Testimony of Mr. Joel Berg  
Chief Executive Officer, Hunger Free America

For Hearing “RE: Oversight - Reducing Food Insecurity in New York City”

Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare jointly with the Committee on Higher Education

February 14, 2019

I am Joel Berg, Chief Executive Officer of Hunger Free America, a nationwide direct service and advocacy organization based in New York City. I thank Chairs Levin and Barron and both committees for holding this vital hearing.

Background on Still Sky-High Food Insecurity in New York City and New York State

Hunger Free America’s 2018 report on hunger in New York City and State, based on our analysis of federal food insecurity data, found:

- Hunger decreased in New York City, the New York Metropolitan Region, and New York State over the last six years, but remained higher than before the recession. This is the first time in at least the last two decades that food insecurity in the state, city, and region have demonstrated sustained, multi-year reductions, likely because of increases in wages and employment.

- In New York City, the number of people living in food insecure households – unable to afford an adequate supply of food – decreased by 22 percent during the past six years, declining from 1.4 million people in 2012-2014 to 1.09 million in 2015-2017. However, the number is still 22 percent higher than the level of 0.892 million in 2005-2007, before the recession, and one in eight city residents still struggled against hunger. We must not accept mass deprivation in the wealthiest nation in world history as any sort of “new normal.”
Hunger is unacceptable in any society, but it’s particularly outrageous in a nation as wealthy as the United States and in a city as wealthy as New York.

- In 2015-17, 12.8 percent of the city’s population suffered from food insecurity, including 18 percent of all children, 8.9 percent of all employed adults, and 10.9 percent of all seniors.

- The Bronx remains New York City’s hungriest borough in every category, with more than one in four Bronx residents (26 percent) experiencing food insecurity. This includes more than 37 percent of all children, nearly 17 percent of working adults, and almost 24 percent of seniors.

- The number of children living in food insecure households in New York City is not decreasing as quickly as the overall number of food insecure people. While the number of food insecure individuals in New York City decreased by 22 percent from 2012-2014 to 2015-2017, the number of food insecure children (324,432 in 2015-2017) fell by 16 percent. Conversely, the number of food insecure working adults (351,912 in 2015-2017) experienced a larger drop of 26 percent in the same time period, likely due to the minimum wage increase.

- While food insecurity among working adults declined, most likely due to minimum wage increases, the area is still facing a “working hungry epidemic.” The number of adults working but still struggling against hunger in 2015-2017, was 351,912 in New York City, 666,852 in New York State, and 692,937 in the New York Metropolitan region.

Table 1 – Overall Food Insecurity in New York City

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2015-17</strong></td>
<td>1,090,936 (12.8%)</td>
<td>290,469 (26.3%)</td>
<td>368,799 (11.5%)</td>
<td>180,326 (11.3%)</td>
<td>202,417 (8.7%)</td>
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<td><strong>2012-14</strong></td>
<td>1,403,496 (16.9%)</td>
<td>396,326 (29.6%)</td>
<td>569,659 (20.3%)</td>
<td>227,261 (13.6%)</td>
<td>192,416 (8.4%)</td>
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<td><strong>2005-07</strong></td>
<td>892,214 (12.1%)</td>
<td>246,128 (20.6%)</td>
<td>211,988 (9.5%)</td>
<td>179,016 (13.5%)</td>
<td>200,366 (8.8%)</td>
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Figure 1 – Overall Food Insecurity by Borough

Table 2 – Food Insecurity Among Children in New York City

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<tr>
<td>2015-17</td>
<td>324,432 (18.0%)</td>
<td>95,365 (37.6%)</td>
<td>105,122 (14.2%)</td>
<td>47,761 (17.5%)</td>
<td>56,619 (11.8%)</td>
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<td>2012-14</td>
<td>385,004 (21.4%)</td>
<td>100,963 (30.6%)</td>
<td>186,657 (25.2%)</td>
<td>42,006 (17.8%)</td>
<td>74,556 (11.3%)</td>
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<td>2005-07</td>
<td>271,689 (15.4%)</td>
<td>92,453 (23.6%)</td>
<td>74,034 (13.4%)</td>
<td>43,922 (20.8%)</td>
<td>54,810 (10.2%)</td>
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Figure 2 – Food Insecurity Among Children by Borough

