

ENDING HUNGER IN NYC:

A TRANSITION PLAN FOR THE NEXT ADMINISTRATION



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SPECIAL THANKS TO THE FOLLOWING:

Food Bank For New York City represents a membership of approximately 1,000 emergency food providers, community-based organizations and schools throughout New York City. This transition plan is the result of a series of meetings of Food Bank members in the spring of 2013 to collaboratively review and update the [Anti-Hunger Policy Platform for New York State and City 2007-2012](#) in light of both attacks on the anti-hunger safety net at the federal level and the anticipated transition of New York City's leadership with a new Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller and City Council Speaker, as well as new Borough Presidents for Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens and Staten Island and a number of new City Council Members. A number of representatives from Food Bank's network gave freely of their time, experience and thoughtfulness to evaluate progress made and progress still needed – with the needs and interests of the New Yorkers we collectively serve first and foremost in these discussions. It is the authors' hope that their wisdom is duly reflected here. In particular, Food Bank wishes to thank:

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Executive Summary

This is a pivotal year: just as New York City's leadership is scheduled to change hands for the first time in more than a decade, the national anti-hunger safety net has come under attack. Cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) – our nation's first line of defense against hunger – have already taken place, leaving nearly 1.9 million low-income New Yorkers to make up for the loss: 76 million meals over the course of the next 12 months. Reauthorization negotiations currently in progress for the federal Farm Bill, which sets policy and funding for nutrition and agriculture programs, have put additional cuts to SNAP on the table. These decisions, made hundreds of miles away, will determine whether New York's newly elected leaders will have to confront hunger in our city on a scale not seen in most New Yorkers' lifetimes.

Food Bank For New York City serves a member network of approximately 1,000 emergency food providers, community-based organizations and schools across the five boroughs. Approximately 1.4 million New York City residents rely on emergency food; for them, this network represents the last line of defense against hunger. The thousands of men and women who do the work – paid, and often, unpaid – of ensuring New Yorkers have the food they need for survival bear witness daily to the privation and indignity of food poverty. This document reflects their voices and experiences.

No New Yorker should go hungry: access to adequate, nutritious food is a fundamental human right. New York City's new Mayor, and all our city's newly elected leaders, must develop a plan to realize this core principle. Recognizing that recent decisions to cut SNAP create new challenges, but also that policy options well within the authority and discretion of City government can considerably improve the lives of New Yorkers who struggle to afford food, Food Bank For New York City offers this transition plan on behalf of the emergency food network in a spirit of partnership. It is our hope this spirit will be met by constructive engagement by the Mayor's Office, the Human Resources Administration, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and other relevant agencies. We are strongest and most effective when we take on hunger together.

This transition plan offers a detailed set of recommendations, grouped in the following five key areas.

1. Strengthen, Streamline and Simplify SNAP

Despite the already enacted reduction in benefit amounts, SNAP remains the first line of defense against hunger, and has provided New York City residents with approximately \$3.4 billion annually for food purchases in recent years. (Recent SNAP cuts and potential benefit reductions and/or changes to eligibility in Farm Bill proposals will reduce that amount.) With a goal to increase SNAP participation to 90 percent of eligible New Yorkers over the next four years, the next Administration should:

- Simplify application and recertification processes to minimize scheduling conflicts for working families and other applicants facing hardships by fully implementing online SNAP application and recertification, coordination with other benefits and expanding community-based sites for application submission;
- Maximize all federal waivers and options that expand program access and benefits, and simplify program administration;
- Strengthen and coordinate public and private SNAP outreach efforts to reach eligible New Yorkers by expanding outreach efforts at programs and services that reach low-income populations, like emergency food programs and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites;
- Work with community-based organizations in advance to set roles and expectations in Disaster SNAP scenarios; and
- Improve SNAP administration, placing priority on the customer service experience; and

- Draft SNAP notices using clear language, avoiding messages that discourage participation or confuse.

Key six-month milestones:

- Submission of SNAP waiver applications to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) via the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA); and
- Submission (to USDA via OTDA) of a comprehensive citywide SNAP outreach plan that leverages all eligible funding sources for federal matching dollars.

