

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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November 24, 2014  
Start: 11:16 a.m.  
Recess: 2:22 p.m.

HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Room,  
14<sup>th</sup> floor

B E F O R E: Stephen T. Levin  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Annabel Palma  
Fernando Cabrera  
Ruben Wills  
Donovan J. Richards  
Vanessa L. Gibson  
Corey D. Johnson  
Carlos Menchaca  
Ritchie J. Torres

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

Steven Banks  
HRA Commissioner

Joel Berg  
NYC Coalition Against Hunger

David DeVaughn  
City Harvest

Triada Stampas  
Food Bank of NYC

Jessica Hughson-Andrade  
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

Anthony Butler  
St. Johns Bread and Life

Lisa Zullig  
God's Love We Deliver

Beau Heyen  
Masbia Soup Kitchen Network

Ajali Morgan  
Single Stop

Laura Morrison  
NYC McSilver Institution on Poverty, Policy and  
Research

Sumani Lanka  
Legal Aid Society

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

Camille Zentner  
New York Legal Assistance Group

Louise Feld  
Committee for Children

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning. I am  
3 Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the New York  
4 City Council's Committee on General Welfare. This  
5 morning, before we go onto the Oversight hearing,  
6 Hunger in New York City, the committee is going to be  
7 voting on a piece of legislation, Proposed Intro  
8 361A, a Local Law to amend the administrative code of  
9 the city of New York in relation to requiring the  
10 Department of Homeless Services to grant a  
11 presumption of eligibility for applicants to the  
12 shelter system who are exiting human resources  
13 administration domestic violence shelters. Council  
14 Member Corey Johnson and myself are the prime  
15 sponsors of this legislation. I want to thank him for  
16 all of his hard work on this bill. The Department of  
17 Homeless Services shelter system continues to be at  
18 record levels. There are currently over 58,000  
19 individuals living in shelters. According to DHS,  
20 one of the top three reasons for shelter entry is  
21 domestic violence. Many of the families who enter  
22 the DHS system due to domestic violence started in a  
23 human resources administration domestic violence  
24 shelter only to have to leave after only 180 days due  
25 to state imposed time limits. While more resources

1  
2 are needed from the state and city to help move  
3 survivors out of shelter all together and into a  
4 affordable permanent housing, this bill helps ease an  
5 unnecessary bureaucratic requirement. With this  
6 bill, victims will no longer need to be assessed for  
7 eligibility by DHS just because they had to leave one  
8 system of emergency shelter and enter another. This  
9 bill will both help victims and streamline an  
10 unnecessary administrative procedure. I want to  
11 thank the administration for working with us on this  
12 bill, in particular Commissioners Gilbert Taylor and  
13 Steve Banks. I urge all my colleagues to vote, on  
14 this committee, to vote yes on this important piece  
15 of legislation, and Council Member Corey Johnson, the  
16 prime sponsor of this bill will now make a statement.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr.  
18 Chairman. I want to thank Chair Steve Levin for his  
19 aid in getting this bill to today, and being a co-  
20 prime sponsor with me. I also want to thank the  
21 General Welfare Committee Counsel, Andrea Vasquez  
22 [sp?] for her work on this legislation as well as my  
23 legislative director Louis Sheldon-Brown [sp?]. This  
24 bill would streamline access to the department of  
25 homeless services shelters for those timing out of

1 human resource administration domestic violence  
2 shelters. People in DV shelters can exhaust their  
3 maximum length of stay and are required to leave,  
4 whether or not they have a place to call home. Under  
5 this bill, applicants who come from these facilities  
6 would no longer be required to undergo a Department  
7 of Homeless Services eligibility determination  
8 process prior to being admitted to the DHS shelter  
9 systems. Stays and DV shelters are time limited as  
10 Chair Levin said, pursuant to New York State  
11 regulation. At the end of their maximum 180 day stay  
12 at emergency domestic violence shelter, families are  
13 required to leave the shelter regardless of whether  
14 or not they have a place to go. Fewer than 11  
15 percent of families leave with safe housing, and for  
16 many, they are forced to enter DHS shelters. To  
17 access a placement, families despite having already  
18 been deemed eligible for DV shelter must apply at a  
19 DHS prevention assistance and temporary housing path  
20 intake center. Families are subjected to lengthy  
21 interviews where they must disclose their domestic  
22 violence history in front of their children to a  
23 social worker in order to secure a safe DHS  
24 placement. This bill would ensure that anyone who  
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1 gets into and stays in DV shelter for the maximum  
2 allowable time to be automatically be deemed homeless  
3 and allowed to seamlessly transition to a DHS shelter  
4 without having to go to Path. Families escaping  
5 domestic violence are among the most vulnerable  
6 members of our city's shelter population, yet they  
7 often face barriers exessing temporary shelter after  
8 their stays in DV and RHY shelters expire. Intro 361  
9 will ensure they do not need to jump through  
10 duplicative hoops to obtain shelter. Today's passage  
11 is a big step forward in protecting this increasingly  
12 at risk population, and I'm grateful to all of those  
13 who contributed in its milestone. I want to say that  
14 I am really grateful that Chair Levin, who had an  
15 incredibly busy month of October at the General  
16 Welfare Committee and the Committee Counsel Andrea  
17 Vasquez were able to find a time to hear this bill  
18 last month, and if and when I hope this gets a  
19 positive vote today and at the stated meeting  
20 tomorrow. This will be my first piece of legislation  
21 passed in the New York City Council. Thank you very  
22 much for the time today.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well,  
25 congratulations, Council Member Johnson, and this is

2 an important and common sense piece of legislation  
3 and speaks to what this counsel and this  
4 Administration is seeking to do to help vulnerable  
5 New Yorkers and New Yorkers that need help getting  
6 that help and making sure that our city government is  
7 not standing in the way of getting that help to New  
8 Yorkers that need it. And with that, I will as  
9 Andrea Vasquez Counsel of the Committee to--oh, I'm  
10 sorry. I'll ask Clerk of the Committee to call the  
11 roll, and I recommend an aye vote on this item.

12 COUNCIL CLERK: Kevin Penn [sic]  
13 Committee Clerk, roll call on the Committee on  
14 General Welfare, Intro 361A. Council Member Levin?

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I vote aye.

16 COUNCIL CLERK: Cabrera?

17 COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I vote aye, and  
18 I congratulate Council Member Corey Johnson for his  
19 first bill.

20 COUNCIL CLERK: Wills?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Congratulations to  
22 my colleagues, and I vote aye.

23 COUNCIL CLERK: Johnson?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I vote aye.

25 COUNCIL CLERK: Menchaca?

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: [speaking Spanish] Council Member Johnson, and I vote aye.

COUNCIL CLERK: By a vote of 5 in the affirmative, 0 in the negative, and no abstentions, the item has been adopted.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: I apologize for leaving. I'm chairing a Health Committee hearing right now, so I have to run back upstairs. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Congratulations, Councilman Johnson, because you do have a majority vote on this item. So congratulations. We're going to keep the roll open on this vote and begin the Oversight Hearing so that members of the committee that are on their way have an opportunity to vote. So, the hearing on Intro 361A we'll be leaving open, and we will now commence the Oversight hearing on Hunger in New York City.

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning. As I introduced myself before, I am Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the New York City's General Welfare Committee. Today's Oversight hearing continues the Committee's annual tradition of holding a hearing the week of Thanksgiving in order to examine the state of

1 hunger in New York City. As we prepare to spend this  
2 week with our friends and our families enjoying a  
3 meal, we cannot forget that members of our city often  
4 do not have enough food to feed their families.

5 According to the New York City Center for Economic  
6 Opportunity's most recent research, in 2012, 21.4

7 percent of New York City residents were living in

8 poverty. Further, according to CEO's poverty

9 measure, almost half of New York City's residents

10 were living near poverty, which is 150 percent of the

11 CEO's poverty threshold. I want to say that again.

12 Almost half of New York City's residents were living

13 near poverty in 2012. Additionally, according to the

14 USDA, 14 percent of households in New York State were

15 food insecure at some point during 2013, meaning that

16 at some point during the year they had difficulty

17 providing food for their family. The USDA's data set

18 also does not include any households living in

19 homeless shelters, so we must assume that the figure

20 is even higher considering the record levels of

21 homelessness in New York City. In order to help

22 combat hunger, the Human Resources Administration

23 administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

24 Program, or SNAP, the cornerstone of the nation's  
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1 nutrition assistance and safety net programs. In New  
2 York City, from June 2008 to June 2013, the number of  
3 people receiving SNAP benefits increased by over 70  
4 percent, from 1.1 million to 1.9 million individuals.  
5 However, from June 2013 to June 2014, the number of  
6 recipients in the city fell by 6.3 percent. Although  
7 the city's Independent Budget Office and HRA have  
8 stated that this reduction of benefit recipients may  
9 be attributed to improvements in the local labor  
10 market. Poverty in the city has remained relatively  
11 unchanged. The homeless shelter system is at an all-  
12 time high and food pantries and soup kitchens have  
13 seen increases in the number of visitors over the  
14 last year. That we'll see from testimony from the  
15 Food Bank of New York City later in this hearing. At  
16 the hearing today, the committee is interested in  
17 learning more about this enrollment data and the  
18 reason why enrollment has decreased over the past  
19 year. Today, the committee is also interested in  
20 hearing from the food pantry and soup kitchen  
21 providers that are here today. Because SNAP generally  
22 only provides enough benefits to last a family for  
23 three weeks out of a month, these entities provide an  
24 essential service to help New Yorkers ensure that  
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1 they can feed their families. With the November 2013  
2 cuts to the SNAP program on a federal level, benefits  
3 are now stretched even further with a family of four  
4 having lost about 21 meals per month. These cuts have  
5 increased the demand on food pantries and soup  
6 kitchens with 85 percent reporting to the food bank  
7 that they have seen an increase over the past year.  
8 Because we have, unfortunately, a limited role in the  
9 affecting the actions of our Congress, the city must  
10 go even further to fill the gaps and ensure that no  
11 individual in New York City has to go hungry. I want  
12 to thank before we begin, the Counsel to our  
13 Committee, Andrea Vasquez, Policy Analyst, Tonya  
14 Cyrus [sp?], Finance Analyst, Nori Yaya [sp?], New  
15 Finance Analyst, Brittany Moresy [sp?]. And with  
16 that, I welcome the testimony from Commissioner Steve  
17 Banks of HRA.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Before we begin,  
21 we're going to have the counsel swear you in.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Do you affirm to tell  
23 the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth  
24 in your testimony before this committee and to  
25 respond honestly to Council Member questions?

COMMISSIONER BANKS: I do.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
Commissioner, you may proceed.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you very much.

Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity to  
testify about HRA's efforts to address hunger in New  
York City. We have some prepared remarks, and then  
I'm happy to answer questions that you may have.

Hunger is clearly a serious problem in New York City.

Nationally, an estimated 14.3 percent of households

were food insecure at least some time during the year

in 2013. In New York City, according to an analysis

produced by Feeding America, 1.4 million New Yorkers,

17.4 percent, were food insecure at least some time

during the year in 2012. Households are food

insecure when their access to adequate food is

limited by a lack of money and other resources. Food

insecurity is a consequence of unemployment and low

wage jobs. Hunger is a consequence of food

insecurity. In some, food insecurity is one of the

consequences of growing income inequality. The de

Blasio Administration has addressed the issue in two

main ways. First, there's an ongoing effort to fight

inequality by for example, raising the minimum wage

1 and improving job training programs to provide skills  
2 for a living wage jobs. Second, over this past eight  
3 months, during their form [sic] process at HRA with  
4 implemented and instituted a number of reforms to  
5 streamline access to enroll and re-enroll in the  
6 federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or  
7 SNAP, formerly known as food stamps. We've also  
8 begun new outreach efforts to sign up New Yorkers who  
9 qualify for snap, but are not receiving assistance,  
10 and we are developing additional outreach programs.  
11 One of the key benefit programs that HRA administers  
12 is the federal staff program. Nearly 1.7 million New  
13 Yorkers currently receive federal SNAP benefits from  
14 HRA. Only about 350,000 of them are on public  
15 assistance. Many of the rest are working in jobs  
16 which pay an amount low enough so that they qualify  
17 for federal food assistance. Overall, for almost one  
18 in four New Yorkers, almost one in four New Yorkers,  
19 federal SNAP benefits play an important role in  
20 providing the food they need for themselves and their  
21 families. For New Yorkers struggling to survive in  
22 low wage jobs, government benefits such as SNAP aid  
23 help them keep those jobs and stay in the workforce  
24 and try to build a better future. After growing for  
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1 many years, beginning in 2013, the number of people  
2 receiving SNAP or food stamp assistance in New York  
3 has been slowly declining. National usage has also  
4 been declining over the same period. There are two  
5 factors that appear to be associated with this  
6 national/local decline. First, is the improvement in  
7 the economy which has resulted in some people's  
8 income increasing enough so that they no longer meet  
9 the federal requirements to qualify for SNAP.  
10 Further analysis for New York City numbers also shows  
11 that there's been no decline in the number of people  
12 receiving both public assistance and SNAP. The  
13 decline has among those only receiving SNAP benefits,  
14 many of whom are working. This data indicates that  
15 their income may have increased so that they no  
16 longer qualify for federal food assistance under the  
17 United States Department of Agriculture's rule for  
18 implementing the federal statute. The second factor  
19 causing a national and local decline in SNAP  
20 assistance is Congress's decision to cut the amount  
21 of snap benefits for the federal fiscal year that  
22 started last year. Therefore, some people may have  
23 concluded that it's no longer worth it to obtain and  
24 retain the substantial reduced benefit level, which  
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1  
2 declines as income rises. Moreover, federal food  
3 stamp benefits alone do not solve the problem of  
4 hunger, even for those who receive them. For  
5 example, the level of SNAP benefits does not reflect  
6 increased food costs and other living costs in New  
7 York City. We hear from many clients that they run  
8 out of SNAP benefits before the end of the month, and  
9 that has been exacerbated as a result of the cuts  
10 over the past year at the federal level. While we  
11 must abide by the limitations of the federal law, HRA  
12 can and is taking steps to help as many New Yorkers  
13 as possible qualify for this benefit actually receive  
14 it. We're eliminating bureaucratic barriers so that  
15 eligible New Yorkers can apply for and obtain SNAP  
16 benefits, and we've implemented several outreach  
17 programs to reach those who qualify but are not  
18 receiving benefits. Here's some highlights of what  
19 we have been doing to address hunger in our city, and  
20 there's clearly more that we can continue to do.  
21 First of all, continuing outreach efforts. Outreach  
22 is a crucial part of the day to day work at HRA.  
23 Outreach is--HRA's Office of Supplemental Nutrition  
24 Assistance Program Outreach services educates the  
25 general public about SNAP eligibility guidelines, and

1  
2 assists with the application process. In fiscal year  
3 2014, this unit provided outreach services at more  
4 than 1,543 individual community events. Because we  
5 understand that immigrants with legal status are one  
6 of the largest groups of New Yorkers who qualify but  
7 do not receive SNAP benefits, we've increased  
8 services to immigrants and non-English speaking New  
9 Yorkers by partnering with 53 community based  
10 organizations that primarily serve these groups. In  
11 addition, our unit manages three community based  
12 paperless office system sites to provide online  
13 access to benefits and monitors the activity of 79  
14 community based organizations that provide SNAP,  
15 facilitate enrollment and recertification services.  
16 Over the past year, the Office of SNAP Outreach  
17 Services pre-screened more than 11,300 potentially  
18 eligible applicants. In an attempt to further assist  
19 those New Yorkers who seek help through the emergency  
20 food network, this unit works with all HRA funded  
21 community kitchens and food pantries to make sure  
22 that they're engaged in providing some type of staff  
23 outreach services. Senior citizen outreach: In  
24 September 2014, HRA started working with the Robin  
25 Hood Foundation that benefits data, trust, BDT and

1 the New York City Department for the Aging to send  
2 letters followed by robot calls and reminder post  
3 cards to about 100,000 seniors 60 and over whom we've  
4 identified as receiving other benefits such as  
5 Medicaid, but not SNAP. Nationally, more than 60  
6 percent of eligible seniors do not receive SNAP. In  
7 New York there was a 50 percent participation rate  
8 for eligible low income seniors. This is due to many  
9 barriers, including mobility, lack of knowledge and  
10 supposed stigma of accepting government assistance.  
11 In order to follow up on HRA's mailings and robo-  
12 calls to the 100,000 seniors in partnership with HRA  
13 and funded By Robin Hood, the New York Benefits  
14 Center is employing BDT's proven model of targeting  
15 outreach and application assistance that was used in  
16 Philadelphia. Using enrollment data for five  
17 boroughs and working with HRA to complement our  
18 outreach, the New York Benefit's Center has  
19 implemented a phone and direct mail campaign for  
20 these seniors who are not receiving SNAP. As seniors  
21 respond to the targeted outreach, highly trained  
22 contact center staff provide seniors with  
23 comprehensive SNAP application assistance including  
24 document support and extensive follow-up. The goals  
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1 of this new program are as follows: Outreach to  
2 85,000 to 100,000 seniors, submit 8-10,000  
3 applications at least, enroll 7,000-9,000 additional  
4 seniors. Since the start of the program in  
5 September, working with HRA, BDT has mailed 23,800  
6 outreach letters, conducted robo-calls recorded by  
7 the HRA Commissioner to 15,542 households in  
8 conjunction with the mailing, screened 4,385  
9 households for SNAP over the phone, and began SNAP  
10 applications for 2,049 households or 46.7 percent of  
11 all households screened. Already, applications have  
12 been submitted on Access New York for 1,683 seniors,  
13 589 of these applications for seniors in the Bronx,  
14 and 1,094 of the applications were for seniors in  
15 Queens. Outreach and NYCHA: HRA and the New York  
16 City Housing Authority are working together to  
17 develop a similar computer match to identify NYCHA  
18 residents who do not receive food stamps and are  
19 likely to qualify them and then contact them and  
20 offer help in enrolling in the program. In  
21 conjunction with the rollout of the updated Access to  
22 NYC website this year, HRA will conduct a broad  
23 campaign to reach those eligible for SNAP but not  
24 receiving these benefits and let them know that they  
25

1 can enroll and re-enroll online through community  
2 based organizations around the city. This--through  
3 this broad campaign we will focus on both seniors and  
4 immigrants, the two main groups with significant  
5 numbers of New Yorkers identified as likely to be  
6 qualified but not receiving benefits, and we welcome  
7 the help of community organizations, Council Members,  
8 and other elected officials in this campaign.