Table 3 – Food Insecurity Among Employed Adults in New York City

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<tr>
<td>2015-17</td>
<td>351,912</td>
<td>67,896</td>
<td>113,148</td>
<td>74,509</td>
<td>75,505</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.9%)</td>
<td>(16.7%)</td>
<td>(7.9%)</td>
<td>(8.4%)</td>
<td>(6.9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012-14</td>
<td>476,604</td>
<td>128,796</td>
<td>175,422</td>
<td>80,456</td>
<td>88,015</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12.7%)</td>
<td>(27.0%)</td>
<td>(14.9%)</td>
<td>(9.3%)</td>
<td>(7.9%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005-07</td>
<td>277,550</td>
<td>69,606</td>
<td>65,454</td>
<td>58,827</td>
<td>72,045</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8.3%)</td>
<td>(15.5%)</td>
<td>(6.8%)</td>
<td>(8.3%)</td>
<td>(6.8%)</td>
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**Figure 3** – Food Insecurity Among Employed Adults by Borough

**Table 4** – Food Insecurity Among Seniors (60+) in New York City

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015-17</td>
<td>183,290 (10.9%)</td>
<td>45,665 (23.7%)</td>
<td>67,789 (10.7%)</td>
<td>26,530 (9.0%)</td>
<td>42,103 (8.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-14</td>
<td>209,892 (14.3%)</td>
<td>59,753 (27.1%)</td>
<td>80,160 (18.5%)</td>
<td>39,248 (11.6%)</td>
<td>29,326 (7.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-07</td>
<td>96,609 (8.5%)</td>
<td>19,438 (12.2%)</td>
<td>24,860 (6.9%)</td>
<td>21,004 (9.5%)</td>
<td>27,204 (8.1%)</td>
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For the first time, we compared hunger in New York City to the entire metropolitan area, which demonstrated that this is a widespread problem in both the city and the suburbs.

Figure 5 – Overall Number of Food Insecure People – Citywide vs Metropolitan
Hunger Free America’s 2018 survey of New York City’s food pantries and soup kitchens found:

- New York City food pantries and soup kitchens fed five percent more people in 2018 than the previous year, compared to annual increases of six percent in 2017, nine percent in 2016, and five percent in 2015.

- In 2018, 34 percent of pantries and kitchens in New York City were forced to turn people away, reduce their portion sizes, and/or limit their hours of operation due to a lack of resources. In contrast, the proportion of feeding agencies that were forced to reduce food distribution due to lack of resources was 38 percent in 2017 and 40 percent in 2016.

- When asked if the overall number of people needing food has changed in the last year, 30.3% of pantries and kitchens reported that it had greatly increased, while 45.7% said it had somewhat increased (figure 8). Collectively, 10.3% reported that the number of people needing food had decreased and 10.9% reported no change. When asked about specific populations utilizing their services, 45.7% of kitchens and pantries reported an increase in homeless populations, 35.4% reported an increase in employed individuals, 65.2% reported an increase in families with children, 65.1% reported an increase in senior citizens/elderly, 47.4% reported an increase in immigrants, and 48.57% reported an increase in people who have lost or had reductions in their SNAP (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) benefits.

**Figure 6 – Change in Overall Number of People Needing Food**

It is important to note the persistent increase in demand facing emergency food programs in conjunction with the decrease in overall food insecurity witnessed in recent years. Although food
insecurity is dropping in New York City, it is evident that food pantries and soup kitchens are a strong contributor to this success.

**Background on College Hunger**

Because student aid often fails to cover true living costs, many students struggle with hunger.

About 60,000 CUNY undergraduates — about one in four — experience food insecurity, according to the CUNY Food Policy Institute. Even students at wealthier post-secondary institutions can’t always afford enough food, as evidenced by the fact that students at Columbia University created a campus food pantry.

Nationwide, more than a third of college students struggle against hunger, according to a survey published by Temple University and the Wisconsin HOPE Lab. Yet a report by the United States General Accountability Office in 2018 analyzed data from 2016 and concluded that almost two million students who may be eligible for SNAP benefits failed to receive them.

**Proposed Federal Public Policy Steps**

1. **Defeat the Trump Administration’s proposed “public charge” rule that would make it more difficult for legal immigrants to get food, health care, and housing help.**

On February 25, 1923, my mother, Bejla, two months old, arrived at Ellis Island on the S.S. Minnekhada, along with her two parents, Etel and Levi, fleeing Czortków, Russia.