2. Expand Access to School and Summer Meals

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP), the School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) are federal entitlement programs that provide nutritious, balanced meals to school-aged children during the school year, and to all children up to age 18 during the summer. With considerable flexibility for New York City in terms of program administration, they also offer great potential to narrow New York City's growing meal gap. More than 75 percent of public school children qualify for free school meals based on their household income (below 185 percent of the federal poverty measure) – yet lunch participation in middle and high school, breakfast participation at all grade levels and SFSP participation are surprisingly low despite the need. Among New York City households with children that rely on emergency food, for example, school lunch and summer meal participation rates are close to average participation rates for all public school children, in spite of the obvious food needs of these particular families. With a goal of maximizing participation in all three programs, the next Administration should:

- Implement universal, free school lunch using available federal options to maximize federal reimbursements and minimize cost to the city;
- Make Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) an opt-out rather than opt-in program for schools, with a goal of full participation but recognizing that some schools may need facilities improvements and/or sufficient staffing to fully implement;
- Make capital improvements to school cafeterias, ensuring they have the electrical infrastructure and storage capacity to accommodate program necessities and growth in participation;
- Increase the number of SFSP sites open for the entire duration of summer recess;
- Open additional school-based SFSP sites, particularly in high-need areas, and encourage the increase of SFSP sites at non-school locations, including at pools, parks, NYCHA buildings, libraries, churches and other community-based venues, particularly in areas where children have no neighborhood access to other open sites;
- Provide breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in summer school and incorporate adequate time for meals into summer schedules, including offering “grab and go” meals in the classroom;
- Ensure that the Department of Education publicizes the SFSP program in a timely fashion; and
- Continue to improve coordination among city agencies, community partners and other stakeholders in promoting nutritious school and summer meals.

Key six-month milestones:

- Development of a multi-year plan to provide free, universal school meals, starting in the 2014-15 school year, using existing provisions of the NSLP to maximize federal reimbursements and minimize cost to the city;
- Development of a multi-year plan to expand BIC, starting in the 2014-15 school year;

- *A completed audit of school cafeterias' infrastructure needs and capacity in order to make full implementation of USM and BIC possible; and*
- *Public dissemination of a complete list of open school and non-school sites for summer meals.*

3. Leverage and Fortify the Emergency Food System

New York City's emergency food system currently serves 1.4 million New Yorkers, predominately low-income and food-insecure. For these individuals and families, not only is an emergency food organization the last line of defense against hunger, it is an opportunity to connect to other needed programs and services. Successful SNAP outreach in the emergency food network, for example, has contributed to a near-doubling of participation among emergency food participants since 2004. Given the reach of the emergency food network to a population with acute food assistance needs, the SNAP outreach model should be applied to other programs for which underparticipation is a concern, such as WIC and SFSP.

The City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) provides a year-round supply of shelf-stable food for almost 500 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the five boroughs; a City Council initiative supplements EFAP with funding for frozen food as well as additional shelf-stable food. Flat-funding in the face of food inflation has resulted in the loss of purchasing power; increases in need since the Great Recession have resulted in more emergency food programs reporting food shortages. With the twin goals of leveraging the reach of the emergency food network to connect participants to more sustainable income supports and of shoring up the supply of emergency food to ensure no New Yorker goes hungry, the next Administration should:

- Increase EFAP funding to a Fiscal Year 2015 funding level of \$19.8 million to account for increased need since the Great Recession, as well as to recover lost purchasing power due to food inflation.
- Appropriate funding for emergency food programs when the city experiences any decrease in outside funding.
- Ensure that all EFAP funding designated for administrative costs is provided in one lump sum to programs at the beginning of the fiscal year.
- Continue improvements to food quality by offering more minimally processed and fresh food, and by giving programs choice over food selection.
- Enact a policy of cost-neutral preferencing of kosher and halal products.
- Ensure that EFAP distributed during disaster response is incorporated into New York City's request for federal reimbursement of disaster-related expenditures.

Key six-month milestones:

- *A Fiscal Year 2015 budget that increases baseline funding for EFAP to \$19.8 million to account for increased need since the Great Recession and to recover lost buying power due to inflation.*
- *An SFSP outreach plan that engages the reach and capacity of the emergency food network.*

4. Tackle Poverty to End Hunger

The anti-hunger community can only eradicate poverty by embracing a holistic approach to the problem and by collaborating with policy advocates in the health care, housing and education fields, as

well as with all others who combat this multifaceted socioeconomic problem. With this paradigm in mind, the anti-hunger community has lent its support to those seeking: a living wage with benefits; affordable and comprehensive universal health care; career advancement opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed; open and equal access to education and training; the creation, maintenance and retention of affordable housing; affordable, accessible transportation; high quality, affordable child care; a more progressive tax code; and all other forms of socioeconomic uplift. Only this holistic approach is capable of ending poverty, and only by ending poverty will hunger be eliminated. With the twofold goal of ending hunger, and, by ending hunger, helping to eliminate poverty, the next Administration should:

- Enhance the New York City Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Expand funding of free tax service programs for low-income New Yorkers, and continue to take an active role in implementing innovative tax service and asset building program models like Virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA), SaveUSA and the Paycheck Plus pilot program.
- Promote policies that support a living wage with access to medical benefits and paid time off, and that make living wage jobs more accessible to low-income people.
- Develop job creation, training and education strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction.
- Continue to invest in economic development – such as the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) initiative – that both enhances the nutrition landscape and provides opportunities for employment in low-income communities.