9 Particularly, I want to acknowledge the work we've  
10 been doing with the Coalition Against Hunger and Joel  
11 Berg and other advocates to try to expand access to  
12 SNAP. There are a number of process changes in order  
13 to make enrolling and staying on SNAP easier that we  
14 are developing and implementing. As I noted earlier,  
15 in the past few months HRA has instituted a range of  
16 reforms to make it easier to apply and reapply for  
17 SNAP benefits. One of the problems we've had in the  
18 past was that too often clients would submit  
19 documents, and the documents would not be included in  
20 our records. This created frustration for both  
21 clients and HRA staff and could delay receiving  
22 benefits. We were addressing this problem in a number  
23 of ways. Five SNAP HRA centers and 10 community  
24 based organization partners have self-service areas  
25

1 which applicants or clients can provide required  
2 documents electronically through self-service  
3 scanners that automatically associate the documents  
4 with appropriate case information. This can be done  
5 not only when initially applying, but also to report  
6 case changes such as the additional removal of a  
7 family member, change in rent or address changes.  
8 Through this initiative a confirmation receipt is  
9 mailed to clients so that they have verification that  
10 they submitted the documents. Additional SNAP centers  
11 will be implementing this technology following this  
12 initial pilot. HRA has also introduced or instituted  
13 Rightfax, which allows clients to fax the required  
14 documents directly into the HRA case viewer. Again,  
15 this is being piloted and will be fully implemented.  
16 In addition, HRA has provided the center's fax  
17 numbers on the HRA has provided the center's fax  
18 numbers on the HRA form that highlights the required  
19 documents needed to establish SNAP eligibility. This  
20 process has reduced the need for clients to have to  
21 go to the centers. Since 2010, applicants have been  
22 able to apply for SNAP benefits online at  
23 [www.nyc.gov/accessnyc](http://www.nyc.gov/accessnyc). During 2015 we're  
24 implementing a new system to make it possible to  
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1 and help them navigate the process with special  
2 attention paid to needs such as language access and  
3 Americans with Disability Act requirements. And these  
4 process this year are only the beginning. During  
5 2015, HRA plans to provide on demand SNAP interviews  
6 allowing clients to call at their convenience.  
7 Eventually we expect that certain functions will be  
8 available with a smart phone, such as document  
9 upload. By the beginning of 2015, multiple SNAP  
10 forms will be consolidated into one streamline form  
11 which will be easier for clients to understand and  
12 respond to. We have also filed two waiver requests  
13 for the state to improve processing of SNAP cases and  
14 to provide a more efficient and effective means for  
15 clients to document certain expenses. Furthermore,  
16 we've also made an important policy change to  
17 increase access to federal food assistance. In May  
18 of this year, HRA accepted the federal Able-bodied  
19 Adult Without Dependents, ABAWD waiver, which allows  
20 single adults who are unemployed or underemployed to  
21 receive food stamps when they cannot find work for  
22 more than 20 hours of work per week. This waiver had  
23 already been accepted by 43 of 50 states and by other  
24 New York counties. In addition to providing federal  
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1 assistance to address hunger, this policy change  
2 provides an economic benefit when this federal  
3 assistance is spent in the neighborhoods of our city.  
4 The United States Department of Agriculture has found  
5 that every dollar of SNAP benefits produces a \$1.80  
6 in local economic activity. EFAP, the Emergency Food  
7 Assistance Program, the city also supports food  
8 pantries and soup kitchens through HRA. HRA's  
9 emergency food programs, EFAP, baseline funding for  
10 food in fiscal year 2015 is 9.7 million. This now  
11 includes in the baseline funds which in the past had  
12 to be added by the Council. For this year, the  
13 Council added an additional 250,000 dollars on top of  
14 that baseline funding. EFAP has also made  
15 significant efforts to improve nutritional standards  
16 of all foods that are provided to the emergency food  
17 network. Since 2008, EFAP has required that all foods  
18 purchased with city funding meet sodium, sugar and  
19 trans fat standards that aim to reduce the prevalence  
20 of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. In  
21 addition, HRA requires that all emergency food  
22 programs funded by EFAP receive SNAP outreach  
23 services. These services include SNAP eligibility  
24 pre-screening, assistance with the SNAP application  
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1 process and guidance on making healthy food choices.  
2 During the last fiscal year, EFAP distributed 12  
3 million pounds of food. Finally, HRA is working with  
4 a subgroup of the Reducing Hunger Service Initiative  
5 to create and conduct a survey of the skill base  
6 volunteer needs of the emergency food network. The  
7 survey is targeting individual emergency food  
8 programs such as soup kitchens and food pantries. It  
9 will assess volunteer needs and program interest and  
10 having a skill based volunteer at the site. The  
11 results will be used to recruit volunteers from the  
12 needed skills to NYC Serve and assign them  
13 appropriately. In conclusion, there's no question  
14 that the SNAP program and the Emergency Food  
15 Assistance Program have and will continue to provide  
16 essential help to New Yorkers. It's clear that  
17 without SNAP the problem of hunger in the city would  
18 be much worse. That said, these programs have not  
19 eliminated the problem of hunger. More remains to be  
20 done. The long term solutions are clear. When New  
21 Yorkers earn a living wage and find affordable  
22 housing, they will have the ability to obtain the  
23 food they need to prevent hunger. So while we work as  
24 hard as we can to make the current programs as  
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1 effective as possible, we can never lose sight of the  
2 bigger goals needed to fund or mentally address  
3 hunger, which is why in fighting poverty and income  
4 inequality, the administration's implementing a  
5 comprehensive affordable housing plan and initiatives  
6 to create more living wage jobs. Thank you for the  
7 opportunity to testify. We look forward to continue  
8 to work with the committee and the council as a whole  
9 to address these important issues. I'm happy to  
10 answer any questions that you may have. I note that  
11 there are--there were events earlier this morning in  
12 which some very helpful information was provided  
13 about the continuum and mentions the problem, and  
14 there are a number of steps that have been  
15 recommended that we are working on and happy to keep  
16 working on with the Council.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
19 Commissioner. I appreciate all of the work that you  
20 and your staff have been doing since taking over at  
21 HRA. It's been a pleasure to work with you and I  
22 think that there's--we're doing the right thing by a  
23 great many New Yorkers. So, being that I'm at the  
24 moment the other only member here, I have a number

1  
2 of questions for you. So it's just going to be us for  
3 a little while.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Okay, I'm ready.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Commissioner,  
6 how many New Yorkers do we know qualify for SNAP that  
7 are not receiving the benefit right now?

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I think that's a  
9 hard number to estimate in a responsible fashion, but  
10 I think as you see what we've been attempting to do,  
11 we've been attempting to do data matches that would  
12 indicate clients who on their face are likely to be  
13 eligible for SNAP benefits are not receiving them.  
14 So again, the seniors outreach, by looking at seniors  
15 who are receiving Medicaid or HEAP [sic] benefits for  
16 example, on its face, those seniors should be  
17 eligible for federal food assistance as well, since  
18 they're receiving federally supported medical  
19 assistance and federally assistance and federally  
20 supported heating assistance, and so that's why we  
21 designed outreach there. Second group that we're  
22 working on in a very similar program to what we've  
23 already implemented for seniors is NYCHA tenants,  
24 where people residing NYCHA developments, on their  
25 face, those who are not eligible for--not receiving

1 food stamps, it appears to us, ought to be eligible  
2 for receiving food stamps. So targeted outreach  
3 there. We're prepared to work with the various  
4 excellent not for profit providers food assistance in  
5 the city to be careful and ensure that people that  
6 are seeking food assistance at the food programs are  
7 actually receiving food stamps. As I indicated in  
8 the testimony, a number of us have indicated in  
9 various public comments, it does appear at the end of  
10 the month that people are coming and seeking  
11 assistance because food stamps aren't enough to cover  
12 the full month's benefit or others are off of food  
13 stamps because they no longer meet the federal limit,  
14 but we want to redouble our efforts to make sure that  
15 people that are actually seeking federal--seeking  
16 food assistance from us at our city-funded programs  
17 are receiving federal benefits. That's another area  
18 of very helpful targeted outreach.

19  
20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Can you speak a little  
21 bit to the barriers that are out there, both large  
22 barriers, small barriers, and kind of across the  
23 board that are preventing individuals from enrolling  
24 and receiving benefits?

25

1  
2           COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think the  
3 first starting point is the federal eligibility cut  
4 off has an impact on those that may be earning now  
5 more as a result. That's a good thing that they're  
6 able to work.

7           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And when is the  
8 eligibility?

9           COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's basically just  
10 over the poverty level. So it's not a level that  
11 represents people who aren't struggling to get by day  
12 to day, but the--so that's one issue in terms of  
13 barrier, which is a federal statute. Second area by  
14 way of barrier, is the reduced benefit levels that  
15 people are receiving because of the cuts over the  
16 past year, and for small amount of money there may be  
17 a rational choice to say, look, I can't take off of  
18 work, or I can't do the kinds of things that I need  
19 to do to get that small amount of money. The third  
20 area, though, are the kinds of bureaucratic things in  
21 the past that the committee has looked at and that  
22 HRA is very focused now on addressing, the kinds of  
23 things that we mentioned before. The ability to  
24 apply online is important, but the ability to  
25 recertify online is equally important. That's why

1 we're working, and during the course of 2015, we'll  
2 be introducing that type of technology to permit  
3 that, and we think that will remove a barrier.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And there's no  
5 prohibition against that? In other words, there's no  
6 federal requirement that somebody recertify in  
7 person?  
8

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: There are some  
10 waivers that we have, that we need in connection with  
11 that, and we've been requesting them and we've gotten  
12 certain waivers from the state and we have a  
13 cooperative relationship with the state in order to  
14 address that. The process is, the state has to make  
15 the submission to the federal government, and we've  
16 been working with the state on those various  
17 requests. The most, you know, sort of related to the  
18 waivers get the ability to have an on-demand  
19 interview by telephone is very important.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: For initial  
21 certification?

22 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Or for  
23 recertification in order to be able to provide you  
24 with the ability to schedule it if you're working  
25 around the hours that you're working. And so that

1 requires a waiver. The state's been supportive, and  
2 we expect the federal government will consider that  
3 in relatively short order, but that's an important  
4 change to address a barrier that we talked about  
5 before, if you're in the workforce and working, the  
6 ability to conduct business by telephone is not  
7 unlimited during the day, and so scheduling with our  
8 staff is important. It's also important for our  
9 staff in terms of managing workload to be able to  
10 schedule times rather than having any times.  
11  
12 Documentation has been another in the past. You  
13 know, I know there've been hearings in the past that  
14 you've conducted and the information's been provided  
15 about difficulties of managing document submission to  
16 get it to case records. And so a number of the  
17 technology changes that we're introducing in a short  
18 run, but certainly during 2015 are going to be aimed  
19 to make it easier to submit documents to avoid a trip  
20 to the center, and right now there are ways in which  
21 documents can be submitted. If you go to the center  
22 in a more streamline fashion, and the coming the  
23 technology advances will allow it to be--you to  
24 submit documents online, which will even eliminate  
25 the need to come to the center. So, in a short run,

1  
2 we've been trying to cut down waiting time in terms  
3 of people that are coming and submitting them, not  
4 having to wait through Rightfax technology and  
5 through the self-service technology and all of the  
6 things that I described, but that's a short term  
7 solution. We want to be able to give people the  
8 ability to submit documents without having to come  
9 in. Again, try and accommodate the work needs of  
10 people that are in the workforce.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is it possible that  
12 there's--are there any--have you been exploring  
13 different types of apps that people can use for their  
14 smart phones to be able to take pictures of the  
15 documents?

16 COMMISSIONER BANKS: One of the things  
17 that I mentioned is we will be getting to--we are  
18 developing the capacity to be able to permit that  
19 kind of submission that obviously gives someone a  
20 record that they have submitted it, but gives us the  
21 ability to receive the document associated with the  
22 case. In the past there were efforts by the prior  
23 Administration that were put in place that allow  
24 people to submit documents not associated with the  
25 case, and that created more work for our workforce,

1 and I think frustration for both workers and clients.  
2 We're moving to a system where any document  
3 submitted, whether it be through the self-service  
4 centers, Rightfax, through the type of mobile  
5 technology that you described that we're moving  
6 towards during 2015 to ensure that it's associate  
7 with the case record so it doesn't become a  
8 frustrating experience for both clients and for our  
9 staff.  
10

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. I always see  
12 these commercials for different banks, you know,  
13 Citibank or Chase or whatever. You can just, you  
14 know, deposit your check through your mobile device,  
15 and seems like we could capitalize on the same sort  
16 of technology.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And we're moving  
18 towards that during 2015. We think that'll make a  
19 big--it'd be a big benefit for our clients and for  
20 our staff and ultimately address what has been a  
21 barrier in terms of document submission.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Are there any other  
23 jurisdictions around the country that you're able to  
24 look at as doing a very good job of encouraging  
25 enrollment and facilitating enrollment. Are there

1  
2 any best practices that are out there? Obviously  
3 we're the largest jurisdiction and it's the, you  
4 know, the hardest to administer, but are there any  
5 other jurisdictions that kind of on the cutting edge  
6 you're looking at exploring new and innovative ways?

7 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think as you  
8 saw with our employment plan, we have not been afraid  
9 to canvas what's going on in the other 50 states to  
10 see what we can learn and do a better job, and what  
11 we've found in the access to SNAP or food stamp  
12 benefit area that advances in access to technology  
13 have been further developed in other jurisdictions  
14 and some are of our way of requests for on-demand  
15 telephone interviews and submission of documents  
16 online and those kinds of things are being done in  
17 other places. So, to some extent, we're trying to  
18 catch up, but in our own New York way. We want to  
19 improve upon what's been done in other jurisdictions.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: The--we spoke about  
21 the decrease in the number of enrollees from June  
22 2013 to June 2014, decreasing by 6.3 percent, which  
23 is--you know, I can see the argument that improved  
24 economy and improved employment numbers may be  
25 contributing to that. You know, I--when we do see the

1  
2 job numbers every month, we also--it's always  
3 accompanied by a caveat that wages seem to be  
4 staggering, and that's, you know, nationwide. That  
5 being said, this is the first year since I've been  
6 closely following it that we've seen a decrease not  
7 an increase in SNAP enrollment. And first I want to  
8 ask, do you have numbers from June of this year until  
9 today of whether that decrease is continuing or  
10 whether that's leveled off at all?

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: The trend is  
12 continuing. The trend is continuing, and I don't  
13 know if this is what you were going to ask, but you  
14 know, for us here in New York we can see the national  
15 trends and the national factors, which is more people  
16 in the workforce and the cut in federal benefits, and  
17 those have had an impact. But the other reforms that  
18 we're instituting are aimed at not being satisfied  
19 with those local factors being the end of the  
20 discussion, and very much focused on what's happening  
21 on the ground in terms of people seeking assistance  
22 in the food programs, and that's why the kind of  
23 reforms that address unnecessary bureaucratic  
24 barriers have been so important to us, and at the  
25 same time, reaching out to those who on their face

1  
2 appear to be eligible but are not receiving benefits  
3 are two priority errors for us. It may be one thing  
4 to say, look, they're national trends, there's  
5 nothing we can do about them. We're saying those are  
6 national trends, but there are two areas in which we  
7 think we can address the need in New York City  
8 irrespective of what the national trends are, and  
9 that is with respect to ensuring that people who need  
10 help get access and to addressing people who for  
11 whatever reason who are facially appear to be  
12 eligible but are not applying, how can we reach out  
13 to them? Those are two initiatives that we're going  
14 to keep focusing on here irrespective of the national  
15 trends.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: There's--in looking  
17 at that trend, the trend in the decrease in the  
18 number of SNAP benefit recipients, but then also  
19 hearing from pantry providers, soup kitchen  
20 providers, and there's been surveys that have been  
21 conducted by the food bank and others that show that  
22 it seems like November of 2013, so a year ago, that  
23 that seems to be when those trends commenced. So,  
24 the decrease in the number of SNAP recipients, that  
25 started to happen in November 2013. We just, we

1  
2 heard from or we've seen survey responses from pantry  
3 providers that have said that they saw an increase, a  
4 significant increase in the number of people coming  
5 to pantries in New York City for emergency food or  
6 non-emergency food for, you know, a long term  
7 sustaining food happening around that time. So are we  
8 kind of exploring exactly what type of impact the  
9 Farm Bill in 2013, those cuts to SNAP benefits across  
10 the city, how that kind of plays out long term in the  
11 various areas of hunger prevention.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, I think the  
13 facts on the ground are what they are, which is that  
14 it shows that our case load began to decline in 2013  
15 as people found more employment, but that usage of  
16 the food programs also increased at a time when a  
17 federal benefit cut was implemented. Traditionally,  
18 fighting hunger has been a priority of the federal  
19 government and it's required federal leadership, and  
20 we certainly, you know, need to redouble our efforts  
21 to address gaps caused at the federal level, but as I  
22 indicated at the city level, we want to do everything  
23 we can to ensure that there's access to the benefits  
24 such as they are, and that people who should be  
25 receiving benefits receive outreach from us and

1  
2 community based organization to try to make sure that  
3 anyone who's eligible is receiving the benefits.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, I'm  
5 going to turn it over to my colleague Fernando  
6 Cabrera for some questions, and then I'm going to  
7 have a bunch for you when we get there.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Sure.

