



THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

City Hall
New York, NY 10007
(212) 788-7116

****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****

August 18, 2009

Contact: 212-788-7116

Speaker Quinn, HRA Commissioner Doar Announce Over 50,000 Additional New Yorkers Receiving Food Stamps Following Innovative Outreach Campaign

New York State Conducting Similar Outreach to New Yorkers Losing Unemployment Benefits

City Hall, August 18th, 2009 - City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn, Human Resources Administration (HRA) Commissioner Robert Doar, Food Policy Coordinator Benjamin Thomases and nutrition advocates today announced that one year later over 50,000 additional New Yorkers are now receiving food stamps, following the Medicaid/Food Stamp data match conducted by the City Council and HRA since the summer of 2008. The data match, an initiative announced by Speaker Quinn in her 2008 State of the City address, identified households throughout all five boroughs that would likely qualify for food stamps but were not enrolled.

HRA completed the data match in June 2008 and mailed letters to these households beginning in July 2008. Households received a letter explaining that due to their enrollment in the Medicaid or Family Health Plus program, they may be eligible for the Food Stamp Program as well. The eligibility requirements for Medicaid and food stamp enrollment have similar criteria. In addition to the letter, households received a brochure detailing the Food Stamp Program and providing information on the application process. HRA, City Council staff and community partners provided targeted outreach after letters were sent.

Final results show that 66,939 people in New York City who were targeted by the data match applied for food stamps in the last year. 51,100 of them – nearly 76% of those who applied – received a food stamp benefit. This means that in one month as much as \$15 million in additional federal food stamp aid was spent in local grocery stores throughout the city.

“As we face the worst recession we’ve seen in decades, more and more New Yorkers are having trouble putting food on the table,” said **Speaker Christine C. Quinn**. “And many of those who have recently lost their jobs are finding themselves in need of financial help for the first time. Working with Commissioner Doar and the Bloomberg administration, we’ve been able to help get tens of thousands of additional New Yorkers enrolled in food stamps, by identifying those that are most likely to qualify. Now we’re working with State leaders to expand our efforts, and help connect people who are about to lose their unemployment benefits with critical support services when they need them the most.”

“The Human Resources Administration has made remarkable progress in ensuring that this important support for working families and others is more accessible,” said **HRA Commissioner Robert Doar**. “I’m proud of the HRA employees who have worked hard to make the process of applying for food stamp benefits easier and more convenient for low-income New Yorkers.”

“The City’s efforts to simplify the food stamp application process, and to connect more eligible families with benefits are an important part of our work to promote access to healthy food for all New Yorkers,” said **Food Policy Coordinator Ben Thomases**. “We are also working to give food stamp recipients opportunities and incentives to use their benefits to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables.”

Thousands of New Yorkers from every borough have received food stamps following the data match, including:

- Queens – 10,496
- Bronx – 10,908
- Manhattan – 7,955
- Brooklyn – 19,717
- Staten Island – 2,024

While the Medicaid/Food Stamp data match has been extremely successful, there may still be New Yorkers who likely qualify for food stamps, but are not yet receiving them. HRA will continue to help those New Yorkers in need of assistance through outreach and accessibility.

The current recession has only increased the number of New Yorkers in need of financial assistance. In coming months that need is likely to grow, as hundreds of thousands of Americans begin to run out of their unemployment benefits. Unless Congress takes action to extend benefits, many states will begin seeing funding expire as early as September. In New York State, 103,275 people are expected to lose their benefits by the end of December.

In an effort to address that need, the Speaker has continued working with agencies on both the state and local level. Under the leadership of Governor David A. Paterson, and at the urging of Speaker Quinn, the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) and the State Department of Labor (DOL) are working together to make sure New Yorkers are aware of other benefits that may be available to them while they are out of work. Unemployed individuals may qualify for a number of additional benefits, including Food Stamps, the Earned Income Tax Credit, Home Energy Assistance Program, public health insurance and various emergency grants. OTDA and DOL are doing targeted outreach and marketing, directing individuals to the State’s mybenefits website, and the City’s accessnyc website, which offer prescreening tools and applications.

