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Food Stamp Enrollment and **GROWING HUNGER** in New York City



A STAFF REPORT TO

**THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**Hon. Gifford Miller
Speaker**



**THE COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND INVESTIGATIONS**

**Hon. Eric Gioia
Chair**

**THE COMMITTEE ON
GENERAL WELFARE**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While risk of hunger has increased to nearly one in four New York City residents, hundreds of thousands of eligible New Yorkers still experience difficulty in accessing food stamps. A New York City Council investigation reveals that City residents face significant barriers to obtaining food stamp applications at New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) offices. Such barriers can discourage New Yorkers from applying for hunger relief.

- As many as two million New York City residents are at risk of going hungry and are potentially eligible for federally-funded food stamp benefits, yet only about 54% currently receive them.ⁱ
- Children comprise about 41% of food stamp recipients in New York City.ⁱⁱ
- New York City's food stamp Participant Access Rate (52%)ⁱⁱⁱ lags behind the national average (61.5%) and is dramatically lower than cities and states that take proactive measures to increase enrollment, like West Virginia (80.5%).^{iv}
- Barriers remain for New Yorkers trying to access food stamps, according to the Council investigation:
 - Between 621,000 and one million eligible New Yorkers are not receiving food stamps.^v As a result, the City of New York is losing out as much as \$1.45 billion in federal food stamp funds^{vi};
 - Basic information about food stamps was unavailable at 39% of food stamp offices and job centers in New York City;

ⁱ Food Bank for New York City, "Hunger Safety Net 2004 Fact Sheet," <http://www.foodbanknyc.org/index.cfm?objectid=D995EE3A-3473-0E4E-CDC8A297A789EB12&flushcache=1&showdraft=1> [accessed Oct. 14, 2004]; Human Resources Administration (hereinafter HRA), "HRA Facts: January 2005," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/pdf/facts0904.pdf> [accessed Feb. 22, 2004].

ⁱⁱ "NYC Food Stamp Recipients By Selected Age Groups and Case Type, October 2004," email message from Dave Dlugolecki, Director, Bureau of Data Management & Analysis, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (hereinafter OTDA), Dec. 8, 2004.

ⁱⁱⁱ NYC Participant Access Rate (PAR) calculation uses USDA methodology for State PARs and is based on information in the March 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS) and "HRA Facts."

^{iv} USDA, "2003 Participant Access Rate Calculation: 2003," <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/FILES/Other/PAR2003Tables.pdf> [accessed Jan. 27, 2005].

^v Eligible population based on the number of people living at up to 124% of the federal poverty level as reported by the March 2004 CPS, and is reported as a range rather than a single number because the number of people at risk of hunger is generally less than the number of people living in poverty, and such things as immigration status or assets can render people ineligible for food stamps.

^{vi} Monetary calculation based on the monthly average food stamp benefit dollars in New York City, according to OTDA's November 2004 report.

- Investigators waited as long as 51 minutes to receive a food stamp application;
 - Staff at 28% of locations demanded superfluous personal information before giving investigators an application; and
 - Food stamp applications were simply unavailable at 14% of locations.
- Over the past year, food stamp enrollment has increased 13%, yet other indicators of food insecurity have also increased; demand at City-funded food pantries and soup kitchens, for example, rose 17% in that same time.^{vii}

In light of these findings, the Council recommends the following simple steps to increase food stamp enrollment citywide:

- **Allow applicants to submit food stamp applications online.**
- **Make food stamp applications available at soup kitchens and food pantries, as well as other social service agencies.**
- **Keep all food stamp offices open for extended hours on evenings and weekends to accommodate working New Yorkers.**

Approximately 1,083,305 New York City residents are enrolled in the federally funded Food Stamp Program (FSP), which was created to enable low-income households to buy nutritious food.^{viii} It is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and currently serves 25.1 million people nationwide.^{ix} The federal government also subsidizes 50 percent of all local administrative costs for the FSP, which, in New York City, is administered by HRA in conjunction with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).^x

In December 2002, the New York City Council released an investigation on the availability of food stamp applications at 40 HRA food stamp offices and/or job centers in New York City. The investigation revealed the barriers New Yorkers face in obtaining food stamps, including requests for superfluous personal information;

^{vii} Calculations based on food stamp enrollment data as reported in “HRA Facts: Nov. 2003 and Nov. 2004,” and the daily counts of people served by the Emergency Food Assistance Program in Nov. 2003 and 2004 reported in “HRA Facts: Dec. 2004 and Jan. 2004.”