9 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you, to the  
10 Chair and Commissioner, welcome. I apologize I  
11 couldn't be here at the beginning, but there's all  
12 kinds of meetings as you can imagine going on  
13 simultaneously. And so if I ask you a question that  
14 was already addressed, I apologize right from the  
15 beginning. One is actually is an observation, and  
16 please give me grounded [sic]. The other day I was in  
17 one of my schools where Friday afternoon food was  
18 given out, and I had to tell you, I just--you know, I  
19 live in the--I live and I'm the Council Member of the  
20 fifth poorest Council Member district, but I was--and  
21 I seen what I saw, but I saw it in a more chronic  
22 way. The amount of people that were waiting in line  
23 for food when it was extremely cold waiting three  
24 hours. Naturally, they were told, you know, don't  
25 come in that early, and the lines were just huge. It

1 was just a mob of people. Is this something that we  
2 see in a lot of churches, in schools that are being  
3 used to give out food, or? You know, and if so, if  
4 it's increasing, why is that taking place?  
5

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think what  
7 you saw in your district and others have seen in  
8 districts across the city reflects the income  
9 inequality problem and the housing problem that the  
10 Administration is very focused on addressing through  
11 living wage jobs, and we saw it in the Jobs for New  
12 Yorkers Taskforce recommendations from last week, in  
13 terms of focusing on training people for higher wage  
14 jobs that exist in the economy as opposed to low wage  
15 jobs, which contribute to the kind of food insecurity  
16 that we've described in the testimony that others  
17 have described in the various events today and over  
18 the course of this weekend that you saw with your own  
19 eyes. And you know, as we testified during our, the  
20 hearing on our employment plan, we know that without  
21 a high school equivalency or high school diploma,  
22 someone's earning capacity is going to be on average  
23 about 21,000 dollars. It's going to increase to  
24 31,000 dollars with the high school equivalency or  
25 diploma and to 41,000 plus with associate's degree or

1 above. And so the kind of training and education  
2 based focus that the Mayor announced as the new jobs  
3 for New Yorkers approach last week and the kinds of  
4 things that HRA announced, the employment plan that  
5 you're hearing are really aimed at what you're  
6 seeing, and what you're seeing is very real, and our  
7 clients see it, our frontline staff sees it, and the  
8 kinds of reforms that we're implementing at the  
9 agency level are aimed at addressing that problem  
10 that's very real and the kinds of policy changes that  
11 the Mayor's pursuing are also aimed at addressing  
12 that problem.

14 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And Commissioner,  
15 thank you so much for--to be honest with you, with  
16 your level of honesty about what's happening on the  
17 ground, I felt in my first four years that I was here  
18 that whenever we would ask questions like this it was  
19 always kind of a defensive kind of answer, like we  
20 have it all under control, that everyone is being  
21 taken care of, and we know that we have a difficult  
22 situation here that we're dealing with. It requires  
23 multifaceted kind of approach. You mentioned  
24 something very important which I'm a firm believer, I  
25 believe that a job is the best answer to the poverty

1  
2 problem, but in relationship to those jobs that you  
3 mentioned in the mayor's plan, how do we address with  
4 the undocumented, which find it often difficult to  
5 find jobs? Is that part of the new plan that you  
6 guys are coming forward addressing the issue of the  
7 undocumented, in light of the new move that the  
8 President just put forth in allowing for work  
9 permits?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Me and Commissioner  
11 Agarwal, the Immigrant Affairs Commissioner and I as  
12 the HRA Commissioner, working very closely at  
13 developing the city's response to ensure that as many  
14 people who can take advantage of the new executive  
15 action can so that they can become part of the  
16 economy in a recognized way in the city, and that  
17 benefits the city in terms of contributions that such  
18 individuals make, but also potentially benefits them  
19 as you described in terms of having the wherewithal  
20 to earn a living wage and be able to meet the food  
21 needs of their families. So, it's a--that, too, is a  
22 complex national problem, which we in New York have  
23 to address, but I know that Commissioner Agarwal and  
24 we at HRA and the Mayor's overall leadership are  
25

1  
2 giving us the ability to do everything we possibly  
3 can on a local level to meet those needs.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Commissioner, if I  
5 remember right, and here's my last question, if I  
6 remember right, about five years ago 50 percent of  
7 people--I remember this, because I remember as I was  
8 running for office. I saw these numbers that 50  
9 percent of people who were eligible for food stamps  
10 were not taking advantage of that federal program,  
11 which was a great program because it doesn't cost us  
12 anything here in the city. What's the number now?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, I--the Chair  
14 asked me the similar question, and I think that there  
15 are lots of guesstimates and lots of analysis, you  
16 know, in one way or the other that are all  
17 reasonable. We're very much focused at HRA, though,  
18 at targeting very specific groups that we think  
19 there's particular under usage of this and very  
20 important federal benefit against seniors, Housing  
21 Authority, tenants, and as we move through those  
22 groups we'll find others. We appreciate the input  
23 that we've been getting from the Coalition against  
24 Hunger and other important advocacy groups in the  
25 city to focus on groups just like you would like us

1  
2 to that are not able to or not aware of the  
3 availability of this benefit.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, Commissioner, I  
5 always believed you go fishing where the fish are,  
6 and so the fish are coming to get the resources from,  
7 you know, from all these organizations that are  
8 giving out the free food. Is there any way that we  
9 could encourage those organizations or maybe even  
10 mandate that once a month when they come that a  
11 question get asked, are you receiving, you know, SNAP  
12 or are you enrolled? Is there any way that we could  
13 require that or maybe there's a requirement don't  
14 know about.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think the  
16 community based organizations, the not for profits  
17 and the faith based groups that are providing these  
18 services now are already doing much of that. And  
19 what we learned from them is that people who are  
20 coming and getting the help are largely people that  
21 are either already getting our federal food stamp  
22 assistance or don't qualify. However, we can always  
23 do better and we can redouble our efforts just to  
24 make sure that there's no stone unturned.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: The part that I'm a  
3 little confused is that gap, because where else are  
4 they going to get food? I mean, they're either  
5 getting it through where the food bank distributes  
6 those outlets at CBO's or they're getting the food  
7 stamps and they're not getting it from there. What  
8 would be another pool?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Those are the major  
10 places.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: But even people who  
13 could be getting federal, who could be getting  
14 assistance in food pantries who may be eligible for  
15 federal assistance may not be availing themselves of  
16 either food pantries or the federal assistance, which  
17 is why we're so focused again on, as you said, groups  
18 where there may be more fish than in other places,  
19 which is seniors who are receiving Medicaid but SNAP,  
20 Housing Authority residents who are not receiving  
21 federal food stamps.

22 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: We obviously can't  
23 mandate it, right? That if you're going to receive  
24 food that you have sign up?

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COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I think we want to make sure that we don't have any additional barriers in terms of getting the help that people need.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

COMMISSIONER BANKS: But again, I think we can and we will redouble our efforts to ensure that people that are coming to food programs are screened for eligibility for food stamps. The groups on the frontlines do a terrific job of that already, and we can continue to work with them to make sure that nobody's missed.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I'm smiling because I would imagine that somebody would get happy if they get home and they say, "Oh, here's extra resources for you." I'm just trying to figure out what the fear is. I mean, we could hear from the CBO's, what is really the actual fear. I can understand with undocumented because obviously sometimes their fear is they're going to track me down. You know, that's usually what hear when I speak to them, but everyone else I'm just trying to understand is it the shame or stigma, I'm not totally sure.

1  
2           COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, there could  
3 be a number of different factors that come into  
4 place. For some it could be they may be at a low  
5 wage job, but it's just above what the federal  
6 eligibility rate would be.

7           CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Gotcha.

8           COMMISSIONER BANKS: For some, it may be  
9 given their past experience with HRA policies before  
10 the changes we've been trying to make and even while  
11 we're making some of the changes. They may have  
12 experienced barriers in the past, so we want to do  
13 everything we can to communicate that we've addressed  
14 those problems, and there may be individuals who for  
15 whatever reason don't want to avail themselves of  
16 government assistance even though it's available to  
17 them. But again, we will continue to work directly  
18 with the frontline groups who are doing a tremendous  
19 job under very difficult circumstances to make sure  
20 that anybody that can get assistance does get  
21 assistance.

22           CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I mean, it would be  
23 nice to have like commercials to just explain those  
24 new policy, new approach maybe that will draw. I  
25 think in the long run we end up saving money, and

1  
2 most of all, most important would be to help our  
3 people.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well I mean it's--I  
5 appreciate that you mentioned the sort of outreach  
6 campaign through commercials, but that type of  
7 approach--

8 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Right.

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As we develop our  
10 new reforms during the course of 2015 that will make  
11 it easier to apply and easier to get the benefits,  
12 we'll certainly be wanting to convey that to people  
13 that online applications, online recertifications,  
14 on-demand telephones, all these new changes that kind  
15 of document submission procedures that the Chair  
16 asked me about that we'll be implementing, getting  
17 that information out is going to be important.

18 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Commissioner, thank  
19 you so much. We really appreciate all you do for our  
20 constituents.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
23 Council Member Cabrera. Commissioner, yeah,  
24 following up on that point, the--in the, you know,  
25 obviously like the Department of Health has done very

1  
2 effective advertising on the subways, and I mean, you  
3 can look to see a correlation in smoking rates, for  
4 example, have decreased substantially due to public  
5 awareness campaigns, and you know, doing something  
6 that is, you know, out there, reducing the stigma,  
7 knowing--allowing people to know that the resource is  
8 out there and that they very well may qualify in a  
9 very, you know, noticeable and ostensible fashion  
10 could I think yield good benefit and good bang for  
11 the buck, if you will.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Understood, and  
13 we're evaluating how to do that most effectively.  
14 From, you know, and our service delivery approach it  
15 may make more sense to be very targeted to particular  
16 areas and communities as opposed to a general  
17 approach that the Health Department may have used  
18 with smoking given its general applicability, but we  
19 want to make sure as we make the reforms and they're  
20 in place, we don't want to be premature and have  
21 people become frustrated that our technology changes  
22 aren't in place, but when they are we want to be able  
23 to make sure that people are aware of them and that  
24 access is available so that we can reach more people.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, you know, one  
3 in four New Yorkers could qualify for SNAP.

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's a lot of  
5 people.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's a lot of people.  
7 That's one out of every four subway riders. That's  
8 looking at advertising the subways. And just I want  
9 to point out, and this is something that's an  
10 important piece of information that I think, and I  
11 did not mention it in my opening remarks, but for  
12 every dollar that is a SNAP benefits that comes into  
13 the local economy, it generates one dollar and 79  
14 cents in economic activity.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, and as I  
16 said, when we took the federal waiver to enable under  
17 employed or unemployed adults who couldn't find work  
18 for 20 hours a week, the so called ABAWD waiver, it  
19 made sense from so many different perspectives. It  
20 made sense in terms of fighting hunger, but it also  
21 made sense in terms of economic activity, because for  
22 every dollar that we took with the ABAWD waiver that,  
23 you know, 43 other states have, it brought in almost  
24 a \$1.80 in local economic activity for each of those



1 over that threshold or they're right on the edge and  
2 they're making the decision that it's not quite worth  
3 the benefit to go through the, you know, the  
4 bureaucracy of applying. Is it possible to look at  
5 the current situation and say that food insecurity in  
6 New York City's actually, because of the SNAP cut,  
7 getting worse?  
8

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, the SNAP cuts  
10 certainly a contributor to food insecurity in the  
11 city and whether it's the same or more over the past  
12 year, it's at a level that we have to address, and  
13 that's why from our perspective, the Administration,  
14 and from HRA, the fact that there may be national  
15 factors is not stopping us from addressing past  
16 barriers and access to food stamps and not stopping  
17 us from increasing outreach efforts to address people  
18 that are not currently receiving benefits who should  
19 be. We don't want to simply say, well, they're  
20 national trends and we cannot take independent steps.  
21 We are taking independent steps because, you know,  
22 it's part of the mayor's overall concern and programs  
23 to address income inequality. The living wage work,  
24 the minimum wage work, the housing plans, all these  
25 are part of the larger effort to address food

1  
2 insecurity and then directly in terms of HRA clients,  
3 the outreach to ensure everybody's who's getting the  
4 benefit can and to streamline access, our part of  
5 that fight against food insecurity, too.

6 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Commissioner, you  
7 spoke of reforms that HRA has made in recent months,  
8 those reforms that you announced at the executive  
9 budget hearing in May, including the reminder calls,  
10 the missed appointment calls. Do you have  
11 preliminary data at this point to show if those  
12 efforts have been successful?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, preliminarily  
14 we're seeing that, you know--we have certain measures  
15 that we look at. So there's 20, you know, our  
16 request for fair hearings are 20 percent down, for  
17 example, which would reflect a reduction in  
18 unnecessary actions. As you know, one of the  
19 concerns we've had is that the state budget agreement  
20 imposes a 10 million dollar penalty on the city for  
21 unnecessary hearings. So, one of the priorities--

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] And  
23 that includes SNAP not just public assistance?

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Includes, right,  
25 includes all of our hearings. And so one of the

1 things that we've very much focused on was how could  
2 we eliminate adverse actions occurring for clients  
3 that would result in hearings in which HRA was  
4 winning only one out of 10 of the hearings that are  
5 held.  
6

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

8 COMMISSIONER BANKS: So, the robo-calls,  
9 the reminder calls, the rescheduling calls are all  
10 aimed at that, and a byproduct of that is that fewer  
11 people have adverse actions taken against them.  
12 That's not so much is the case load going to go up.  
13 That's a, are we going to stop the phenomenon of  
14 people having their benefits cut and then having to  
15 apply and the churning on and off the case load, and  
16 we wanted to do everything we could to address that  
17 problem, which also is associated with food  
18 insecurity.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, in the past  
20 we've heard many complaints about issues at SNAP  
21 centers with long wait times and other related  
22 issues. Do you still see some of those issues  
23 happening at the centers themselves, and if so, can  
24 you describe some of the efforts that you're taking  
25 to address those?

2                   COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, I spent a part  
3 of each week meeting with frontline staff at centers  
4 around the city and I see what the frontline staff is  
5 seeing, which is a substantial amount of need and  
6 people seeking help from our agency. And so, many of  
7 the reforms that we've been implementing and that  
8 will be implemented during 2015 are really aimed at  
9 addressing complaints from clients, complaints from  
10 advocacy organizations who have been working with us  
11 on reforms like the Coalition Against Hunger and very  
12 good suggestions and observations from our own  
13 frontline staff who are very committed to improving  
14 client services and addressing workload issues that  
15 they themselves are facing. And so the Rightfax  
16 technology or the self-service technology to allow  
17 you to submit documents in the waiting room without  
18 having to wait to see a worker have been implemented  
19 to try to cut down on wait times. But more  
20 significantly, the new technology that will be  
21 implemented and rolled out during the course of 2015  
22 is really aimed at both improving access and  
23 services, but also cutting wait times as part of that  
24 because people will be able to recertify online, have  
25 online--have on-demand interviews and be able to

1 submit documents online. So all of those efforts  
2 will be aimed at avoiding people having to go into  
3 the centers for as many transactions as possible, and  
4 so it's a problem that's been identified. It's a  
5 problem that our staff is living with each day. It's  
6 a problem that our clients have been living with, and  
7 so we've taken some short term steps to cut it down  
8 but the near term steps that are going to be rolled  
9 out during the course of 2015 are really aimed at  
10 addressing what you're describing.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm going to address  
13 or speak a couple minutes about the senior citizen  
14 issue and the work that you've been doing on that.  
15 You mentioned the work that you're doing with Robin  
16 Hood and the New York Benefits Center. I want to  
17 ask, for all seniors that receive some measure of  
18 home care or that have, that are contracted with some  
19 type of social services organization that is related  
20 to health care, not just those that are on Medicaid,  
21 but others that potentially could receive SNAP  
22 benefits, are we working with the home care providers  
23 and making sure that each home care worker is doing  
24 an assessment of their client at home and whether or  
25 not they're receiving--whether they're receiving

1  
2 SNAP, whether there's some ability to assess whether  
3 those seniors are in a food insecure environment?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Those seniors should  
5 have been captured in our outreach to those seniors  
6 who are receiving Medicaid or HEAP but not SNAP  
7 benefits. As we evaluate the effectiveness of the  
8 outreach, I think that your suggestion is a good one.  
9 We should take a careful look to make sure that the  
10 uptake in terms of people receiving home care matches  
11 our overall effort to try to address seniors, but we  
12 thought if we look at as a broad area, recipients of  
13 Medicaid not receiving food stamps that we would  
14 catch a large group of people--

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] A large  
16 number.

17 COMMISSIONER BANKS: including who you're  
18 describing, but once we evaluate the effectiveness of  
19 that, we will look much more deeply at particular  
20 subgroups.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I'm just thinking of  
22 establishing partnerships. Like, for example, I'm  
23 sure the know the organization, Heights and Hills,  
24 in--

1  
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Very  
3 well.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: downtown Brooklyn,  
5 right? Who have now grown exponentially and they  
6 have over 1,000 clients and they do case managements.  
7 So they don't do intensive home care, but they have  
8 these relationships with these seniors where they're  
9 doing it. It's a case management contract. A lot of  
10 it's funded through the City Council, and they're  
11 able to check in with these seniors periodically just  
12 to make sure that they're healthy, that they're  
13 receiving medication that they need. And is it  
14 possible that we could start looking at establishing  
15 those relationships with the not for profit providers  
16 that are out there, you know, reaching--if Heights  
17 and Hills is, you know, is seeing 1,100 or 1,200  
18 seniors throughout the city, that pool must be quite  
19 large, and whether or not like, you know, everybody's--  
20 -every one of those case managers knows to ask, "Do  
21 you have SNAP?" You know, "Are you enrolled for  
22 SNAP?" And make sure that the senior is doing that.