5. Champion Anti-Hunger Policies

New York City offers its elected officials a bully pulpit unlike any other. The policies and initiatives our City undertakes make news across the country, embolden and inspire other leaders, and become examples for other cities and states. In the current fight to protect and strengthen SNAP, our City's leaders should signal New York City's opposition to cuts by joining the national Hunger Cliff platform (HungerCliff.org), which promotes a national call to action in support of SNAP.

At all times, our Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, City Council Speaker and others can and should be powerful voices for anti-hunger priorities in Albany and Washington. The 1.4 million New Yorkers who find themselves on emergency food lines just to get enough to eat deserve no less.

Introduction

New York City's Meal Gap: 235 Million Meals

Nearly 1.9 million New York City residents (almost one in five) rely on SNAP to keep food on the table, with an average monthly household benefit of \$280 – or approximately \$3.4 billion annually.

Nearly one in three New York City residents struggles to afford food, and approximately 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food, despite SNAP and other nutrition assistance programs – evidence that a **meal gap** remains.

Hunger in NYC

- Nearly 1 in 3 New Yorkers (2.6 million) struggle to afford food.
- About 1.9 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP (food stamps).
- About 1.4 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food for basic nutrition.

The meal gap represents the translation of a food budget shortfall *into a number of meals*. Analysis by Feeding America finds **an annual meal gap in New York City of 235 million meals**. Despite the collective efforts of our city's network of emergency food providers to fill the gap, a shortfall of approximately 100 million meals remains each year. Unfortunately, instead of identifying ways to close the gap, **decisions in Washington threaten to make the meal gap even wider**.

November 1, 2013: 76 million meals lost

On November 1, sweeping cuts to SNAP benefits took effect, which will result in the estimated **loss of 76 million meals** for New York City residents in its first year. A household of three is losing, on average, \$29 per month in SNAP benefits – or nearly \$19 million per month in New York City alone.

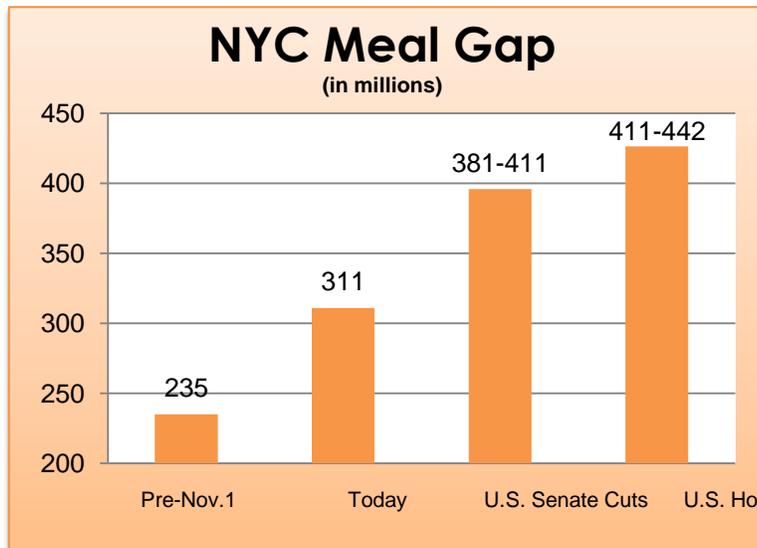
These cuts are the result of a deal struck in December 2010 in order to pay for a \$0.06 per meal increase in federal school lunch reimbursements as part of the "Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act." While the White House promised to work with Congress to restore the funds before the cuts could take effect, the promise was not fulfilled. Bills have been introduced in both the House and the Senate to reverse this cut, but yet to have amassed enough support for passage.

The Farm Bill: 132 million or more additional meals lost

The Farm Bill, negotiated by Congress every five years, sets policy and funding for critical components of the safety net, including SNAP and emergency food (through the federal Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP). Reauthorization negotiations provide an opportunity to strengthen anti-hunger programs; instead, leaders in both the Senate and the House of Representatives are promoting bills that would cut SNAP and worsen hunger in New York City.

The Senate's bill includes a **\$4.1 billion cut** to SNAP, which will result in the loss of \$90-130 per month for 190,000 New York City households. In its first year alone, these cuts translate to 70-100 million fewer meals in New York City, **increasing New York City's meal gap to as much as 411 million meals**.

The House of Representatives narrowly passed even deeper cuts in a separate, SNAP-only bill. The \$40 billion in cuts for this bill would result in the estimated loss of at least 100-131 million meals in New York City, increasing the meal gap to 442 million meals or more — **nearly double today's meal gap**. This is a conservative estimate, as it does not incorporate the effects of difficult to quantify, unfunded work requirement provisions.



Who loses in these deals?

