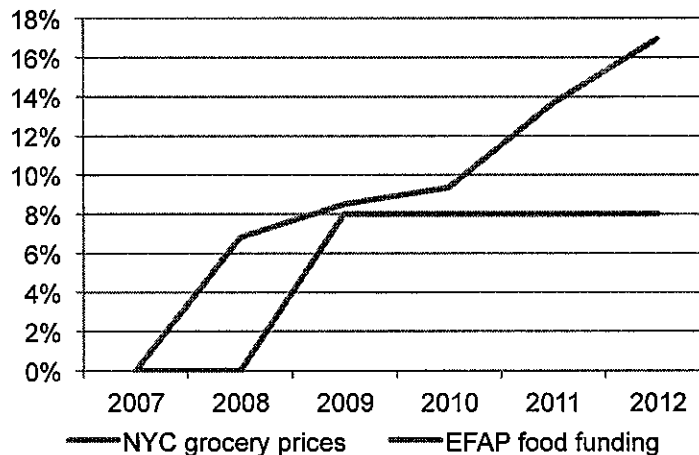
November (through the federal budget process) could take place between now then. As noted earlier in this testimony, the City Council's consistent and vocal advocacy on behalf of the vulnerable New Yorkers who stand to lose from these cuts – predominately children, seniors and working families – has been of great value to advocacy efforts nationally.

Whatever Congress decides, closing our City's meal gap necessitates a thoughtful, multi-pronged strategy. With key federal programs under threat, New York City's anti-hunger resources – primarily those that bolster SNAP enrollment and fortify our emergency food system – will be more vital than ever.

EMERGENCY FOOD

New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) is a major source of food for our city's emergency food network. Because the emergency food system relies heavily on donations, variety, quality and availability of product can vary widely. EFAP plays an especially important role because it provides a steady year-round supply of nutritious food for the approximately 500 food pantries and soup kitchens that participate. EFAP provides food from all five food groups, and all EFAP food meets the City's rigorous nutrition standards. In addition, EFAP is an important source of kosher food.

Nevertheless, baseline food funding for the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), now \$8.4 million, has lost value as food prices have risen, and does not reflect New York City's growing need since the start of the recession. Since the start of the recession, poverty in New York City has grown 13 percent, and unemployment has been steadily higher than pre-recession levels. As the graph below illustrates, the cost of food in New York City has increased more than 16 percent since the start of the recession¹⁹; after a single baseline funding increase in Fiscal Year (FY) 2009, however, EFAP funding has remained flat.



- We ask the City Council to increase of EFAP baseline funding to \$19.8 million in order to allow the program to “catch up” to rising poverty and food costs, as well as adjust for the current inadequacy of the food supply, which only allows food pantries to provide 5.8 meals in a typical pantry bag – far short of New York State’s nine-meal standard.
- City Council initiative funding that supplements EFAP (the Food Pantries – HRA Initiative) meets the same nutrition standards and provides a supply of food from all five food groups,

¹⁹ Consumer Price Index data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, FY 2007-2012.

but the funding amount has likewise remained unchanged. We ask the City Council for a proportionate increase from the current \$1.3 million to \$2.4 million, to similarly allow the Food Pantries – HRA Initiative to catch up to current need and costs.

SNAP

While SNAP cuts will reduce the benefits of those already participating, it remains important to ensure that eligible New Yorkers who are not enrolled in the program avail themselves of the benefit – particularly emergency food participants.

- We encourage the Council to work with HRA to expand the number of sites engaged in SNAP enrollment via the Paperless Office System (POS). This allows trained staff at CBOs to facilitate and submit SNAP applications at sites throughout the city – relieving the burden on HRA office staff in the process.
- We encourage the Council to work closely with HRA to ensure SNAP outreach materials are incorporated into outreach for other programs and services, like the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), targeted to likely eligible populations
- In addition, we ask the Council to increase funding for SNAP outreach within the Food Pantries – HRA Initiative, as it effectively targets emergency food participants who are known to need food assistance.

SCHOOL MEALS

Maximizing participation in school meals, through adoption of Universal School Meals (USM) and expansion of Breakfast in the Classroom, will not only provide hundreds of thousands of New York City children with access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch, it will also help close New York City's meal gap.

New York City now has two options for providing USM: the Community Eligibility Option (CEO) and Provision 2. CEO would provide full federal reimbursement of school meals in high-need schools through a reimbursement formula indexed to the proportion of students who are categorically eligible for free school meals through their participation in other federal means-tested programs (like SNAP, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, and Medicaid) or because of their status as homeless or in foster care. This is a fully paperless process that entirely does away with the submission and processing of school meals applications – thus reducing administrative resource needs. Currently, CEO is only being implemented in District 75 schools.

Provision 2 provides USM on a four- to six-year cycle, with school meals applications required only in the first year of the cycle. While it does not entirely eliminate the administrative burden associated with the forms, it significantly reduces that burden. Provision 2 has been implemented in hundreds of New York City public schools and has been shown to increase school meal participation, most dramatically in participating high schools. Regrettably, the Department of Education has chosen to reduce the number of schools receiving USM through Provision 2 at a time of such high need.

- We encourage the City Council to work with the new Administration to implement USM using the Community Eligibility Option and Provision 2 to maximize federal reimbursements and minimize cost to the city.

New York City's public schools have offered universal, free school breakfast since 2004. The breakfast period is scheduled 30 minutes before the start of the school day. Unfortunately, the inconvenience of the program and the stigma associated with participation – the only children in the cafeteria before the start of the school day are those whose parents could not provide them a breakfast at home – conspire to keep participation low. Indeed, in a survey of large school districts, New York City most recently ranked 55th of 57 in school breakfast participation among low-income students.²⁰

Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) has been a strategy successfully employed by large urban school districts to ensure low-income students start the day with the nourishment they need. In New York City, BIC is a principal's decision, and while more than 300 schools offer it in at least one classroom, few offer it schoolwide.

- We thank the City Council for the passage of Resolutions 910 and 911 of 2011, calling for expansion of BIC and we encourage the Council to work with the Administration to make it an opt-out, rather than an opt-in, program for schools.
- Recognizing that some schools may need facilities improvements in order to accommodate program necessities and anticipated growth in participation associated with USM and BIC, we encourage the Council to work with the Administration to fund those capital needs.

SUMMER MEALS

The federal Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), commonly known as Summer Meals, provides free lunch and breakfast to children up to (and including) age 18 during the summer months when access to school meals is lost. Summer meals are available at certain schools, as well as at other community-based locations, including parks, pools, playgrounds, libraries and emergency food programs. While New York City's participation rates are higher than the national average, they remain woefully low relative to participation in school meals – summer meals participation is less than 30 percent of the participation of free and reduced-price eligible children in the school meals program.²¹ Tellingly, among those households that use emergency food programs and have school-aged children, SFSP participation is little different from the city's participation rate overall.²² There are clearly opportunities to increase participation and help shrink our city's meal gap.

- We encourage the City Council to work with the Administration to identify appropriate school and non-school sites to act as summer meals sites, as well as to encourage your constituents to take advantage of the availability of free meals for children throughout the summer.

INTRODUCTION 1194 OF 2013

By requiring development of a measure and annual reporting of food insecurity in New York City, Introduction 1194 of 2013, the bill before the committees here today, would create an important tool both in assessing the underlying need for food assistance, and for gauging the

²⁰ *School Breakfast: Making It Work in Large Districts, School Year 2011-2012*. (2013). Food Research and Action Center.

²¹ *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2012*. (2012). Food Research and Action Center.

²² *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. (2013). Food Bank For New York City.

effectiveness of programmatic and policy interventions. Having a shared metric would allow governmental and non-governmental entities engaged in hunger relief to work from a shared understanding of the problem, which could better lead to shared strategies and solutions. Food Bank supports Int. 1194-2013 and in particular encourages the Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability to develop a food security metric that enables comparison with the federal food security measure, and that can discern the contributions of governmental nutrition assistance programs toward a household's food security. From the Commission for Economic Opportunity to the Department of City Planning, the City of New York has considerable assets and expertise to ensure the measurement of food security in New York City is done accurately and effectively.

SUMMARY

Cuts to SNAP will have profound repercussions for low-income New Yorkers already struggling to put food on the table. With SNAP benefits reduced, these cuts will place new demands on services supported by State and City funding. In a matter of weeks, a new Mayor will take office, and Members of the City Council will elect a new Speaker. Recognizing the needs of this moment, the next Administration and City Council must work together in a forward-thinking way in order to marshal our city's resources wisely to alleviate the hunger and hardship imposed by poor decision-making in Washington. As a city, this is a responsibility we share. The 1.4 million New Yorkers who find themselves turning to food pantries and soup kitchens for needed food deserve no less.



Testimony of

Stephanie Gendell
Associate Executive Director for Policy and Government Relations
Citizens' Committee for Children

Before the
New York City Council
Committees on General Welfare, Health and Women's Issues

*Oversight – Hunger in NYC
Int. 1194-2013:
A Local Law to amend the New York City Charter and the Administrative Code
of the City of New York in Relation to Assessing Food Security*

November 25, 2013

Good afternoon. My name is Stephanie Gendell and I am the Associate Executive Director for Policy and Government Relations at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 70-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe. I would like to thank Chairs, Palma, Arroyo and Ferreras, and the members of the City Council Committees on General Welfare, Health, and Women's Issues for holding today's hearing related to hunger and measuring food insecurity in New York City.

CCC appreciates the City Council's long-standing commitment to the food security of New Yorkers. The Council tradition of holding its hunger oversight hearing every November, as many New Yorkers prepare for their large Thanksgiving meals while other New Yorkers struggle to put food on the table, is a testament to this commitment.

CCC is also grateful that Speaker Quinn, the entire City Council and Mayor Bloomberg have been working very hard on a number of initiatives and programs to increase New Yorkers' access to nutritious foods and improve health outcomes for New York City's children and families.

We are thankful for the successful efforts in recent years to increase SNAP enrollment in New York City and the expansion of SNAP benefit use to New York City's farmers' markets. We are also appreciative of laws passed by the City Council aimed at increasing fresh, local food procurement for schools and other City agencies. We are also pleased with the progress made in the fight against food insecurity that has resulted from programs such as Green Carts and FRESH. Finally, we continue to support many of the exciting initiatives detailed in Speaker Quinn's FoodWorks plan.

Despite these laudable achievements, recent data show that a staggering number of New Yorkers continue to struggle with poverty, food insecurity, and hunger. According to the most recent U.S. Census data, New York City's overall poverty rate is 21.2 percent, which means that one in every five New Yorkers lives in poverty.¹ Even more sobering, the child poverty rate in New York City grew from 27.1 percent in 2009 to 31.4 in 2012, with over 553,000 children now living in poverty.² Further, one in four New York City children lives in a food insecure home, and about 1.9 million people – 21.2 percent of New Yorkers — receive SNAP (commonly called "Food Stamps"). Among New York City families with children, 32.2 percent participate in SNAP – representing an over 60 percent increase between 2007 and 2012.³

Food insecurity and hunger are taking both a short- and long-term toll on the overall well-being of New York City's children. Poor nutrition can impact children's academic outcomes, as it not only effects cognitive and psychosocial development and a child's ability to focus in class, but can also lead to illnesses, which increase school absences.⁴ Further, a poor diet can have lifelong health consequences, such as obesity, and an increased risk of diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, 2012.

² Id.

³ Id.

⁴ Sell, K., Zlotnik, S., Noonan, K., and Rubin, D. (Nov. 2010). The Recession and Food Security. *The Effect of Recession on Child Well-Being*.