This was no easy time to arrive here. The New York Times reported that the city had been so cold that the harbor was “ice-clogged” that day and that coal deliveries across the Hudson were made “under great difficulty.” The city was also in the throes of a deadly influenza epidemic.

Times were tough, but they were openly embraced by New York and America.

My father’s two parents were also immigrants from Eastern Europe. While none of my family members then were formally classified as refugees, they were clearly fleeing the anti-Semitic violence and destitution so common in their homelands. Odds are, had they not escaped, they would have been killed during the Holocaust or in a pogrom, as were many other members of my family who stayed. Thus I, and tens of millions of fellow descendants of immigrants, literally owe our lives to welcoming U.S. immigration policies when our families arrived.

So, few things trouble me more than when recent immigrants – or children or grandchildren of immigrants (such as Donald Trump) – want to take away the welcome mat for immigrants who come after them (except those they marry). That’s why I am so outraged that the Trump Administration recently unveiled a proposed administrative rule that would force legal immigrant families to make an unfathomable choice: either turn down temporary food, housing, and health care aid that their family needs to avoid hunger, homelessness, or unnecessary disease or risk losing a path to citizenship that could keep their family together.
Make no mistake about it: If this proposal is implemented as proposed, it will increase poverty—and the worst symptoms of poverty such as hunger, homelessness, and early deaths—in New York City and nationwide.

Hard-working legal immigrant families would lose key assistance for health care, housing, and food. Not only would such a policy be an immoral rejection of America’s welcoming ethos (under which most of our families entered this country), it would be economically counter-productive.

While new immigrants have higher rates of poverty and lower median incomes than native-born Americans, immigrants who have become naturalized citizens have lower rates of poverty and higher median incomes than native-born Americans. Therefore, making it harder for new immigrants to obtain the temporary benefits they need to lift themselves out of poverty as they work will only hamper their ability to enter the economic mainstream of society.

If enacted, the rule would also slam the economy in other, broader ways. Even the proposed rule admits that, if enforced, this cruel new guideline would also harm hospitals, landlords, grocery stores, and farmers by limiting immigrants’ use of Medicaid, nutrition benefits, and federally-funded housing.

President Trump’s administration has implied that, if the rule is implemented, non-profit groups such as Hunger Free America, will be able to pick up the slack. That’s nonsense. Many Americans—particularly middle and low-income ones—already donate very generously to fund anti-poverty work, but if this rule is implemented as proposed, all the charitable efforts in the nation won’t be able to come even close, and we won’t be able to fill the vast gap left by government.

This nation welcomed my family, and tens of millions of others. Now it’s all our jobs to ensure that we continue to welcome those seeking safety, health, and freedom.

2. **Defeat the Trump Administration’s proposed rule that would take away food from temporarily unemployed Americans.**

A new rule has been proposed by President Trump’s appointees at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) — the agency that oversees SNAP. According to the administration’s own calculations, the rule could take food away from up to 755,000 of the most vulnerable low-income Americans, taking up to $15 billion worth of food out of their shopping carts over the next ten years.

The rule limits the ability of states with high levels of unemployment to qualify for waivers of certain rules mandating up to 20 hours of work activities per week for Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) to receive SNAP benefits.

The newly proposed, harsh rule would deny food for people who are temporarily unemployed. Since 1996, every state except Delaware has used the waivers currently in place to halt time limits on SNAP. The current rules give states the flexibility needed to support residents during
tough times, and this heartless rule would limit that flexibility. This rule would, ironically, force unemployed people to halt their job search to go to government offices to attest that they are looking for work. It will increase hunger while doing nothing to increase employment.

In 2017, according to USDA, 40 million Americans, (a population larger than the combined populations of Texas and West Virginia, suffered from food insecurity, unable to always afford a sufficient supply of food. Hunger Free America’s analysis of USDA data found that 14.76 million American adults in 2015-2017 were working for income but still lived in households that were food insecure. While food insecurity across the country overall – as well as food insecurity among working people – would be far higher if SNAP did not exist, we believe that the single most important goal for improving SNAP should be to expand and strengthen it so that it helps virtually eliminate food insecurity and hunger in America.

It is vital to note that the SNAP program is already incredibly effective in enabling work outside the home. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, 90 percent of SNAP households with children had at least one parent working for income the year before and the year after getting SNAP and nearly 75 percent of adults who participate in SNAP in a typical month work either that month or within a year of that month of participation.