More than half of SNAP recipients in New York State are in households with **children**. More than one third are **elderly** or **disabled**. All saw benefit reductions start on November 1.

The Farm Bill proposals will disproportionately harm New York City. New York City represents nearly 40 percent of the households who will have their SNAP benefits cut in the Senate bill, which targets SNAP recipients in federally subsidized housing – including NYCHA – who receive assistance from the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). The House bill includes this cut and

additionally targets seniors, working families with children and unemployed, childless adults.

More than half of New York City residents who rely on emergency food are SNAP recipients, and for 75 percent, their SNAP benefits don't last past the third week of the month. Emergency food providers are already struggling to meet unprecedented need: **63 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens reported food shortages in the past year.**

Policy Options for New York City

While the ultimate fate of SNAP will be decided in Washington, **there is much New York City's leaders can do to help ensure that struggling New Yorkers can afford to keep food on the table.** The set of policy and programmatic options that follows can be implemented by City government to improve financial and geographic access to nutritious, affordable food across the five boroughs.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

In New York City, the SNAP participation rate has increased since the start of the recession, as it has elsewhere in the country. Nevertheless, too many eligible city residents still do not access the program. According to the Program Access Indicator, a metric used by USDA, approximately 85 percent of eligible residents in New York City currently receive SNAP.¹ Given that the number of New York City residents in poverty has risen by five percent between 2007 and 2011,² increasing the participation rate for SNAP is a necessary step in reducing this growing need. In New York City, SNAP is administered by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), and is supported by strong public-private efforts to connect eligible New Yorkers to the sustainable nutritional support that SNAP provides. Below are policy goals for increasing access to SNAP.

Policy Recommendations

- Increase SNAP participation to 90 percent of eligible New York City residents by the end of 2018.

¹ Food Bank For New York City analysis, using 2011 American Community Survey data and monthly SNAP participation.

² United States Census Bureau. (2005-2007) & (2009-2011). *American Community Survey*

Table 1: Proposed Increase in SNAP Participation over the Next Five Years (2014 – 2018)

Year	Percentage Point Increase in Participation	Participation Rate
2014	1%	86%
2015	1%	87%
2016	1%	88%
2017	1%	89%
2018	1%	90%
Total Increase from 2014 – 2018	5%	90%

- Simplify application and recertification processes.
 - Create simple systems through which working families and other groups facing hardships can apply for SNAP in ways that do not conflict with jobs, training programs, or job search activities, and that generally minimize potential scheduling conflicts, by: offering late evening and weekend hours at more offices for interviews and the submission of SNAP application materials; opening satellite offices for conducting SNAP interviews; and establishing drop boxes for after-hours access.
 - Accelerate and expand efforts to enable true online application and recertification for SNAP.
 - Coordinate among multiple benefits so that clients can apply for several programs and services simultaneously, such as public health insurance, taxes, childcare subsidies and nutrition programs.
 - Increase available funds for Paperless Office System (POS) sites for expansion to more community-based sites, and authorize more POS sites supported by private funding.
- Maximize all federal waivers that expand program access and benefits,³ including:
 - the Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWD) waiver, which extends issuance of SNAP benefits for unemployed childless adults beyond three months during times of high unemployment;
 - simplified applications for seniors;
 - elimination of mandatory verification of childcare expenses, which leads to under-utilization of allowable childcare deductions (especially for low-income households who rely on home-based childcare), in favor of verification only when questionable;
 - extension of recertification periods whenever possible, and waiver of recertification interviews for households in which all members are elderly and/or disabled and have no earned income;
 - adoption of a standard medical deduction for seniors whose medical expenses exceed \$35 per month; and
 - inclusion of pregnant women living alone under broad-based categorical eligibility, to raise the gross income limit on applications to 200% of the poverty level and better align SNAP eligibility with WIC.
- Ensure that the Mayor’s Office, the City Council and all government agencies work together to increase SNAP participation, and that HRA complies with all state and federal laws and regulations regarding SNAP access.
- Strengthen and coordinate public and private SNAP outreach efforts throughout the city:
 - Take common-sense measures to reach eligible New Yorkers, including but not limited to: an expansion of SNAP outreach services to every neighborhood; the development of targeted outreach to increase the participation of older New Yorkers, children, working

³ Available SNAP waivers and options may be contingent on policy changes made in the federal Farm Bill currently under negotiation in Congress.