Mayor-elect de Blasio and the City Council must make addressing hunger and food insecurity a top priority. This will require supporting and expanding those programs that have been proven to assist food insecure families and children, and creating new programs and initiatives to ensure all New Yorkers, regardless of where they live, have access to healthy, affordable food.

CCC believes this will require State and City decision-makers to think creatively about how to fight hunger, food access and nutrition. In order to achieve these goals, CCC respectfully submits the following proposals to make healthy food more affordable and accessible to all New Yorkers:

Measuring Food Insecurity: Int. 1194-2013

CCC thanks Council Member Palma for introducing Int. 1194-2013, which would require the City to assess and track food security in the City, in part through a survey of New Yorkers, and have this information included in the annual city food metrics report already required to be submitted to the City Council. CCC agrees that understanding the level food security (and insecurity), particularly by borough and community district (or board as stated in the bill), is critical to being able to target interventions that will eliminate food insecurity.

While we are supportive of Int. 1194-2013 in concept, we do have some concerns about how we define “food insecurity” and thus how it will be measured, the cost of conducting a survey, and the desire in these economic times to be sure not to duplicate efforts already underway to measure food insecurity.

We appreciate that the proposed legislation does not dictate the definition of food security and allows the Department of Health and the Human Resources Administration to establish the indicators for assessing and tracking the level of food security in the city. The current annual food system metrics report includes some indicators that we believe measure some aspects related to food insecurity. For example, it includes the number of persons over age 65 receiving SNAP, the number of city meals served by city agencies and the number of grocery stores by community district. We believe that there is some data, already available, that could be added to the food metrics to provide more detail about food insecurity, such as the number of all New Yorkers receiving SNAP, the number of children receiving SNAP, the number of children eligible for free/reduced price lunch, the number of children participating in the free/reduced price lunch program, the number of children participating in the summer meals program, etc.

In addition, several organizations, such as the Food Research Action Center (FRAC), the Food Bank, and NYCCA, already do exemplary work measuring hunger, food hardship and food insecurity in New York City. We do not want the City to have to duplicate their efforts and suggest considering the inclusion of their data as part of the food metrics (such as the number of emergency meals served), or whether their data can be used in conjunction with the information included in the annual food metrics report.

While CCC also believes that surveying New Yorkers is a valuable tool for learning information about the status and needs of New Yorkers, we also know that surveys are very expensive to conduct. The current food metrics report does not include a survey, but the proposed legislation would require that there be a survey of New Yorkers about their level of food security.

We therefore suggest that the question(s) about food insecurity be added to a pre-existing survey administered by DOHMH. For example, DOHMH already administers a Community Health Survey that asks New Yorkers questions such as how many adults had eaten fruits or vegetables the prior day. The national organization, FRAC, conducts a “Food Hardship” survey that asks, “Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?”⁵ Adding an additional question like this to the existing survey does not seem like it would be too onerous or costly to implement.

Despite our concerns about the proposed legislation, we want to stress that we do believe that we need to continue to develop a clearer picture of food security in New York City, and to further highlight key food insecurity demographics, such as which neighborhoods, age cohorts, racial/ethnic groups, etc. need additional interventions and assistance.

Strengthen the anti-hunger safety net in order to maximize participation in food assistance programs

Safety net programs are absolutely vital resources to the large - and still growing - number of New Yorkers who struggle with hunger and food insecurity. Programs such as SNAP and WIC are critical supports that help New Yorkers feed their families and access the nutritious foods children need for healthy growth and development. Moreover, these programs function as economic engines, bringing federal resources to local supermarkets, corner stores, farmers' markets, and even Green Carts. Research shows that there is \$1.80 of economic activity resulting from every \$1 of SNAP spent. Further, SNAP receipt has been proven to lift a significant number of Americans above the poverty level. In some neighborhoods, such as Mott Haven, East Harlem, and East New York, more than 80 percent of households depend on SNAP.⁶

We hope that the next Administration will continue the current FoodWorks and Council initiatives that have resulted in an increased number of eligible New Yorkers enrolling in the program. For example, we appreciate the Medicaid match, which helped identify thousands of New Yorkers who qualified for SNAP, and the Council support provided to non-profits for SNAP outreach. Further, we hope that the next Administration and Council will explore creation of similar outreach to WIC-eligible New Yorkers, in order to increase participation in that program. We are hopeful that the Council will consider advocating at the State level for the efficient and expeditious inclusion of WIC on the SNAP EBT card, to make the use of the two programs easier for recipients who are enrolled in both.

On a related note, we are grateful that the Council has in recent years recognized the beneficial role that farmers' markets and federally-funded food programs play in helping New Yorkers

FRAC, “Data and Publications: Food Hardship,” available at <http://frac.org/reports-and-resources/food-hardship-data/>.

⁶ Keeping Track Online (2013); <http://data.cccnewyork.org/>.

access healthy, local foods. As data from our recent report *From Farm to Table: The Use of Federally-Funded Food Programs at New York City Farmers' Markets* show, use of SNAP, the WIC Fruit & Vegetable check, and the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) in our City's farmers' markets positively impacts both the food security of low-income families and the incomes of regional farmers.

We appreciate that the current Administration, Speaker Quinn, and the Council have enabled and encouraged New Yorkers to use SNAP benefits at our City's farmers' market. The number of New Yorkers who make SNAP purchases at farmers' markets grows substantially each year, as a result of the DOHMH Health Bucks program and the repeated Council distribution of one-year funds to support EBT technology at the markets. Given the positive impact the ability to use SNAP at farmers' markets has on the food security of New Yorkers, the next Administration should: ensure that all New York City farmers' markets are equipped with EBT technology; baseline funds to sustain that technology at every market; and continue to support the Health Bucks program. We also hope, as our report recommends, that the Health Bucks program will be expanded to include a targeted match for WIC Fruit & Vegetable check purchases.

Finally with regard to the food safety net, we hope that the next Administration will increase the Emergency Food Assistance Program budget to \$15 million, to address the growing need for emergency food found in New York City as a result of the recession and the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

Increase School Meal options and participation rates

Federally-funded school meal programs represent another critical resource in the fight against childhood hunger and obesity, as they provide children from low-income families with consistent access to nutritionally sound free or reduced-price meals. About 75 percent of the City's 1.1 million public school students come from families with incomes low enough to qualify for free or reduced-price school lunches,⁷ and thus school meal programs have the potential to impact the food security of a large number of children. Unfortunately, too many children who could benefit from school meal programs do not participate. A number of these children choose not to eat school meals because they do not want others to label them "poor."

We urge the next Administration to support and expand those programs that destigmatize school meals, make it easier for parents to enroll their children, provide greater options for after-school meals, and ultimately increase the number of children who eat healthy food at school. This, in turn, would have a positive impact on children's health and well-being, as well as their academic achievement. To achieve these goals, we hope that the next Administration will:

- Expand the Breakfast-in-Classroom program (BIC) citywide

According to the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), New York City's school breakfast participation rates are repeatedly the poorest among 26 major U.S. cities, despite the fact that breakfast is free for all our City's public school children. In our 2012 report entitled *The School*

⁷ Children from families at 130 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for free school meals, while children from families at 185 percent of the federal poverty level qualify for reduced-price meals.

Breakfast Program in New York City Public Schools: Results from a Parent Survey Concerning Student Participation, CCC recommended that the BIC program, which provides breakfast in children's classrooms at the start of the school day, be mandated in all classrooms citywide. CCC believes that this would ensure that more children have access to a healthy breakfast.

BIC is the best way to increase children's participation in school breakfast, as it helps to reduce the barriers that otherwise prevent students from eating breakfast at school. For example, BIC eliminates the stigma some children associate with receiving a free meal in the cafeteria prior to the beginning of the school day. BIC also decreases parents' stress, because they would otherwise have to rush their children to school early in the morning, before the school day begins, in order to guarantee that their children eat breakfast in the school cafeteria. Because BIC helps diminish these obstacles, it results in more children actually eating breakfast, which is critical to their healthy development and ability to achieve academically.

- Expand Universal School Meals lunch program

Although the participation rates for school lunch are higher than for school breakfast, they are still low. More than 400,000 New York City public school children do not participate in school lunch, despite the fact that a large number of them are from families with incomes low enough to qualify them for free or reduced-price meals. Also as with breakfast, fear of being stigmatized prevents many children, especially teens, from participating. In addition, the current administration of the school lunch program is burdensome to parents and school staff; most parents must, each year, fill out an application that requires the disclosure of personal financial information, while school staff must, each day, determine which students do and do not have to pay for their meals.

CCC is an active member of the Lunch 4 Learning campaign, which seeks to make a healthy school lunch free for every New York City public school student. We believe that the New York City Department of Education can take advantage of federal options that permit all students to eat lunch for free, every day, regardless of income eligibility and without parent-submitted applications. Establishing citywide, universal free school lunches would help feed students, many of whom do not have consistent access to the healthy food they need to grow and learn. We hope that the next Administration includes in the City's budget the \$20 million of City funding needed to implement universal school lunches citywide. This investment will raise participation, which will in turn increase - by a projected \$59 million - the amount of federal and state reimbursement money the City will receive for serving more meals.

Support initiatives that fight childhood obesity

- Continue to implement menu improvements

We appreciate that the City has acted to improve the quality of meals served in New York City's public schools. The growth in the number of schools that have salad bars represents one such effort. However, further attempts to institute menu improvements, and ultimately serve higher quality meals, may be challenging, or even impossible, in schools lacking sufficient kitchen equipment. We therefore urge current and future City leaders to determine which school kitchen

facilities must be upgraded, and include funding for such improvements in the Department of Education's Capital Budget.

- Support nutrition education and school gardens

School food is not simply about the meals served to students, but also encompasses nutrition and agricultural education. The Council has funded several garden education initiatives that teach New York City students about from where their food comes. These school gardens, as well as nutrition education programs, help children learn about healthy meals and their larger environment. They are therefore vital components of children's education that should be supported and promoted.

Expand upon efforts to bring fresh, healthy foods into all New York City neighborhoods

New York City has many "food deserts" - communities where residents have limited access to healthy, affordable food. We support the initiatives that aim to increase the presence of healthy and fresh food retail outlets in underserved communities. For example, CCC has long supported the Green Carts program, advocating for its establishment and then producing a report about the first year of its implementation. We are pleased the number of Green Carts equipped with EBT technology has grown, and hope that the City will explore ways to help Green Cart vendors serve New Yorkers year-round, including through partnerships with CBOs and other agencies, so that vendors can be housed indoors and continue to work and serve their communities during inclement winter months.

Further, CCC also advocated for FRESH at its inception, and we are so pleased that already 16 new and expanding grocery stores have been approved. We agree that the next Administration should build upon and learn from the program's successes, using it to upgrade outdated infrastructure at grocery stores in neighborhoods that lack sufficient fresh food retailers. Such upgrades should include efforts to ensure that these retailers, including and especially smaller stores and bodegas, have the capacity to obtain and refrigerate fresh produce, fish, and meats. We also hope that the City will consider additional grants or incentives that would encourage food retailers to improve or further develop their outlets in underserved neighborhoods.

Finally, while we appreciate the potential that FRESH presents for food access in neighborhoods throughout the City, we must also recognize that not every retailer can leverage FRESH, especially during challenging economic times. We therefore urge current and future City decision makers to think creatively about both how to assist smaller retailers in acquiring fresh produce, including exploration of bulk or cooperative purchasing arrangements for groups of small stores, and how to negotiate the Hunts Point market. We also urge the City to explore not only how to get food into underserved neighborhoods, but also how to get residents from underserved neighborhoods to outlets that sell affordable food. For example, we would like to see the exploration of expanded use of bus services linking NYCHA residents and other community members in neighborhoods that are hard to reach via public transportation with food retail outlets, or increased use of mobile markets.

