



Legislation Text

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**File #:** Res 0092-2010, **Version:** \*

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Res No. 92

Resolution calling upon the Governor and the Mayor to discontinue the practice of finger imaging food stamp applicants.

Council Members Dickens, Brewer, Comrie, Dromm, Mark-Viverito, Mealy, Palma, Vann, Williams and Rodriguez

Whereas, Milo Perkins, the first federal administrator of the food stamp program, stated that food stamps were designed to bridge the gap between “farm surpluses” and “under-nourished city folks”; and

Whereas, Today the federal food stamp program serves the same purpose of providing resources to “under-nourished” Americans; and

Whereas, Ensuring that people have the resources that they need to survive, thrive, and eat healthy food is one step towards preserving the city’s well being; and

Whereas, Imposing unnecessary barriers to enrollment on low-income individuals takes us away from the goal of providing services to the “under-nourished;” and

Whereas, Requiring that food stamp applicants undergo finger imaging stands in the way of the original goal of assisting those in need; and

Whereas, When individuals are arrested they are fingerprinted to determine their criminal history and to prepare for their arraignments; and

Whereas, Subjecting people who are merely applying for food stamps to the same process reflects a failure on the part of the city to verify, document, and track people’s identity in a nonintrusive manner; and

Whereas, A report issued by the Government Accountability Office titled “Food Stamp Program: use of alternative methods to apply for and maintain benefits could be enhanced by additional evaluation and

information on promising practices” found that finger imaging does not enhance program integrity and that it may have a negative effect on program access by deterring certain households from applying; and

Whereas, Additional federal studies have also found that finger imaging is a deterrent to applying for food stamps; and

Whereas, Federal guidelines for the food stamp program do not require food stamp applicants to be finger imaged; and

Whereas, Forty-six states do not subject food stamp applicants to a finger imaging requirement; and

Whereas, Under Secretary Kevin Concannon of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) testified at a City Council hearing in November 2009 that the USDA would no longer approve applications to implement finger imaging as a form of biometric identification because the evidence is mixed on its success to prevent fraud and it has the “unintended consequences” of dissuading participants from enrollment; and

Whereas, New York State (NYS) and New York City (NYC) should move to change their current laws and policies to fully mirror the intent and purpose of the federal programs that they administer; and

Whereas, The NYS Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA) launched the “working families initiative,” which waived the requirement of finger imaging for working families, seniors, and families that have a member with disabilities; and

Whereas, NYC’s boroughs are the only five counties in the State of New York that continue to require that these populations be finger imaged; and

Whereas, NYC is reimbursed for administrative costs for every single resident who participates in the food stamp program and draws down additional federal monies based on additional participants enrolled; and

Whereas, This funding stream provided directly to needy and qualifying individuals creates an economic stimulus in the city overall; and

Whereas, HRA has the responsibility to administer the federal food stamp program for individuals and families who meet the eligibility requirements and to determine that they are eligible; and

Whereas, The requirement to finger image food stamp applicants is an unnecessary obstacle for food stamp participation; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls upon the Governor and the Mayor to discontinue the practice of finger imaging food stamp applicants.

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