- families and immigrants; and the incorporation of SNAP outreach into Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), WIC and Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) outreach.
- Mandate and provide additional funding for the distribution of SNAP outreach materials at emergency food programs.
- Expand the distribution of SNAP outreach materials at hospitals, government offices, community food programs (senior centers, daycare centers, kids cafes, rehabilitation centers, shelters, etc.) and other services and providers that reach low-income populations.
- Work with community-based organizations to set roles and expectations (for training, outreach, etc.) in Disaster SNAP scenarios.
- Improve SNAP administration.
 - Enact comprehensive changes to the customer service experience in order to promote dignity among applicants and participants.
 - Provide annual incentive awards to local social service offices that achieve the largest increases in SNAP participation.
 - Increase funds for SNAP administration, which is essential to fund technology improvements and adequate staffing.
 - Ensure adequate staffing at government offices and application centers.
 - Improve city hotlines that serve both SNAP applicants and recipients trying to access their benefits, particularly by providing services in multiple languages.
- Draft SNAP notices using clear language, avoiding messages that discourage participation or cause confusion.

Key six-month milestones:

- *Submission of SNAP waiver applications to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) via the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA); and*
- *Submission (to USDA via OTDA) of a comprehensive citywide SNAP outreach plan that leverages all eligible funding sources for federal matching dollars.*

School Lunch and Breakfast

Authorized under the National School Lunch Act, the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) adheres to national income guidelines for provision of free or reduced-price meals in schools. In School Year 2010-2011, 77.9 percent of New York City public school students in grades K-6 (422,601 total students) received free or reduced-price school lunch, compared to 36.3 in the rest of New York State, a slight decrease from 79 percent of students in School Year 2008-2009.⁴

Because New York City provides universal school breakfast, all students are eligible for a free school breakfast, irrespective of household income. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of low-income students who participate in free or reduced-price school lunch do not participate in the free breakfast program.⁵ While participation rates in school lunch and school breakfast continue to fall far below universal participation, the need for these child nutrition programs has grown significantly. Between

⁴ New York State Council on Children and Families: Kids' Well-Being Indicators Clearinghouse. (2013). *KWIC Indicator: Children Receiving Free or Reduced-price School Lunch - Public Schools*.

⁵ Levin, Madeleine. Food Research and Action Center. (2012). *School Breakfast in America's Big Cities: School Year 2010-2011*.

2007 and 2011, the number of New York City residents in poverty has risen by five percent.⁶

A wide range of factors prevents full participation in these vital child nutrition programs, including economic, social, psychological, logistical and administrative barriers. Reducing the stigma associated with school meals is one of the foremost necessary steps in the effort to increase program participation. Too often children decline to participate in school lunches and school breakfasts because they fear their classmates' ridicule. Current program structure also invites distinctions between low-income and wealthier students, providing only the former with free meals. The availability of competitive food in vending machines and elsewhere also encourages low-income students to spend their money on less nutritious food, while further increasing the stigma associated with school meals.

In addition to these administrative and psychosocial barriers, logistical and economic challenges further undermine program participation. School overcrowding very often results in excessively staggered lunch schedules, leaving some students with lunch periods shortly after the beginning of the day and immediately before day's end. Limited space and a lack of adequate staffing also impede the expansion of school meals. When school breakfast is not incorporated into the school day, parents often find it difficult to arrange for the necessary transportation, particularly low-income families with little flexibility in their work schedules. Further exacerbating each of these difficulties is the lack of awareness regarding school lunch and school breakfast among families with children, and the inability of schools to conduct effective outreach.

Policy Recommendations

- Implement universal, free school lunch using the available provisions of the NSLP (such as the Community Eligibility Option and Provision 2) to maximize federal reimbursements and minimize cost to the city.
- Make Breakfast in the Classroom (BIC) an opt-out rather than opt-in program for schools, recognizing that some schools may need facilities improvements and/or sufficient staffing to fully implement.
- Ensure that buildings where school meals are provided have the electrical infrastructure and storage capacity to accommodate program necessities and growth in participation.
- Create incentives for schools to offer nutritious "grab and go" breakfasts and lunches at cafeteria and hallway kiosks, and incentives for breakfasts and lunches in the classroom.
- Encourage schools to schedule lunches as close to midday as possible, and to cease scheduling lunches at 10am and 2pm.
- Encourage schools to hold recess before lunch, which would allow students to build up an appetite during recess and, consequently, eat more of their lunch.
- Create new funding sources to add more fruit and vegetables to the menu.
- Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.
- Eliminate the sale of competitive food (in snack bars, student stores, vending machines and à la carte lines) completely during the school day, so as to improve access to school meals and reduce stigma.
- End all city contracts between private vending corporations and school districts.

⁶ United State Census Bureau. (2005-2007) & (2009-2011). *American Community Survey*

- Improve the type and form of USDA commodities that schools receive, particularly by reducing the fat and sodium levels of processed food.
- Ensure that school districts adhere to identification guidelines.
- Be sensitive to the dietary, cultural and religious preferences and needs of students.
- Ensure that free water is available at all schools.
- Redesign school cafeterias as part of the capital improvement plan for new schools and for schools that will be renovated, ensuring that children have enough space to eat comfortably and that all cafeterias are air-conditioned.
- Leverage community partners and other stakeholders in promoting nutritious school breakfast and lunch.