23 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right. We can  
24 certainly take a look at that subset of the overall  
25 senior population once we see what the outcome of the

1  
2 outreach that we did with Robin Hood support, but I  
3 think you make a good point.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then one other  
5 thing, just speaking to the work that you're doing  
6 right now with Robin Hood. So there's been 1,683  
7 applications submitted on Access New York and 589  
8 from the Bronx and 1,094 from Queens, what about the  
9 other boroughs?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, they're  
11 smaller numbers given the math that you see there,  
12 right. We've got 1,700 or so in and the remainder  
13 are the other three boroughs. But again, this is  
14 only the beginning step because we, you know, the  
15 nearly 4,000 of them are in process--are screened and  
16 we hope to be in process. So we're hopeful that  
17 we'll get more and be able to give you more data on  
18 Brooklyn, which I know you're concerned about and  
19 Manhattan and Staten Island.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. No, I think  
21 that--is it not that those 589 plus 1,094, so the  
22 Bronx and the Queens numbers add up to the 1,683?  
23 So, is there--are we doing the service in Brooklyn--

24 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] We're  
25 doing the ser--right. This is where we are

1  
2 currently. It represents a report in terms of, I  
3 guess, the best term to describe it would be an  
4 interim report--

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: where we are  
7 currently.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. So there's the  
9 same level of services happening in the other  
10 boroughs--

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] It's  
12 not only--it's not a focus on seniors only in Queens  
13 and the Bronx. It's an overall focus on seniors, but  
14 it's a--you know, it's a longer process than one shot  
15 to say, alright, what--we did an outreach, what did  
16 we get, and now we're satisfied. We're continuing to  
17 look at this and continuing to work on it.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So I want to go from  
19 seniors to children now. So, one thing that I've  
20 focused on for a number of years now and it's been  
21 something you've hit a lot of head wind on this issue  
22 is breakfast for children in the school system.  
23 Currently, about a third of the children that qualify  
24 for free or reduced lunch are eating breakfast in  
25 school and school in New York City is universally

1 free, so there's no barrier whatsoever to a child  
2 eating breakfast, you know, in terms of eligibility.  
3 Every child is eligible for a free breakfast. The  
4 biggest challenge of the 1.1 million school children  
5 in New York City as you know, the biggest barrier  
6 seems to be that they're not--you know, the food is  
7 not getting to the kid or the kid's not getting to  
8 the food and that's because most schools just have  
9 the option in the cafeteria prior to first period and  
10 for a myriad of reasons children are not able to get  
11 to school before first period, I mean, just the  
12 logistical challenges. If a parent has, you know,  
13 different kids in different schools or a child is  
14 taking a school bus to school, you know, any number  
15 of reasons. Just you know, getting to school on time  
16 is a challenge. It was a challenge for me when I was  
17 a kid. It's a challenge for all.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's a challenge to  
20 get my own children to school.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You know, so it's a--  
22 but the fact remains that New York City's the--we're  
23 the worst in the country out of all major, all large  
24 cities, we are the worst. We have the lowest  
25 percentage of children that are accessing breakfast

1  
2 at school of those that are, you know, that they're  
3 able to keep track of through title one. So, is that  
4 an issue that HRA is looking at in terms of food  
5 insecurity? Because that's a lot of meals. I don't  
6 know the exact number of meals or the exact, but it's  
7 about 50 million dollars of federal funds that we  
8 leave on the table every year, but it's certainly a  
9 lot of meals and those are a lot of meals that for  
10 those families could--they get spread throughout the  
11 rest of the month in lunch and dinner.

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: As we know, the  
13 Administration's been looking at these issues and the  
14 Council and the Administration came to some  
15 resolution in the budget agreement on particular  
16 groups of children and meals. I know when HRA was  
17 originally created it was called the Super Agency,  
18 and it was described as this whole, you know, breath  
19 of involvement with many, many different issues.  
20 School meals was not one of the areas that was within  
21 our purview, and look, as I know you can appreciate,  
22 we're very focused on trying to expand the access to  
23 SNAP and arrange of other programs, and this is one  
24 area in which our role is not one that's direct.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right. But  
3 there's--so the one--there's one proven solution  
4 that's been effective in other jurisdictions and  
5 that's, you know, having a breakfast after the bell  
6 after first period, you know, grab and go, or some  
7 type of way for kids to be eating that breakfast  
8 during first period. Can I--would I be able to get  
9 you to endorse the idea of breakfast after the bell?

10 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I've got so many  
11 reforms to focus on at HRA that I'm going to leave it  
12 to the agencies that are focused on the school meals  
13 and not take on one more issue.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, fair enough,  
15 fair enough, but it's certainly an issue that I think  
16 that we could--it would--I mean, in all seriousness  
17 it would be a very important and impactful way to get  
18 more meals to more kids and allow their parents to  
19 spread their resources out throughout the rest of the  
20 month.

21 COMMISSIONER BANKS: No, and I understand  
22 that, and you've heard me say this in other contexts  
23 and in other hearings, for HRA it took 20 years for  
24 us to get to the place we got to, and to make the  
25 progress that we've been trying to make, it can't

1  
2 happen overnight. And I expect other agencies have  
3 similar problems to the ones that we are grappling  
4 with at HRA, which is we inherited certain serious of  
5 assumptions and certain facts, and we're doing the  
6 best we can to rapidly make progress.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: So moving over to the  
8 ABAWD issue, do we have a count thus far of how many  
9 individuals, how many adults are now receiving  
10 benefits that would fall under that category since  
11 HRA's received the waiver?

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, we know on  
13 an annual basis the projection was that it would  
14 benefit about 35 to 40,000 New Yorkers. I think that  
15 we are still analyzing what the actual impact has  
16 been. It may be that the impact is going to  
17 ultimately be felt more in what I described earlier,  
18 which is people who didn't lose their benefits rather  
19 than people who are going to be added to the case  
20 load because remember, under the very complicated  
21 budgeting rules you could get benefits for three  
22 months in any three year period of time, and so we  
23 were very focused on trying to make sure that people  
24 aren't going to lose their benefits when we took the  
25 waiver, and that's, you know, that's a help to the

1 local economy. It's a help to the people otherwise  
2 would be confronting greater food insecurity, but  
3 it's a help to our frontline staff too given the  
4 complication of the budgeting process that  
5 jurisdictions who did not take the waiver had to  
6 employ. So I think the impact we believe we're seeing  
7 is more on stopping reductions as opposed to adding  
8 people, but we're continuing to look at it.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Moving over to the  
11 EFAP program, I mean we have a lot of providers that  
12 we work with through the council that you work with  
13 through HRA that do, you know, do that frontline  
14 work. It's real yeoman's work, and it's a difficult  
15 job to do. I, you know, I visited one provider and  
16 it's a larger provider, and they took me around and I  
17 was struck when they told me that between their HRA  
18 allocation and other federal and city allocations,  
19 they still spend I think they said 20,000 dollars a  
20 week on food of their own money, money that--the  
21 private money that they had to raise to meet the  
22 needs of their clients, because they want to provide  
23 their clients with a balanced meal to meet all the  
24 nutritional standards that USDA and HRA, you know,  
25 shoot for, and that really struck me as, you know,



1 that for EFAP by base-lining dollars that previously  
2 were a year to year struggle to get, but I think it's  
3 certainly an appropriate thing to do to take a fresh  
4 look at the network and the dollars that are there  
5 and what the needs are, and I think we'll know more  
6 as we see what is going to be occurring at the  
7 federal level over the--with the change over the  
8 course of 2015, which may give us new challenges in  
9 this area, and I think we're all going to have to--  
10 the Council and the Administration and the providers  
11 are going to have to look very carefully at what all  
12 these changes in Washington are going to mean for the  
13 future for us.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: With EFAP, it's my  
16 understanding, and I've heard from a few providers on  
17 this, that I's broken down into two separate  
18 categories. So the first six months, HRA provides  
19 emergency food directly to the not for profit, the  
20 pantries, and then for the other half of the year,  
21 the second half of the year, the funds go to the food  
22 bank to distribute the emergency food through their,  
23 you know, procurement. Is--can you explain maybe a  
24 little bit as to why that is? Is one better than the  
25 other, and should we look at--what we've heard is

1  
2 that the second half of the year is a little bit  
3 better than the first half of the year, that they're  
4 able to have a little bit more, you know, if it's a  
5 pantry that has, you know, dietary restrictions,  
6 halal or kosher, that flexibility is very beneficial  
7 to those pantries. Can you speak a little bit to  
8 this kind of odd system that we have here?

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Well, again, this is  
10 one of those things that's built up over the course  
11 of many, many years, and I think it's fair to take a  
12 fresh look at it. We can't reform everything in the  
13 first period of time, but it certainly merits another  
14 look. I think historically, some of the concern has  
15 been the city's ability to buy food creates certain  
16 economies that can't be gotten without the ability of  
17 the city to purchase the food.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

19 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And I remember, you  
20 know, taking a look at this when I first came in in  
21 April about whether that made sense, and I think it  
22 does make sense to have the city be the purchaser  
23 when you can get economies of scale through a  
24 purchaser that you can't otherwise, but you know,  
25

1  
2 again, having said that, certainly take a fresh look  
3 at some of the concerns.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. Because I  
5 mean, in addition to that, I mean, the food bank  
6 obviously gets the economies of scale of their on  
7 their own as the size of the provision is remarkable  
8 on their end. So--

9 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] They do  
10 a great job.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, I concur. If-  
12 -is there, in terms of the issue of dietary  
13 restrictions, because this did come up, and we want  
14 to be, you know-- New York City is a city, obviously  
15 immensely diverse and each neighborhood has its own  
16 diversity within the neighborhood itself. You know,  
17 we have so many different immigrant populations from  
18 throughout the world and many different cuisines and  
19 dietary restrictions, many different ingredients that  
20 go into those different cuisines. With those  
21 pantries that are not able to access a certain type  
22 of food because of dietary restrictions, if it's not  
23 kosher, not halal, do they have any way of then  
24 recouping what they've had to give up through the  
25 process, or are we looking at ways in which--because

1  
2 what we've heard is that pantries are essentially  
3 giving up food to, you know, essentially nutrients to  
4 distribute to their clients because of the dietary  
5 restriction issue.

6 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, there are  
7 certainly challenges here with the public benefit or  
8 a publicly funded program to ensure that every  
9 program has access to any city resident. So, some of  
10 the challenges here really relate to ensuring that  
11 everyone has access to any program. I've heard some  
12 of the concerns that you're asking me about, and it's  
13 certainly something that we're happy to sit down with  
14 groups and look for solutions, but one of the  
15 limitations to those solutions is going to be the  
16 requirement to ensure that there's equal access to  
17 anybody irrespective of what a particular program is  
18 doing or not doing.

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: And that has some  
21 limitations in it in terms of flexibility inherently.  
22 And as it should in order to assure equal access.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right, right. I  
24 guess the question is making sure that they're having  
25 full access to the amount of food that they're, you

1 know, entitled to as a provider and able to make up  
2 where they have to, you know, have to give up in  
3 order to--you know, to serve a--if a majority of--if  
4 they're in a neighborhood where the majority of the  
5 neighborhood is keeping kosher, then I can--you know,  
6 I'm totally 100 percent sure that an organization  
7 like that would keep their, you know, keep their  
8 doors open to anybody that came in through those  
9 doors, but you know, they couldn't have non-kosher  
10 meals.  
11

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Right, no, I  
13 understand that. And I, you know, I understand that  
14 this issue has been looked at in the past with the  
15 conclusion that there was--that many groups felt they  
16 had enough flexibility. Some groups felt that they  
17 did not, but I'm happy to convene a meeting of all  
18 the areas of affected groups and try to sort out  
19 where people think it's working, where people think  
20 it's not working.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In terms of fresh  
22 produce, because I know EFAP is for shelf stable  
23 food, what resources are out there so that we can  
24 ensure that communities that need it, that people  
25

1  
2 going to pantries have access to to high quality  
3 fresh food and vegetables?

4 COMMISSIONER BANKS: You know, I think  
5 this is something, again, with Robin Hood that we're  
6 taking, and with the Health Department, that we're  
7 taking a very close look at what more we can do to  
8 encourage that kind of access. It's something that's  
9 a priority, and it's something we're certainly taking  
10 a look at and be happy to work with you and the  
11 committee if there are recommendations that we could  
12 be implementing.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: In this past budget  
14 in FY 15, 1.5 million dollars of funds that the  
15 Council had previously allocated for emergency food  
16 was baselined by the Administration. We're very  
17 happy about that. Can--is all of that funding going  
18 to purchasing food or how is that being allocated  
19 within HRA?

20 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, it's all  
21 allocated to the EFAP program. So it's all part of  
22 that same program.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Is there a  
24 breakdown of food versus personnel cost or  
25 administrative costs or?

1  
2 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, this is  
3 money that's going out into the field

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

5 COMMISSIONER BANKS: It's not--I mean, we  
6 have enough other--there are enough other issues in  
7 terms of our operations. The agency that this is  
8 dollars--these are dollars that are intended for  
9 food.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay, so it's all--  
11 all that is within EFAP and all of it's--

12 COMMISSIONER BANKS: [interposing] Yep.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: All of it's going  
14 towards food.

15 COMMISSIONER BANKS: Yep.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then, and this  
17 will be my last question, Commissioner. I don't  
18 think any of my other colleagues are coming back for--  
19 -obviously it's a busy week and everybody--there's  
20 multiple hearings happening at the same time. So,  
21 but I want to thank you for taking the time to be  
22 here and for your dedication to ensuring that every  
23 New Yorker has access to the quality food that no New  
24 Yorker go hungry, and that's a--it's a lofty goal and  
25 it's something that we could all collectively, every

1 person in New York City, strive towards and not  
2 necessarily ever attain, but it's something that I  
3 think we have a collective responsibility to work  
4 towards and do everything we can to make sure they  
5 system is working correctly and it's working for  
6 those that it was designed to work for. So, I want  
7 to thank you very much for your testimony today and  
8 for your answering these questions forthright and  
9 candidly.  
10

11 COMMISSIONER BANKS: We appreciate your  
12 leadership and we appreciate the partnership that we  
13 have in trying to address these things that are of  
14 great concern to the Administration and we know are  
15 concerns to the committee and the Council.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. I have  
17 one last question, though. So, because there has--  
18 you know, we've seen a 10 percent increase in the  
19 number of people over the last, according to the EFAP  
20 quarterly report a 10 percent increase in the number  
21 of individuals served at pantries and soup kitchens.  
22 What steps are we taking currently in response to that  
23 increase? So what measures is HRA looking at or  
24 considering that specifically geared towards those  
25 providers, because one thing that I saw earlier

1  
2 today, and it was a remarkable number at the food  
3 bank when they showed the current state of pantries  
4 was that I think it was 80 percent of them are  
5 rationing their allotment, that they're, because of  
6 this increase in the number of individuals coming to  
7 the kitchens and coming to the pantries, they're  
8 having to roll back the amount of food that they're  
9 providing. So, what are we looking at right now to  
10 address specifically this issue of the increase in  
11 people, individuals coming to the pantries and the  
12 kitchens?

13 COMMISSIONER BANKS: I mean, it's an  
14 increase that we look at too, from July to September  
15 quarter to the--of 2013, to the July to September  
16 quarter currently. You know, certainly in between an  
17 important step that we wanted to take was to baseline  
18 the dollars to eliminate the budgetary uncertainty,  
19 and you know, as of the committee we're going to take  
20 a very close look at what further measures are needed  
21 to try to address this problem.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And we at the  
23 Council, you know, are here to help and want to make  
24 sure that we're doing everything we can do assist you  
25 and to assist the providers in those aims.

1  
2           COMMISSIONER BANKS: Thank you very much.  
3 I appreciate it.

4           CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you,  
5 Commissioner. We are going to close the vote at this  
6 point on Intro 361A.

7           COUNCIL CLERK: Final vote in the  
8 Committee on General Welfare, Intro 361A, 5 in the  
9 affirmative, 0 in the negatives, no abstentions.

10          CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. The  
11 hearing on 361--okay, it's all the same hearing, so  
12 I'm not going to adjourn that, but I am going to take  
13 a two minute break. Alright. We are back. The  
14 first panel--and I want to thank everybody who stayed  
15 for Commissioner Banks' testimony. We appreciate  
16 your patience, and we look forward to hearing public  
17 testimony starting now. First we want to call the  
18 first panel, Joel Berg from the New York City  
19 Coalition Against Hunger, David DeVaughn from City  
20 Harvest, and Triada Stampas from the Food Bank of New  
21 York City. Start--

22          JOEL BERG: Hello, I'm Joel Berg,  
23 Executive Director of the New York City Coalition  
24 Against Hunger. I want to want to thank the Chair  
25 and your excellent staff for highlighting this vital

1 issue. I will say this is the first time in the last  
2 13 years I did not have to sit through the  
3 Commissioner's testimony with a red pen correcting it  
4 because of misinformation. And just to start from a  
5 baseline of common values where the Administration  
6 accepts A, that hunger exists, B, that the city has a  
7 responsibility for fixing it whether Washington  
8 accepts that responsibility or not, and 3, that they  
9 can actually work in collaboration with the advocates  
10 and service providers to do something serious about  
11 this, it's hard to overstate the importance of that,  
12 and I never thought I'd live to see to the day where  
13 I can come to one of these hearings and say I agree  
14 with everything the Commissioner said. That being  
15 said, let me talk just a little bit about the impact  
16 of the SNAP cuts and what that means and the impact  
17 of the declining case load, and if there's any  
18 difference, it's a difference of nuance about some of  
19 the explanations of the declining case load and I  
20 want to end, of course, with a pitch for breakfast  
21 before the bell, of course.

22  
23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: After the bell.