Anyone facing the loss of unemployment insurance benefits, and even those collecting unemployment, should visit OTDA’s web site, myBenefits.ny.gov <<http://www.mybenefits.ny.gov/>>, for more information about the assistance that may be

available to them. An e-government hub for human services, mybenefits.ny.gov allows New Yorkers to connect with a range of benefits and services for which they may be eligible.

“OTDA is committed to Governor Paterson's goal of helping struggling New Yorkers make ends meet in these difficult economic times and helping them achieve economic security,” said **Kristin Proud, Governor Paterson's Deputy Secretary for Human Services, Technology and Operations**, who is currently overseeing OTDA. “In particular, our Working Families Food Stamp Initiative has made it easier for those eligible to access food stamp benefits, resulting in all-time high enrollment in New York State. We are also pleased that Speaker Quinn and members of the City Council are continuing to do all they can to help these families.”

“Since the inception of the Speaker’s innovative Food Today, Healthy Tomorrow program, I have been to schools, food pantries, supermarkets and bodegas throughout my district to spread the message of the importance of good nutrition and to inform my constituents of the many programs and opportunities available through the City,” said **Council Member Sara Gonzalez**. “The approach of matching Medicaid recipients with food stamp enrollment databases has proven beneficial to all of Brooklyn and District 38 in particular. This will also benefit our local economy by increasing federal dollars spent at our local stores.”

“We are so grateful to Speaker Quinn and Commissioner Doar for their successful efforts in providing access to additional income supports, specifically those of food stamp enrollment, to populations in need,” said **Bishop Mitchell Taylor**, President/CEO of COHI/ERDA Bread of Life Food Pantry in Long Island City. “At ERDA, we have seen a substantial increase in demand for all of our services to public housing residents in Western Queens, and our paperless food stamp enrollment program, conducted in conjunction with HRA, NYCCAH, and Food Change, is no exception. In the current economic climate, it is not enough to simply offer a service; targeted outreach is key. The data match program has made great strides in identifying New Yorkers in low-income communities who may qualify for an array of income supports.”

“At a time of skyrocketing unemployment, this work truly helps put food on the table for more than 1.5 million New Yorkers. As we have seen in our own work, it is partnerships like these that generate the most innovative and effective ideas for connecting people to the resources to which they are entitled,” said **Dr. Lucy Cabrera, President & CEO of the Food Bank For New York City**, which provides food stamp information and application assistance to over 25,000 New Yorkers annually. “The Food Bank is proud to stand with Speaker Quinn, Commissioner Doar, the City’s Food Policy Coordinator and everyone here to recognize this accomplishment.”

“Finding people who are eligible for entitlements but not receiving them is of paramount importance, especially during these tough economic times,” said **Ellen Rautenberg, President & CEO of Public Health Solutions**. “The data match between the Medicaid and Food Stamp registries is a terrific use of technology and one that will lead to increased numbers of people getting the support that they so badly need to get enough food on the table for their families. Public Health Solutions is excited about this updated information, as it will enable us to increase our efforts in certain neighborhoods to ensure that eligible households obtain public health

insurance coverage and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, thereby maximizing their own ability to become or remain economically self-sufficient.”

“Matching up people who are already receiving health benefits with people who also are eligible for nutrition benefits but not currently getting them is a common-sense, cost-effective approach to getting food help to people who need it,” Said **Joel Berg, Executive Director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.**

The City Council and community based organizations have partnered with the City on many initiatives to improve access to the Food Stamp Program. To that end, HRA has provided training and created technology to enable 37 community based organizations, including food pantries and soup kitchens throughout New York City, to submit applications and required documents online to local food stamp offices. These partnerships allow individuals to apply in convenient, customer-friendly neighborhood organizations, which typically maintain extended hours. The sites target underserved communities and working families, allowing them to apply for food stamps in non-work-hours.

HRA has also increased enrollment through a shortened application created by the State; provided up-to-date informational materials online for recipients and community based organizations; implemented telephone recertification for working families; mail-in recertification for Supplemental Security Income recipients and eligible seniors and translated materials into nine languages.

###

Contact:

Council – Anthony Hoglebe – 212-788-7157

HRA – Barbara Brancaccio – 212-331-4990