Key six-month milestones:

- *Development of a multi-year plan to provide free, universal school meals, starting in the 2014-15 school year, using existing provisions of the NSLP to maximize federal reimbursements and minimize cost to the city;*
- *Development of a multi-year plan to expand BIC, starting in the 2014-15 school year;*
- *A completed audit of school cafeterias' infrastructure needs and capacity in order to make full implementation of USM and BIC possible; and*

Summer Meals

Of the 782,411 low-income New York City students who participated in the free or reduced-price meals as part of the National School Lunch Program in 2011, only 319,787 students (28.5 percent) received meals through the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), commonly known as summer meals.⁷ Though participation rates in SFSP remain extraordinarily low, the need for this entitlement program has grown significantly. Between 2007 and 2011, the number of New York City residents in poverty has risen by five percent.⁸

Like school breakfast and lunch, a variety of socioeconomic, logistical and administrative barriers circumscribe SFSP participation. Complicated reimbursement processes that often underestimate program costs deter many providers from opening host sites. Lack of timely information about open sites can confuse parents and ultimately deter participation. Further restricting access to SFSP programs, low-income parents with inflexible work schedules often have difficulty arranging transportation to sites. Exacerbating each of these problems is a lack of awareness regarding SFSP among low-income families with children.

Policy Recommendations

- Expand the number of sites open for the entire duration of time that schools are closed for summer recess.
- Open additional school SFSP sites, particularly in high-need areas, even if they do not meet the optimal level of 300 participants per day.
- Encourage the increase of SFSP sites at non-school locations, including at pools, parks, NYCHA buildings, libraries, churches and other community-based sites, particularly in areas where children have no neighborhood access to other open sites.

⁷ Food Research and Action Center. (June 2012). *Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation: Summer Nutrition Status Report 2012*

⁸ United State Census Bureau. (2005-2007) & (2009-2011). *American Community Survey*

- Provide breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in summer school and create incentives for schools to offer nutritious “grab and go” summer meals in the classroom.
- Incorporate adequate time for meals into summer school schedules, and ensure that all programs offer lunch before their afternoon activities.
- Ensure that the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) publicizes the program by: placing posters in lobbies, at management offices and in elevators; posting notices in the *NYCHA Journal*; putting a message at the bottom of monthly rent statements during summer months; and promoting the program at Family Days.
- Ensure that the Department of Education publicizes the program in a timely fashion by: identifying open school sites early enough to develop accurate lists for early publication, before school recess; reminding parents and students about the availability of summer meals on all school notices; involving principals, teachers and parent coordinators in the promotion of summer meals; and advertising how to access information regarding expanded sites throughout the summer.
- Continue to improve coordination among city agencies for SFSP.
- Create new funding sources to add more fruit and vegetables to the menu.
- Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.

Key six-month milestones:

- *Public dissemination of a complete list of open school and non-school sites for summer meals.*
- *An SFSP outreach plan that engages the reach and capacity of the emergency food network.*

Emergency Food

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) is a city-sponsored program that provides food for almost 500 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the city.⁹ In addition to funding food distribution, EFAP also provides administrative funding to build capacity at emergency food programs and administers technical assistance grants for the automation of SNAP enrollment at soup kitchens, food pantries and other locations. EFAP is administered by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

In 2013,¹⁰ the FY 2013 Modified Budget for EFAP was \$11.7 million, \$8.2 million of which is baseline funding for food,¹¹ and \$1.5 million of which is grant funding from the New York City Council. EFAP has been flat-funded in recent years, though both food prices and the need for the program have increased significantly. Between 2007 and 2011, the number of New York City residents in poverty has

⁹ NYC Human Resources Administration: Department of Social Services. (September 2012). *Press Release: New York City Human Resources Administration And Cornell University Cooperative Extension Encourage Brooklyn Families To “Cut The Junk” Through Hands-On Education And A Healthy Eating Guide At Fort Greene Food Stamp Center*. Retrieved from http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/press_releases/2012/pr_september_2012/cut_the_junk_eating_classes.pdf

¹⁰ New York City’s fiscal year begins in July and runs to the following June. The year indicates the calendar year in which the fiscal year ends; thus, FY 2012 is the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2011 and ending June 30, 2012.