24 JOEL BERG: After the bell, correct. So,  
25 we know that Congress passed massive cuts in the last

1  
2 few years, and I have to say for the record, both  
3 happened with the Democrats still theoretically--you  
4 know, it first happened with the Democrats controlled  
5 both houses of Congress and the second when the  
6 Democrats theoretically controlled the Senate, and  
7 they resulted in 14 billion dollars of cuts  
8 nationwide because Governor Cuomo took action here in  
9 New York, he was able to prevent some of the worst  
10 cuts from going into effect in New York, saving 457  
11 million dollars a year statewide. Very important.  
12 But because federal law overrides the city and  
13 states, every one of the 1.7 million people on the  
14 SNAP rolls in New York City did get a cut, losing an  
15 average of 19 dollars per month, which equals about  
16 228 dollars for the year. Before the cuts, the  
17 average SNAP benefit was one dollar and 70 cents a  
18 meal, and now it's a dollar 60 cents a meal, and  
19 partially because of those cuts. Fewer people  
20 applied. Fewer people recertified, and between  
21 August 2013 and August 2014 there was a 125,000  
22 person drop in participation. We say six percent.  
23 What does that mean? One hundred and 25 thousand  
24 fewer people, or Madison Square Garden filled up six  
25 times over maybe for a Billy Joel concert, not

1 necessarily for the Knicks, that's how many people  
2 that is. And what does that mean in raw numbers?  
3 That means 426 million dollars less is going to come  
4 into the grocery carts of hungry families in New York  
5 City this year, 426 million dollars less. You heard  
6 about, you know, City Council funding for EFAP and  
7 how important that is, and that the money was base  
8 lined in both the Food Bank for New York City and us.  
9 We got money for SNAP outreach as part of that, which  
10 is absolutely vital, but again, all the money the  
11 city could possibly afford is just dwarfed by the  
12 magnitude of the federal cuts. I certainly do  
13 believe as the Commissioner said that one of the top  
14 reasons for the decline in participation is the  
15 benefits were down. Therefore, as people go through  
16 the hassle to pay-off ratio, they're going to be less  
17 likely to apply or recertify if the pay-off is less  
18 and the hassle is the same. Now, all the things the  
19 city is doing to reduce the hassle, that will surely  
20 help, and then the ratio will improve, but I do  
21 question just a bit at the edges in a nuanced matter,  
22 not a wholesale repudiation of the claim, but I do  
23 question a little the degree to which the supposedly  
24 improving economy has been responsible for this case  
25

1 line, to quote, "case load decline here and  
2 nationwide." Yes, there's been the benefit  
3 reduction, but we also can't underestimate the role  
4 of the demonization of low income people and SNAP  
5 recipients in the media. Occasionally, even here in  
6 New York City, a low income person will accidentally  
7 read the New York Post. You know, occasionally, you  
8 know, Fox News will be on some place. They're at a  
9 public place, they have no choice but to watch it,  
10 and to see the general demonization in our society of  
11 these benefits, there's no question in my mind that  
12 impacts low income people as well. And there's no  
13 question as well that some of these barriers at the  
14 city level have been built up over a very, very long  
15 time. If you've ever been negligent and didn't go to  
16 a dentist one year for your check-up, you know, the  
17 next year is more painful and it takes more time to  
18 take away the tartar, and I'd say the  
19 Administration's taking a lot of time to take away  
20 the tartar so to speak from previous decades of  
21 demonizing low income people in New York City, and I  
22 think all of that contributes to the lower case load,  
23 and we see that it is profound in its impact. Again,  
24 nearly half a billion dollars less. So I'm hoping  
25

1  
2 the Council will strongly support as this committee  
3 has all the vital improvements the city is making and  
4 HRA is making. Certainly, other things the Mayor has  
5 done have helped fight hunger. Increasing, expanding  
6 the living wage will help people afford more food.  
7 Certainly, universal pre-k to the extent that kids  
8 are getting free meals paid for by the federal  
9 government, that's helping fight hunger. We will say  
10 out of our wish list of ten things the city should be  
11 doing, they're doing about eight or nine, but the  
12 most obvious thing they're not is breakfast after the  
13 bell. As you indicated, Mr. Chair, out of 63 big  
14 city school districts in the United States, New  
15 York's dead last. I've said it before. I'll say it  
16 again. It's humiliating when we lose to Boston or  
17 Chicago in basketball or football or baseball, but  
18 it's truly unacceptable when we lose to them in  
19 feeding our children.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It was humiliating  
21 when we were the last of 27 that were surveyed, but  
22 then when they expanded it 63, we're still last.

23 JOEL BERG: Yeah, we are still last. The  
24 Mayor said he wants to do it and I believe that they  
25 do, but we just need a gentle push from their friends

1 and allies to get that done. And I do hope we  
2 continue to have a united front to push back against  
3 the cuts at the federal level. We never talk about  
4 politics in such an august government hearing room,  
5 but I will point out, I must, that one of the leading  
6 opponents of SNAP Congressman Steve Southerland of  
7 Florida who was booted out of office. You know, Thad  
8 Cochran, one of the leading Republican supporter of  
9 SNAP from Mississippi, not exactly a left wing state,  
10 won by a handy margin re-election. So, I'm hoping we  
11 can reunite the bipartisan coalition that we had in  
12 the 70's in support of these programs just as basic  
13 common sense, feeding our neighbors and helping the  
14 economy. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
17 Joel. Actually, before we go on, I actually wanted  
18 to just say very quickly, just filling in a little  
19 bit something you made reference to of what Governor  
20 Cuomo's action earlier this year around the HEAP  
21 benefit and how that played out. Do you want to--do  
22 you want to tell folks exactly what happened there?

23 JOEL BERG: Yeah. So one of the things  
24 the Farm Bill did with a projected 8.7 billion  
25 dollars in cuts nationwide was basically take away

1 the flexibility of governors to combine heat or eat  
2 basically that's the colloquial, combine LIHEAP, Home  
3 Energy Assistance Benefits with SNAP benefits to  
4 increase the amount of SNAP benefits people are able  
5 to get. Another issue is the hypocrisy of Congress  
6 run by people who claim they want to empower states,  
7 and that's why they want to block grant benefits to  
8 the states, taking away flexibility from the  
9 governors. But it was maintained sort of kind of in  
10 the bill, and Governor Cuomo did come up with extra  
11 SNAP LIHEAP home energy assistance funding for one  
12 year. We've hopeful that it continues and we're  
13 hopeful that Congress under new leadership does not  
14 take away that remaining marginal eligibility. Oh,  
15 one thing I should have mentioned because you asked  
16 and I believe another Council Member asked about the  
17 number of people eligible for SNAP not getting it.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

19 JOEL BERG: I understand it is a rough,  
20 rough calculation. We don't have great numbers for  
21 New York City's. There are different methodologies  
22 USDA uses. That being said, they do publish a number  
23 for New York state, and if you just extrapolate that  
24 same number from New York City at least 400,000 to  
25

1  
2 600,000 people in New York City are eligible for SNAP  
3 not getting it. If you look at Medicaid versus SNAP,  
4 about a million extra people are getting Medicaid  
5 than they're getting SNAP. Not all of them are  
6 eligible for SNAP, but many, many are.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's a lot. And then  
8 just one other thing about what the Governor did last  
9 year, because I want to make sure that, you know, we  
10 acknowledge what he did, because it brought in over  
11 457--it was 457 million dollars--

12 JOEL BERG: [interposing] Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: in SNAP benefits that  
14 were set to be lost in the state of New York, and the  
15 overall cost to the state was just a few million. I  
16 think it was eight million dollars that the Governor  
17 allocated that then brought in 457 million dollars.  
18 So it was a good thing for our economy. He deserves  
19 credit for doing that.

20 JOEL BERG: Absolutely. There are things  
21 we wish the state was doing differently. We wished  
22 they raised the minimum wage more aggressively. We  
23 wished they gave less in tax cuts to state tax  
24 beneficiaries, but on hunger, the two biggest asks  
25 we've had over the last decade the Governor has done.

1 He has taken this heat or eat option to preserve, as  
2 you said, 457 million dollars, and he did, you know,  
3 take away finger imaging for SNAP.  
4

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

6 JOEL BERG: Opposed to the very  
7 vociferous objections of the previous mayor, and I  
8 didn't mention that in my testimony. It's sort of a  
9 dead issue now--

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Right.

11 JOEL BERG: but as you know, this was a  
12 controversy for a good 13 years, and the other side,  
13 "Oh, there'll be massive fraud if you stop treating  
14 poor people like criminals." For the record, there's  
15 been no increase whatsoever in duplicative cases that  
16 we know of that could have been detected by finger  
17 imaging. So that action not only saved tax payers  
18 money, but also clearly took away stigma and  
19 increased participation.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Not to mention the  
21 fair hearing decrease and all that.

22 JOEL BERG: Yes, as the Commissioner  
23 said, it's smart government. It's good for tax  
24 payers and good for hungry people just to actually  
25 run these programs better. And you may recall the

1  
2 previous Commissioner when he was asked what he could  
3 learn from other states shocked me, and I'm not  
4 easily shocked, basically said there's nothing he can  
5 learn from other states. Compare that to the current  
6 Administration saying they're scouring the country to  
7 find best practices they can bring here. That's  
8 fresh air and good for tax payers not just advocates.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. Thank you.

10 DAVID DEVAUGHN: Alright, good morning.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Good morning.

12 DAVID DEVAUGHN: Members of the--I'll  
13 address you. Thank you for holding this hearing  
14 today and putting a spotlight on Hunger New York  
15 City. I'm David DeVaughn, Manager of Policy and  
16 Government Relations at City Harvest, and you know,  
17 in this time period thinking about the Thanksgiving  
18 holiday, it's really important to address why there  
19 are many families in our city where the question  
20 isn't what to have for Thanksgiving dinner, but are  
21 we going to have Thanksgiving dinner. And so I  
22 appreciate the opportunity to share what we're  
23 learning in the communities we're working with around  
24 hunger and food insecurity, and I'm going to touch a  
25 little bit on the coalition efforts that we're a part

1 of to address the need for emergency food. And so  
2 the City Harvest, I want to first say, is encouraged  
3 by the appetite of the new Administration and the  
4 Council seems to have want to have a comprehensive  
5 approach to fighting hunger and food insecurity. In  
6 addition to ensuring maximum enrollment in federal  
7 nutrition programs, we hope the Administration will  
8 significantly build on its commitment to universal  
9 free school lunch through Lunch for Learning  
10 Campaign, which I know many have been a part of in  
11 the Council, and expanding Breakfast After the Bell  
12 with the Powered by Breakfast campaign, which I know  
13 I saw you in front of the microphones on our rally  
14 that rainy day. So each seeks to maximize federal  
15 dollars in participation for these programs to ensure  
16 that every student gets easily accessible healthy  
17 free meals regardless of income. We want to thank  
18 you for your continued support on this. So when  
19 we're looking at hunger and food insecurity like many  
20 of our partners have said, we're seeing an increased  
21 need in all the five boroughs that we're working in  
22 and specifically the neighborhoods that are healthy  
23 neighborhoods. You know, we're in the South Bronx,  
24 north shore of Staten Island, Bed-Stuy and Brooklyn,  
25

1 northwest Queens and Washington Heights in Inwood,  
2 and we've recently just opened our eighth mobile  
3 market in November to serve, you know, to give out  
4 fresh fruits and vegetables in Mariner's Harbor  
5 Staten Island, which was I believe around a 45 minute  
6 bus ride from the ferry. So we went, you know, out by  
7 NYCHA facility and it was a really great day, and  
8 it's something that's going to happen every two  
9 months now, to give out fresh fruits and vegetables  
10 at that facility. And this month also commemorates  
11 our 10 years since the opening of our first mobile  
12 market in the Melrose neighborhood of the south  
13 Bronx, and we're actually opening a second mobile  
14 market in Washington Heights and Inwood in 2015 in  
15 the spring. So, but with these efforts and with what  
16 many people have mentioned, when we surveyed the soup  
17 kitchens and food pantries that we serve, on average  
18 we're seeing a 43 percent increase from 2008 to 2014  
19 in the need that they're seeing. So, one thing that  
20 was talked about a lot today was the gap. You can  
21 call it the meal gap, the food gap, when people  
22 receive benefits, they then have an income that's  
23 above that level where they can receive benefits,  
24 where do they go? Where do they turn to? Usually

1  
2 emergency food programs. So I want to invite everyone  
3 in this room, and I believe we invited most of the  
4 Council to the release of the 2014 Self Sufficiency  
5 Report. So that's going to be happening on December  
6 2<sup>nd</sup> in the morning at the Tishman Auditorium at the  
7 New School and this is prepared for the Women's  
8 Center for Education and Career Advancement with the  
9 support of City Harvest, the United Way and New York  
10 Community Trust, and it's going to really get at that  
11 gap where the level of income New Yorkers need to be  
12 able to afford basic necessities and the point at  
13 which residents no longer qualify for public  
14 benefits. And so for the first time through the  
15 study we're going to put a number to how many New  
16 Yorkers fall into this gap. And another thing that  
17 we're doing, and I know we've talked to your office  
18 about, is the New York City Alliance for Child  
19 Nutrition Reauthorization. This is a group of  
20 diverse stakeholders who are convening with the  
21 Laurie M. Tisch Center for Food Education and Policy  
22 at Teachers College Columbia University to work--  
23 looking at the Child Nutrition Act, making sure that  
24 the priorities for New York are included in the  
25 national discussion around CNR, and this bill, as

1 many of you know, expires in September 2015, so we  
2 want to make sure to get ahead of this. And so, you  
3 know, we're deeply interested in all of these issues  
4 and working with the Council and Administration to  
5 ensure adequate support and attention to hunger in  
6 the city, and we want to thank you for your attention  
7 to these urgent matters and for all your work on  
8 improving the lives and conditions for low income New  
9 Yorkers. Thanks.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, and I just  
12 want to acknowledge the good work that City Harvest  
13 is doing, both around the larger policy issues and  
14 both citywide and nationally, but then also looking  
15 towards getting, you know, finding new and innovative  
16 ways as you made reference to to get fresh fruit and  
17 vegetables to families that need it. That is  
18 something that I think that we as a city can always  
19 do more of and always do a better job of, but City  
20 Harvest has been there on the forefront of that fight  
21 for a long time, and so I want to acknowledge that  
22 good work.

23 DAVID DEVAUGHN: Thank you.

24 TRIADA STAMPAS: Good afternoon. My name  
25 is Triada Stampas. I'm Vice President for Research

1 and Public Affairs at Food Bank for New York City.  
2 Thank you, Chairman Levin, for the opportunity to  
3 testify here this afternoon for the General Welfare  
4 Committee's annual Hunger hearing. I want to start  
5 first by addressing a couple of the things that were  
6 brought up in the Commissioner's testimony and some  
7 of the Q & A, and first and foremost, recognize and  
8 celebrate the--a lot of what Commissioner Banks had  
9 to say. For one thing, HRA's continued emphasis on  
10 SNAP outreach and enrollment and finding the people  
11 who are hardest to enroll. A recognition that  
12 addressing hunger is not either through short term,  
13 you know, addressing short term needs with emergency  
14 food or through living wage jobs, but really working  
15 across the spectrum simultaneously because that's  
16 really how we move the needle both short and long  
17 term, and also to recognize, you know, the Council's  
18 continued leadership on this through several, you  
19 know, several Administrations. The Council really  
20 has pushed and it has been very effective at pushing  
21 for addressing anti-hunger priorities, sometimes to  
22 encourage the Administration to act where it's been  
23 slow and other times to twist arms a little bit more  
24 when needed. But it really--the Council plays a  
25

1 vital role and continues to play a vital role in  
2 this. And in particular, there was a comment made  
3 about, you know, the Council having or the city  
4 having limited impact on what happens in Washington.  
5 And while it is true that nobody in this room sits in  
6 Congress and gets to vote on things, the Council has  
7 been quite effective in advocating for New York  
8 City's priorities when federal led anti-hunger  
9 legislation has come up like in the previous Farm  
10 Bill. So I hope that you don't stop doing that. The  
11 reason why SNAP benefits were cut last November was  
12 because of a deal made in the last Child Nutrition  
13 reauthorization. This year, Child Nutrition is being  
14 reauthorized yet again, and SNAP unfortunately, it's  
15 the concern of many anti-hunger organizations, could  
16 be vulnerable once again for--as seen as a funding  
17 source for Child Nutrition Programs or other, you  
18 know, so called reforms made in that bill.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, I just want--  
21 just to interject for one second. So, what would  
22 happen--what would happen, just throwing this out  
23 there, since the Republicans are now going to be  
24 controlling both houses of Congress, that the  
25 Republicans put together a bill that does not meet

1  
2 the President's standards, what would happen then if  
3 the President were to veto a bill? I'm just throwing  
4 this out there. Would the current bill be extended  
5 then until the new one is authorized, or what would  
6 happen there? Do you--I just--on a procedural level.

7 TRIADA STAMPAS: My understanding is that  
8 the current authorization--for mandatory programs.  
9 So for school lunch, for example, and school  
10 breakfast that are entitlement programs that the  
11 current authorization would just kind of carry over,  
12 but that may not be the case for a program like WIC,  
13 which is not mandatory and is subject to annual  
14 appropriations and things like that. So that might  
15 shift. I'm not an expert in this, though. That's  
16 just my current understanding based on, you know,  
17 other similar situations that have occurred. I do  
18 want to say the federal government--

19 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Okay,  
20 sorry.

21 TRIADA STAMPAS: Yeah. And that could  
22 happen. The President has murmured about his ability  
23 to veto legislation, so and we'll see what happens  
24 this year with Child Nutrition reauthorization and if  
25 that's the moment that he chooses to find that pen.