As is the case with unemployment insurance, people pay for SNAP with their tax dollars when they are working, and, if they are temporarily unemployed, they then receive back (in the form of benefits) a bit of what they have previously paid into the system.

Moreover, the vast majority of Americans who rely on SNAP are children, older Americans, people with disabilities, and working people. Only about 7 percent of SNAP recipients are classified as Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) who are not currently working. Many people who are in this category are veterans, some of whom have undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorders.

So we note the great irony that, rather than focusing on ending food insecurity for the 40 million Americans who suffer from it, the Trump Administration is hyper-focused on taking food way from the seven percent of the caseloads that are ABAWDs.

The best way for the executive and legislative branches to slash U.S. food insecurity and increase paid employment is to create more jobs and ensure that these jobs pay a living wage. But for the foreseeable future in the U.S., there will not be enough living wage jobs. Additionally, increased wages alone will not end hunger for most children, older Americans, people with disabilities, or people looking for work. Moreover, we believe no American of any age or status should go hungry.

Some people judge the success of anti-poverty programs solely on whether the use of those programs goes down over time. Such a limited metric makes little sense and is tantamount to judging the success of a hospital solely by how many people leave the hospital, without differentiating between how many people leave the hospital cured, equally ill, or dead. A reduction in the SNAP caseload should only be considered a success if it corresponds to a reduction in food insecurity and hunger in America. That principle should apply to a reduction in
the ABAWD caseload as well, which should only be judged successful if hunger decreases among the ABAWD population.

Limiting ABAWD waivers would increase hunger and fail to increase employment. It would be the wrong solution to the wrong problem. Such a change would be based on the false assumption that low-income Americans don’t want to work, so they need to be forced to do so. Yet the vast majority of low-income adults – including SNAP participants – are regular workers. Most proposals to limit ABAWD waivers do not include an extra penny for job creation, job training, or job creation; trying to place more people in employment without spending more money on employment would be as ineffective as trying to solve drought without more water. Eliminating waivers won’t create jobs; doing so would mostly increase bureaucracy and paperwork by forcing SNAP participants to take time out of their jobs or their job searches to report to a SNAP agency that they are working or looking for work, and then force states and counties to record and report those activities. Furthermore, under the Trump Administration, USDA has repeatedly said it wants to increase the flexibility that states have to administer SNAP; it is wholly inconsistent to then reduce flexibility that states now have to aid SNAP participants. The executive and legislative branches should work together to eliminate special ABAWD requirements entirely and use the administrative funds saved to support concrete job creation activities.

3. Congress should both expand SNAP eligibility and increase benefit allotments for SNAP by adopting the moderate cost food plan.

Too many food insecure families remain legally ineligible for SNAP. The current average benefits, equaling $1.37 per meal, are far too meager to fund sufficient, nutritious food.

4. Congress should remove the counter-productive requirement that full-time college students work 20 hours per week in addition to their studies in order to qualify for SNAP.

Given that obtaining a post-secondary degree is one of the best ways to reduce poverty, and thus hunger, federal law should make it far easier for low-income post-secondary students to obtain SNAP.

5. Congress should make it easier for low-income, active duty military families to receive SNAP.

Military housing allowances should no longer count against SNAP eligibility for active duty military families.
6. Congress should pass a Child Nutrition Reauthorization Bill that significantly reduces child hunger.

The bill should:

a) Make in-classroom school breakfasts universal, free, paperless and mandatory.
b) Make school lunches universal and free.
c) End the congregate feeding program for summer meals.
d) Dramatically expand efforts that increase funding on EBT cards for families with children over the summer.
e) Make the WIC Program for pregnant and small children an entitlement available to all who need it.
f) Increase The Emergency Food Assistance Program food and funding for food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

7. Congress should authorize state and local pilot projects to create H.O.P.E accounts to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally, as proposed by Hunger Free America.


8. Congress should raise the national minimum wage and index future raises to the rate of inflation.

It is simply outrageous that, according to Hunger Free America’s analysis of USDA data, 14.76 million American adults in 2015-2017 were working for income but still lived in households that were food insecure.

9. Congress should create a national targeted jobs program focused on repairing our infrastructure, boosting energy independence (a Green New Deal), and bringing broadband service to isolated rural towns and urban neighborhoods.

