



Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 1320-2020, **Version:** \*

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Res. No. 1320

Resolution calling upon the United States Department of Agriculture to expand the number of retailers that are permitted in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program online purchasing program to ensure vulnerable communities in New York City can safely access healthy food.

By Council Members Chin, Kallos, Yeger, Levin, Rose, Cumbo, Reynoso, Rosenthal, Salamanca, Van Bramer, Koslowitz, Koo, Cabrera, Brannan, Grodenchik, Powers, Ampry-Samuel, Ayala, Lander, Rivera and Menchaca

Whereas, The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), also commonly referred to as “food stamps”, is a federal entitlement program that provides financial assistance to applicants for their purchase of healthy food; and

Whereas, The benefits allow participants to purchase food at grocery and convenience stores, as well as some farmers’ markets and coops; and

Whereas, The program aims to support people’s ability to purchase healthy food items; and

Whereas, In New York City, more than 19 percent of the population, or 1.7 million people, rely on SNAP benefits; and

Whereas, However, financial assistance is only part of the issue when it comes to accessing healthy food; and

Whereas, More than four percent of the American population live more than a mile away from a supermarket, placing them in what is referred to as a “food desert”; and

Whereas, In New York City, where the population relies heavily on public transport to get around, this makes travelling far for groceries even more difficult; and

Whereas, In addition to being in healthy-food deserts, these same communities are also often teeming

with a plethora of fast-food and other high-calorie food options; and

Whereas, This situation has been referred to as a “food swamp” or “grocery gap” and describes an area in which residents will, for example, find it much easier to buy a can of grape soda rather than a bunch of grapes; and

Whereas, In New York City, predominately Black communities and neighborhoods with low-socioeconomic status tend to have significantly lower rates of healthy food options when compared to areas with whiter and more affluent communities; and

Whereas, Furthermore, researchers have found that Adult Type-2 Diabetes in New York City is more than two and a half times more prevalent, and Type-1 Diabetes one and a half times more prevalent, than communities without fast food establishments; and

Whereas, The links between overall health, obesity rates and ready access to affordable, healthy food is well documented; and

Whereas, Ensuring that more people can afford nutritional food is the main objective of SNAP; and

Whereas, This is why the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), who are responsible for administering SNAP, developed a pilot program to allow SNAP participants to use their benefits on grocery delivery; and

Whereas, At the moment, New York state is part of the pilot program, which began in 2016, and New Yorkers using SNAP can order groceries and have them delivered using Walmart, Amazon, and ShopRite; and

Whereas, According to the USDA, the purpose of the pilot was “to address the needs of the elderly and disabled, who often cannot easily go out to shop. It will also be beneficial for those that lack consistent access to transportation or live in areas considered to be food deserts”; and

Whereas, Allowing SNAP users to utilize grocery delivery has been beneficial, but the small list of

approved providers limits users' shopping choices; and

Whereas, There are also complications with the current list of providers; and

Whereas, For example, SNAP users who order from Amazon and Amazon Direct can have their orders delivered, but they will need to pick-up their orders in person if they place an order through Whole Foods, even though Amazon also owns Whole Foods; and

Whereas, Meanwhile, Instacart, the country's largest grocery delivery platform, is not part of SNAP; and

Whereas, During the COVID-19 emergency, when people are being asked to stay home and severely limit the amount of time they are outside of their homes, grocery delivery has become crucial; and

Whereas, SNAP users are now at an additional disadvantage because so few grocery delivery platforms accept their SNAP benefits; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the United States Department of Agriculture expand the number of retailers that are permitted in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program online purchasing program to ensure vulnerable communities in New York City can safely access healthy food.

LS #14527  
5/7//2020  
LMS