^{viii} “HRA Facts: January 2005.” See n. i; Food Stamp Act of 1964 (7 U.S.C.S. 2011-2025).

^{ix} USDA, “Food Stamp Program Monthly Data,” <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pdfs/monthly.htm> [accessed Feb. 18, 2004].

^x USDA, “Short History of the Food Stamp Program,” <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Legislation/history.htm> [accessed Oct. 21, 2004]. The New York State and City governments share the remaining administrative costs equally.

inaccurate listing of addresses on HRA's website; and a lack of food stamp applications and basic written information at HRA food stamp offices and or/job centers. Council investigators conducted a follow-up investigation in September 2003 and found few improvements.

For this most recent follow-up, Council investigators visited all 36 of HRA's food stamp offices and job centers between October 18 and November 5, 2004.^{xi} Among other things, investigators noted whether written food stamp information was available, whether they could obtain a food stamp application, and the length of the application. In addition, this investigation monitored the time investigators had to wait to be served at each office.

Over all three investigations, approximately one out of three food stamp offices and job centers had no written food stamp information available on site, and HRA staff asked for superfluous personal information between 28 and 52 percent of the time. In addition, findings indicate that short food stamp applications were available at eight percent fewer sites in this investigation than in the 2003 investigation.

The investigations come amid a surge in food insecurity in New York City. HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program, which funds more than 500 food pantries and soup kitchens citywide, experienced a 17% increase in demand last year.^{xii} The program, which served 12.1 million people in Fiscal Year 2004, does not include the 700 to 800 food pantries and soup kitchens that do not receive City funding.^{xiii}

In addition, New York City's food stamp participation rate lags behind that of jurisdictions like West Virginia and Illinois, which can serve as models for best

^{xi} The number of HRA food stamp offices and/or job centers listed on HRA's website decreased from 40 during the 2002 investigation to 37 during the 2003 investigation and 33 in this most recent investigation. The number of sites actually operating changed from 32 in the 2002 investigation, 33 during the 2003 investigation and 36 during this investigation.

^{xii} See n. vii.

^{xiii} Testimony of Patricia M. Smith, First Deputy Commissioner, HRA, Hearing of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, September 29, 2004.

practices.^{xiv} West Virginia has taken innovative measures in increasing food stamp accessibility, most demonstrably through its online interactive benefits application.^{xv} The state of Illinois (61.5% participation rate) has increased access to food stamps by offering telephone interviews to accommodate applicants' work schedules.^{xvi}

Several weeks ago, a federal judge found that HRA's implementation of the FSP had been so poor it evidenced "a breakdown in the delivery of essential services to New York's neediest population."^{xvii} A court order now mandates that the City strictly follow federal laws ensuring that qualified applicants receive food stamps in a timely manner, something it had failed to do.^{xviii}

In New York City, non-profit and community-based organizations have taken the initiative to reach out to the hungry population. In June 2003, the United Way of New York City launched its Food Card Access Project (FCAP) in partnership with HRA, OTDA, the Public Advocate's office and other non-profits. The program stations outreach staff at neighborhood grocery stores, soup kitchens, food pantries and other locations to assess potential applicants' eligibility, provide information and aid them with the application process. By October 2004, FCAP helped enroll 6,884 individuals in the FSP and provided information to more than 84,000 New Yorkers.^{xix} However, this most recent Council investigation highlights the need for further action in breaking down the barriers that hungry New Yorkers face to access nutritional food.

^{xiv} Castner, Laura A. and Allen L. Schirm, "Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2001," Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. February 2004.

^{xv} State of West Virginia, "Welcome to inRoads," <http://wvinroads.org/inroads/PGM/ASP/SC002.asp> [accessed Nov. 8, 2004].

^{xvi} State of Illinois, Department of Human Services, "On-line Request for Cash Assistance, Medical Assistance, Food Stamps," <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/ts/fss/pdf/IL444-2378b.pdf> [accessed Jan. 25, 2005].

