



**TESTIMONY**

**OF**

**VERNA EGGLESTON**

**ADMINISTRATOR/COMMISSIONER**

**HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION/  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

**BEFORE THE**

**CITY COUNCIL  
GENERAL WELFARE COMMITTEE**

**ON**

**HUNGER RELIEF IN NEW YORK CITY**

**NOVEMBER 21, 2005**

Good afternoon. From the start of the Bloomberg Administration, we have recognized the vital role that nutrition plays in the lives of New Yorkers, and in HRA's efforts to assist people in moving toward self-sufficiency. Food assistance can be an important support for helping people maximize their health and wellness, which contributes to self-sufficiency. Transitional benefits, including but not limited to food stamps, are important factors in employment retention for those who have left public assistance. Under the Mayor's leadership, we have worked to increase access for all eligible New Yorkers to the City's human services and benefits, and in this effort have substantially increased the food stamp rolls.

I have brought my staff to give you a brief update on developments in HRA's food programs since the last time we discussed these issues. But I am here to initiate a much broader discussion about what we can do together to prevent hunger in New York City, and to ensure that all feeding programs incorporate good nutrition, health and wellness into their services. The food programs that HRA operates are only a part of the overall picture of addressing hunger. For example, we must also look at the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, better known as WIC, run by New York State. And we must encourage the State to expand and re-target its other nutritional support programs to meet the needs in the City.

Just last week, Mayor Bloomberg participated in the kick-off of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual Daily News “Readers Care to Feed the Hungry of New York” drive, and spoke about the important collaboration between non-profit organizations, City agencies, and private businesses in feeding the hungry. And last September, Pat Smith, my First Deputy Commissioner, testified before you on food issues in Staten Island. Ms. Smith expressed HRA’s willingness to contribute to a collaborative effort by public and private entities toward the goal of maximizing access to food programs on Staten Island. She committed HRA to participating in the development of a plan to achieve that goal with everything we would be able to bring to the process. She can elaborate on our progress there later.

But we must think bigger. I believe that we need to convene a city-wide meeting on hunger issues, encouraging all of those who are or should be involved to step to the plate to help those in need. HRA would be happy to work with the Council and provider organizations to coordinate such a meeting. Because we have made so much progress over the past four years, I believe this is an opportune time to bring all of the stakeholders together to identify what still needs to be done, and how we can all participate in making it happen.

Over the past four years, HRA has made substantial efforts to maximize the accessibility and effectiveness of the City’s food programs, as evidenced by the rise in food stamp enrollment and by the broad reach of our EFAP program. But we all need to do more. We have to collaborate in assessing where pockets of

hunger may still exist, and how we can best focus our resources on them. We look forward to working with this Committee, the network of food programs, advocates, and other stakeholders to further the City's progress in combating hunger.

Let me now have my staff tell you what HRA has done.



**TESTIMONY**

**OF**

**SETH DIAMOND**

**EXECUTIVE DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE ADMINISTRATION**

**HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION/  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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Good afternoon. Let me begin by answering your questions about the short-term decrease in food stamp enrollment earlier this year. We did have a decline, in July, in the number of households receiving food stamps without public assistance. The decline was largely attributable to two events. First under the NYSNIP program, New York State extended for several months beyond the initial 90-day period the time individuals had to begin accessing their food stamp benefits before their cases were closed. In the spring and summer, the State, with the approval of the USDA, worked out a plan to close several months of cases in a compressed time frame. During an eight-week period between May 20 and July 15, the State closed five months of NYSNIP cases with unaccessed benefits, representing 12,394 cases. Approximately 5,400 of these closings affected the New York City enrollment reduction in July. In addition to these closings, the State ran an automated program to close the cases of nearly 6,000 individuals in New York City who had moved out of state, died or were institutionalized. The balance of the closings came from 1,100 individuals who did not appear for their recertification appointments. The overall number of individuals in receipt of food stamps was also affected by a decline of nearly 1,400 public assistance cases in July. As we have explained previously, that is the result of the City's active and successful welfare to work program.

We are further convinced that July was a one-month anomaly by looking at the food stamp enrollment numbers since then. In every month since July, when we had the unusual number of automated closings, enrollment by those in receipt of

food stamps alone has increased. In August enrollment grew by 2,980, in September by 11,519, in October by 4,177 and in November by 5,814. Given these increases, it is clear that the July numbers represent the confluence of several unusual factors and should not be read as a trend or as reflective of the overall program.

In fact, the overall number of people receiving food stamps in New York City has surpassed one million, increasing by nearly 37% since January 2002. While the public assistance rolls have decreased during that period, the number of people receiving food stamps independent of public assistance has increased by over 78% since January 2002. Most significantly, the number of low-income working people and other able bodied recipients, who receive food stamps independent of cash assistance or SSI, has grown by 107%. We will continue our intensive efforts to ensure that eligible New Yorkers receive food stamp benefits.

At the Executive Budget hearing this spring, we mentioned that HRA had applied for a United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) grant to implement an on-line application process for the Food Stamp Program. I am proud to announce that in September, HRA was awarded this grant. We are finalizing our partnership with Food Change and the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, and developing the information technology that will be a core component of the project. This grant will enable our partners to take food stamp applications on-

site at emergency food assistance locations and convert our Food Stamp Offices to a paperless office system with the complete imaging of supporting documents. And the USDA recently profiled HRA's Model Centers, where food stamp offices are co-located with Job Centers, in its "Promising Practices" report, which details innovative food stamp practices around the country.

HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) has allocated \$8.3 million in FY 2006 for the purchase of food for 550 participating food assistance programs across the City. In FY 2005, HRA distributed over 14 million pounds of non-perishable food, and over 10.6 million people were provided with a meal or meal ingredients by EFAP providers. The City Council allocated an additional \$500,000 to EFAP for Fiscal Year 2006 in administrative funding to build capacity of the emergency food facilities. These funds will ensure that vital equipment and staffing supports, such as the purchase of refrigerators and the hiring of interns or recruitment of volunteers, will enhance the services of the emergency food programs to meet the needs of hungry New Yorkers. Thank you.