1 So, I want to--you know, this morning, Food Bank for  
2 New York City released the results of a new survey  
3 about food pantries and soup kitchens in the wake of  
4 SNAP cuts that happened a year ago. And we've  
5 calculated, you know, and this is something that Joel  
6 alluded to, the great extent of the SNAP cuts to date  
7 as of September has been a loss in our city of more  
8 than 56 million meals and counting. The reduced  
9 benefit amounts are still in effect. Those numbers  
10 are 11 month numbers. Fifty-six million meals is  
11 more meals than most food banks across the country  
12 distribute in a year. So that is a tremendous loss.  
13 It is not trivial, as Joel noted, and I want to agree  
14 with that. The impact on food pantries and soup  
15 kitchens was immediate and widespread and  
16 unfortunately it has continued. Eighty percent of  
17 food pantries and soup kitchens this past September  
18 reported greater need than a year ago before the SNAP  
19 cuts too effect. And what's more distressing is the  
20 extent of food shortages and the emergency food  
21 network. So, 60 percent of food pantries and soup  
22 kitchens reported running out of food in one month  
23 alone. Thirty-seven percent reported having to turn  
24 people away, which as anybody who has ever set foot  
25

1 in a food pantry or soup kitchen to volunteer, to  
2 help out, has learned anything about them knows it is  
3 the absolute last resort, the last thing anyone at a  
4 food pantry or soup kitchen wants to do when someone  
5 shows up in need of a meal or of a bag of food to  
6 take home is to say, "Sorry, we don't have anything  
7 for you." And our research shows that when people  
8 are turned away from food pantries and soup kitchens,  
9 most often they just go hungry. They will maybe seek  
10 out food from friends or family. They will maybe try  
11 to find another food pantry or soup kitchen, but it  
12 is not an easily replaced resource, and more often  
13 than not, they just do without. And then 61 percent  
14 of food pantries this past September reported  
15 rationing the food in their pantry bags. Even under  
16 better circumstances, the average food pantry  
17 struggles to meet the state's nine meal standard.  
18 Three meals for three days per person is the state  
19 standard for pantry bag, but even more are reporting  
20 not having enough and rationing just to be able to  
21 meet as much of the need as they can on their lines.  
22 So that's the situation that we're in right now as a  
23 network. Fifty-six million, more than 56 million  
24 meals lost means that people show up on food pantry  
25

1 and soup kitchen lines and it means that they show up  
2 on food pantry and soup kitchen lines more often than  
3 before, and that it's probably more of them than  
4 before. You asked the question earlier about food  
5 insecurity, and does a decline in SNAP enrollment  
6 signal a reduction of food insecurity? And I can't  
7 say that on its own it does. Even under better  
8 circumstances before SNAP benefits were cut, snap was  
9 not lasting people the month and about 58 percent of  
10 people using food pantries and soup kitchens were  
11 already receiving snap. So a food pantry or a soup  
12 kitchen in many cases had already become a strategy  
13 for getting through the month and having enough food  
14 through the month even before benefits were cut. So,  
15 getting SNAP is no guarantee of food security.  
16 Losing SNAP benefits or reducing SNAP benefits--or I  
17 mean, losing or getting off of SNAP is no guarantee  
18 that you are now food secure. So, that in a nutshell  
19 is the situation that we're in, and I think to better  
20 understand food insecurity there's a metric that we  
21 use call the Meal Gap. It's a measure that was  
22 developed by an agricultural economist named Craig  
23 Gundersen at the University of Illinois at Urbana-  
24 Champaign at the behest of Feeding America, which is  
25

1 the national network of food banks, and what the Meal  
2 Gap incorporates, which I think is helpful for the  
3 New York City example is not just who's food  
4 insecure, but also the cost of food. So for example,  
5 between 2011 and 2012, and 2012 is the most recent  
6 data that's available, New York City's meal gap  
7 increased by 15 million. It went from 235 million  
8 meals to 250 million meals, and when you look closely  
9 at the numbers, what was driving that largely is not--  
10 -there was no big change in how many people were food  
11 insecure. The big driver was the increase in food  
12 prices in New York City that meant that food insecure  
13 people were falling even shorter of being able to get  
14 a complete diet throughout the year of adequate  
15 nutritious food. So, you know, food prices in New  
16 York City are something also to be looked at and  
17 something that drives the meal gap and drives people  
18 to food pantries and soup kitchens even when food  
19 insecurity itself isn't changing very much. That can  
20 really impact usage on the front lines. My written  
21 testimony has a whole bunch more, but I don't think  
22 we need to get into that.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, I want to  
25 thank--I want to thank you, Triada, and the Food Bank

1  
2 for always being there and for keeping all of these  
3 issues on the front burner for a lot of us here in  
4 the City Council and in the city government. We  
5 have, I think, our work cut out for us. One  
6 question, and just to--may have phrased it a  
7 different way than I asked you before, but this--I  
8 asked the Commissioner this, is the food insecurity  
9 picture better today than it was a year ago or is it  
10 worse today in New York City than it was a year ago?  
11 It's a difficult question, so I really--

12 TRIADA STAMPAS: [interposing] So, yeah.  
13 So, we won't see the data, like the official data for  
14 another couple of years. There's a two year lag.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

16 TRIADA STAMPAS: So, we won't get a look  
17 at 2014 until 2016, but as the representative of a  
18 network of emergency food providers across the city,  
19 it is hard to say that anything is getting better. I  
20 mean, we have seen increases in need from the start  
21 of the recession through the end of the recession and  
22 the recovery and now through cuts to SNAP. There  
23 seems to be, from our perspective and the research  
24 that we've done, a deeply entrenched food poverty  
25 problem in New York City, and we've not yet seen, you

1  
2 know, our city moving out of it, which is not to say  
3 that we don't have the tools because we do, but we  
4 haven't yet done it.

5 JOEL BERG: I want to reiterate what  
6 Triada said is that the federal data we use on the  
7 sums [sic] basis for the basis of the food gap  
8 analysis as well, we run three year averages of the  
9 federal data and it's only as recent as 2013, but we  
10 can tell you that 2010 versus 2012 numbers are not  
11 worse, but unfortunately, the most recent three  
12 years. So, my point is the rate of increase may have  
13 been slightly stemmed, but that covers up the fact  
14 that this is the first so-called recovery in modern  
15 American history where here and nationwide this  
16 massive recovery at the top has not represented, you  
17 know, very significant job growth. It does not  
18 represent significant income growth. It has not  
19 represented a very significant poverty growth. So  
20 even if it's just as bad as it was six years ago in  
21 the height of the recession, I stress, that is a  
22 major, major overall public policy catastrophe and  
23 failure that we have the best stock market in world  
24 history, and the fact that there haven't been any

1  
2 significant improvements and possibly it's getting  
3 worse. We don't know yet.

4 TRIADA STAMPAS: A substantial majority  
5 of our members would say it's getting worse.

6 JOEL BERG: Yes, and certainly our data  
7 is that more people are coming and they're not coming  
8 because it's a field day. They're going to these  
9 places because they need food.

10 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. And, you know,  
11 it's a stark picture when you factor in how the top  
12 one percent, if you will, continue to get richer and  
13 it's--the Mayor's focus on income inequality is  
14 welcomed here in New York City, but it's going to  
15 require, I think, a lot of time and a lot of effort  
16 on all of our parts to move the needle on that.

17 DAVID DEVAUGHN: I just wanted to say  
18 really quickly one thing that we're also--you'll be  
19 able to see on December 2<sup>nd</sup> in the self-sufficiency  
20 launch for 2014, is looking at all these figures from  
21 2000 to 2014. So you can look at food insecurity.  
22 You can look at the price of food. You can look at  
23 types of jobs and where they have seen their incomes  
24 rise or stay stagnant. So it's really--we're seeing  
25 a lot of interesting data that we didn't necessarily

1  
2 have in the past self-sufficiency standards. I can't  
3 tell you right now, but right after, you know, I  
4 think 10:30 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> you can see the whole report.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: We look forward to  
6 seeing it.

7 TRIADA STAMPAS: And one other thing you-  
8 -in response to your questions about EFAP and why are  
9 there two cycles of EFAP and why are they different.  
10 So, just in a nutshell, the two different cycles of  
11 EFAP are a historical sort of--they're a legacy, but  
12 they started with the creation of the City Council  
13 initiative to supplement EFAP, and so the first six  
14 month cycle is the food purchased by DCAS at the  
15 direction of HRA, and that is all shelf stable food.  
16 The second cycle incorporates the City Council  
17 funding, which was--which went through food banks  
18 wholesale purchasing and included not just shelf  
19 stable food but also frozen food, frozen produce in  
20 particular. The--when the initiative was started it  
21 was intended to be a pilot, a way of seeing whether  
22 this could be something that could be adopted for the  
23 entire program, whether that kind of flexibility  
24 would be beneficial, whether the prices would be  
25 competitive. It never made it out of the pilot phase

1  
2 as sometimes happens in government, and so the City  
3 Council initiative continued as a wholesale  
4 purchasing program while the baseline funding for  
5 EFAP continued as a DCAS procured twice a year set of  
6 foods that is stored in food banks' warehouse and  
7 distributed by food bank at the direction of HRA.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right.

9 TRIADA STAMPAS: So that's kind of the  
10 history.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Would it--is it  
12 opinion of the Food Bank that it would be beneficial  
13 to pantries throughout New York City to adopt the  
14 pilot model for the entire system?

15 TRIADA STAMPAS: We think it has a lot of  
16 benefits and a lot of good, you know, a lot of  
17 strengths. We certainly would not want to do  
18 anything that would diminish the overall food supply,  
19 but in our analysis of our wholesale purchasing, and  
20 we do millions of dollars--

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] A lot  
22 of, yeah.

23 TRIADA STAMPAS: of wholesale food  
24 purchasing to ensure that there is a year-round  
25 supply, a full complement of all five food groups

1  
2 year-round that's available to our food pantries and  
3 soup kitchens. In our analysis of our--the prices  
4 that we achieve through competitive bidding and our  
5 wholesale purchasing, we believe that they are  
6 comparable and in some cases better.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Right. I mean, it--  
8 from the economies of scale argument or perspective,  
9 it just seems--

10 TRIADA STAMPAS: [interposing] We have  
11 scale.

12 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: You have scale,  
13 right, right. You are the Food Bank after all.  
14 Okay. We look forward to continuing that  
15 conversation in the coming months and taking a hard  
16 look at that because we want to make sure that we  
17 are, you know, working with our partners in the most  
18 effective way. Obviously, nobody wants to diminish a  
19 single ounce of food to go out to people that need  
20 it, but if it's--if that is--if that concern is  
21 addressed, then we should look towards potentially  
22 doing that in the coming budget.

23 TRIADA STAMPAS: Great.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thanks.

25 TRIADA STAMPAS: Thank you.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
3 to this panel. Thank you for all of your work.  
4 Thank you. Next panel is Jessica Hughson-Andrade  
5 from the Met Council, Beau Heyen from Masbia Soup  
6 Kitchen Network, Anthony Butler, Saint John's Bread  
7 and Life, and Lisa Zullig from God's Love We Deliver.  
8 And before this panel starts, I want to acknowledge  
9 the good work that you all do as truly the front line  
10 organizations that are providing food and service and  
11 outreach because we could, you know, do all that we  
12 talk about doing on a governmental level, but if we  
13 don't have partners that are there on the front lines  
14 providing the services, that food will never get to a  
15 hungry mouth. So, I want to thank you very much in  
16 advance for your testimony. Whoever wants to start  
17 can start.

18 JESSICA HUGHSON-ANDRADE: Okay, sure. So  
19 my name is Jessica Hughson-Andrade. Great job on the  
20 pronunciation by the way. I have a very difficult  
21 name. I am the Outreach Manager at Metropolitan  
22 Council on Jewish Poverty or Met Council. To begin,  
23 first of all, thank you so much, Chair Levin, and to  
24 the other members of the General Welfare Committee  
25 for allowing us to speak today. You've gone through

1  
2 the stats, Food Bank, New York City Coalition Against  
3 Hunger, City Harvest did a great job in terms of the  
4 picture of hunger in New York city today. From  
5 Metropolitan Council's perspective, we--as everyone  
6 knows there are over 1.3 million food insecure in New  
7 York City. Many of them are children or seniors.  
8 The issue is further compounded for a lot of the  
9 populations that we serve, and regardless of race,  
10 religion, ethnicity, our services are available to  
11 any New Yorker in need, but for those clients that  
12 face religious dietary restrictions, the issue of  
13 food insecurity is compounded even further due to the  
14 high cost of kosher food or halal food. So from  
15 Metropolitan Council's perspective, we estimate that  
16 a kosher meal is about 30 more, 30 percent more  
17 expensive than a non-kosher meal. So, the picture of  
18 food insecurity is only going to grow especially  
19 among those populations. You see the SNAP benefits  
20 for a New Yorker without those restrictions will  
21 stretch maybe three weeks of a month, whereas  
22 somebody that has a dietary restriction based on  
23 religion will stretch about two weeks of the month.  
24 So, the need for the--the need for increased snap  
25 benefits as well as the need for increased emergency

1 food is something that's particularly dire for these  
2 communities. I'll just share a quick kind of case  
3 study just to bring a little bit more of the human  
4 face of hunger to the picture. So, we worked with a  
5 woman that was a teacher for over 20 years. She  
6 taught math and reading to over 300 students in the  
7 public school system in Brooklyn. She inspired to  
8 instill learning in her students and prepare them for  
9 future challenges. Unfortunately, in 2012, she was  
10 diagnosed with Lupus and fibromyalgia, and the  
11 medical bills began to increase at a break neck pace.  
12 So the frequent trips to the hospital, the pain that  
13 she was in, unfortunately she had to--she could no  
14 longer stay employed as a teacher, and when she tried  
15 to seek out benefits on her own, it was very  
16 difficult because for most of her life she was in the  
17 middle class. This wasn't a safety net that she had  
18 to think about before. So, she got in touch with Met  
19 Council and through our network of social services we  
20 helped her with private funds to be able to help her  
21 with rent that was in arrears, that was in back  
22 payment. We also enrolled her into SNAP benefits and  
23 other public benefits programs and kind of got her to  
24 a place that she was able to stabilize her life and  
25

1  
2 get out of crisis. So that, in addition to SNAP  
3 benefits and other social services that we provide,  
4 we try to get people to keep their head above water  
5 and to hopefully a place of self-sufficiency over  
6 time. From the food pantries perspective in our  
7 pantry network alone, we're the largest kosher food  
8 network in the US. We've seen at least a 15 percent  
9 increase since the cuts to SNAP in November of last  
10 year.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
12 for your testimony. That's incredible. I mean, it--  
13 what's striking about that number is that it seems to  
14 be the norm across the board, which you know,  
15 demonstrates that there's a cause and effect there,  
16 and so I think that collectively we need to start to  
17 really hone in on that and see exactly how that's,  
18 you know, what's--I mean, there's common sense  
19 involved obviously, but exactly how that's effecting  
20 people's day to day lives and their decisions to--you  
21 know, those that are not enrolling, for example, in  
22 SNAP benefit because of the, you know, the lower  
23 amount that it--you know, what's going, factoring  
24 into that decision. Thank you very much.

25 JESSICA HUGHSON-ANDRADE: Thank you.

1  
2 LISA ZULLIG: Hi, thank you. My name is  
3 Lisa Zullig. I'm from--I'm the Director of Nutrition  
4 Services at God's Love We Deliver. Thank you for  
5 having me today. God's Love is New York City's  
6 leading not for profit provider of life sustaini  
7 meals and nutritional counseling for people living  
8 with life threatening illnesses. So we're dedicated  
9 to cooking and delivering meals that are specific to  
10 a client's severe illness and what the treatment  
11 requires. We support families by providing meals for  
12 the children and the senior caregivers of those  
13 clients, including breakfast for kids, because as you  
14 mentioned, school breakfast is very underutilized,  
15 and many of our families if they're sick, they can't  
16 get their kids to school before the bell rings for  
17 breakfast. So we provide that. We do everything free  
18 of charge and we serve every demographic. Ninety  
19 percent of clients are below the federal poverty  
20 level. We're an integral and unique part of the  
21 hunger safety net in New York City while other  
22 emergency programs like SNAP or food banks, food  
23 banks or congregate meal sites, they play an  
24 essential role for many New Yorkers. Our clients are  
25 too sick to access many of these programs.

1  
2 Furthermore, due to their illnesses, they often have  
3 complicated dietary needs that cannot be addressed by  
4 traditional food programs. For our clients, for  
5 those who cannot access the food pantries or meal  
6 programs, home delivered meals ensure that they are  
7 able--I'm sorry. They are able to continue to  
8 receive the nutrition that their condition urgently  
9 requires, and they're able to remain nourished and in  
10 their homes. Looking at the overall picture of New  
11 York City, hunger affects both the well and the sick,  
12 and I ask you to remember the people who are home and  
13 sick and homebound. We distinctly address their  
14 specific needs, and endeavor to improve the health  
15 and well-being of those affected by serious illnesses  
16 throughout the city. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. And I  
18 was--you know, your testimony reminded me, and we're  
19 going to write a follow-up letter, but you know, the  
20 overall Meals on Wheels program, and the, I think,  
21 looking into how we can better and best utilize meals  
22 to the homebound is, I think, a worthy goal. So I  
23 look forward to working with you and God's Love We  
24 Deliver on perhaps looking at a set of  
25 recommendations around those issues as well.

1  
2 LISA ZULLIG: Thank you, wonderful.

3 ANTHONY BUTLER: Good afternoon,  
4 Commissioner--Councilman, I know. I don't know if  
5 you want that job anyways. I'm Anthony Butler. I'm  
6 the Executive Director of Saint John's Bread and  
7 Life, and I really appreciate the work and the--that  
8 the City Council's done that we're seeing in HRA to  
9 really look at this hunger issue. It's a huge--we  
10 did over a million meals last year for hungry New  
11 Yorkers, and we're seeing a 14 percent increase this  
12 year, and that's done--we do our work through our  
13 mobile soup kitchen which serves Jackson Heights,  
14 Williamsburg, Coney Island, Rockaways and so on. Our  
15 digital food pantry has allowed us to expand to other  
16 communities where people order off a touch screen to  
17 get them the food, culturally sensitive food. And  
18 all this is done--there's a huge support of the  
19 government, but in reality, I look at my own budget.  
20 My whole budget is only nine percent government  
21 funded. So to keep feeding these folks, I have to  
22 raise three million dollars a year.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry, which breaks  
24 down to how much a week?

25

1  
2 ANTHONY BUTLER: About 60,000 dollars a  
3 week.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Amazing.