^{xvii} *Reynolds, et al. v. Giuliani, et al.*, 98 Civ. 8877 (S.D.N.Y. 2004).

^{xviii} *Ibid.*

^{xix} United Way of New York City, "Our Programs & Initiatives," <http://www.unitedwaynyc.org/?id=17&pg=fcap> [accessed Nov. 8, 2004].

BACKGROUND

The Food Stamp Program (FSP) is a federally funded program that was created to enable low-income households to buy nutritious food. Established by the Food Stamp Act of 1964,¹ the FSP is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and currently serves 25.1 million people nationwide.²

Reauthorized in 2002, the Food Stamp Act authorizes as much funding as necessary for food stamp benefits. In federal Fiscal Year (FY) 2004, appropriations for the FSP reached \$25.6 billion, with an additional \$2 billion in contingency reserve.³ The federal government also subsidizes 50 percent of all local administrative costs for the FSP, which, in New York City, is administered by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) in conjunction with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).⁴ In New York City FY 2004, the administration of the FSP in New York City cost a total of \$49.3 million, including both the federal and non-federal share of the costs.⁵

As of November 2004, only 1,051,594 of the approximately two million New York City residents potentially eligible for food stamps were enrolled in the FSP; 41 percent, or approximately 424,805 food stamp recipients are children.⁶ In New York State, there are 1,716,699 food stamp

¹ Food Stamp Act of 1964 (7 U.S.C.S. §§ 2011-2025).

² United States Department of Agriculture [hereinafter USDA], "Food Stamp Program Monthly Data," <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pdfs/monthly.htm> [accessed Feb. 18, 2005].

³ USDA, "USDA 2004 Budget Summary," <http://www.usda.gov/agency/obpa/Budget-Summary/2004/08.FNS.htm> [accessed Oct. 21, 2004]. Federal Fiscal Year 2004 runs from Oct. 1, 2003 until Sept. 30, 2004.

⁴ USDA, "Short History of the Food Stamp Program," <http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/rules/Legislation/history.htm> [accessed Oct. 21, 2004].

⁵ New York City Office of Management and Budget, "State Ceiling Report," e-mail message, Nov. 20, 2004.

⁶ Human Resources Administration (hereinafter HRA), "HRA Facts: November 2004," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/pdf/facts0904.pdf> [accessed Feb. 22, 2005]; Food Bank

recipients, with New York City residents representing 61.3 percent of this total.⁷ Despite the large number of food stamp recipients in New York City, between 621,000 and one million New Yorkers are potentially eligible but not receiving benefits. As a result, the City of New York is foregoing up to \$1.45 billion in federal food stamp funds, which can provide hunger relief for thousands of New Yorkers and boost the City economy.⁸

In order to receive benefits, food stamp recipients must meet several eligibility requirements. The table below outlines the FSP income eligibility standards and the corresponding maximum monthly benefits. For example, a single person earning up to \$1,009 in gross monthly income would be eligible to receive up to \$149 in monthly food stamp benefits.⁹

People in Household	Gross Monthly Income	Maximum Monthly Allotment
1	\$1,009	\$149
2	1,354	279
3	1,698	393
4	2,043	499
5	2,387	592
6	2,732	711
7	3,076	786
8	3,421	898
Each additional person	+345	+112

Table 1. Eligibility and Allotment for FY 2004 (Source: USDA Food & Nutrition Service. FY 2004 Income Eligibility Standards. Fact sheet on resources, income and benefits.)

for New York City, “Hunger Safety Net 2004 Fact Sheet,” <http://www.foodbanknyc.org/index.cfm?objectid=D995EE3A-3473-0E4E-CDC8A297A789EB12&flushcache=1&showdraft=1> [accessed Oct. 14, 2004]; “NYC Food Stamp Recipients By Selected Age Groups and Case Type, October 2004,” email message from Dave Dlugolecki, Director, Bureau of Data Management & Analysis, New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (hereinafter OTDA), Dec. 8, 2004.

⁷ OTDA, “Temporary and Disability Assistance Statistics: November 2004,” <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/bdma/2004/stats0804.pdf> [accessed Feb. 22, 2005].