In conclusion, New York City's low-income and working families are facing ever-growing challenges in their attempts to feed their children the nutritious and affordable meals necessary for healthy growth and development. New York City must ensure that all families are provided with, and can access, nutritious foods so that their children can thrive.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

**Testimony of
Ellen Vollinger
On behalf of
Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)
Before
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
With
Committee on Health and Committee on Women's Issues
Regarding
Oversight on Hunger in New York City and Int. 1194-2013
November 25, 2013**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Palma and Members of the Committee on General Welfare and Members of the Committee on Health and of the Committee on Women's Issues. My name is Ellen Vollinger. I am Legal Director of the Washington, DC based Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). FRAC appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today in support of efforts to address hunger in New York City, including the proposed legislation to assess and track food insecurity levels across the City.

FRAC is the leading national nonprofit organization working to improve public policies and public-private partnerships to eradicate hunger and undernutrition in the United States. FRAC works with hundreds of national, state and local nonprofit organizations, public agencies, corporations and labor organizations to address hunger, food insecurity, and their root cause, poverty. We are fortunate to have strong partners in New York who help inform our work.

Ending Hunger Matters

In a nation as affluent as the United States, no one should have to go hungry. Hunger hurts those individuals and families who experience it. In addition, hunger hurts our whole society, by causing lower productivity, worse educational outcomes, and higher health costs.

Our nation and communities can and must take the steps necessary to eradicate hunger. In particular, FRAC supports President Obama's goal of ending childhood hunger in the United States by 2015. Economic policies to promote jobs and income coupled with effective nutrition safety net programs are the prescription for achieving that objective. Specific program priorities include the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), WIC, and school meals and other child nutrition programs. You will find FRAC's paper on ending childhood hunger posted at http://frac.org/newsite/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/endingchildhunger_2015paper.pdf

Assessing and Tracking Food Insecurity

Since 1995, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), using data from surveys conducted annually by the Census Bureau, has released national and state estimates of the number of people in households that are food insecure. Food insecure

households are those that are not able to afford an adequate diet at all times in the past 12 months. For states, USDA uses three-year averages to give a better estimate (with a smaller margin of error) of the number of households experiencing food insecurity. Experts agree that the Census/USDA measure of food insecurity is a conservative one, with the result that only households experiencing substantial food insecurity are so classified.

Sadly, as this USDA research documents, food insecurity remains a major problem for many Americans. One in six Americans struggled with hunger in 2012. More than 48.9 million Americans lived in households struggling against hunger in 2012. Of them, 15.8 million are children (21.6 percent of all children). Previously, in 2011, 50.1 million Americans were in food insecure households. The number of people living in households with very low food security—the worst off households—increased slightly, rising from 16.8 million in 2011 to 17.1 million in 2012. For the three-year period 2010-2012, the averages for food insecurity and for very low food security in New York State were 13.2 percent and 5.0 percent, respectively. Links to USDA's Household Food Security in the United States in 2012 are found at <http://ers.usda.gov/publications/err-economic-research-report/err155.aspx#.UpJgy2RARhU>

FRAC analysis of data from the Gallup Healthways Well-Being Index Project also confirms food hardship in the US and New York. The survey asks "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?" In 2012 percentages of households answering yes were 18.2 for the United States and 17.1 for New York State. For the period 2011-2012, the food hardship rate for the New York-North Jersey-Long Island metropolitan-statistical area (MSA) was 16.3 percent. For the period 2011-2012 food hardship was found in every congressional district in the US, with New York's 16th Congressional District scoring the nation's highest food hardship rate at 36.3 percent. For details, see FRAC's report at http://frac.org/pdf/food_hardship_2012.pdf

The proposed legislation seeks to assess and track food insecurity levels for New York City and areas within it, specifically by disaggregating data by borough and community board. Such an undertaking would provide policymakers and the public with important additional information about the extent of hunger in New York City and help them develop responses commensurate with that scope and direction. In addition, it would help inform policymakers, service providers, outreach workers, and other private and nonprofit stakeholders in determining where in the City to target resources and initiatives to improve food security.

The survey questions and methodology from USDA and others can inform New York City's efforts. For example, the California Health Survey, conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, includes questions to identify availability of food in the household in past 12 months. The data is available for counties and some subcounty areas. See http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/chis/design/Documents/respondent_topics_2011.pdf and <http://appliedresearch.cancer.gov/surveys/chis/> and <http://healthpolicy.ucla.edu/newsroom/press-releases/pages/details.aspx?NewsID=150>

Additional Priorities Not Only For Tracking But For Action

New York City can and must take steps now to improve food security for its residents, including by tracking and maximizing use of federal nutrition resources. These include SNAP, School Lunch, School Breakfast, Summer Food, Child and Adult Care Food Program, and WIC. Effective strategies for maximizing those resources are detailed in FRAC's report "Smart Choices in Hard Times," posted at <http://frac.org/smart-choices-in-hard-times/>

SNAP is a lifeline for many needy people but could be reaching more of them and with more adequate allotments. Doing so will help the City's economy. Each additional \$1 in federal SNAP benefits generates \$1.79 in economic activity. The City should build on current SNAP outreach and application processing initiatives. It should work with New York State to seek USDA approval of waivers of SNAP benefit time limits on jobless adults aged 18 to 50 without dependents who want but can't find jobs. It should help households realize the full SNAP deductions to which they are entitled—especially households with high child care costs and households (with elders or persons with disabilities) with high excess medical expenses. For more details on steps that would help needy elderly in New York, see AARP New York's white paper posted at <http://states.aarp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/AARP-NY-2013-Hunger-White-Paper.pdf>

Another key step to ending hunger in New York is for the City to increase its commitment to getting a healthy school breakfast into the hands of every child at school each morning through a strong Breakfast in the Classroom program. This should be tracked by the proposed survey -- not just how many breakfasts, but how many schools have fully implemented a program that allows children to eat in the classroom at the beginning of the school day.

Similarly, the City should make an increased commitment to serving meals in afterschool programs and track its progress through the proposed survey. We can now ensure that children have eaten a healthy meal to sustain them through the evening when they head home from their afterschool program -- whether from a school, a YMCA or another community-based organization. This program brings us closer to ensuring that no child goes to bed hungry in New York City.

Finally, the Summer Nutrition Programs must be promoted rigorously by the City and counted by the proposed survey. Meals served during the summer months are critical to thousands of children who no longer have access to the school breakfasts, lunches and afterschool snacks and meals they receive during the regular school year.

Protecting and Strengthening the Federal Nutrition Safety Net

Unfortunately, even as so many in New York City and across the nation worry about from where their next meal will come, SNAP benefits were reduced for households effective November 1st. The action is pursuant to a federal enactment in 2010 that prematurely terminated the boost in benefits made under the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. For a SNAP household of three the cut was \$29.

Moreover, Congress is considering bills to cut ten-year SNAP funding by as much as \$40 billion. We appreciate the letter opposing SNAP cuts that the Council sent to Congress earlier this year. We have posted the Council's May 10, 2013 letter on the FRAC website: http://frac.org/pdf/ny_city_council_snapsupport.pdf

Your continued voices are needed to remind Congress and the White House what is at stake. Proposed SNAP cuts would make choosing between eating and heating harder for many households. They would decrease state and local flexibility. They would shift costs of hunger to state and local government, to hard-pressed charities, and to already struggling families. Please continue to remind Congress and the White House SNAP cuts are wrong for New York City and wrong for America.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views.

Submitted by

Ellen Vollinger, FRAC Legal Director, 1875 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20009; 202-986-2200; www.frac.org

Public Hearing

Oversight: Hunger in NYC

New York City Council

Committee on General Welfare
Committee on Women's Issues
Committee on Health

November 25, 2013

Prepared by:

Lori McNeil, Ph.D

Director of Research and Policy

Safety Net Project

Carolyn O'Connor

NOEP Coordinator

Safety Net Project

URBAN
JUSTICE
CENTER



SAFETY NET PROJECT

Good afternoon, my name is Lori McNeil. I am the Director of Research and Policy at the Urban Justice Center's Safety Net Project (SNP). Thank you for this opportunity to testify. The Safety Net Project is New York City's advocate for economic justice, combining direct legal services, litigation, research, and policymaking to achieve economic justice for all New Yorkers. We protect the due process rights of low- and no-income New Yorkers by ensuring access to public benefits, nutritional assistance programs, eviction prevention services, public housing, emergency shelter, and other elements of our social safety net. SNP's attorneys and advocates hold the government accountable in order to ensure that no New Yorker is without food, housing, or other basic human rights.

In New York City, a third of our residents are classified as food insecure (Food Bank for New York City, Policy Brief, NYC on the Edge of a Hunger Cliff, September 24, 2013). Currently, almost 2 million City residents rely on the federal food stamps program, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), to provide daily sustenance. The expiration of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on November 1, 2013—which had provided a critical boost in SNAP benefits for our City residents—now has decreased food stamp levels in New York City by almost \$19 million per month from 2009 levels.

The federal Farm Bill, which includes funding for the SNAP program, is currently being negotiated for the time range of 2014-2018. The outlook for the Farm Bill budget is grim and, by most accounts, cuts to the SNAP program will be exponentially larger than those already experienced due to the sun-setting of ARRA. In light of substantially

decreased SNAP levels, and with our City already experiencing high rates of food insecurity, the Safety Net Project (SNP) urges City Council to be proactive in its interventions to address hunger in New York City.

Part of our work at the Safety Net Project includes food stamp outreach efforts. To this end, we host two outreach clinics in the Bronx at community health centers—one in Tremont and another in Fordham. The health centers are located in Congressional District (CD16), which has **the highest rate of food hardship in the entire United States**. Based on our outreach work in CD16 and research examining food hardship across the nation, we have found that hunger is not indiscriminate, but rather it is uniquely shaped by geography, which in turn is shaped by special circumstances such as disability.

This conclusion is based on preliminary analysis of 312 households SNP prescreened (in CD16) for food stamp eligibility between March and July 2013. Demographically, the 312 households were disproportionately characterized by the following:

- Households or people of color
- Income originating from SSI or SSD
- Mixed citizenship families
- Single parent/caretaker families
- Working households, i.e., earned income

It is important to note that the characteristics referred to above are often signifiers of households that are not able to individually fill hunger gaps. For example, working, disabled, or single parents may not be able to access food pantries even if the pantries have the capacity to fill the gap—which is unlikely. And, mixed citizenship households

may not have access to other safety net services such as Cash Assistance or disability benefits.

As our City explores interventions to fill the current—and predicted increased—hunger gap, we urge thoughtful consideration of geographic hunger pockets as well as the household characteristics presented above. Hunger discriminates and our efforts to eliminate hunger must include a thorough examination of hunger patterns across our City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important and timely topic and please feel free to contact the Safety Net Project should you wish for additional information or clarification regarding this testimony.



**New York City
Food Policy Center**
AT HUNTER COLLEGE

Promoting smart, fair food policy for New York

**TESTIMONY TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEES ON GENERAL
WELFARE, WOMEN'S ISSUES AND HEALTH ON HUNGER IN NEW YORK CITY**

*Janet Poppendieck, PhD, Professor Emerita of Sociology, Hunter College, CUNY, Policy
Director, New York City Food Policy at Hunter College and
Nicholas Freudenberg, DrPH, Distinguished Professor of Public Health, CUNY School of Public
Health and Hunter College and Faculty Director, NYC Food Policy Center*

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your annual review of Hunger in New York City. I congratulate the City Council for placing a priority on this issue. I am here on behalf of the New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College, of which I am the Policy Director. The Center was created in 2012 to develop intersectoral, innovative and evidence-based solutions to preventing diet related diseases and promoting food security in New York and other cities. The Center works with policy makers, community organizations, advocates and the public to create healthier, more sustainable food environments and to use food to promote community and economic development. We thank the City Council and the Speaker's office for their support of our center.

