

**HRA COMMISSIONER DOAR DELIVERS CITY COUNCIL
TESTIMONY ON THE STRENGTH OF NEW YORK CITY'S FOOD
PROGRAM**



New York, November 25, 2008 – New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Robert Doar today highlighted the City’s food security efforts during City Council testimony on feeding New Yorkers during a challenging economy.

“Food assistance is a key component in the Administration’s aggressive and innovative strategy to assist working New Yorkers,” said Commissioner Doar. “To help get people off of cash welfare and to shore up weak wage rates for entry level jobs, we have made a concerted effort to improve our work support system – including food stamps.”

Under Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the City has been a leader in improving the accessibility of the Food Stamp Program for working New Yorkers. More than 1.3 million New Yorkers are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program, an increase of 65 percent since 2002. While maintaining the integrity of the Program, the biggest area of growth—an increase of 156 percent since the beginning of the Administration—has been among those who rely on food stamps to supplement their income and do not receive Cash Assistance or Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

New York City has already exceeded the goal set jointly with New York State to identify and enroll persons who were eligible for food stamps but not yet receiving a benefit.

Commissioner Doar attributed the increase in caseload to agency efforts in three categories: use of technology; simplifying the application and recertification process; and coordinated outreach with community partners. The following initiatives were outlined:

- **Implemented the Paperless Office System:** This year, HRA reached its goal to upgrade technology in all food stamp offices, allowing for greater efficiency through easier processing of applications and re-certifications, electronic storage of case records and better management reports.
- **Increasing Community Locations to Submit Electronic Applications:** Building on the success of the City’s pilot program which allowed food pantries and soup kitchens to submit over 3,000 food stamp applications electronically, HRA is now working with The Robin Hood Foundation and the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty to implement a similar system in up to 15 “Single Stop” locations where applicants can submit a joint application for the Food Stamp and Medicaid programs.

- **Targeted Outreach to New Yorkers Receiving Medicaid:** In partnership with the City Council, HRA performed a data match to identify individuals who were receiving Medicaid but were not getting food stamps, as there are similarities in the eligibility requirements of these programs. HRA has completed mailing to 300,000 households in Queens and the Bronx, resulting in almost 29,000 new applications. Letters were sent to Manhattan this month, and Brooklyn and Staten Island are slated for early January.
- **Reengaged Clients Previously Denied Benefits:** Changes to the Food Stamp Program in New York State led to the exemption of certain financial resources from the eligibility criteria for all non-sanctioned households whose income is at or under 130 percent of federal poverty (200 percent for the elderly and disabled). In order to notify those most likely impacted, HRA sent out more than 1,800 letters to clients who were denied benefits because of excess resources, advising them that they could re-apply.

Commissioner Doar also highlighted today that HRA has not only protected the City's food and nutrition programs from budget reductions, but for the second year in a row the agency is providing additional funding to our emergency food programs.

Earlier this month, Commissioner Doar joined Mayor Bloomberg to announce that in partnership with City Council, the Human Resources Administration has allocated \$1.3 million to provide additional frozen vegetables in 142 soup kitchens and food pantries that serve 300,000 people per month. Mayor Bloomberg also announced that the Human Resources Administration and the Department for the Aging received a USDA grant of more than \$600,000 to develop an automated food stamp benefit assessment and simplified application process for over 40,000 seniors who may be eligible for food stamps. These initiatives were among the 18 initiatives to help New Yorkers weather the increasing challenges brought on by the economic downturn.

Since 2002, the City's efforts to make the Food Stamp Program significantly more accessible have included shortening both the application itself and the time frame for applying; translating the material into nine languages; automatically enrolling SSI recipients into the program; expanding hours of operation in the evenings and Saturdays; providing up-to-date informational materials online for recipients and community based organizations; implementing telephone recertification for working families, as well as mail-in recertification for SSI recipients and eligible seniors; and in partnership with Speaker Quinn, creating the Mayor's Food Policy Task Force, which brings together advocates and community-based organizations to increase enrollment in food support programs so that families can put healthy food on their tables.

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