⁸ Eligible population based on the number of people living up to 124% of the federal poverty level as reported in the March 2004 U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey [hereinafter CPS]. Monetary calculation based on the monthly average food stamp benefit dollars in New York City, based on OTDA’s November 2004.

⁹ USDA, “Fact Sheet on Resources, Income, and Benefits,” http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/applicant_recipients/fs_Res_Ben_Elig.htm [accessed Dec. 2, 2004]

For eligibility determinations, the FSP imposes limits on the ownership of assets as well. Households applying for food stamps may have up to \$2,000 in countable resources, such as bank accounts (up to \$3,000, if at least one member of the household is 60 or older). However, this calculation does not include certain resources such as homes and lots of people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Public Assistance.¹⁰

Recently, changes in federal law have increased the pool of eligible individuals for the FSP. The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002, known as the Farm Bill, enabled previously ineligible immigrants who have resided in the United States for at least five years to gain access to food stamp benefits, effective April 1, 2003 in New York City. The law also granted eligibility to all immigrant children under the age of 18, taking effect in New York City on October 1, 2003.¹¹

As a result, HRA expected to automatically enroll in the Food Stamp Program nearly 10,000 legal immigrants on Public Assistance. In addition, HRA planned to send notification letters to another 30,000 immigrants who were potentially eligible.¹²

Growing Hunger and Need in New York City

In the past three years, New York City has seen a surge in food insecurity, as indicated by an increased reliance on food pantries and soup kitchens among City residents. HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), which partially funds and monitors more than 500 food pantries and soup kitchens citywide, served 885,400 people in November 2003 and

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ HRA, "Commissioners Eggleston and Bhojwani Urge Newly Eligible Immigrants to Enroll in Food Stamp Program," news release, March 14, 2003.

¹² *Ibid.*

1,034,415 people in November 2004—a 17 percent increase over the past year.¹³ Furthermore, these City-funded food pantries and soup kitchens represent only about 45% of the 1,300 soup kitchens and food pantries that service New York City.¹⁴ Food stamp enrollment during the same period grew by 13 percent.¹⁵

Individual food pantries and soup kitchens have reported a more pronounced growth rate in emergency food assistance demand. For example, the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, one of the largest direct service providers in New York City, reported a 145.9 percent increase in demand in the nine months between July 2002 and April 2003.¹⁶

The increased need for food and nutritional assistance in New York City is also supported by a May 2003 survey that sampled 87 emergency food assistance providers citywide. The study revealed that 92 percent had experienced noticeable growth in food demand over the past two years.¹⁷ In fact, some reports estimate that as many as half of the two million New Yorkers currently at risk of hunger are relying on the 1,300 food pantries

¹³ Calculation based on the daily counts of people served by the Emergency Food Assistance Program (hereinafter EFAP) in Nov. 2003 and 2004 reported in “HRA Facts: Dec. 2004 and Jan. 2004,” available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/hrafacts.html> [accessed Jan. 20, 2004]. EFAP served 885,400 people in November 2003 and 1,034,415 in November 2004.

¹⁴ Testimony of Patricia M. Smith, First Deputy Commissioner, HRA, Hearing of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, September 29, 2004.

¹⁵ Calculation based on monthly data reported by HRA in “HRA Facts,” available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/hrafacts.html> [accessed Jan. 20, 2004]. There were 930,011 food stamp recipients in November 2003 and 1,051,594 food stamp recipients in November 2004.

¹⁶ Calculation based on monthly data on the number of people served by the West Side Campaign Against Hunger from July 2002-April 2003 in “The Other 364...Hunger Isn’t Just on Thanksgiving: Report on Increasing Demand and Unmet Needs at New York City Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries,” Report issued by the New York Coalition Against Hunger, May 27, 2003.

¹⁷ West Side Campaign Against Hunger, “The Other 364.”

and soup kitchens in New York City, yet less than a third of them have access to food stamps.¹⁸

The Food Stamp Application Process in NYC

- Individuals can access food stamp applications at HRA food stamp offices and job centers throughout the five boroughs. Applications are distributed at 36 locations, including:
 - 6 Food Stamp Offices;
 - 17 Combined Food Stamp Office and Job Center Locations; and
 - 13 Job Centers.