This is a pivotal moment in our history. The recent cuts to SNAP have made life even more difficult for the nearly 1.9 million New Yorkers who rely on SNAP to put food on the table, and they will harm many more New Yorkers as they trickle up through our economy, eliminating jobs and reducing work hours in the food sector. We are counting on you to reach out to other municipal legislators from around the nation and to work with our Congressional Delegation to undo these cuts and prevent the further damage that House and Senate Conferees are now contemplating. New York City will bear such an unconscionably large proportion of the cuts now under consideration that you should be leading the charge to avert them.

This is also, however, a time for bold, new thinking. With a new administration coming into City Hall, changes in your own body, and a vibrant food movement mobilizing around all things food, now is a time to "think big." I'm counting on other witnesses today to provide more facts about hunger and the performance of the food assistance programs that address it. I want to talk about a broader vision for eliminating hunger from our city by enhancing the public and non-profit food sectors.

Imagine restoring and revitalizing our public market spaces, like La Marqueta in East Harlem, just a few blocks from the CUNY School of Public Health, as centers for the healthy fruits and vegetables so needed by consumers in our neighborhoods, and as centers for

health education and celebrations of local arts and culture. Imagine turning the old Fulton Fish Market into the sort of vibrant incubator of local, artisanal food products that have helped to galvanize the food economies of other cities—Seattle’s Pike Place Market comes to mind. Imagine a thriving food incubator in every borough.

Imagine tapping the full potential of the school food programs to fight hunger by moving to universal free school lunches for all, removing the stigma that still attaches to school food in the minds of too many of our youth, and generating jobs—good jobs on the school calendar, and thus jobs that are particularly well suited to single parents—by harnessing the federal entitlement for school food. We estimate that each increase of participation by 10% will create approximately 500 such jobs. Imagine continuing to upgrade the skills of our school food cooks by training them in healthy food preparation techniques. Further, imagine increasing our summer meals program to reach more of the thousands of youngsters who eat free during the school year but do without during the summer.

And imagine using those school cafeterias and kitchens in the evening hours as public family dining rooms, where grandparents, parents and children can share healthy, affordable meals while local poets present and local musicians perform and writers read from their new novels in progress and aspiring film makers show their creations—and where City Council members mingle with and listen to their constituents. This could mean more labor hours for school food workers who desire them and a healthy alternative to fast food for parents juggling multiple jobs and child care roles.

Since so many New York City agencies and institutions prepare and serve meals—at least 270,000,000 of them each year—to some of our most vulnerable neighbors, imagine expanding food processing capacity in New York, so that we can process locally and regionally sourced food into the products that our institutions need. In Burlington, Vermont, the school system is the primary customer for a bean-processing facility that makes, among other products, a black bean crumble used to upgrade the nutrition quality and reduce the cost of healthy school food—and now that it is established, healthy hospital food and healthy day care food and healthy senior center food. And imagine stimulating the creation of local small businesses that can sell healthy regional fresh and processed foods to these institutions, and to the many corporate dining rooms that prepare and serve food in NYC.

Imagine converting the food services at the 17 campuses of the City University of New York that serve our 539,000 students and 40,000 faculty and staff into a self-operated system that can innovate new healthy products, teach culinary skills, make healthy eating a priority, provide convenient jobs for students, and redirect the profits that currently flow to corporations based in Warren, Ohio or Charlotte, North Carolina (and then on to the U.K.) into the economy of New York. [Note that 2 CUNY campuses are already self-ops].

Imagine providing start-up funds, technical assistance, and help with space for new food co-ops, to provide alternatives for New Yorkers, especially in low income communities.

Imagine a Healthy Food Truck and Street Vendors Project to assist aspiring entrepreneurs to prepare and sell healthy, affordable street food in New York City neighborhoods, parks and tourist venues.

By providing jobs and stimulating economic activity, we will be reducing hunger and the need to rely on the uncertain mercies of the SNAP Program, but it works the other way, too. With creative and energetic outreach to enroll an additional 250,000 eligible New Yorkers in SNAP, we can increase the federal income stream that Congress seems intent on taking away from us.

New York City faces three intersecting food crises: too many New Yorkers are hungry or food insecure, too many are at risk of diet-related diseases and too many food workers can't support themselves and their families on their current wages. The City Council, the new Mayor, the food movement—all of us have the opportunity to make real progress in transforming New York City's food environments by tackling these three problems simultaneously. It's time to think big. We at the New York City Food Policy Center stand ready to explore these ideas with you and to help in any way we can. Together we can realize the vision of a New York City without hunger, without rising rates of diet-related diseases, and without food workers who go hungry or have to apply for SNAP benefits—truly the food capital of the world.

For more information about the New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College, visit our website at www.nycfoodpolicy.org or e-mail Nicholas Freudenberg at nf@nycfoodpolicy.org.

FOR THE RECORD



New York City Council

November 25, 2013

Oversight Hearing on Hunger-General Welfare Committee

Testimony of Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

Since its inception in 1972, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) has been a defender and advocate for New Yorkers in need. Our broad range of culturally sensitive programs and services are designed to stabilize individuals and families in crisis while giving them tools for continued self-sufficiency.

Together with our network of 25 local Jewish Community Councils, Met Council is able to aid, sustain, and empower more than 100,000 people annually in every ZIP code in New York City. We serve the working-poor, near-poor, immigrant community, recently unemployed, and seniors living on fixed incomes, many of who are not eligible for government assistance because they hover just above the federal poverty threshold.

Whether they are needy families struggling to feed their children, low-income immigrants, or the frail elderly, Met Council provides them with emergency as well as continuous food assistance. Our Food Program consists of food packages (5.2 million pounds of food distributed to 15,000 households per month annually), emergency food vouchers (approximately \$600, 000 distributed annually) and kosher soup kitchens (81,473 weekday meals and 22,962 weekend meals). All of the food is kosher, making us a unique provider for the needy Jewish population. **However, all of our nutritional resources are available to anyone in need.** Through the Paperless Office System (POS) operated in collaboration with the Human Resources Administration, we are able to facilitate enrollment of over 9,000 applications for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formally known as the Food Stamps program) annually.

Contrary to popular belief, the percentage of New Yorkers that experience food insecurity is exceedingly high. According to the Food Bank of New York, 1.9 million New Yorkers rely on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits and 1 in 3 struggle to afford food. Before the SNAP cuts on Nov 1st the average household ran out of SNAP benefits by the 4th week of the month, now recipients will see an average a 7% reduction in their benefits, which means they will run out of SNAP benefits by the 3rd week of the month.

The current version of the Farm bill, which sharply reduces SNAP, will have a disproportionately devastating effect on New York City residents. On average, this will result in a loss of \$90-130 per month per household. This will also place an excessive burden on our food pantries and soup kitchens. Even before any SNAP cuts take place Met Council food pantries are already experiencing a drastic increase in demand for food.

As the primary emergency food provider for the needy Jewish population, we find that the scarcity of kosher food in The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) is also a serious issue that must be addressed. Food insecurity and hunger is as widespread in the Jewish community as in other underserved populations. Presently almost no fresh protein items are available to people with kosher dietary restrictions. As such, we believe that needy individuals and families should not have to compromise a nutritious diet in order to adhere to their religious values. Similarly we know that the Halal community, who follows similar dietary restriction to those with a Kosher eating practices, are also being face with increasingly limited emergency food option.

We hope that you join us in advocating for increases in SNAP and TEFAP with more availability of kosher products and fresh protein in the system.

I would like to reiterate that we could not continue providing critical social services to over 100,000 needy New Yorkers each year without the vital partnership of New York City Council We deeply value your leadership and partnership and look forward to working together to help the needy throughout the New York area.

Thank you.

Sarah Felsenthal

Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

www.metcouncil.org

80 Maiden Lane, 21st Floor

New York, New York 10024

Phone: 347-839-0106

Email: sfelsenthal@metcouncil.org



A CAMPAIGN FOR FREE AND HEALTHY SCHOOL LUNCH FOR ALL

Win! Win! Win!

1: Students Win

Eliminate Stigma:

- **No income identification of students in the lunchroom or anywhere else.**
- **Increase participation. More students will eat school lunch meaning better nutrition for all.**

Many students skip school meals because of the “poor kid” stigma. Studies and surveys show that school meals are more nutritious than items students buy from stores or bring from home. School meals offer more vegetables, fruits, and whole grains needed to fight childhood obesity and sustain children’s health.

2: Schools Win

Eliminate costly and labor intensive paperwork for schools:

- **No need for schools to collect family income applications.**
- **No need for school staff to identify students by income at the point of meal service.**

Save valuable staff time that could otherwise be used for education. Several federal options are available that do not require schools to collect forms or income information from parents. The Mayor, City Council, and Chancellor of the Department of Education should seize these opportunities.

3: Jobs and the Local Economy Win

Increase school meals participation:

- **More meals mean more jobs -- every 10% increase in lunch participation creates approximately 500 jobs.**
- **More meals mean more food purchased in the local economy.**

Most of the costs of school meals are covered by federal and state reimbursements. These funds add to the city’s economy by providing thousands of jobs in school cafeterias and the food industry, generating significant local economic activity at minimal cost to the city.

New York City can offer free school lunch to all students for an additional \$20 annual investment per student. The additional \$20 million city investment will bring in \$59 million of federal and state funding. (See www.lunch4learningnyc.org for cost projections.)

Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio should make this a priority.



A Campaign for Free and Healthy School Lunch for All

Partner list (10-17-13)

Advocates for Children
American Academy of Pediatrics New York Chapter 3
Alliance for Quality Education
Bed-Stuy Campaign Against Hunger
Beth Hark Christian Counseling Center, Inc.
Bronx Bethany Community Corporation
Bronx Health Reach
BronxWorks
Brooklyn Food Coalition
Brooklyn Movement Center
CAMBA
Celebrevents
Chhaya CDC
Child Development Support Corporation
Children's Aid Society
Citizens' Committee for Children
Children's Defense Fund - NY
City Harvest
Coalition for Educational Justice
Community Education Council 17 - Brooklyn
Community Food Advocates
Community Health Action of Staten Island
Congregation Anshe Chesed
Congregation Rodeph Sholom
Council of School Supervisors and Administrators,
Local 1: American Federation of School Administrators, AFL-CIO
CUNY School of Public Health
District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO
El Puente
Every Day is a Miracle, Inc.
FoodFight
Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies
First Corinthian Baptist Church Fishes and Loaves
Food Bank for New York City

Food Research and Action Center
Fort Greene Peace
Goddard Riverside Community Center
Good Shepherd Services
Henry Street Settlement
Hour Children
Human Services Council of New York
Hunger Action Network of NYS
Jamaica Seventh Day Adventist Church
Jan Poppendieck, Author, Free for All: Fixing School Food in America
Judson Memorial Church
Just Food
Kolot Chayeinu/Voices of Our Lives
**Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food, Education & Policy at Teachers
College Columbia University**
Make the Road New York
**Marion Nestle, Paulette Goddard Professor, NYU, Steinhardt School,
Department of Nutrition, Food Studies & Public Health**
Met Council on Jewish Poverty
Metropolitan NYC WIC Association
Middle Collegiate Church
MinKwon Center for Community Action
Myrtle Avenue Revitalization Project
Neighborhood Family Services Coalition
New York City Coalition Against Hunger
**New York City Councilman Robert Jackson, Chair, Education
Committee**
New York City Councilman Brad Lander
New York City Councilman Stephen Levin
New York City Food and Fitness Partnership
New York City Food Policy Center at Hunter College
New York City LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce
New York State Senator Liz Krueger
New York Faith and Justice
New York City Public Advocate Elect Letitia James
Red Rabbit
Resilience Advocacy Project
School Food FOCUS
Share Our Strength
Silvia Center
Slow Food NYC
Single Stop USA
Society for the Advancement of Judaism
Southside United HDFC - Los Sures
St. Nick's Alliance
Staten Island Federation of Parent Teacher Associations

The After School Corporation
The Battery Conservancy
The Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)
The Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew
The Fort Greene/Clinton Hill Community Food Council
The River Fund
True Gospel Tabernacle
UJA-Federation of NY
United Federation of Teachers
Union Settlement Association
United Community Centers/United Community Day Care Center
United Neighborhood Houses
United Way of New York City
Uniting Disabled Individuals, Inc.
University Settlement
Wellness In The Schools
West Side Campaign Against Hunger
WhyHunger
YMCA of Greater New York
YWCA of the City of New York



Real Possibilities

AARP New York State Office

Testimony Before the New York City Council

Local Law 1194 to amend the New York City charter
and the administrative code of the city of New York

November 25, 2013

New York City, New York

Introduction

Good afternoon Council Member Palma and other members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Beth Finkel, State Director for AARP in New York.