5 ANTHONY BUTLER: Yeah, so and that's--and  
6 only spending 82 cents on the dollar towards direct  
7 services. Our overhead is only 18 percent, and it's  
8 a huge lift and it's an unsustainable lift as the  
9 need keeps growing, you know, very generous donors,  
10 generous philanthropies, generous foundations and so  
11 on, but the hunger crisis, and it's going to get to a  
12 tipping point where you're seeing that places are not  
13 giving enough food. Places are shutting down, and  
14 we're one of the big ones, and I'm a decent fund  
15 raiser, but it's really got to be looked at at what  
16 we can do to really address this, because EFAP's not  
17 doing it. HPNAP's [sic] not doing it enough, even  
18 though we're very generous compared to--I'd hate to  
19 be poor in some other cities, you know, compared to  
20 what we're doing in New York, but they're not doing  
21 it, and the hunger crisis continues to grow and the  
22 resources are not. And so I encourage the City  
23 Council to look at that and what really we can do  
24 because it will really--it's not quite a tale of two  
25 cities yet, but it's going to be. It could be like

1 what we read about five years ago in Paris where the  
2 poor circled the city, and like that, you know, we  
3 see in the gentrification. But hungry New Yorkers  
4 need us to act and need us to bring the resources to  
5 bear to really solve this problem.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. Thank you  
8 for your testimony.

9 BEAU HEYEN: Good afternoon and thank  
10 you, Chairman, for allowing us to come and speak  
11 today. My name's Beau Heyen, the Chief Operating  
12 Officer at Masbia Soup Kitchen Network. Like my  
13 colleagues in the field, I think we've all  
14 experienced a time this year where we've faced  
15 numbers that we weren't expecting. For Masbia, we  
16 actually are seeing a doubling in the amount of meals  
17 that we're going to serve this year, surpassing the  
18 1.5 million mark. What that's forced us to do is to  
19 really look at how we're providing those meals and  
20 making sure that we are the most efficient machine  
21 that we can possibly be, and to make that possible,  
22 we've really had to--we had the ability to leverage a  
23 lot of our partnerships, whether Food Bank for New  
24 York City or City Harvest, and also our relationship  
25 with the HRA to really make sure we understand what

1 constituted a balanced pantry bag, and we want to  
2 definitely start by applauding the HRA and the  
3 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the  
4 Mayor's Obesity Taskforce and Food Bank and city  
5 Harvest for really giving us good guidelines of what  
6 that looks like. And in my testimony there's  
7 actually the chart that is given out to all of us in  
8 the emergency food network of how to live into that  
9 based on the My Plate health standards. What we're  
10 finding, and I think what most of us are finding  
11 with, you know, the government funding from the  
12 federal program to state and to EFAP is that it is a  
13 small portion of our food funding or all of our  
14 funding in general. About 10 percent of our budget  
15 as well, comes from those programs combined. What is  
16 interesting is that the city that has so many amazing  
17 health policies and ideas is one step behind when it  
18 comes to emergency food and implementing those ideas.  
19 So some of the things, for example, that we're  
20 noticing on the ground is when it comes to the  
21 program that EFAP of HRA's administered, the first  
22 half of the cycle, is that we're seeing items that  
23 really in the city's eyes aren't the preferred.  
24 We're seeing juices. We're seeing non-fresh produce,  
25

1  
2 although we're trying to push for more fresh produce  
3 for people to use. We're also seeing that in a  
4 system where we have three different funding sources,  
5 that we're getting products that are very similar but  
6 very different and that are causing confusion among  
7 our pantries. We operate three different locations  
8 and trying to balance out what we receive across  
9 those three locations to ensure that we have enough  
10 for everyone is a challenge. One of the things that  
11 we try to avoid throughout our network is the bread  
12 line approach, or that feeling of we don't have  
13 enough, and we make a commitment to always provide  
14 enough for everyone. In the current EFAP system, a  
15 lot of the items that we get aren't in quantities  
16 that are enough for us to spread over our network.  
17 So we're getting 100 items here, 50 items there, and  
18 then the third month maybe we finally hit the  
19 capacity we need in order to introduce it into our  
20 pantry system. Also the items that we get as a  
21 kosher agency joining Met Council, only 20 of the 35  
22 items that are offered are Kosher. So we find that  
23 our shipments are usually less, and we're not always  
24 guaranteed that we're going to get the compensated  
25 value of the products that are kosher. One of the

1 things that we do find is that, or one of the things  
2 we hope is that the city should be the most nimble in  
3 addressing the needs of our community. You know, we  
4 look at the federal government so often as our  
5 answer. We turn to them and we want them to talk  
6 about issues of kosher and halal food. We want them  
7 to meet all of our answers, but the reality is that's  
8 hard for the federal government to do. Being from  
9 the Midwest, working in the south and coming here, I  
10 could tell you firsthand that people in the Midwest  
11 aren't going to have the same conversation about  
12 kosher and halal food that we're going to have here  
13 in New York City. And for us to sit there and make a  
14 mandate at the federal level to do things when it  
15 could be cost inhibitive is going to be a struggle,  
16 but I think there's opportunities and there are  
17 opportunities for the city to step in and to be the  
18 more nimble system. We already see at HPNAP, the  
19 state funded hunger program where organizations are  
20 awarded money that then can go buy what they need,  
21 whether that's kosher, halal, whether that's grain,  
22 whether that's a focus on protein based on whatever  
23 else is in the market it gives that flexibility, and  
24 it's--I, in my opinion, the most flexible of the  
25

1 three systems, and it's interesting that the city  
2 system isn't the most flexible. So one of the things  
3 that we're very much recommending is to look at that  
4 program that Triada mentioned earlier and make it the  
5 program for emergency food in New York City. With  
6 that increasing the awareness or increasing our  
7 ability to get what we need to meet diverse needs,  
8 but also to make sure that we're getting the needs  
9 and the food that we really want, opening it up, you  
10 know. We've opened it up to frozen produce, but  
11 let's open it up to fresh produce. Let's talk about,  
12 you know, kosher and halal food, but let's also  
13 reduce some of the administrative cost that comes  
14 with trying to instigate two programs at the same  
15 time. For us, it's definitely a comprehensive  
16 approach where we're trying to stretch every dollar  
17 where we can, and you know, as Jessica mentioned with  
18 kosher food being 30 percent more expensive, you  
19 know, we face a challenge and face a challenge where  
20 we've also doubled our program in a year. To me, it  
21 was interesting to find out that actually the amount  
22 of money that we're awarded for EFAP was greater than  
23 the amount of money we're awarded from HPNAP. You  
24 know, and yet the impact of the EFAP money is far  
25

1 less in what it does to our system. And actually, it  
2 becomes inhibitive to using it, and becomes  
3 frustrating more often than not. So we really just  
4 asked to look and examine that and to engage member  
5 agencies across the city that are on the ground with  
6 this and have us join together and have that  
7 conversation.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you. That  
10 testimony is very helpful. So just to be clear, and  
11 for the record to reflect, the different systems, all  
12 the different systems if you give the acronym and  
13 where the source of funding is from.

14 BEAU HEYEN: So EFAP, is the Emergency  
15 Food Assistance Program, which is the city program  
16 which is in the two components. HPNAP is the Hunger  
17 Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, and  
18 that's the state program through the Department of  
19 State--Department of Health, correct? Health and  
20 Nutrition? And then TFAP, which is the Emergency  
21 Food--The Emergency Food Assistance Program is the  
22 USDA's federal program.

23 ANTHONY BUTLER: And you also have EFSP  
24 that shows up every once in a while, too. It's  
25 Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And the TFAP you can  
3 get fresh produce from, is that correct?

4 BEAU HEYEN: TFAP is the source of fresh  
5 produce. HPNAP really drives that fresh produce too.  
6 There's--

7 LISA ZULLIG: Right, specifically New  
8 York State grown.

9 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see, okay. So this  
10 was all very helpful testimony, and we want to  
11 proceed in the coming months with coming up with a  
12 set of policy recommendations that can make this  
13 whole system better. One thing Anthony that you  
14 mentioned, sorry, that you mentioned that was that  
15 you're not a bad fund raiser. That being said, for  
16 not for profits across New York City and you hear  
17 this many, many times, it's much easier to raise  
18 funds for, you know, big capital projects where you  
19 get the big funder or big philanthropist. You can  
20 put their name on something, right? You guys don't  
21 do that and you're raising money for emergency food.  
22 And--

23 ANTHONY BUTLER: [interposing] [off mic]  
24 Hungry middle aged families, just not like the sexy  
25 fundraising--[off mic] Just saying that you know,

1  
2 the hungry middle aged families are not--they're hard  
3 to fund raise for. Our neighbors are harder to fund  
4 raise for than some building, you know.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: But that makes it all  
6 the more remarkable, the scale at which you  
7 fundraise. I think that is--one major thing that I  
8 think we should all be taking away from this hearing  
9 is that you are fundraising, despite the three, four  
10 programs, emergency food programs, plus whatever the  
11 City Council's doing, despite all of that you are  
12 still fundraising 90 percent of your funds, and that  
13 is a remarkable number to think that you--I mean, you  
14 know, most not for profits out there cannot raise  
15 three million dollars in year without a development  
16 wing, and it seems as if that is something that we  
17 should be addressing and correcting, because as you  
18 said, it's not really sustainable.

19 ANTHONY BUTLER: It's a tightrope every  
20 year.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: It's not sustainable.  
22 It's not sustainable.

23 ANTHONY BUTLER: I can't get any greyer,  
24 but other than that, you know.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And then I just want  
3 to ask each of you, because I guess now that I've  
4 asked everybody this, I think it's helpful to know,  
5 from your perspective, is the food insecurity  
6 situation in New York City, has it gotten better or  
7 worse since November of 2013?

8 ANTHONY BUTLER: I'd say easily it's  
9 gotten worse.

10 JESSICA HUGHSON-ANDRADE: Worse.

11 ANTHONY BUTLER: Just looking at the  
12 amount of people coming in.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay.

14 LISA ZULLIG: I mean, we checked, it's  
15 number--yeah, the SNAP benefits that have decreased.  
16 I'm sorry, the--I would say worse. I mean, just--many  
17 of our clients do get SNAP who are able to use it,  
18 but they are--we track the amount, you know, the  
19 diminished amounts, and a lot of them are expressing  
20 the frustration that's been spoken about today, yeah.

21 BEAU HEYEN: I would just also add that I  
22 think what's compounding this is that when emergency  
23 food providers are watching more of them run out  
24 food, we're creating a scarcity model that's causing  
25 people even be more aggressive in their approach for



1  
2 Nice to see you all. Thank you very much for your  
3 patience.

4 LAURA MORRISON: Good afternoon. Thank  
5 you, Chair Levin, and thank you for your obvious  
6 engagement in addressing hunger in New York City.

7 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

8 LAURA MORRISON: I'm Laura Morrison. I'm  
9 the Director of External Relations and communications  
10 for the McSilver Institute for Poverty, Policy and  
11 Research at NYU's Silver School for Social Work. I'm  
12 going to talk just briefly about two McSilver  
13 Institute research projects related to food  
14 insecurity among families and children and it's  
15 detailed in the testimony. There are citations. I'll  
16 just be general. You asked the Commissioner about  
17 children, and actually there are an estimated 406,260  
18 children who are food insecure in 2011, 12 in New  
19 York City. That's in one in five New York City  
20 children. we recently studied the link between  
21 economic hardship, food insecurity and school  
22 performance by examining data drawn from the 2011  
23 Administration of the National Survey of Children's  
24 Health, that's the NSCH, which is a cross-sectional  
25 survey sponsored by the material and child health

1 Bureau of Hursa [sic]. In our analysis of the sub  
2 sample of families living under the federal poverty  
3 line, including all families that would be eligible  
4 for SNAP found that children and families  
5 experiencing severe economic hardship completed less  
6 homework, were more likely to miss 11 or more days of  
7 school, cared less about doing well in school, and  
8 were more likely to repeat a grade. And we found  
9 that there is a significant association between  
10 family difficulty affording basic necessities  
11 including food and failing in school, and that holds  
12 across all indicators of number of children and  
13 adults in the household, single parent household  
14 status and race ethnicity. However, when families  
15 participated in SNAP, and you had asked the  
16 Commissioner how many New York City families were  
17 eligible for SNAP aren't actually accessing SNAP.  
18 Well, we have a national number. Seventy percent of  
19 eligible families participate in SNAP, leaving 30  
20 percent who could be who aren't, and when those  
21 families participate in SNAP there is no longer a  
22 significant association between difficulty affording  
23 basic necessities and repeating a grade. Food  
24 insecurity has also been shown to impact mental  
25

1 health and family functioning. Children experiencing  
2 severe hunger have been found to have experienced  
3 more stressful and traumatic life events when  
4 compared to children not experiencing severe hunger,  
5 and mothers of children who report severe hunger were  
6 more likely to have a lifetime diagnosis of PTSD or  
7 substance abuse and anxiety. So, in order to fill a  
8 gap in the literature and services on the  
9 relationship between caregiver stress, family  
10 functioning and food insecurity, we've initiated a  
11 program called Food and Family Matters, and we have  
12 researchers from the institute who are currently  
13 investigating challenges facing food insecure  
14 caregivers in New York City as well as Justice [sic]  
15 counties with children ages five to 12 who use food  
16 pantries to supplement their family's nutrition. Some  
17 of those families are not--are SNAP eligible but  
18 they're relying upon food pantries. And we're  
19 exploring questions about why are they relying on  
20 food pantries and not SNAP. What are the various  
21 forms of emergency food services and formal support  
22 that they're using to combat food insecurity? How  
23 are they buying and cooking and eating food? And  
24 we're looking at all those questions so that we can  
25

1  
2 then develop a service curriculum that we hope to  
3 roll out in spring of 2015 in corporation with City  
4 Harvest and Urban Institute, Westside Campaign  
5 Against Hunger, and the New York City Coalition  
6 Against Hunger that is going to be informed by those  
7 findings and give us evidence based practices to  
8 address food insecurity among children and families  
9 in New York City. So you're going to hear a lot of  
10 recommendations. We've already heard some today. We  
11 have five things we want to recommend, one of which  
12 you've already spoken about, free breakfast in the  
13 classroom. We also would like to see universal free  
14 lunch in our school. We'd like to consider the  
15 strong implications, the association between food  
16 insecurity and educational achievement may have for  
17 clinical practice as well as prevention efforts in  
18 child serving outpatient clinics, and I know that's a  
19 Health Committee issue as well. We seek a greater  
20 understanding of the relationship between caregiver  
21 stress, family functioning and food insecurity and an  
22 increase in support services for families who use  
23 informal and formal supports. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
25 for your testimony, and I think that looking at it

1  
2 comprehensively, obviously holistically and saying,  
3 you know, what, how is this impacting other aspects  
4 of caregivers in children's lives is essential. And  
5 honestly, thinking about it in terms of how that  
6 affects the functioning of our city government and  
7 the services that we provide, and the outpatient and  
8 inpatient services, etcetera, is important to look  
9 at. So thank you very much for your testimony. I look  
10 forward to working with you.

11 SUMANI LANKA: Good afternoon. I'd would  
12 also like to thank you for the opportunity to speak  
13 today on this very important topic. My name is  
14 Sumani Lanka, and I'm a staff attorney in the law  
15 firm at the Legal Aid Society, and I focus mainly on  
16 public benefits and welfare issues. Today, we would  
17 like to focus our testimony on what the city can  
18 still do to increase SNAP participation rates. We  
19 heard from Commissioner Banks in HRA and we applaud  
20 their efforts to really try to increase SNAP  
21 participation in New York City, but still more needs  
22 to be done and we all know that. And I would like to  
23 focus on a couple of possible initiatives that would  
24 be able to help in that effort. First, as  
25 Commissioner Banks has already spoke about, we

1 support the use of data matching among the various  
2 government agencies in terms of trying to be able to  
3 increase SNAP participation. In the past, as a result  
4 of a City Council initiative, the city data matched  
5 individuals who were receiving Medicaid but not SNAP  
6 in order to identify thousands of individuals who  
7 were likely to be eligible for SNAP and then outreach  
8 to them. This type of data matching should be  
9 refined, expanded and replicated among the various  
10 government programs, including NYCHA, such as  
11 Commissioner Banks already spoke about, and this  
12 would allow HRA to quickly and easily identify those  
13 individuals who may be eligible for SNAP. Second,  
14 the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability  
15 Assistance, OTDA, issued an informational initiative  
16 guidance 11-INF-07, which allows local districts the  
17 option to establish a voluntary SNAP employment and  
18 training program. In order to eliminate unnecessary  
19 SNAP employment related sanctions, which basically  
20 would mean that they would be losing SNAP benefits if  
21 they were sanctioned at all, HRA should take  
22 advantage of this option and opt to start a voluntary  
23 SNAP employment and training program. This would  
24 reduce the use of punitive and ineffective sanctions,  
25

1 which would deprive needy families and individuals of  
2 SNAP benefits. This incentive would target and  
3 empower recipients through a wide variety of  
4 permissible activities from job search to training to  
5 education. Third, at minimum, HRA should be  
6 encouraged to expand the exemption categories of  
7 individuals from employment and training programs.  
8 This includes, for example, homeless individuals,  
9 households of more than three children, woman in  
10 their third trimester of pregnancy, part time  
11 employees who may have scheduling conflicts with  
12 program requirements, migrant workers and individuals  
13 temporarily laid off from employment who have  
14 connections to the workforce. Such an expansion would  
15 ensure that the most vulnerable populations will not  
16 be subjected to stringent work requirements that  
17 could result in loss of food. Finally, we should  
18 encourage and urge the state to make SNAP benefits  
19 easily accessible for immigrants with disabilities.  
20 There's a five year bar rule that immigrants must  
21 wait five years before being eligible for most  
22 federally funded public benefits, including SNAP.  
23 There is an exception for immigrants with  
24 disabilities who receive a disability based benefit,  
25

1 such as disability based Medicaid or cash assistance.  
2  
3 Despite this rule, most disabled immigrants in New  
4 York State who should be eligible to receive SNAP  
5 benefits do not receive them. This is due to the  
6 fact that the disability determination must be made  
7 using the same guidelines as used by US Social  
8 Security Administration, which is extremely difficult  
9 for most immigrants with disabilities. Therefore,  
10 most immigrants who should be getting SNAP do not get  
11 SNAP. Therefore, we would like to urge the state to  
12 be able to adopt policies that would make it easier  
13 for needy disabled immigrants to be certified  
14 disabled by either changing the policy to allow more  
15 individuals to get the necessary certified disability  
16 standard or to provide the equivalent of the state  
17 SSI supplement to those immigrants with SSI level  
18 disabilities. An investment of as little as 23  
19 dollars per month could help make these individuals  
20 eligible for nearly 200 dollars per month in SNAP  
21 benefits. These are just a couple things that we're  
22 talking about. There's still so much more to be  
23 done, but thank you for the opportunity to speak  
24 today.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
3 for those very thoughtful recommendations. We'll  
4 start looking into those ASAP, and I think we'll  
5 definitely be in touch with you and Legal Aid Society  
6 on putting forth those recommendations, but it's  
7 certainly a very welcomed to hear your perspectives.  
8 Thank you.