- All food stamp offices are open Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm, except for five extended hours offices, each located in one of the five boroughs. These offices are open until 6pm on weekday evenings, and 9am to 5pm on Saturdays.¹⁹

- Applicants for temporary assistance can apply for food stamps together with other forms of assistance at job centers.²⁰ Job centers provide a wide array of services, including access to job search and placement services, childcare information, vocational, education and training services, as well as referrals for Medicaid, food stamps and other emergency assistance benefits.²¹

- Food stamp application information can be obtained by calling a toll-free number (1-877-HRA-8411) listed on the HRA website. HRA's website also provides a link to a downloadable food stamp application.

¹⁸ Food Bank for New York City, "Hunger Fact Sheet."

¹⁹ HRA, "Food Stamps" http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/serv_foodstamps.html [accessed Feb. 22, 2005].

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ HRA, "Welfare to Work" http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/serv_welfarework.html [accessed Oct. 15, 2004].

For certain households, such as SSI recipients and homebound applicants, HRA processes their application via mail.²²

- OTDA regulations mandate that food stamp offices distribute applications on the same day they are requested. Food stamp offices must provide State-prescribed or State-approved application forms, as well as general information explaining the FSP.²³

After submitting a signed food stamp application, applicants must attend a face-to-face interview. If applicants are unable to attend an interview, State regulations allow them to designate a representative to attend in their place. Face-to-face interviews may be waived altogether if applicants are unable to designate a representative. Instead, State regulations require HRA to offer phone interviews or home visits.²⁴

Federal regulations further mandate that HRA accept any applications that bear, at minimum, a legible name, address and signature. HRA is also responsible for approving and issuing or denying food stamp benefits within 30 days of receipt of an application.²⁵

Currently, HRA's administration of the FSP is subject to several court orders.²⁶ In fact, in *Reynolds v. Giuliani*, the United States District Court of Southern New York placed HRA on a permanent injunction to process applications for food stamps, Medicaid and cash assistance in accordance with federal law. Specifically, the court found that HRA Job Centers were in substantial noncompliance with federal law because they often failed to

²² HRA, "Food Stamps."

²³ OTDA, "Food Stamp Source Book" <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/otda/fs/FSSB.pdf> [accessed Nov. 19, 2004]

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Food Stamp Act (7 U.S.C.S. §§2011-2020).

²⁶ See *Morel et al. v. Giuliani et al.* 927 F. Supp 622 (S.D.N.Y. 1995); *Moore v. Perales* 85 Civ. 1638 (E.D.N.Y. 1990); *Reynolds, et.al. v. Giuliani, et al.*, 98 Civ. 8877 (S.D.N.Y. 2004)

provide expedited food stamps within seven days, determine eligibility for food stamps separately from cash assistance in cases where cash assistance was denied, and provide proper notices on actions taken on an application and on application withdrawals. Originally filed in 1998, the court proceedings found that between 57 and 67 percent of applicants eligible for expedited food stamps had been wrongfully denied, and that separate determinations for food stamp and cash assistance were done only sporadically.²⁷

Food Stamp Accessibility and Outreach

The USDA estimates that there are approximately 2,288,000 individuals who are eligible for food stamps in New York State, yet only 58 percent of this number were participants in 2001.²⁸ Furthermore, New York City's 2003 Participant Access Rate (PAR) of 52 percent is below the national average of 61.5 percent and is far behind other jurisdictions such as the state of West Virginia (80.5%).²⁹

West Virginia's success can be attributed to several factors, such as its relatively small eligible population—242,000 people as opposed to New York State's 2,288,000.³⁰ However, West Virginia has demonstrated significant innovations in increasing food stamp accessibility. One of its most prominent methods is the development of an online interactive benefits application that readily assigns a case number to each applicant.

²⁷ *Reynolds, et.al. v. Giuliani, et al.*, 98 Civ. 8877 (S.D.N.Y. 2004)

²⁸ Castner, Laura A. and Allen L. Schirm, "Reaching Those in Need: State Food Stamp Participation Rates in 2001," Mathematica Policy Research, Inc. February 2004 for the USDA.