This program should combine real work with 21st century job training and apprenticeships to ensure that all created jobs are long-term and pay a living-wage.
10. Congress should fund a dramatic expansion of the AmeriCorps national service program to both fill unmet societal needs and make post-secondary education attainable for everyone willing to serve.

AmeriCorps provides modest living allowances and tuition assistance to Americans who perform significant and structured community service by responding to natural disasters, boosting education, bolstering public safety, fighting poverty, improving health, helping the environment, and protecting homeland security. Any middle-class or low-income student should be able to pay their entire way through college by successfully serving in AmeriCorps.

11. Congress should enact an employee profit-sharing and employee ownership initiative to make it easier for workers to have a real stake in the success of their workplaces.

Trickle-down, crony capitalism is failing our city and our society. It’s time to restore opportunity capitalism, America’s post-war ethos, under which working families prospered and people in poverty were able to climb into the middle-class.

Proposed New York State Public Policy Steps

1. The State should aggressively and universally implement the new law requiring that all high-needs schools in the state serve breakfast in the classroom.

According to a new report by the Food Research Action Center, during the 2017-2018 school year, only 51.8 percent of children who received school lunch statewide received school breakfasts, giving NYS the 36th worst participation rate in the nation. See: http://frac.org/wp-content/uploads/school-breakfast-scorecard-sy-2017-2018.pdf

Especially given that all the breakfasts are funded by the federal government, rapid school breakfast is the smartest, most cost-effective way to reduce child hunger statewide and citywide.

2. The State should take concrete steps to make it easier for post-secondary school students to receive SNAP.

Campus food pantries should be the last – not the first – resort in fighting college student hunger. Since food pantry funding almost always comes out of limited, discretionary funding sources, any additional food and funds that would go to a college food pantry would likely come out of budgets for other vital efforts. Moreover, even the best food pantries and soup kitchens nationwide are not a great solution for hunger. They are humiliating, often have limited supplies of food, and offer recipients little or no choice. College students who live in dorms may not always have proper facilities to use them and those who commute would be forced to carry heavy food objects long distances.
Thus, when it comes to student hunger, New York State and City should focus first and foremost on making it easier for students to get SNAP benefits, which can be used at virtually any food store and most farmers markets. Here are four reasons why this is an even better approach:

a) SNAP benefits are paid entirely for by feds, as opposed to campus pantries, which are paid for by the state. Given the strict state budget cap, it is very difficult to make state funds available for even vital purposes. Given that reality, if a function can be funded by mostly the federal government instead of the state, we should certainly do everything to get the federal government to fund that function.

b) If students get SNAP they can buy any food they need and will not be restricted by what pantries happen to have for them.

c) Many students have long commutes. It would be much easier for them to buy food with SNAP near where they live than have to lug pantry food back home from campuses.

d) SNAP purchases bolster employment in the local food retail sector and at farmers markets, while food pantries don’t aid job creation or business at farmers markets.

There are two ways for the state to make it easier for students to obtain SNAP. The first way, which New Jersey, Illinois, and Massachusetts have already done, is for New York State to make it easy for many community college students to access SNAP by defining essentially all community colleges as job training centers, as defined by SNAP regulations. Doing so wouldn’t cost the state a penny other than the staff time of existing OTDA employees; furthermore, the Governor (though OTDA) has the unilateral authority to do this without the approval of either the state legislature or the federal government.

Normally, under federal law, college students usually can’t get SNAP unless they work 20 hours or more on top of their studies, an impossibility for most full-time students. Here are the USDA rules that apply to SNAP eligibility for post-secondary students. See Section 273.5: https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2009-title7-vol4/pdf/CFR-2009-title7-vol4-sec273-5.pdf

In general, college students attending school at least half time or more cannot obtain SNAP, no matter their income; however, there are many key exceptions. Here are a few of the key exceptions, as explained in that regulation, which means that students in these categories who are otherwise eligible by income and immigration status can obtain SNAP. These students:

- Are receiving TANF or disability payments.
- Have paid employment of 20 hours per week or more.
- Get federal or state-funded work study payments. (Note that this provision does not include a minimum number of hours of work – thus, even an hour of work a week could make a student SNAP eligible.)


- Are participating in a State or federally-financed work study program during the regular school year.

- Are enrolled in an education and training program that is operated by a state or local government.