AARP is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, with a membership of more than 37 million that helps people turn their goals and dreams into real possibilities, strengthens communities, and fights for the issues that matter most to families such as healthcare, employment and income security, retirement planning, affordable utilities and protection from financial abuse. Here in New York, AARP has 2.5 million members – with about 800,000 in the New York City metro area. AARP's work toward ending hunger is often supported by the work of the AARP Foundation.

AARP Foundation is an affiliated charity of AARP that is working to win back opportunities for struggling Americans age 50+ by being a force for change on the most serious issues they face today: housing, hunger, income and isolation.

I would like to thank you for allowing us to speak today about the important issue of older adult hunger and particularly, Local Law 1194 to amend the New York City Charter and the administrative code of the City of New York, in relation to assessing food security.

Background

Hunger is a key issue for AARP and is one of the AARP Foundation's top four priority areas nationwide. Of the 50 million Americans who face the threat of hunger, nearly nine million are over the age of 50. According to the AARP Foundation, more than 7% of older Americans are at risk of hunger reside in New York State.

In New York State, one in four people over age 60 living at home are considered nutritionally at-risk. Many low-income older adults have to make the difficult choice between paying for medications and housing costs or putting nutritious food on the table. Research from the Food Bank for New York City finds that more than 15% of New York City residents aged 50 and over paid for rent instead of food, and more than 15% also reported paying for medications and health care costs instead of food.

In these economic times, making ends meet has become harder and harder for so many families and older adults in New York, with the effects of the recession still lingering and older workers facing a weak job market. AARP has made it a priority that it be easier and more acceptable for people to apply for food assistance when they are in need. In particular AARP has focused on increasing participation in SNAP which also brings an economic boost to our local economy. For every five dollars that a SNAP recipient spends, nine dollars are added to the economy.

AARP Position on Local Law 1194

AARP is supportive of this proposal and we believe it can provide much needed detailed information to help target resources to those in need.

Local law 1194 requires the Director of the Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability in collaboration with the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Mental Hygiene, social services/human resources administration, and other individuals as the Director of the Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability shall designate to establish a set of indicators to assess and track the level of food security in the city, including but not limited to a survey of New Yorkers regarding their level of food security. In addition, a report would be developed on these indicators to be included in the annual City Food System Metrics Report. The report shall disaggregate such indicators by borough and community board as well.

AARP believes that food insecurity among the elderly is a growing problem. This new proposal, which will empower policy makers with more information about this growing societal challenge, is worthy of enacting. In addition, the information that is gathered by this survey relating to the level of food insecurity could also be used to target SNAP outreach and other related services and benefits to make sure that people are aware that help is available when needed.

Conclusion

Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on this proposal of which AARP is in strong support.

AARP and the AARP Foundation are committed to making sure that people have easy access to the nutritional services they need in order to remain healthy and living independently in the community. We believe this proposal is a step in that direction by getting a better understanding of the level of food insecurity in New York City.

Thank you for making New York City a place where older people can age with independence and dignity.



2012 SUMMIT

HUNGER AMONG OLDER NEW YORKERS

Breaking Down the Barriers

Made possible by AARP and AARP Foundation

Acknowledgements

AARP thanks Nicole Kulik and Ellen Vollinger for writing this report. AARP would like to acknowledge the leadership of Beth Finkel and Christine Deska who led the charge to convene New York's anti-hunger leaders and implement programs and services to help those in need. We would also like to thank David McNally and Bill Ferris from AARP's Legislative Office in Albany for continuing to work diligently toward policy changes that will improve the lives of older New Yorkers in need of food assistance.

AARP and AARP Foundation funding and thoughtful leadership made the 2012 summit and this paper possible. AARP would also like to commend the AARP Foundation's commitment, especially the dedication and expertise of Karen Patyk, to fighting hunger among older adults through a variety of initiatives nationwide, most notably the *Drive to End Hunger* effort.

Finally, we would like to thank the 2012 Summit planning committee, speakers, and participants for their thoughtful recommendations on this important issue.

Speakers

Linda Bopp, Executive Director
Hunger Solutions New York

Bonnie Brathwaite, Regional SNAP Director
*Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Northeast
Regional Office*

Corinda Crossdale, Executive Deputy Director
New York State Office for the Aging

Kim Hernandez, Deputy Assistant
Commissioner | *New York City Department for the
Aging*

Jo Ann Jenkins, President, AARP Foundation
and COO, AARP

Karol Markosky, Director of Training
and Innovation | *Council of Senior Centers and
Services of New York City*

Phyllis Morris, Acting Deputy Commissioner
*New York State Office of Temporary and Disability
Assistance*

Gwen O'Shea, President
Health and Welfare Council of Long Island

Jim Weill, President
Food Research and Action Center

Ellie Wilson, Senior Nutritionist
*Price Chopper Supermarkets,
Food Industry Alliance*

Planning Committee

Lori Andrade, Senior Director of Planning and Development | *Health and Welfare Council of Long Island*

Jeanette Batiste, Chief Operating Officer
FoodLink

Joel Berg, Executive Director | *New York City Coalition Against Hunger*

Lucia Perez Bernhardt, Director of Economic Empowerment | *Hispanic Federation*

Linda Bopp, Executive Director
Hunger Solutions New York

Christine Deska, Senior Program Specialist
AARP New York

Beth Finkel, State Director | *AARP New York*

Tom Hedderman, Director of Food and Nutrition Policy | *New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*

Jan Kallio, Outreach Coordinator
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Northeast Regional Office

Misha Marvel, Special Projects Coordinator
Hunger Solutions New York

David McNally, Senior Manager of Advocacy
AARP New York

Greg Olsen, Acting Director
New York State Office for the Aging

Eddie Ortega, Outreach Strategist
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Northeast Regional Office

Gwen O'Shea, President
Long Island Health and Welfare Council

Karen Patyk, Program Manager
AARP Foundation

Mark Quandt, Executive Director
Regional Food Bank

Arva Rice, President and Chief Executive Officer
New York Urban League

Bobbie Sackman, Director of Public Policy
Council of Senior Centers and Services of New York City

Frances Shannon-Akstull, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Bureau Chief | *New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance*

Jody Signoracci, Director of Constituency Services | *New York State Office for the Aging*

Triada Stampas, Director of Government Relations and Public Education | *Food Bank For New York City*

Ellen Vollinger, Legal Director
Food Research and Action Center

Penny Weaver, Program Specialist
Food and Nutrition Service, USDA Northeast Regional Office

Jo-Ann Yoo, Managing Director of Community Services | *Asian American Federation*

Executive Summary

Of the 50 million Americans who face the threat of hunger, nearly nine million are over the age of 50. According to AARP Foundation, more than 7% of these older Americans who are at risk of hunger reside in New York State.¹ Many low-income older adults have to make the difficult choice between paying for medications and housing costs or putting nutritious food on the table. Research from the Food Bank For New York City finds that more than 15% of New York City residents aged 50 and over paid for rent instead of food, and more than 15% also reported paying for medications and health care costs instead of food.²

AARP New York and AARP Foundation have resolved to eliminate the threat of hunger in New York State. To further this purpose, on November 13, 2012, they and their stakeholder partners hosted a summit entitled “Hunger Among Older New Yorkers: Breaking Down the Barriers.”

This 2012 summit and report builds on the successes of a previous summit, which was held on October 18, 2010, and identified key collective strategies to end hunger in New York State. With engagement of stakeholders and leadership from Governor Andrew Cuomo, three of the 2010 summit recommendations were implemented: the name of the Food Stamp Program was changed to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) (effective August 29, 2012); the finger-imaging requirement was eliminated statewide (effective on November 1, 2012); and funding for New York State’s Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (“NOEP”) was increased by \$1 million to fund an expansion of SNAP outreach work in targeted counties.

These achievements since 2010 represent important progress in reducing stigma, removing procedural deterrents, and providing additional education and outreach to assist New Yorkers in accessing SNAP. Nonetheless, more remains to be done.

Approximately half of older New Yorkers who may be eligible do not receive SNAP benefits.³ In order to raise the participation rates of older eligible adults in the SNAP program, the 2012 summit participants identified and discussed the barriers that continue to impede older New Yorkers’ access to this nutrition program and identified ways in which to minimize or eliminate these barriers.

¹ AARP Foundation, 2012

² Food Bank For NYC, 2012

³ Hunger Solutions NY, 2012

2012 Summit Recommendations

Summit attendees, comprised of experts from New York State and across the nation, participated in a series of workgroups that focused on the following topics: policy, direct service, service integration, and messaging. These workgroups facilitated discussions on the barriers that hinder older adults' participation in SNAP and allowed attendees to discuss proven strategies and brainstorm about innovative new ways to connect eligible older New Yorkers to this critical nutrition assistance program.

These discussions led to the following policy recommendations:

- ***Simplify SNAP application and improve program effectiveness***
 - *Develop a shortened application for seniors in New York*
 - *Seek and implement a waiver to extend seniors' recertification period to 3 years*
- ***Increase SNAP benefit adequacy***
 - *Implement a Standard Medical Deduction*
 - *Conduct outreach to encourage more older adults to use the current medical deduction*
- ***Use data-sharing strategies within and among agencies to increase SNAP participation***
- ***Improve and expand state-level SNAP outreach and education***
- ***Protect and expand resources for other hunger relief programs***

Though this paper primarily focuses on recommendations geared toward action by New York State, summit participants also identified federal-level policy decisions that affect food insecure older adults. A federal SNAP benefit cutback slated to take effect November 1, 2013, and congressional Farm Bill proposals that threaten to slash SNAP funding further and undermine state administrative flexibility would exacerbate hunger among older New Yorkers. In contrast, federal policies that would improve senior food security include replacing the Thrifty Food Plan with the Low Cost Meal Plan as the basis for SNAP allotments.

INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

Activities Leading to 2012 Summit

In July 2010, AARP New York began convening stakeholders throughout New York State around the issue of older adult hunger, bringing together nontraditional partners from the aging, hunger, philanthropic, and government sectors. The 2012 summit and resulting report builds on the successes of a summit held in October 2010, the first summit focusing on hunger and aging in New York State. A 2010 white paper, "Older Adult Hunger: Framing the Issue in New York," identified key collective strategies and recommendations to end older adult hunger. As referenced in the executive summary, three of the 2010 summit recommendations were achieved within a two-year period.