²⁹ NYC Participant Access Rate (PAR) calculation based on USDA methodology for State PARs and on information in the March 2004 Current Population Survey (CPS) and "HRA Facts;" USDA, "2003 State-by-State Participant Access Rates (PAR)" October 2004, quoted in Food Research Action Center, "Food Stamp Participation Access Rates, State-by-State, 2003," http://www.frac.org/html/federal_food_programs/FSP/Participation_Rates_03.html [accessed Nov. 19, 2004].

³⁰ Castner and Schirm, "Reaching Those in Need."

The interactive application, provided by means of the Information Network for Resident Online Access and Delivery of Services (inROADS), allows applicants to electronically submit a food stamp application, except for a signature page that must be mailed.³¹

Other states, like Illinois, have increased access to food stamps by accommodating the work schedules of food stamp applicants. Illinois, with a PAR of 61.5 percent, uses an application that provides a check box allowing applicants to opt for a phone interview instead of a face-to-face interview, if “hours of work or educational activities conflict with Department of Human Services office hours.”³² While HRA’s food stamp application offers a similar option, it encourages applicants to authorize a representative to attend the required face-to-face interview on behalf of the applicant. In addition, the application itself does not clearly specify under which circumstances an applicant can arrange a phone interview.³³ Applicants must call a phone number specified in the application in order to set up a phone interview and this phone number is often not provided with the application.³⁴

New York State has also taken significant steps to increase access to food stamps. In September 2004, the State launched the New York State Nutrition Improvement Project (NYSNIP), a federally approved demonstration program. NYSNIP uses data collected by the Social Security Administration to automatically enroll single Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients who are found to be potentially eligible for

³¹ State of West Virginia, “Welcome to inRoads,” <http://wvinroads.org/inroads/PGM/ASP/SC002.asp> [accessed Nov. 8, 2004]

³² USDA, “2003 State-by State PAR”; State of Illinois Department of Human Services, “On-Line Request for Cash Assistance, Medical Assistance, Food Stamps,” <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/ts/fss/pdf/IL444-2378b.pdf> [accessed 8 Nov 04].

³³ OTDA, “Food Stamp Benefits Application/Recertification”

³⁴ All except one of the short applications collected during this investigation had no phone number specified.

food stamps. The program automatically creates food benefit cases for eligible SSI recipients who do not already have an active case. Once their eligibility is verified, they receive a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to be used with the NYS Benefit Identification Card, allowing them to debit their food expenditures at participating retail venues. The program is estimated to increase Food Stamp enrollment by 62,000 cases in New York City alone.³⁵

In New York City, non-profit and community-based organizations have taken the initiative to reach out to the population at risk of hunger. In June 2003, the United Way of New York City launched its Food Card Access Project (FCAP). Bringing funding from the private sector and partnering with community-based organizations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations, FCAP disseminates information regarding the Food Stamp Program and identifies and helps enroll eligible individuals and households. The program stations outreach staff at neighborhood grocery stores, soup kitchens, food pantries, unemployment offices, senior centers and other locations. Equipped with laptops, the staff assesses the eligibility of potential applicants, provides multi-lingual information and aids families with the application process. Modeled after the highly successful “Food Force Program” created by the Community Food Resource Center (CFRC; now FoodChange) and in close collaboration with CFRC, FCAP helped enroll 6,884 individuals in the food stamp program and provided information to more than 84,000 New Yorkers in six languages in its first 16 months. The project also has pre-screened roughly 16,000 potential applicants and scheduled appointments or made referrals for 73 percent of them.³⁶

³⁵ “Governor Pataki Announced Project That Will Make Food Assistance Benefits More Accessible To Those In Need” [press release]. OTDA. 22 Sept 04.

<http://www.otda.state.ny.us/featured/new/default.htm> [accessed Oct. 15, 2004]

³⁶ United Way of New York City, “Our Programs & Initiatives,”

<http://www.unitedwaynyc.org/?id=17&pg=fcap> [accessed Nov. 8, 2004].

In December 2002, the staff of the New York City Council Committee on Oversight and Investigations released a report on the availability of food stamp applications at 40 HRA food stamp offices and/or job centers throughout New York City.³⁷ The investigation revealed that New York City residents face significant barriers in obtaining access to food stamp information and applications. Barriers included requests for personal information from HRA staff prior to receiving a food stamp application, inaccurate listing of office addresses on HRA's website and an inability to obtain applications and/or written information at food stamp offices and/or job centers.