9 LOUISE FELD: Good afternoon. My name is  
10 Louise Feld, and I'm the Senior Policy Associate for  
11 Food and Economic Security at Citizens Committee for  
12 Children. We're a 71 year old multi-issue child  
13 advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that  
14 every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and  
15 safe. I'll just join in the chorus of my colleagues  
16 of thanking you, Chair Levin, and the Council for its  
17 well established dedication to fighting hunger in New  
18 York City. We thank you for holding this hearing  
19 every year, and we also join with our colleagues in  
20 saying that sadly we're back again to say we too  
21 believe that hunger has not diminished in New York  
22 City. So I've submitted written testimony, which  
23 goes into greater detail on some of our  
24 recommendations, some of which have been covered by  
25 the Commissioner, the Chair, and some of the

1 colleagues. So in the interest of time I'll just be  
2 very brief. We do address some of the issues related  
3 to SNAP in our testimony and emergency food  
4 providers. So I just want to go on record as saying  
5 once again we really do hope to see an increase in  
6 funding for emergency food providers in the coming  
7 year, and also we do want to see continued resources  
8 going to helping New Yorkers use their SNAP benefits,  
9 not just in traditional arenas, but also in farmer's  
10 markets and our green carts as we move forward.  
11 There was some money that was not base lined for  
12 that. It was one of the only human services lines  
13 that was not base lined. It's just a council  
14 initiative each and every year. So we do hope to see  
15 that be base lined in the future. With regard to  
16 school meals, yes, outside the purview of the  
17 Commissioner, but absolutely as everyone has said,  
18 and an integral tool in the fight against hunger.  
19 Long supporters of Breakfast After the Bell  
20 programming. We're very, very interested in core  
21 member of the Lunch for Learning Campaign, and we're  
22 thrilled and thank the council so much for all the  
23 work to make universal school lunch a reality in  
24 middle schools, but our work is not done, and we  
25

1  
2 certainly hope that in this coming year we can see it  
3 expand to all grades and make sure that those middle  
4 schoolers who are in K through Eight and Six through  
5 12 schools are not lost, because they right now are  
6 not receiving universal school lunch. And although  
7 we are about to start on a snowy day in a couple of  
8 days, we cannot fail to mention that summer meals are  
9 another portion of school programming that really--  
10 school food programming, they go a long way in  
11 fighting hunger. We saw a lot of great things done  
12 this past year. we thank the Administration for doing  
13 something as simple as releasing the list of sites a  
14 couple of weeks before school ends so that parents  
15 know where they can take their children to get meals,  
16 and we want to see more thinking about how to better  
17 implement the program so that more families are  
18 actually taking advantage in things like Breakfast  
19 After the Bell, perhaps, Lunch in Classroom are ideas  
20 that could be implemented at summertime so that well  
21 before we get to this hearing we're feeding more kids  
22 when school is not in session. And the last thing  
23 I'll say is that the city has done a great deal of  
24 work to think creatively about how to get food into  
25 underserved neighborhoods, how to get food to people

1 and how to get people to food. The green carts  
2 program, fresh, these are examples that we really  
3 appreciated and supported in the past, and we just  
4 urge the city to continue to think creatively about  
5 practices that are done elsewhere or maybe done on  
6 small scale pilots in New York City to try and grow  
7 them, think about how to better leverage them in  
8 order to get food ideas like mobile markets, shuttle  
9 services, better use of--better leveraging of fresh  
10 for small scale retailers, just ways to get food into  
11 communities so that people who are using these  
12 benefits can have more options and make better use of  
13 the benefits that they do get. So, thank you for this  
14 opportunity. Thank you for this hearing, and we  
15 really appreciate the opportunity to testify.  
16

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much,  
18 Ms. Feld, thank you.

19 CAMILLE ZENTNER: Hi, good afternoon. My  
20 name is Camille Zentner and I'm a Supervising  
21 Attorney at the New York Legal Assistance Group, a  
22 nonprofit civil legal services organization that  
23 serves low income New Yorkers. I want to--I'm just  
24 going to skip around hopefully briefly in my  
25 testimony to talk about SNAP benefit and access to

1 SNAP benefits, and also address Chair Levin some of  
2 the things you discussed with Commissioner Banks  
3 specifically. Access to SNAP benefits is a means to  
4 basic substance. We commend HRA's recent and  
5 evolving improvements aimed at making SNAP program  
6 more accessible. We've also been involved in a lot of  
7 the working groups that HRA is holding to improve  
8 access to public assistance and SNAP. The most  
9 common SNAP problems we're seeing right now are still  
10 with the recertification process, and you talked a  
11 little bit to the Commissioner about phone  
12 recertification's, if those are possible, and the  
13 city does use phone recertification for some  
14 households now, specifically households with members  
15 who have disabilities, and we are seeing innumerable  
16 problems with these phone recertification interviews.  
17 The notices for them are received by recipients if  
18 received at all too late to actually stick by a phone  
19 if people have phones to wait for the call, and the  
20 calls routinely do not come in. This starts the ball  
21 rolling towards usually termination of a benefit,  
22 termination of the whole household, termination of  
23 the whole SNAP benefit, not just a reduction. Where  
24 households are able to reschedule the call or go into  
25

1 a SNAP center, the cases are often terminated anyway.  
2 There's no stopping the course toward termination.  
3 Even if the case is reopened, there are frequently  
4 gaps in these benefits, and the problem  
5 disproportionately impacts SNAP households that have  
6 members with disabilities, because they most often  
7 use the phone call system. Fair hearings on these  
8 SNAP losses are very difficult to have and to win,  
9 because the agency sends notices about  
10 recertification a month in advance of the timeline  
11 required by law. It means that once I realize that  
12 everything I did to try to fix my SNAP benefits  
13 didn't work. I have a few days to request my hearing  
14 timely, because I got the notice of expiration three  
15 months ago, and I only have 90 days to request a  
16 hearing on SNAP benefits. I want to skip over my  
17 client experiences, but I'm sure you'll read them.  
18 For the phone interview process to be workable for  
19 HRN [sic] recipients, increased resources and  
20 planning are needed so that HRA can consistently send  
21 out notices timely. We think it's a major question  
22 of resources for HRA staff. They need to have enough  
23 staff to make the calls within appointment time  
24 frames and troubleshoot the problems to stop the  
25

1  
2 progression towards termination where the phone  
3 system fails. When our clients successfully apply or  
4 recertify, they also face myriad budgeting issues,  
5 often resulting in significant food loss. And one of  
6 those issues we're seeing recently relates to the  
7 HEAP issue. You know, today we can't change the  
8 federal cuts and the LIHEAP changes, and the  
9 protective actions of Governor Cuomo were really  
10 important, saved a lot of food for people, but the  
11 system changes and the implementation under the new  
12 authority is defaulting budgets to lower levels of  
13 the standard utility allowance, and thus, defaulting  
14 households to lower levels of benefits. It's a real  
15 problem. We're seeing it increasingly, even in the  
16 middle of certification periods where workers are  
17 making routine changes like--yes?

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Sorry. That was--you  
19 mean that it's defaulting to that 20 dollars a month,  
20 that's what the benefit is even if their heating cost  
21 is--their heating cost benefit is more?

22 CAMILLE ZENTNER: Yes, it's defaulting to  
23 the 33 dollar phone cost for the standard utility  
24 allowance, and that's going into the budget.

25

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: I see. Even if it's  
3 more?

4 CAMILLE ZENTER: Yes, even if it's more,  
5 and there's not a exploration of what the actual type  
6 of utility cost paid by the household if paid at all  
7 is and whether the household has received a HEAP  
8 benefit in the last year. And I think this is a  
9 system and a human error and NYLAG thinks that with  
10 training workers will be alerted because it's a big  
11 change in the system to have to look at the sue [sic]  
12 more closely, to have to look at utility costs more  
13 closely. But it's also a program problem because the  
14 systems that have been updated to actually default,  
15 so workers have to proactively change things on  
16 active budgets, even if the case record already says  
17 the type of utilities that people pay, so it's a  
18 really big problem, and the notices are often about  
19 taking a 19 year old who leaves the household off the  
20 budget and don't highlight that change. So people  
21 don't even see it. They get a notice about something  
22 else, and then somewhere in a bullet point it says,  
23 "And we allow 33 bucks for your phone." And people  
24 don't understand what that means. They don't  
25 challenge it. They lose hundreds of dollars in

1 benefits where maybe they should just lose 50.  
2 Couple of other budgeting problems. Medical expense  
3 deductions for seniors and people with disabilities.  
4 We routinely see folks who have receipts and lots of  
5 information about medical expenses over 35 bucks a  
6 month that aren't taken into account in their food  
7 stamp budgets. Often they're told that they're  
8 irrelevant or told that they're already considered  
9 when they're not, and because the SNAP program  
10 doesn't contemplate special diets and dietary needs,  
11 it's especially important for people with severe  
12 medical conditions to take into consideration what  
13 they're paying out of pocket for their medical  
14 expenses. And finally, there's this new problem that  
15 we've seen recently that exclusively affects low  
16 income senior citizens who are working under the  
17 federal senior community service employment program,  
18 or SCSEP. The income from this federal program is  
19 specifically exempted by federal law and rules for  
20 SNAP benefits, but we're seeing HRA budget this  
21 income and often seniors don't know that it's no  
22 supposed to be budgeted, so they just think they're  
23 ineligible or eligible for many fewer food benefits  
24 than they are. So we'd like to encourage HRA to look  
25



1  
2 perspective gotten better in the last six months or  
3 eight months under the new Administration in terms of  
4 these very specific issues that you raise in terms of  
5 deductions and loss of benefit amount? Have you  
6 seen--I mean, have you see a noticeable change at HRA  
7 when it comes to that?

8 CAMILLE ZENTNER: We have seen changes on  
9 the backend in fixing the problem, fixing the problem  
10 more quickly and getting in touch with staff who are  
11 able to fix it, but in terms of the systemic problems  
12 with the notices and the budget changes, not yet.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Yeah.

14 CAMILLE ZENTNER: But the agency is  
15 certainly more willing to work at fixing them on the  
16 front end.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Okay. And are you  
18 able to-- I mean, we'll make sure that HRA gets your  
19 list of recommendations, but it would be helpful  
20 that, you know, that you're able to communicate  
21 directly with HRA if possible. Is that happening?

22 CAMILLE ZENTNER: Yes, it's definitely  
23 happening.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Is there a line of  
25 communication?

CAMILLE ZENTNER: Yes, yes. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Great. Thank you.

AJALI MORGAN: Alright, good afternoon.

My name is Ajali Morgan, and I'm a policy fellow at Single Stop. Thank you Chair Levin for the opportunity to testify on the issue of hunger in New York City. I know that between the committee and the Human Resources Administration you've all worked diligently on this issue, and today I respectfully offer Single Stop's observations and recommendations for your consideration. So as everyone here knows, hunger does not have a face and it does not discriminate. Hunger affects children, teenagers, adults, seniors and even college students. In addition, SNAP is the nation's safety net program designed for the most vulnerable and yet over hundreds of thousands of eligible New Yorkers are not enrolled. And the reasons as to why this is are limitless and beyond the scope of my testimony today. However, I'm here to share with you the Single Stop model and how it exists to help low income individuals and families access the full range of benefits and resources that are available for them. Single Stop is a one-stop shop that coordinates

1 access to resources and helps low income New Yorkers  
2 secure public benefits, access higher education  
3 opportunities and achieve financial self-sufficiency.

4 We partner with community based organizations and  
5 community colleges to operate more than 65 sites

6 through which we serve 150,000 households last year  
7 alone. Six of those are located at the city's

8 largest food pantries. So thus far in 2014, Single

9 Stop has helped over 12,000 households enroll in

10 SNAP. Additionally, more than 5,000 were referred to  
11 food pantries, and even more accessed pantries

12 located in the same place as a Single Stop site.

13 Single Stop also connects people with other food

14 assistance programs such as WIC and school meals. So

15 what we're able to observe through our work in the

16 community is that clients are struggling to put food

17 on the table each month despite the fact that they're

18 in receipt of SNAP benefits. Single Stop continues

19 to counsel SNAP clients who are often forced to turn

20 to food pantries to be able to provide for their

21 families, and as everyone here knows, food pantries

22 do a tremendous job providing for the thousands of

23 hungry New Yorkers each day, but the bottom line is

24 there are a host of other issues that need to be  
25

1 addressed to complement benefits like SNAP and  
2 services like food pantries. Far too often we come  
3 across situations of mothers being unable to afford  
4 daycare services and forced to take leave without  
5 pay, exacerbating the issue of not having enough  
6 money to pay for food. And more recently, we are  
7 beginning to see the issue of food insecurity and  
8 hunger pop up on college campuses. Until we take a  
9 holistic approach to attacking poverty as a root  
10 cause of hunger, it'll be very difficult to envision  
11 an end to hunger in this city. Single Stop's model  
12 aims to do just this by coordinating services all in  
13 one place. So as such, Single Stop offers four wide  
14 ranging recommendations for the Council and the city  
15 to consider. Number one, Single Stop recommends  
16 making K-12 school meals universal and free across  
17 the board. The fact that half of all SNAP  
18 participants are children is staggering. Hunger  
19 prevents children from reaching their full potential  
20 in school and otherwise. Number two, Single Stop  
21 recommends that food pantries and EBT accepting food  
22 stores should be the norm across New York college  
23 campuses. Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn  
24 and Hostess Community College in the South Bronx  
25

1 partner with the Food Bank and have piloted campus  
2 food pantries that are available for all students.  
3 Pantries coordinate their hours of operation with  
4 class schedules so that more students can be  
5 accommodated throughout the day. In addition, some  
6 colleges offer food preparation classes, meal  
7 vouchers for students in dire need and onsite  
8 nutritionists. Many also partner with on campus  
9 childcare centers to ensure the student parents and  
10 their children have access to food. As the number of  
11 food pantries continue to grow through the work of  
12 private partnerships, we recommend the city continue  
13 to promote them. We also ask the city consider  
14 funding Single Stop as part of CUNY's 2014 budget  
15 priorities to ensure that students are getting all  
16 the supports and coordinated services they need to  
17 graduate. Number three, Single Stop recommends  
18 maximizing participation in all federal programs to  
19 address the full spectrum of difficulties faced by  
20 low income individuals and families. Social safety  
21 net programs are designed to alleviate poverty in  
22 this country, yet an overwhelming number of Americans  
23 including New Yorker are not participating in federal  
24 programs that are available to them. Single Stop  
25

1  
2 commends the city for its efforts to modernize its  
3 Access NYC portal to streamline access to federal  
4 programs, but we think the city cannot do this work  
5 alone. Many of the programs that clients are  
6 eligible for require application through the state,  
7 like health insurance, or the federal government,  
8 like tax credits. We call on the city to continue  
9 working with Single Stop and other efforts to create  
10 a client first approach by integrating technology and  
11 human service platforms that clients can easily  
12 secure the spectrum of benefits and services they  
13 need all in one place. And finally, we recommend  
14 raising the minimum wage to a fairer level and having  
15 it index to inflation. The Mayor's initiative to  
16 raise the minimum hourly wage to 13 dollars and 13  
17 cents for city contract workers is a huge step in the  
18 right direction. However, we recommend that the city  
19 take further steps like applying this new minimum  
20 wage universally, linking the wage and tip wage to  
21 the rate of inflation as soon as possible and  
22 encouraging city law makers to lobby state law makers  
23 for the authority to do so. So thank you again for  
24 the opportunity to testify.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much  
3 for your testimony, and I am very impressed with the  
4 work that Single Stop is doing. Very aptly named  
5 organization and just remarkable, you know, just as  
6 you mentioned in 2014 helping close to 13,000 New  
7 Yorkers enroll in SNAP is a remarkable number for any  
8 single organization. So, I want to thank you very  
9 much and I look forward to working with you and  
10 Single Stop in the coming months and years on the  
11 implementation of these recommendations. Before I  
12 let this panel go and adjourn the hearing, I do want  
13 to ask you, since I've asked the other panels as  
14 well, quick question, do you think that the food  
15 insecurity picture in New York City is better than it  
16 was a year ago or worse than it was a year ago?

17 CAMILLE ZENTNER: [off mic] Fairly worse.

18 LOUISE FELD: [off mic] I would tend to  
19 agree with that.

20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Alright. I very much  
21 appreciate that. Thank you very much. I want to  
22 thank everybody who took the time to, you know,  
23 through the entire hearing and we learned a lot.  
24 This has been very effective. We look forward to  
25 working with everybody over the coming months so we

1 can do our best to make sure that nobody in New York  
2 City goes hungry. That's our collective  
3 responsibility, but it's--no matter what, it's going  
4 to take a lot of hard work and a lot of collaboration  
5 and a lot of good ideas. And so we want to thank you  
6 all for your testimony and for your hard work and  
7 contribution. And I want to wish you all a very  
8 happy Thanksgiving. This hearing is adjourned.

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10 [gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date November 30, 2014