In 2011 and 2012, AARP New York, with the support of AARP Foundation continued its hunger work in partnership with Hunger Solutions New York hosting a series of Drive to End Hunger Roundtable thought leader discussions. These thought leader roundtables were held in five geographically diverse locations around the state (Rochester, Syracuse, Utica, Glens Falls, and Suffolk County), and three were held in New York City and focused on multicultural older adult populations: African American/Black/Caribbean, Hispanic/Latino, and Asian. These thought leadership efforts have evolved into local collaborative groups that meet regularly to discuss how they can most effectively coordinate their resources to address older adult hunger at the local level. AARP New York, with the support of AARP Foundation, also participated in the New York City Hunger Free Communities Consortium, a two-year USDA grant project. The grant worked primarily with the New York City Department for the Aging and the Council of Senior Centers and Services to hold SNAP enrollment events and station trained specialists at senior centers throughout New York City's most vulnerable communities.

Finally, during 2012, AARP New York, AARP Foundation, and stakeholders planned a statewide summit to engage thought leaders in a strategic discussion about policies and practices to address hunger among older New Yorkers. The Hunger Among Older New Yorkers: Breaking Down the Barriers Summit was held in Albany, NY, on November 13, 2012. This report reflects information and background related to the summit discussions and the major recommendations that emerged.

Food Insecurity Nationally and in New York

Summit discussions helped frame the dimensions, causes, and costs of hunger among older adults nationally and in New York State. Of the 50 million Americans who face the threat of hunger, nearly nine million are over the age of 50. According to AARP Foundation, more than 7% of these older Americans who are at risk of hunger reside in New York State.⁴

Summit participants noted that older adult women and minorities are at greater risk of food insecurity. It is estimated that three out of every five seniors facing hunger are women, and African Americans and Hispanics are twice as likely to face hunger threats as Whites are.⁵ In 2011, food insecurity rates for African Americans and Hispanics in the US, were 25.1% and 26.2%, respectively, compared

⁴ AARP Foundation, 2012

⁵ Waldron, 2012

with the national average of 14.7%.⁶ A State Profile of Food Insecurity for Seniors revealed similar disparities among older New Yorkers: food insecurity rates for older African American New Yorkers and older Hispanic adults were 12.7% and 14.3%, respectively, while the food insecurity rate for the general population of older New York adults was 3.7%.⁷

Many older adults in New York are on fixed incomes and rely on Social Security benefits as the main source of their monthly income. The typical older adult receives just over \$1,200 per month in Social Security benefits.⁸ In New York State, 22.6% of Social Security recipients rely on Social Security for 90% or more of their income, and 47.6% rely on Social Security for 50% or more of their income.⁹

Seniors use their limited dollars to pay for housing expenses, health care, utility bills, groceries, and other daily needs. Many low-income older adults have to make the difficult choice between paying for medications and housing costs or putting nutritious food on the table. Research from the Food Bank For New York City finds that more than 15% of New York City residents aged 50 and over paid for rent instead of food; and more than 15% also reported paying for medications and health care costs instead of food.¹⁰

Limited access to transportation contributes to older adults' nutritional challenges. Without reliable access to transportation, older adults are more likely to shop at places near their homes such as convenience stores, corner stores, and fast food restaurants where there is often an inadequate supply of healthy foods.

Summit attendees discussed the importance of food security to improving health outcomes, including issues with obesity. Inexpensive, energy-dense foods can be filling but may contribute to obesity. This is cause for concern because obesity increases the risk of health conditions such as hypertension, adverse lipid concentrations, and type 2 diabetes.¹¹

As the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) has pointed out:

While all segments of the population are affected, low-income and food insecure people are especially vulnerable due to the additional risk factors associated with poverty, including limited resources, limited access to healthy and affordable foods, and limited opportunities for physical activity.¹²

Researchers have found that food insecure adults are more likely to be overweight or obese.¹³ Data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) conducted in 2009-2010 revealed that more than one-third of adults in the United States are considered obese. The survey showed that 36.6% of men and 42.3% of women over the age of 60 were classified as obese.¹⁴ In New York State, approximately 22% of adults over the age of 60 were classified as obese.¹⁵

⁶ Colemam-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, & Carlson, 2012

⁷ Ziliak & Gunderson, 2009

⁸ AARP Foundation, 2012

⁹ AARP, 2012.

¹⁰ Food Bank For NYC, 2012

¹¹ Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012

¹² Food Research & Action Center (FRAC), 2010 a, b or c?

¹³ Basiotis & Lino, 2002; Wilde & Peterman, 2006.

¹⁴ Ogden et al. 2011

¹⁵ Wales & Brissette, 2011

Gaps in SNAP Participation Among Older New Yorkers

In light of food insecurity and risk factors associated with it and obesity, AARP New York, AARP Foundation, and summit participants discussed the importance of increasing older adults' awareness of and access to nutrition assistance programs such as SNAP so they can afford a healthier diet on a more consistent basis.

SNAP reaches only a fraction of the seniors who are eligible. Nationally, only 35% of eligible seniors (age 60 or over) participate in SNAP.¹⁶ While a higher percentage of eligible seniors are served in New York State than nationally, SNAP misses about half of those New York State seniors who are eligible—an estimated 500,000 older New Yorkers.

In some New York neighborhoods, SNAP senior under-participation gaps are particularly large. In parts of Queens and Staten Island, for example, SNAP under-enrollment rates of older seniors are great with only 45% of those eligible receiving the benefit.¹⁷

Summit participants noted that language access is a challenge for connecting needy older New Yorkers with SNAP. Currently, “3.2 million New Yorkers of all ages report that they do not speak English ‘very well.’”¹⁸ These individuals indicated that they speak a language other than English at home and do not consider themselves proficient in English language skills.¹⁹

Additional challenges that summit attendees identified in closing SNAP participation gaps in New York State are variations in policy and practice across counties, problems for SNAP clients to maintain SNAP benefits when they move across counties, and shortfalls in administrative infrastructure.

Statewide Anti-Hunger Task Force

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has stressed the serious consequences of food insecurity on the elderly, including “increase[d] hospitalizations, physician’s visits, and the need for expensive prescription drugs.”²⁰ In his 2013 State of the State address, he implored public officials and organizations across the state to commit to fighting senior hunger in their communities.

In calling for better coordination of both public and private resources to systematically and effectively address food insecurity in New York,

Governor Cuomo announced the creation of a “Statewide Anti-Hunger Task Force to work to end hunger in New York by leveraging public-private partnerships to maximize and improve New York’s network of anti-hunger services. The taskforce will focus on three goals [one of which is] increasing participation in federally-funded anti-hunger programs.”²¹

At the time of print, parameters are reportedly in development for the task force.

¹⁶ USDA 2012 reporting 2010 data

¹⁷ Council of Senior Centers and Services of NYC, Inc., 2013

¹⁸ New York State Office for the Aging (NYSOFA), n.d.a

¹⁹ NYSOFA, n.d.a

²⁰ Cuomo, 2012a, p. 146

²¹ Cuomo, 2012a, p.134

Overcoming Barriers

Summit attendees identified five main barriers to older New Yorkers' participation in SNAP:

- 1) Stigma and Myths Surrounding SNAP;
- 2) Difficulty Navigating the SNAP Application;
- 3) Inadequate Benefit Amounts;
- 4) Cultural and Language Barriers; and
- 5) Lack of Access Due to Transportation and Geographic Location

Barrier 1: Stigma and Myths Surrounding SNAP

Many myths surrounding SNAP were identified by summit attendees. The following three myths were found to create the most daunting challenges for older adults in need of assistance.

Myth 1: If I apply for SNAP, I'll get only \$16 per month.

Reality: The average SNAP household with a senior in New York receives \$170.42/month. SNAP households with more than one senior receive an average benefit of \$191.60/month.²²

Myth 2: By participating in SNAP, older adults will be taking away benefits from others who need them more, such as working families and children.

Reality: SNAP benefits are available to all eligible individuals who qualify. SNAP benefits are funded with federal money, and no participant is taking anything away from another person in need. In fact, every \$5 in new SNAP benefits generates \$9 in total community spending.²³

Myth 3: Older adults are required to have a face-to-face interview before SNAP benefits can be issued.

Reality: Older adults may have a face-to-face interview if that is their preference; however, in New York State, it is common for the interview to be conducted by telephone or by a scheduled home visit.²⁴

²² NYSOFA, n.d.b

²³ U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2010

²⁴ Federal policy gives applicants for whom an office visit would present "hardship" the option to replace the face-to-face interview with a telephone interview. "These hardship conditions include, but are not limited to: Illness, transportation difficulties, care of a household member, hardships due to residency in a rural area, prolonged severe weather, or work or training hours which prevent the household from participating in an in-office interview." (7 CFR 273.2(e)(2)) To streamline the process of clients getting telephone interviews, New York State sought and has been granted authority from USDA 1) to waive the face-to-face interview without having to document hardship in the case file, 2) to offer telephone interviews at application for certain households with employed members; and 3) to offer telephone interviews at SNAP recertification for households not receiving public cash assistance.

Research findings underscore the significance of the misimpressions about which the summit discussants raised concerns.²⁵

Discussion of Barrier 1

Summit attendees reviewed actions to dispel the myths. One successful approach that was cited integrates SNAP outreach and education for seniors with other programs that seniors are more comfortable discussing, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). The other programs are often conversation starters that build trust between the outreach worker and the senior. Building trust is especially important when serving an older population, as the client is often more receptive to learning about SNAP after a relationship has been established. Seniors are then more likely to access SNAP benefits as well as additional benefits and resources.

Summit discussants also reviewed procedural changes that could help in alleviating seniors' concerns about the SNAP interview process. In addition to the efforts New York State has made to allow SNAP applicants to complete the eligibility process without an in-office interview, the state could alleviate the burdens on households at recertification by seeking a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) waiver eliminating the requirement for any type of interview for those households comprised of elderly persons or persons with disabilities with no earned incomes and stable economic circumstances. Five states (AR, LA, MA, NM, TX) have taken this recertification interview waiver.²⁶

Barrier 2: Lack of Awareness and Difficulty Navigating the SNAP Application

Some eligible seniors are not aware that they qualify to receive SNAP. And even those who are aware may have difficulty with the enrollment process.

Summit participants identified the complexity of the SNAP application itself as one challenge. The SNAP application in New York State is lengthy and often requires extensive documentation to verify individuals' personal and financial information before benefits can be issued. The process of filling out the application may be difficult for seniors with cognitive or physical limitations. Even with assistance, some seniors may not remember or have the ability to provide the documentation required to complete the six-page application.

New York State may take steps to increase the participation rates of eligible older adults who qualify for SNAP benefits by simplifying the application process, conducting targeted outreach, and providing comprehensive statewide application assistance. These steps would build on recent progress New York has already made in these areas.

Discussion of Barrier 2

First, summit participants recommended that New York State offer a simplified SNAP application for older individuals similar to that offered in Alabama's Elderly Simplified Application Project (AESAP). The Alabama project was "designed to reinvent the SNAP application process for those households where all members are age 60+ and have no earned income." Alabama successfully simplified and

²⁵FRAC, 2008.

