



NEW YORK

Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2023

March 9, 2022

Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chair Ayala and members of the Committee on General Welfare of the New York City Council. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the preliminary budget for Fiscal Year 2023.

First, we thank the City Council for your continued commitment to protect New Yorkers from food insecurity. The City Council has long been a leader in addressing food insecurity, from supporting Breakfast in the Classroom to the expansion of universal school meals to leading the charge for increased, baselined funding for food pantries and soup kitchens to ensuring addressing food insecurity remained a top priority throughout the pandemic. Now more than ever, we are grateful to count you as our partner in the fight against food insecurity.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, our No Kid Hungry campaign builds public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, No Kid Hungry provided nearly \$2 million in emergency grants and support in New York City and Puerto Rico to help schools, food banks and other community organizations feed kids during this crisis. In addition to our grant-making, we also offered strategic assistance to hundreds of local organizations and advocated for policies to address the unique barriers and unprecedented level of need brought on by the pandemic. This included national child nutrition waivers, which allowed meal providers to adapt and streamline their federal child nutrition program operations so they could keep serving meals to kids, other program flexibilities for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Pandemic EBT to help reach more kids in need. No Kid Hungry will also continue to operate a local text line this summer – “NYC FOOD” or “NYC COMIDA” to 304-304 - to help families locate meals, and No Kid Hungry New York will work closely with the New York City Department of Education to customize the service to reflect their specific offerings. Since 2011, our No Kid Hungry New York campaign has helped connect millions of children across the state with school breakfast and summer meals.

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON HUNGER AND POVERTY IN NEW YORK CITY

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all parts of our lives as New Yorkers. For many of our city's children and families, the pandemic and its economic consequences have had a disastrous impact on food security. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 5 children in New York City were food insecure. Recent estimates show that 1 in 4 New York City children may face food insecurity this year and the numbers would likely be higher without interventions from the federal, state and city governments.¹

No Kid Hungry New York believes that all children, no matter their borough or circumstance, deserve the opportunity to be nourished and safe, so they can live up to their full potential and achieve their dreams. Adequate nutrition, both at school and at home, helps lay the foundation for a child's physical and emotional development, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Years of data and research have demonstrated that federal nutrition programs are our nation's most effective defense against hunger and food insecurity and have helped lift millions of families out of poverty.

As the impact of the pandemic lingers, there are numerous investments that can and must be made in the FY 2023 New York City budget to improve food access and food security for children and families across New York City. By providing needed support to expand participation in federal nutrition programs and increase coordination and innovation, New York City can help to reduce food insecurity for New Yorkers in every borough and continue to reverse the trend of drastically increased food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023 NEW YORK CITY BUDGET

Increase Awareness, Outreach and Enrollment for Nutrition Programs. With many New Yorkers still facing unemployment and underemployment, especially in the face of rising food prices and rent, safety net programs are more important than ever. Federal programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Medicaid and the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) exist to help families get back on their feet during hard times. However, these programs only work when people can access them. As many New Yorkers are qualifying for benefits for the first time and the chilling effect of the rescinded Public Charge rule is still being felt by immigrant families, accessing public benefits can be confusing and lead to lack of confidence in enrolling or utilizing programs. New York City must prioritize funding for outreach and education efforts to help immigrant families enroll in programs for which they or their children are eligible.

Further, all programs that serve children and families must address systemic barriers to ensure equitable access for immigrant families, such as promoting language access and cultural competency, partnering with trusted community-based organizations, strengthening transportation access, removing burdensome paperwork requirements, and addressing the impacts of structural racism and discriminatory policies.

Strengthen the Emergency Food Network. New York City must continue to add funding and support for the emergency food network in New York City. Food pantries and soup kitchens are the last line of defense against hunger for many families. The emergency food system is facing a double whammy of increased need and fewer providers to meet this need as many agencies were forced to close their doors due to the pandemic. Further, many organizations who were not directly involved in anti-hunger programs before were compelled to create new programs to address food insecurity for clients because

¹ New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *Food Insecurity and Access in New York City during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020-2021*. Epi Data Brief, No. 128, Nov. 2021.
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/epi/databrief128.pdf>.

the need is so high. It is clear that the hunger crisis is far from over.

Funding for EFAP (Emergency Food Assistance Program), the Food Pantries Initiative and other new funding streams created at the start of the pandemic to support food pantries and soup kitchens should continue to be expanded. Particularly as EFAP now distributes fresh produce, it's essential to increase funds and ensure distribution of EFAP product is done in an equitable manner. In 2016, New York City created the first-in-the-nation food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools, which provide food, cleaning supplies, menstrual products, and tools to address hygiene for families in the school community. The FY 2023 budget should invest in new school pantries, and it should prioritize their location in communities experiencing the greatest food insecurity or lack a nearby, existing emergency food provider. Likewise, the budget should invest in mobile markets, which are another important strategy to increase access to healthy food, particularly in underserved communities. Mobile markets offer an opportunity for city agencies to partner with local nonprofit organizations and businesses to bring fresh produce to communities across the city that struggle to access it.

Provide Adult Meals at Summer Meals Sites. The summer is often referred to as the hungriest time of year. Asked why they did not participate in the summer meals programs before COVID, many parents responded it was because only the child could eat and there weren't meals available for adults. So starting in the spring of 2020, New York City took the extraordinary step of providing meals to adults at the City's own expense during the school year and through summer 2021. New York City should invest City Tax Levy dollars or funds from the American Rescue Plan to continue to provide adult meals at all summer meal sites so that each member of the family can have regular access to meals. While the New York City Department of Education runs the Summer Meal program, expansion to adults would require support, resources and funding from other city agencies, including HRA.

Support an Expanded Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). It takes more than food to fight hunger. When cash is strapped, one of the easiest things to cut from the budget is food. The EITC and other income support programs help families avoid this difficult decision. They help address the root causes of child hunger by making sure families can meet their basic needs. An expansion of the NYC EITC, as proposed by Mayor Adams, will ensure that families have the additional financial resources in their family budgets to provide for more food in household pantries and refrigerators.

CONCLUSION

New York City is recovering from a prolonged period of unprecedented loss and challenges. Throughout the pandemic, city agencies and nonprofit organizations sustained and fed children and families. With the city reopening for business and life taking on signs of more normal existence, it is essential that no New Yorkers are left behind. As you deliberate the FY23 New York City budget, we urge the New York City Council to prioritize funding programs that ensure no New Yorker faces hunger. No Kid Hungry New York stands at the ready to work with the New York City Council and our fellow New Yorkers to ensure all children and families have access to the food they need to thrive.