This last provision is key to what New York State should implement. Massachusetts has defined that provision to include most community colleges and state colleges since they provide education and training as defined by the USDA rules: https://www.masslegalservices.org/content/food-stamps-snap-benefits-now-available-more-community-college-students

Therefore, New York State could potentially define most income-eligible students at community colleges, CUNY schools, and SUNY schools as eligible for SNAP under this provision. The state of Pennsylvania did the same. See this link for more details: https://clsphila.org/learn-about-issues/need-help-paying-food-most-community-college-students-can-now-get-snap-food

Here is the state’s implementation memo: http://services.dpw.state.pa.us/oimpolicymanuals/snap/c_271849.pdf

Illinois also did the same:

Just a few weeks ago, the State of New Jersey did the same:

The State can also do a much better job of utilizing work-study slots to enable students to get SNAP. As noted in the regulation above, if a student works so much as one hour per week in a work-study job, that hour automatically meets the student work requirements for SNAP. Thus, for example, if a campus had funding for 100 hours of work study and allocated that to ten students working ten hours each, that could make SNAP available to ten times as many students as it would have if it allocated all 100 hours to one student.

Beyond SNAP, the State and City could fund public institutions, and press private ones, to provide free meals plans to all low-income students. For instance, my alma mater, Columbia University, has an endowment of more than $10 billion — larger than the GDP of about 50 nations on the planet. Columbia’s president receives compensation ten times that of the President of the United States. It is scandalous that Columbia pays some of its workers so little that they go hungry and gives low-income students so little in financial assistance that they go hungry. Institutions that wealthy should be shamed into immediately using their massive resources to end hunger for both their students and workers.
3. The State should implement a state-level H.O.P.E. pilot project, as detailed above, to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally.

4. The Legislature should end the sub-minimum wage for tipped workers and make overall minimum wages automatic as the cost-of-living increases.

5. The Legislature should increase funding for both the NOEP SNAP outreach program and the HPNAP Program, which funds food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries.

6. If the Trump Administration does restrict SNAP access for immigrants and/or ABAWDs, the Legislature should authorize and fund a State program to provide grocery funding for such excluded people through EBT cards.

7. The State should advocate for all the federal policy steps proposed above.

 Proposed New York City Public Policy Steps

1) NYC DOE should aggressively and universally implement the new law requiring that all high-needs schools in the state serve breakfast in the classroom.

Last year, when DOE School Food briefed us on the progress of in-classroom breakfast roll-out, we were concerned that they were giving so many schools and classes exemptions from in-classroom breakfasts that they were not meeting Mayor Bill de Blasio’s commitment to ensure breakfast in the classroom for all elementary school kids and to start rolling it out in middle schools.


According to the report, in the 2017-2018 school year, even though all breakfasts are federally-funded, only 44.6 percent of NYC DOE kids who received school lunches also got school breakfasts, the same low ratio as in the 2016-2017 school year. NYC is in 68th place out of 76 large school districts in terms of breakfast participation. It’s bad enough when we lose to Boston or Philadelphia in sports; it’s truly unforgivable when we lose to them in feeding our hungry children.
Now that DOE has new leadership and now that state law mandates in-classroom breakfasts in high-needs schools, we are hopeful that significant progress on breakfast can be achieved rapidly in New York City.

2) NYC DOE should serve school lunches at appropriate lunch hours.

City Limits recently reported: “Throughout the city, public schools stretch the concept of ‘lunch,’ sending students to the cafeteria as early as 9 a.m. The extremely early lunches trouble staff, parents and advocates and seem to disproportionately occur at schools in low-income communities.”

When lunch hours are so off, students are far less likely to eat a healthy breakfast.

3) The City should implement a city-level H.O.P.E. pilot project, as detailed above, to make it easier to combine the increased use of digital technology with policy improvements to simplify the lives and boost the long-term self-sufficiency of our lowest-income residents by making it easier for families to obtain and use benefits and manage their finances digitally.

4) The Mayor and Council should increase funding to nonprofits for SNAP outreach, EFAP, and other vital anti-hunger and anti-poverty tasks.

Such SNAP outreach money is matched by the federal government. Funding should be prioritized for efforts that aid ABAWDS, older New Yorkers, immigrants, working families, and post-secondary students.

5) The Mayor and Council should fund a pilot project to pay for meals for parents at summer meals sites at which the federal government pays for meals for children.

6) As detailed above, CUNY should better direct work-study slots to make more students eligible for SNAP.

7) The City Council should advocate for all the federal and state policy steps proposed above.