²⁶U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2013b

shortened its SNAP benefit application for elders to two pages and secured USDA approval to set 3-year certification periods for those participants. Also, with USDA's approval of its demonstration, Alabama eliminated the interview for the project's elder households. Other states with USDA-approved elderly simplified application demonstrations include Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, and South Carolina. Under the simplified elderly application approach, "[i]nformation reported in the application is verified through data matches for income, Social Security numbers, and non-citizen status."²⁷

The Alabama model is one of at least two pathways that New York State could follow to achieve a simplified SNAP application for older persons. First, as Alabama did, New York State could apply to USDA for a demonstration project that not only simplifies the application for seniors, but also lengthens the certification period and eases the interview requirement for them. Alternatively, even without USDA approval, New York State, as Massachusetts, Vermont and Rhode Island have done, could develop and offer seniors a simplified application form.²⁸

Second, summit discussants recommended that New York State implement more cross-agency strategies, including data matching. As an example, they pointed to New York State's successful implementation of the Supplemental Security Income/Combined Application Program (SSI/CAP) that seamlessly enrolls older SSI participants. SSI/CAP eliminates red tape and extra steps by enrolling individuals in SNAP when the government already has information from which to determine SNAP eligibility for a standardized SNAP benefit amount.²⁹

SSI/CAP is just one example of data-matching strategies with promise. Additional targeted outreach approaches, using a cross-agency data-driven approach, have the potential to identify hundreds of thousands of older New Yorkers who are currently enrolled in Medicaid, HEAP, and other benefits, but not in SNAP.

AARP Foundation has seen substantial success in this area through its partnership with Benefits Data Trust and Maryland and Pennsylvania state government. In less than one year, this effort has resulted in the submission of over 6,000 SNAP applications on behalf of low-income older adults by matching SNAP data with LIHEAP and Unemployment Insurance data. This process is both effective and efficient. It identifies individuals who are likely eligible for SNAP by receipt of an existing benefit and provides targeted application assistance to them as well as ongoing support throughout the enrollment process. To date, this effort has generated an estimated \$5.8 million in SNAP benefits and =\$10.4 million in local economic activity.

Third, New York State leverages federal investments for SNAP application assistance through its Nutrition Education and Outreach Program (NOEP). By building on that model, New York can increase its capacity for NOEP to reach even more eligible people identified by data matches and provide application assistance, thereby increasing SNAP participation among even more older New Yorkers in the short term.

²⁷Alabama Department of Human Resources, n.d.a

²⁸USDA, 2010, p. 33

²⁹FRAC, 2004.

Barrier 3: Inadequate Benefit Amounts

Another barrier that summit participants identified as hindering seniors from applying for SNAP benefits is seniors' perceptions of benefit amounts: that benefit amounts are too low to merit completing the process, and that all seniors get no more than the \$16 a month minimum benefit amount.

The average benefit for New York SNAP households with seniors is much higher than the minimum. In fact, the average SNAP household with a senior in New York receives \$170.42/month. SNAP households with more than one senior receive an average benefit of \$191.60/month. Even so, many thousands of older New York SNAP participants could likely be qualifying for more adequate SNAP benefit amounts if their out-of-pocket medical costs were taken into account as allowed by federal law.

Barriers to claiming the medical deduction include lack of awareness of the deduction, too little information about the diverse expenses that can be claimed, and difficulty in verifying expenses.

Discussion of Barrier 3

Summit participants identified the best practices to overcome misperceptions about benefit levels as well as to make seniors' SNAP benefit amounts more robust. These include 1) increasing outreach to inform seniors about how SNAP benefit amounts can help them meet their basic needs; 2) instituting practices to streamline the process for New York SNAP seniors' to deduct out-of-pocket medical expenses; 3) expanding on incentives that boost SNAP purchasing power; and 4) advocating for federal policies that protect and improve benefit levels.

Addressing Misperceptions

On the misperception front, summit participants discussed outreach messaging to older adult New Yorkers about the value of SNAP benefits. First, the average eligible SNAP household with a senior in New York receives \$2,040 in SNAP benefits per year, or about \$170 per month (as stated in Myth #1 above). Even those seniors eligible for only the minimum \$16/month benefit can find it significant in helping to afford nutritious food and free up their resources to pay for other basic needs such as utilities and medicine.

Outreach campaigns that convey this information and offer individual application assistance can help seniors understand what a positive difference completing the SNAP enrollment process can make for them. See Appendix I for sample outreach messaging.

Boosting Purchasing Power

Additionally, improving clients' benefit levels can help in addressing clients' perceptions about whether applying for SNAP is worthwhile. Helping clients take deductions for which they qualify can boost their allotment levels without a federal law change. Implementing financial incentives for SNAP redemptions can boost clients' purchasing power. Advocating for federal policy initiatives also can guard against benefit decreases and result in more adequate benefit levels for SNAP participants.

Getting the Full Value of the Medical Deduction

Strategies states can adopt to address barriers to claiming the SNAP medical deduction include

outreach and application assistance. For example, some states provide checklists about the type of expenses that count—from medical/dental care, health insurance co-pays, prescription eyeglasses, and over the counter medicines, to costs of transportation to obtain medical treatment or medical supplies. Having outreach workers available to help clients identify and gather documents to prove medical costs and having caseworkers trained on how to handle the deductions can help more clients get the value of the deductions.

In addition, in order to streamline the process of documenting excess medical costs, some states have waivers from the USDA for a Standard Medical Deduction. The projects must be cost neutral for the federal government and have an evaluation component. Under the Standard Medical Deduction waiver, once the senior has documented aggregate unreimbursed medical expenses above \$35, the senior gets a standard medical deduction amount, which boosts that client's SNAP allotment amount. If the senior has higher actual medical costs and would qualify for a deduction higher than the standard, the senior can opt to prove those actual costs instead of receiving the standard amount. Upon recertification, participants remain eligible for the standard medical deduction if they declare that their medical expenses continue to exceed \$35; further verification is not required unless the declaration is questionable.

Analysis by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) suggests that a state's chances for success in maximizing potential SNAP benefits for seniors with out-of-pocket medical costs are improved by combining the Standard Medical Deduction with the other strategies discussed above—specifically with targeted outreach, application assistance, and caseworker training.³⁰

Offering Incentives to Boost Purchasing Power

Summit attendees also discussed the potential for expanding the reach and impact of incentive programs, such as Health Bucks and Fresh Connects, that provide SNAP shoppers with extra benefit amounts for targeted purchases at farmers markets. They expressed interest in bringing incentive approaches to grocery store outlets as part of the effort to improve seniors' access to affordable, healthy food.

Health Bucks are paper vouchers, worth \$2 each, developed and distributed by NYC Health Department District Public Health Offices and which can be used to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables at participating farmers markets. For every \$5 a customer spends using Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT), s/he receives one \$2 Health Buck coupon. This increase of 40% in buying power stretches a Food Stamp budget and encourages shoppers to spend more of their monthly Food Stamp allotment on fresh produce from the market. This innovative program helps GrowNYC/Greenmarket provide additional opportunities for residents to buy fresh and affordable produce while supporting regional farmers.³¹

³⁰States that have approved demonstration Standard Medical Deduction waivers include AR, IL, IA, MA, MO, NH, ND, RI, SD, TX, VT, VA, and WY. Standardized deduction amounts range from \$83 to \$210. In those states taking the Standard Medical Deduction, keeping the impact on federal spending “cost neutral” is accomplished by making minor adjustments downward in other SNAP provisions, most commonly in the SNAP standard deduction or in the SNAP Standard Utility Allowance (SUA).

“Advantages” for states taking the Standard Medical Deduction include: “Simplifies process, making computation process easier workers to budget. Results in fewer computational errors. Reduced burden for clients as they do not have to provide as much verification” (USDA, 2013b).

Standard Medical Deduction waivers typically call for states to survey clients as well as supervisors and caseworkers to assess their experiences with it. According to the FRAC, feedback appears favorable. The burden of verifying all medical costs is eased once the first \$35 of expenses is proven. The Standard Medical Deduction tends to lessen confusion over the process of claiming the deduction and eliminates superfluous steps, thereby saving time for clients and caseworkers (FRAC, 2010b; USDA, 2012d; USDA 2013b; Alabama Department of Human Resources - Food Assistance Division, n.d.b.)

³¹Health Bucks & EBT, n.d.

Similarly, New York State launched Fresh Connects in 2011 to create new farmers markets and support existing farmers markets that provide fresh produce to high-need areas. Since 2012 it has included a “Fresh Connect Checks” component. Fresh Connect Checks \$2 coupons are issued for every \$5 of SNAP benefits used at farmers markets for the purchase of SNAP eligible foods, including fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products, and meat.³²

Taking such SNAP incentives into grocery store settings was the subject of the Healthy Incentives Pilot (HIP) federal research demonstration project in Hampden County in Western Massachusetts from November 2011 through December 2012.

HIP participants earned an incentive of 30 cents for every SNAP dollar they spent on targeted fruits and vegetables (TFVs) at participating retailers. The incentive was immediately credited to the household SNAP account and could be spent on any SNAP-eligible foods and beverages. The incentive was capped at \$60 per household per month.³³

An evaluation of HIP is expected in 2013. “Early results from...analyses suggest that recipients of the healthy incentive consumed on the order of one-fifth cup more incentivized fruits and vegetables than a control group that did not receive the incentive.”³⁴

In summer 2013 additional piloting of SNAP incentives in grocery store outlets have been proposed for Detroit and Minnesota.³⁵

Advocating for Federal Policy to Make Benefits Adequate

Federal policy advocacy is another avenue to address the adequacy of clients’ SNAP allotments. Summit participants recognized that it is important for New York State SNAP participants, including seniors, that the federal Farm Bill maintains state flexibility to provide a nominal LIHEAP benefit to the neediest low-income older adults, in order to maximize benefit allotments. Similarly, they recognized that without a federal extension of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act benefit SNAP boost, SNAP benefit levels for all participants will drop effective November 1, 2013.

Other policy priorities regarding SNAP benefit adequacy included advocating for an increase in the minimum monthly SNAP allotment (now \$16), replacing the Thrifty Food Plan with the Low Cost Meal Plan as the basis for determining SNAP benefit amounts; and for SNAP incentive programs to increase buying power for fruits and vegetables, including fresh, canned, and frozen produce in supermarkets.³⁶

Barrier 4: Cultural & Language Barriers

Many older adults from ethnically diverse populations face additional barriers that interfere with their receiving information about and applying to receive SNAP benefits. Recent immigrants to the United States, including those who are documented, may be hesitant to apply for benefits and receive services from government agencies.

³²Cuomo, 2012b

³³USDA, 2013a

³⁴USDA, 2012b

³⁵Welch, 2013; Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2013

³⁶FRAC, 2013; FRAC, 2012

Seniors from minority groups may also speak and read in a language other than English. Therefore, they may not be served effectively by outreach that is provided solely in the English language. They also may have difficulty providing information and filling out a SNAP application if it is not available in their primary language. In New York the SNAP application is currently available in seven languages (English, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian/Creole, Korean, Russian, and Spanish) whereas the recertification SNAP application is only available in only six languages (English, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian/Creole, Russian, and Spanish).³⁷

Discussion of Barrier 4

Summit participants recommended ensuring language access for all participants by expanding translation and interpretation services and providing language access lines at all SNAP offices.

As recommended in the 2010 White Paper, notices should be provided at an 8th grade reading level and in more than the seven languages already available. Those individuals conducting outreach to these communities must understand their target audience and how those communities define family. Additionally, the images featured on communications should reflect the culture of the targeted community in order to elicit a more receptive response.