¹¹ New York City Office of Management and Budget (2013). Preliminary FY 2014 Budget, Departmental Estimates. This reflects Other Than Personal Services (OTPS) expenses only.

increased by 5.3 percent, from 18.9 to 20.1 percent.¹²

Emergency food providers address the lack of sufficient food with a range of tactics, one being to provide less than the State standard of nine meals per person in a pantry bag. Food Bank For New York City research found that in 2011-12, food pantries in New York City were providing an average of 5.8 meals per pantry bag, a number little changed from 2007.¹³

Policy Recommendations

- Increase EFAP funding by 55.5 percent to a FY 2015 funding level of \$19.8 million. To reflect the 5.3 percent increase in New York City poverty, EFAP funding should increase by 5.3 percent. To adjust for the chronic inadequacy of the existing food supply to meet need, there should be an additional 35 percent increase in funding. To adjust for inflation, there should be an additional 15 percent increase in funding. Note that these funding increases will result in baseline food purchases increasing to nearly \$14 million.
- Appropriate funding for emergency food programs in the event that the city experiences any decrease in outside funding.
- Ensure that all EFAP funding designated for administrative costs is provided in one lump sum to programs at the beginning of the fiscal year.
- Create an advisory council consisting of representatives of emergency food providers from all five boroughs, including nutritionists that will meet with HRA on a quarterly basis so as to advise HRA on all EFAP food purchases.
- Continue improvements to food quality by offering more minimally processed and fresh food, and by giving programs choice over food selection.
- Enact a policy of cost-neutral preferencing of kosher and halal products.
- Ensure that EFAP distributed during disaster response is incorporated into New York City's request for federal reimbursement of disaster-related expenditures.

Key six-month milestone:

- *A Fiscal Year 2015 budget that increases baseline funding for EFAP to \$19.8 million to account for increased need since the Great Recession and to recover lost buying power due to inflation.*

Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

Local WIC sites receive federal and state funding through the State Department of Health, which receives appropriations from the federal government in the form of state grants. As on the state and federal levels, the local need for WIC has increased in recent years. The number of New York City residents in poverty has risen by five percent between 2007 and 2011.¹⁴

Policy Recommendations

- Mandate that the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene work in coordination with the New York State Department of Health to provide oversight over the WIC program.
- Require the New York State Department of Health and HRA to coordinate to provide SNAP

¹² United States Census Bureau. (2007) & (2011) *American Community Survey*

¹³ Food Bank For New York City (2012). *Serving Under Stress Post-Recession: The State of Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Today.*

¹⁴ United State Census Bureau. (2005-2007) & (2009-2011). *American Community Survey*

outreach and enrollment opportunities at WIC sites.

Access to Nutritious Food

One method of reducing hunger and improving nutrition in New York City is to address barriers to access. Approximately three million New York City residents lack access to nutritious food.¹⁵ Although this problem affects all communities, low-income neighborhoods experience this lack of availability of most acutely.

One of the greatest barriers impeding this access is the insufficient supply of fresh food in low-income neighborhoods. New York City's reliance on truck transportation instead of rail results in elevated transportation costs for all food products. Given that fresh food like fruit and vegetables have short shelf lives, and that to maintain a steady supply of these food products requires more frequent purchases than shelf-stable products, even marginally higher transportation costs pose a daunting economic cost to retailers in low-income neighborhoods. Many of these local stores therefore have, if any, a limited selection of fruit and vegetables and maintain inventories of the lowest quality food. Lack of access to fresh food therefore becomes disproportionately severe for those most likely to experience hunger. Not only do these low-income individuals struggle to afford nutritious food, they also face a far more limited supply than individuals living in wealthier communities.

In response to the lack of retail access to nutritious food, the City enacted a number of measures, including the Food Retail Expansion to Support Health (FRESH) program, a package of zoning and financial incentives for food retailers in designated areas, and the New York Healthy Food and Healthy Communities Fund, a State-coordinated public-private grant and loan fund for food retailers in underserved communities. In addition, the City has expanded the availability of green carts in underserved communities and dramatically increased the number of farmers' markets that accept SNAP benefits.

Policy Recommendations

- Continue to educate food retailers and developers about the incentives available for development and enhancement of grocery stores through the FRESH program and the New York Healthy Food and Healthy Communities Fund.
- Create a city-state agreement to fund new initiatives that would increase the supply of and access to fresh food in low-income neighborhoods by: encouraging food cooperatives in every low-income neighborhood in the city; enhancing access to nutrition education in all communities through additional funding and greater utilization of existing resources, such as public schools, colleges, senior programs, emergency food programs and community centers; and by enabling emergency and community food providers to purchase locally grown produce.
- Increase farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in low-income communities.
- Encourage the State of New York to fund the Health Bucks program.

Financial Policies for Low-Income New Yorkers

It is essential that low-income New Yorkers access existing resources to ensure that they obtain the greatest possible quantity, quality and variety of basic necessities. Existing tax credits, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the Child Tax Credit (CTC), are among the most meaningful income supports for low-wage workers, providing an infusion of cash resources at tax time. Financial education and counseling would provide the knowledge and skill set to facilitate these financial

¹⁵ New York City Department of City Planning. (2008). "Going to Market."

decisions. Training programs should emphasize: how to access the EITC; lender programs; mortgage lending; predatory credit policies; and other areas of basic financial literacy.

