



NEW YORK

**Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Finance on the
Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2023**

May 25 2022

Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York

INTRODUCTION

Good morning, Chair Brannan and members of the Committee on Finance 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 Executive 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. We are grateful that Speaker Adams' recent State of the City address included strong recommendations to addressing 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. Since March of 2020, No Kid Hungry New York provided more than \$2 million in emergency grants and support across New York City and Puerto Rico. 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 continue to 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 thrive.

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 FY 2023 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.

NEW YORK CITY HUNGER SURVEY

In April 2022, No Kid Hungry engaged in a new polling project in New York City that shows that many New Yorkers report experiencing hunger in the past 12 months due to lack of money or other resources. The numbers are impactful, particularly among parents of school age children.

Here are some of the key findings:

- A majority (62%) of New Yorkers say it is harder to afford groceries for their household than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 87% of respondents support expanding access to school-based programs that provide meals to children and families, like Grab-and-Go Breakfast and breakfast delivered to the classroom
- 36% report they had to skip a meal at least once.
- Nearly half (46%) of all respondents say they were unable to afford to eat healthy food. Families with kids in public school were the most likely to be forced to skip meals or to run out of food in the home.

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>.

An overwhelming majority (85%) of New Yorkers agree that ending childhood hunger should be a top priority for elected officials in New York. Similarly, 79% agree that elected officials in NYC should do more to help families put food on the table.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2023 NEW YORK CITY BUDGET

Full Implementation of Breakfast After the Bell

In 2015, New York City made a bold commitment to equity, requiring all city elementary schools to implement Breakfast in the Classroom and ensuring students in those schools could start the school day with a nutritious breakfast. New York City became a national model for child nutrition programs and paved the way for New York State, which passed legislation in 2018 requiring breakfast be part of the school day for more than 1,400 schools statewide, including over 1,000 schools in New York City. Despite these agreements, many schools chose not to participate and claimed there were operational barriers to offering grab and go breakfast or breakfast delivered to the classroom. Since the pandemic, all New York City public schools have provided alternative breakfast options and this program expansion must become permanent. Students who start the day with breakfast have higher attendance, better test scores and fewer chronic health problems. We urge the Council to support funding that ensures the Department of Education has appropriate funding to fully implement Breakfast After the Bell.

Culturally Relevant Meals

The New York City Department of Education has prioritized offering kosher and halal meals to children and families across the city. Each year, they have also expanded vegetarian and now vegan options. Failure to accommodate cultural food preferences can discourage children from participating in school, out-of-school time, and childcare nutrition programs, so this expansion has helped increase participation. New York City should continue to expand diverse food options and provide city agencies with training and tools to engage communities and plan culturally relevant menus.

Summer Meals Accessibility

Summer meals historically reach far fewer eligible students than meals served during the school year, making summer the hungriest time of the year. In New York City, barriers to access often include accessibility of meal sites and lack of program awareness among families. Broad promotion of the summer meals program and available meal sites is integral to reducing summer hunger among New York City's children. Ensuring that information regarding meal sites comes from trusted messengers, such as schools, local elected officials, principals, parent advisory councils, and faith leaders, is an important way to encourage families to participate in the summer meals program. Many families also struggle with reaching meal sites, especially if meal sites are not close to home or when facing extreme weather. Expanding the number of meal sites and strategically placing them to avoid gaps in service are both essential strategies to increase summer meals participation. We also urge the Council to help promote summer meals to your own constituents.

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 additional city agencies.

Expand School Pantries and Mobile Markets

In 2016, New York City created first-in-the-nation food and hygiene pantries in New York City public schools. The school pantries provide food, cleaning supplies, menstrual products, and tools to address hygiene for families in the school community. Investing in new school pantries would help families put food on the table, and pantry location could be determined based on food insecurity rates, if the school was in an area considered a food desert or did not have an emergency food provider in proximity. Knowing how many communities across the city struggle to access fresh produce, partnering with other city agencies and nonprofit organizations to set up mobile markets could also increase access to fresh produce and resources for families. School pantries also provide another opportunity to promote other programs to families. We support the Council's proposal to increase support so that more schools across New York City can offer food pantries and mobile markets to their families.

Provide Support and Protection for Nutrition Staff Working to Serve Families and Children

We also want to recognize the members of the Department of Education's Office of Food and Nutrition Services staff who have been on the front lines of the pandemic serving school meals to kids and families. The entire New York City school system relies on the incredible men and women of Local 372, DC 37 to provide nutritious meals to children year-round. We must ensure the Department of Education has appropriate supplies, tools and resources to protect staff members as they continue their essential work of feeding children. We also owe them tremendous gratitude for these heroic efforts.

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, including food and nutrition programs, for which they or their children are eligible. Schools are an important and trusted vehicle to communicate about these programs with families.

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 communities slowly returning to pre-existing operations, 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 none of New York's children face 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.