Barrier 5: Transportation and Geographic Location

An estimated 8.4 million older adults in the United States rely on others for their transportation needs.³⁸ Transportation for America estimates that the number of older adults with poor transit access in New York City alone will increase from 461,305 to 562,464 in 2015, a nearly 22% jump.³⁹

Seniors who are part of a multicultural community may have additional challenges to accessing transportation. A recent study indicated that nearly “20 percent of African American households, 14 percent of Latino households, and 13 percent of Asian households lack access to automobiles, compared with nearly 5 percent of white households.”⁴⁰

Without reliable access to transportation, seniors are more likely to shop at businesses near their homes such as convenience stores, corner stores, and fast food restaurants. There is often an inadequate supply of fresh foods at these locations. As previously stated, the foods available in these establishments are often high in fat and sugar content, which contributes to obesity-related health problems.

Likewise, without access to reliable transportation, older adults may be harder to reach with SNAP messaging and thus are not cognizant of their eligibility or the benefits that are available to them.⁴¹

Discussion of Barrier 5

Summit participants recommended a variety of methods to address the needs of homebound seniors of all cultures who do not have access to reliable transportation. With regard to access to SNAP

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³⁸National Caregiver Library, n.d.

³⁹Transportation for America, 2011.

⁴⁰SaludToday Blog, 2011.

⁴¹Office of Temporary Disability Assistance [OTDA], n.d.a

information, state agencies should use government data to identify possible recipients and target them with mailings in multiple languages. These mailings should have clear, concise, and simple messages that are easy to read and be accessible in the recipients' preferred language.

Agencies and their partners should target messages about SNAP eligibility to families and caregivers who can transmit the information to the seniors as well as get information out via schools and kinship care programs to reach grandparents raising grandchildren. Summit attendees recommended repetitive messages from trusted sources such as AARP, religious leaders, family members, and physicians, as well as Area Agencies on Aging (AAA's) and other aging network providers that are in contact with vulnerable older New Yorkers regularly and are looking out for their best interests.

To help seniors with limited transportation options access food, summit attendees recommended steps to make healthy and affordable food more available in their neighborhoods. In particular, summit attendees suggested that New York State build on its corner store initiatives to encourage stores to stock a broader array of fruits and vegetables and other basic food products.

SUMMIT RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE OLDER NEW YORKERS' ACCESS TO SNAP

In recent years, New York State has taken many positive steps toward maximizing access to and participation in SNAP. Additional opportunities like simplifying the application process and creating more consistency across the state are available for the state to reduce hunger by increasing the number of eligible people who receive SNAP benefits and the amounts they receive.

In an effort to overcome the barriers identified by summit attendees, the following recommendations are offered for state policy makers to increase access to much-needed nutritional services for New York's older adult population:

1. Simplify SNAP Application and Improve Program Effectiveness

The SNAP application continues to be a complex and lengthy document that requires much personal, medical, and financial information; for many applicants it is not easy to navigate without assistance. In an effort to overcome this barrier, the application should be simplified, and the recertification period for older adult households with static incomes and medical circumstances should be extended.

Recommended Action Steps:

- *Develop a shortened application for seniors in New York.*
- *Seek and implement a waiver to extend seniors' recertification period to 3 years.*
- *Seek and implement a waiver to eliminate the interview at recertification requirement for older adult households with fixed economic circumstances.*
- *Adopt uniform SNAP rules and enforcement across the state.*
- *Establish a seamless inter-county transfer process for SNAP recipients who move across county lines that would maintain their eligibility, ensure continuation of benefits, and reduce administrative burdens.*
- *Make SNAP applications available in more languages and expand translation and interpreting services.*
- *Bolster New York State outreach efforts by adopting the best practices that have proven effective elsewhere in gathering medical verification, training, and awareness tools.*

2. Increase SNAP Benefit Adequacy

Insufficient benefits create inadequate resources for many older adults to consistently maintain a healthy diet. For others, program rules and policies prevent them from receiving the full benefit amount for which they are qualified or even applying for benefits altogether. Action should be taken to increase benefit adequacy.

Recommended Action Steps:

- *Maximize federal SNAP benefit levels for older New Yorkers by promoting the medical deduction and streamlining the process of deducting out-of-pocket excess medical costs, including by state implementation of a Standard Medical Deduction.*

- *Expand the reach and impact of incentive programs, such as Fresh Connects and Health Bucks, that provide SNAP shoppers with extra benefit amounts for targeted purchases at farmers markets and extend the approach to other grocery outlets.*
- *Advocate for a federal increase in SNAP benefit levels, including by replacing the Thrifty Food Plan with the Low Cost Meal Plan as the basis for SNAP benefits and increasing the \$16 federal minimum monthly benefit amount.*

3. Use Data-Sharing Strategies Within and Among Agencies to Increase Participation in SNAP

Discussion at the summit focused on the need for more intra-agency and interagency communication and collaboration within and among state agencies for data-sharing opportunities. Summit participants discussed how more effective and efficient outreach and enrollment of potential SNAP recipients could happen if proper mechanisms for coordination were in place. Moreover, investing in available technology capabilities and a commitment for improved communication and collaboration would maximize efficient outreach and thereafter SNAP enrollment for older adults.

The costs of SNAP administration, including for caseworkers and technology improvements, are shared between federal and state governments. Therefore, as New York State makes investments to improve SNAP operations, it can draw on federal reimbursements to help defray the costs.

In addition to the normal nominal 50-50 reimbursement rates for SNAP administrative expenses, there is a short-term opportunity for New York State to leverage greater federal support for IT eligibility system improvements. For implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), a 90/10 federal reimbursement funding stream is available to states. States can tap that funding stream for changes to eligibility systems that include SNAP without following normal cost allocation among programs. New York State should consider ways to maximize federal reimbursements as it improves SNAP IT systems.

Recommended Action Steps:

- *Cross reference SNAP with other benefit (e.g. HEAP, Medicaid, etc.) files to determine how many older New Yorkers are on other means-tested programs but not on SNAP. When seniors receive one type of public benefit such as HEAP, they should be screened to determine if they are eligible for SNAP as well;*
- *Ensure that New York State takes advantage of the 90/10 ACA funding to integrate systems as it prioritizes Medicaid eligibility assistance and SNAP program integrity and enhancements; and*
- *Engage in a public-private partnership to conduct a comprehensive statewide outreach and application assistance program, using a targeted data-driven approach to increase participation in SNAP among older New Yorkers.*

4. Improve and Expand State-Level SNAP Outreach and Education

Discussion in all four summit workgroup areas—policy, direct service, service integration, and messaging—addressed ways to provide outreach to older adults to increase their participation in SNAP and dispel myths regarding SNAP. The following recommendations focus on how SNAP stakeholders can improve their messaging to older adults.

Recommended Action Steps:

- *Develop messages that are specifically tailored to different generational subsets of the older adult population and caregivers;*
- *Conduct outreach messaging to older adult New Yorkers about the value of the average benefit in an effort to boost participation rates;*
- *Collect input and feedback directly from older adults to determine whether the messaging connects and engages them to take actions as well as collect insights and feedback on ways to dispel myths and overcome barriers;*
- *Promote innovative collaborations among organizations in the aging network and agencies like the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), New York State Office for the Aging (SOFA), and the Department of Health (DOH) to improve nutrition education and maximize SNAP participation;*
- *Coordinate and collaborate with community-based partners and organizations who provide outreach and assistance to seniors with SNAP applications such as the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP); and*
- *Build on campaigns such as the one conducted by OTDA, which partnered with the Food Industry Alliance (FIA) of New York and member stores and community partners including Hunger Solutions New York, Eat Smart New York, and AARP, which conducted outreach in grocery stores regarding SNAP eligibility and healthy eating with SNAP benefits. This campaign had a three-tier approach that included mass media, in-store outreach by community partners, and SNAP material distribution at FIA membership stores.*

5. Protect and Expand Resources for Model Anti-Hunger Initiatives

Although the summit focused primarily on SNAP, participants discussed other nutrition-assistance programs that provide essential assistance to New York's aging population.

The following programs have proven successful in improving the food security of low-income eligible older New Yorkers and should continue to be supported and enhanced by New York State.

- *Increase supplemental state resources for Home Delivered Meals and Congregate Meals services at congregate locations like senior centers and/or deliver meals directly to the homes of seniors whose mobility is limited in order to keep pace with demand among New York's increasing aging population. These nutrition programs are primarily provided through discretionary funding in the Older Americans' Act (OAA).*
- *Expand the number of adult day programs that provide nutritious meals and snacks through the federally-funded Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP).*
- *Make available additional state resources to the Senior Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (SFMNP), which provides eligible low-income senior households \$20 of free coupons that can be exchanged for fresh fruits, vegetables, honey, and herbs at local farmers markets. Due to limited national funding, NYS now serves only a small fraction of eligible seniors.*

CONCLUSION

Food insecurity is a statewide and national epidemic among older adults. As previously mentioned, of the 50 million Americans who face the threat of hunger, nearly 9 million are over age 50. According to AARP Foundation, more than 7% of these older Americans who are at risk of hunger reside in New York State.

SNAP is an extremely beneficial resource for individuals and families who may be struggling economically. SNAP provides access to a healthy diet to these qualified individuals. With that, there are various gaps in this program that were recognized throughout the 2012 summit. This includes the fact that only a small percentage of likely eligible older adults participate in SNAP. The summit concluded various reasons why this occurs: the tedious nature of the screening and application process, misconceptions and stigmas associated with SNAP, lack of education about SNAP, and minimal benefits provided by SNAP. Additionally, cultural and lingual discrepancies of SNAP were presented in this collected data.

Based on these recognized limitations, the 2012 summit presented several state and federal policy recommendations in order to improve SNAP. These included simplifying the SNAP application, increasing SNAP benefit adequacy, establishing data-sharing strategies within and among agencies to increase SNAP participation, improving and expanding the state-level SNAP outreach and education and the protection and expansion of resources for other hunger relief programs.

Through the strategic action steps comprised during the summit and action taken by AARP, AARP Foundation, and its key stakeholder partners, SNAP will become even more effective than it already is in combating hunger in New York State. Finally, older adults' health and overall well-being will hopefully be enhanced through increased SNAP outreach and education efforts.

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Appendix

How much food can you buy for \$16.00?



The current minimum SNAP (formerly the Food Stamp Program) benefit for 1 or 2 people is \$16 per month. SNAP can be used to purchase grocery items anywhere EBT cards are accepted. You can even use your SNAP dollars to buy seeds and plants to grow your own food!

Stretch your grocery dollars with SNAP!

Food items were purchased from WalMart and Aldi, 3/18/10. References to commercial products do not imply endorsement.

AARP New York
780 Third Avenue, 33rd Floor
New York, New York 10017

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Beth Ansell (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 780 Third Ave

I represent: AAFP

Address: 2nd

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

Name: AGNES MOLNAR (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Community Food Advocates

Address: 15 Madison Lane

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1194 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

Name: Trade Stamps (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Food Bank for NYC

Address: 39 Broadway, 10th Fl, NY, NY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephanie Gendell

Address: _____

I represent: Citizens' Committee for Children

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LORI McNEIL

Address: _____

I represent: Urban Justice Center

Address: 123 William St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. 118

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JORI BRYG

Address: 1 Plaza Street West, Brooklyn

I represent: NYC Coalition Against Hunger

Address: 50 Broad, NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Janet Poppendieck

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Food Policy Center at Hunter College

Address: 3rd Ave & 119th St, NY NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ellen Vollinger

Address: FRAC, 1875 Conn Ave NW DC

I represent: Food Research of Action Center 20009

Address: same

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KATE MACKENZIE

Address: 6 E 3rd St

I represent: CITY HAWEST

Address: 307 DEGRAV

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/25/13

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Booy Jenkins

Address: 180 Water Street, NY

I represent: Human Resources Admin

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cecile Wood

Address: 180 Water Street, NY NY

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert Dora

Address: 180 WATER ST

I represent: Human Resource Administration

Address: 180 Water St

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