



NEW YORK

**Testimony for the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services**

**Public Assistance Benefits in New York State**

**October 26, 2022**

**Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Good morning, Chair Rosenthal and members of the Assembly Committee on Social Services, New York State Assembly. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New York. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony at today's hearing examining the adequacy of temporary assistance in New York State.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national anti-hunger 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 coronavirus pandemic, No Kid Hungry has provided emergency grants across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Guam and Puerto Rico to help school districts, food banks and other community organizations feed kids during this crisis. In addition to our grant-making, we have advocated for policies to address the unique barriers and unprecedented level of need brought on by this crisis – including national child nutrition waivers that offer flexibility to meal providers, expanded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Pandemic EBT – while offering strategic assistance to hundreds of local organizations. No Kid Hungry also launched a text line and website to help families locate meals.

Since 2011, our No Kid Hungry New York campaign has helped connect millions of children across the state to child nutrition programs including school breakfast and summer meals.

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

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all parts of our lives as New Yorkers. For many children and families, the economic consequences of the pandemic have been stark. Prior to the pandemic, 1 in 6 children in New York were already food insecure and 18% lived in poverty. Yet, while food insecurity improved in some aspects during the pandemic, thanks to federal,

state, and local intervention, many families have continually been unable to afford food.<sup>1</sup> From June 2020 to March 2021, child food scarcity, or the overall percentage of families where children were often or sometimes not eating enough because food was unaffordable, remained virtually unchanged.<sup>2</sup> More concerning are the dramatic disparities within this trend. Child food scarcity increased 12 percentage points among Black households during this time, and declined almost five percentage points among white households.

**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.** This means addressing both hunger and its root causes. It means bolstering temporary benefit programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), so they can sufficiently buoy families during hard times. And it means enhancing tools like the Child Tax Credit that provide economic opportunity, so families avoid having to choose between paying for rent, utilities, and food. It takes more than food to fight hunger, and No Kid Hungry New York supports improvements to temporary benefits while also enhancing other anti-poverty tools that reach families in need that may never apply for additional benefits.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Support work to reduce hunger on college campuses.** The face of a typical college student is changing. Fewer are young high school graduates leaving home for the first time, relying on financial help from their parents. Now, over 30% of college students in the U.S. are over the age of 24 and about 44% are a racial or ethnic minority. In New York, total college enrollment is down 10% over the last decade and recent studies show that 48% of students at CUNY were food insecure in the last month.<sup>3</sup> Food is the most important school supply. It supports learning whether a student is in elementary school or college.

During COVID, New York was able to use temporary waivers that expanded SNAP eligibility to college students. Now, New York has the opportunity to support legislation like the Hunger Free Campus Act, a bipartisan bill that seeks to address food insecurity on NY's college campuses, including designating staff to help students with SNAP enrollment and expanding campus options to use SNAP benefits. Support of this type can go a long way to alleviate food insecurity across the state of New York.

**Reduce the administrative burden of SNAP.** The administrative burden is the work it takes a state to manage a public benefit program and can also refer to the time and effort it takes for the public to apply and maintain their eligibility. Reducing the administrative burden in New York will cut costs, increase access, and help to eliminate churn (when a household exits SNAP and then re-enters the program within 4 months.) Churn costs the state money, adding an average of \$80

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<sup>1</sup> 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>.

<sup>2</sup> NYHealth. *Continuing Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food Scarcity in New York*. June 2021.

<https://nyhealthfoundation.org/resource/continuing-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-food-scarcity-in-new-york/#introduction>.

<sup>3</sup> Healthy CUNY and the Hope Center for College Community and Justice. *THE STATE OF FOOD SECURITY AT CUNY in 2020*. CUNY School of Public Health and Health Policy, April 2020.

of administrative cost per case requiring recertification/reapplication.<sup>4</sup> Even if just a fraction of the 1,652,550 SNAP households in New York experience churn, costs will increase significantly.

The following changes in how New York administers SNAP will make it easier for families to apply and maintain their SNAP benefits and will decrease the state's per case costs.

- Eliminate the distinction between simplified reporters and change reporters by adopting universal simplified reporting for all families with children, where households only report a change if their income exceeds the gross monthly income standard
- Allow 12-month recertification for all families with children
- Build upon and expand the work of ideas42 and the SNAP texting program in NYC
- Expand digital access to the entire state of NY by implementing current technology options to simplify applying and maintaining benefits, especially allowing for reporting changes through a website or mobile app.

**Expand the Empire State Child Tax Credit.** Alongside ensuring that existing benefits are adequate, New York should expand the Empire State Child Tax Credit, an important poverty reduction and equity tool that reaches families in need that may never apply for additional benefits. Recent U.S. Census Bureau data showed the power of the CTC.<sup>5</sup> Between 2020 and 2021, the expanded federal CTC helped cut child poverty by 46%, and specifically lifted 2.9 million children out of poverty during this time, including 1 million children under the age of six. The expanded CTC also decreased child poverty among Black and Hispanic children by more than six percentage points each.

NYS included important enhancements to the Empire State Child Tax Credit in its FY23 budget, and No Kid Hungry New York supported these enhancements. However, the state should make permanent improvements to the Empire State Child Tax Credit. The temporary, expanded federal CTC expired last year despite millions of families relying on the benefit and its demonstrated impact of poverty. Permanently expanding the Empire State Child Tax Credit would ensure families can continue to rely on this highly effective anti-poverty tool. Introduced last session, A.3146/S.5866 would expand the reach of the Empire Child Credit by providing qualifying taxpayers a \$1,000 credit per qualifying child under age four, and \$500 for per qualifying child aged four years or older. While the expansion would require upfront investment, this expansion would generate about \$26.2 billion in benefits to society, according to a recent cost-benefit analysis by Columbia University.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mills, Gregory, Tracy Vericker, Heather Koball, Laura Wheaton, Key Lippold, and Sam Elkin (2014). Understanding the Rates, Causes, and Costs of Churning in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Prepared by the Urban Institute for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service: Alexandria, VA. Available online at <http://www.fns.usda.gov/research-and-analysis>.

<sup>5</sup> Burns K, et al. "Expansions to Child Tax Credit Contributed to 46% Decline in Child Poverty Since 2020," U.S. Census Bureau. Sept. 2022. <https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2022/09/record-drop-in-child-poverty.html#:~:text=Expansions%20to%20Child%20Tax%20Credit,in%20Child%20Poverty%20Since%202020&text=Child%20poverty%2C%20calculated%20by%20the,Census%20Bureau%20data%20released%20today>.

<sup>6</sup> Garfinkel I, et al. (2021) The Costs and Benefits of Expanding the Empire State Child Tax Credit. Poverty & Social Policy Brief, vol. 5, no. 2. <https://www.povertycenter.columbia.edu/publication/2021/child-allowance/cost-benefit-analysis-new-york>.

<sup>7</sup> Lauko, R. (2018). Nudging Benefits Access in the Right Direction. Benefits Data Trust. <https://bdtrust.org/nudgingbenefits-access-in-the-right-direction/>

## **CONCLUSION**

We thank the Committee for your continued commitment to protect New Yorkers from the cycle of poverty through temporary assistance programs. New York State has long been a leader taking the appropriate measures and using an innovative approach to reduce poverty to create more equitable opportunities for those in need while building strong communities.

No Kid Hungry New York stands at the ready to work with the Legislature, Governor Hochul and our fellow New Yorkers to ensure all children and families have access to what they need to thrive.