Policy Recommendations

- Enhance the New York City EITC.
- Expand funding of free tax service programs for low-income New Yorkers.
- Continue to take an active role in implementing innovative service delivery models like the Virtual Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program.
- Offer financial counseling and training programs throughout New York City on how to access the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); banking services; wages and supplemental income; lender programs; mortgage lending; predatory credit policies; long-term and retirement financial planning; and other areas of personal finance.

Efforts to Reduce Poverty

The anti-hunger community can only eradicate poverty by embracing a holistic approach to the problem and by collaborating with policy advocates in the health care, housing and education fields, as well as with all others who combat this multifaceted socioeconomic problem. With this paradigm in mind, the anti-hunger community lends its support to those seeking: a living wage with benefits; affordable and comprehensive universal health care; career advancement opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed; open and equal access to education and training; the creation, maintenance and retention of affordable housing; affordable, accessible transportation; high quality, affordable child care; a more progressive tax code; and all other forms of socioeconomic uplift. Only this holistic approach is capable of ending poverty, and only by ending poverty will hunger be eliminated.

In addition to supporting each of these aforementioned issues, the anti-hunger community will also engage in long-term, anti-poverty efforts that will specifically seek to reduce hunger and improve access to nutritious food. The goal will be twofold: to end hunger; and, by ending hunger, to help eliminate poverty and all of its manifestations.

Policy Recommendations

- Promote policies that support a living wage with access to medical benefits and paid time off.
- Adopt policies that make living wage jobs more accessible to low-income people.
- Develop job creation strategies that are geared toward poverty reduction.
- Develop training and education programs that are geared toward poverty reduction.
- Continue to invest in economic development that both enhances the nutrition landscape and provides opportunities for employment in low-income communities.

New York City Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy

Given the pervasiveness and severity of the interrelated problems of food insecurity and poverty, and the need for city government agencies to develop and implement effective strategies to combat each one in a coordinated and comprehensive fashion, New York City residents would benefit significantly from an Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy that develops comprehensive, coordinated city food policies with the goal of ensuring an available, accessible, affordable, safe and nutritious food supply, comprised of locally produced food as much as possible, so that all city residents are able to eat a healthy diet, avoid hunger and obesity and have the opportunity to support a vibrant local farm and food economy. Headed by a Commissioner of Food, Hunger and Nutrition, this office would

coordinate the often isolated efforts of individual departments and agencies, enabling the city government to develop a holistic approach to each of the aforementioned issues.

The ongoing goals of the New York City Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy would be to realize the office's above-mentioned purpose of ensuring available, accessible and affordable food through: government-funded emergency food programs; government-funded nutrition programs; and long-term hunger solutions and policies. Within each of these three subcategories — government-funded emergency food programs, government-funded nutrition programs and long-term hunger solutions and policies — the office will work to implement all policy recommendations contained herein.

Notably, this proposed office would include an advisory committee with whom it would meet on a quarterly basis. Together, the office and the advisory committee would develop *ad hoc* subcommittees on pressing issues throughout the year. Such a structure would preserve administrative flexibility and render the office more sensitive to current food, hunger and nutrition issues. The office and advisory committee would consist of representatives from offices, agencies and organizations involved in food, hunger and nutrition issues.

Policy Recommendations

- Require the Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy to set goals and to make demonstrable progress each year toward obtaining those goals.
- In order to better foster coordination with other City departments, the Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy should report directly to the Mayor rather than to any individual deputy mayor.
- Include on the advisory committee representatives from the following areas: community advocacy, government, labor, energy, nutrition, business, consumer, legislation, food banks and academics.

Conclusion

Ultimately, pulling New York City back from the edge of the Hunger Cliff will take close coordination between federal, state and local government, as well as meaningful partnerships between government and non-profit service providers and advocates. While no single entity acting alone can end hunger, the policy options outlined in this document present our City's newly elected leaders a real toolkit for maximizing the resources available to New York City to close the meal gap and improve access to nutritious food for vulnerable New Yorkers.

ABOUT FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

A Member of  FEEDING AMERICA™

Food Bank For New York City recognizes 30 years as the city's major hunger relief organization working to end food poverty in the five boroughs. As the city's hub for integrated food poverty assistance, Food Bank tackles the hunger issue on three fronts — food distribution, income support, and nutrition education. Through its network of community-based member programs citywide, Food Bank helps provide 400,000 free meals a day to New York City residents in need. Its income support services help poor New Yorkers apply for SNAP benefits, and its free income tax services helps those who are employed gain access to the Earned Income Tax Credit, putting millions of dollars back into their pockets and helping them achieve greater dignity and independence. Food Bank's hands-on nutrition education programs in the public schools reach thousands of children, teens and adults who learn to eat healthfully on a budget. Learn how you can help at foodbanknyc.org.

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