The initial investigation in 2002 showed:

- Of the 40 locations listed on HRA's website, eight (20%) addresses were incorrect.
- Among the 32 sites with correct addresses, investigators could not obtain food stamp applications at 11 (34%) sites.

The Committee staff conducted a follow-up investigation in September 2003 and found a number of improvements. However, the findings of the second investigation demonstrated that a considerable number of sites still fell short of compliance with federal and state regulations. Of the 37 food stamp offices and/or job centers listed on HRA's website in 2003, four (11%) had incorrect addresses. Also, investigators were unable to obtain a food stamp application at eight locations (24%).

³⁷ The number of food stamp offices and/or job centers listed on HRA's website has changed from 40 in the 2002 investigation to 37 in the 2003 investigation and 33 in this third follow-up investigation. This calculation excludes duplicate listings. The actual number of operating offices changed from 32 in the first investigation, to 33 in the second and 36 during this third investigation.

At a hearing held on December 16, 2002, the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare found the 16-page food stamp application to be cumbersome for applicants and advocated the adoption of a simplified food stamp application.³⁸ In fact, the hearing revealed that Onondaga County was operating a pilot program using a one-page application and that other jurisdictions were undertaking similar initiatives.³⁹ Effective June 30, 2003, the State adopted a short, four-page food stamp-only application to replace the 16-page application.⁴⁰ As a result, the September 2003 investigation sought to assess the availability of the new short food stamp applications at HRA food stamp offices and/or job centers. The results revealed that out of 25 sites where investigators obtained an application, three (12%) distributed applications longer than four pages.

³⁸ Statement of Council Member Bill DeBlasio, Chair, New York City Council Committee on General Welfare. December 16, 2002. Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare.

³⁹ Testimony of Verna Eggleston, Commissioner, HRA; Testimony of Robert Canavan, Regional Director, Food Stamp Program Northeast Regional Office, Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, December 16, 2002. Hearing of the NYC Council Committee of General Welfare.

⁴⁰ N.Y. Soc. Serv. Law § 95 (11) (2002).

METHODOLOGY

From October 18 to November 5, 2004, New York City Council investigators conducted a third investigation to determine the availability of food stamp applications at all HRA food stamp offices and job centers throughout the City.

In all three investigations, investigators attempted to visit each site listed on HRA's website as a food stamp office and/or job center. At each location, investigators requested applications from HRA staff and attempted to retrieve written information about food stamps. For the purposes of this investigation, investigators posed as single adults in a household of one who earned a gross salary of \$900 per month. After each visit, investigators completed a survey to provide information on several factors, including:

- Accuracy of location information;
- Availability of written food stamp information (e.g. booklets, brochures, etc.);
- Ability to obtain food stamp applications;
- Requests for personal information by HRA staff prior to receiving applications; and
- Length of food stamp applications.⁴¹

In addition, this investigation re-visited food stamp office addresses from previous investigations to determine whether any of those locations continued to operate as food stamp offices and/or job centers. Investigators also sought to measure the amount of time spent on obtaining food stamp applications at HRA offices. Investigators used a digital stopwatch to measure the amount of time between entering a food

⁴¹ See Appendix B for full survey form.

stamp office and/or job center and receiving help to obtain food stamp application materials. The results were immediately recorded after each site visit.

FINDINGS

General Findings

Accuracy of Website

Of the 33 sites listed on HRA's website, three sites were listed as food stamp offices, 13 as job centers and 17 were listed as both food stamp offices and job centers. All 33 sites listed on HRA's website had correct addresses.

However, investigators identified three additional operating HRA food stamp offices, which were not listed on HRA's website. These three offices had been visited as part of the Council's last food stamp investigation and investigators found them to be currently in operation.⁴² They are:

1. 227 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn
2. 253 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn
3. 45-12 32nd Place, Queens

Investigators thus visited and reported results on a total of 36 operating HRA food stamp offices and/or job centers. Hence, the website accurately listed only 33 out of 36 operating sites and was 8% inaccurate.

Availability of Applications and Application Length

Of the 36 sites in operation:

- At four sites (11%), investigators were unable to obtain a food stamp application.

⁴² These addresses were obtained from records of the previous investigation.

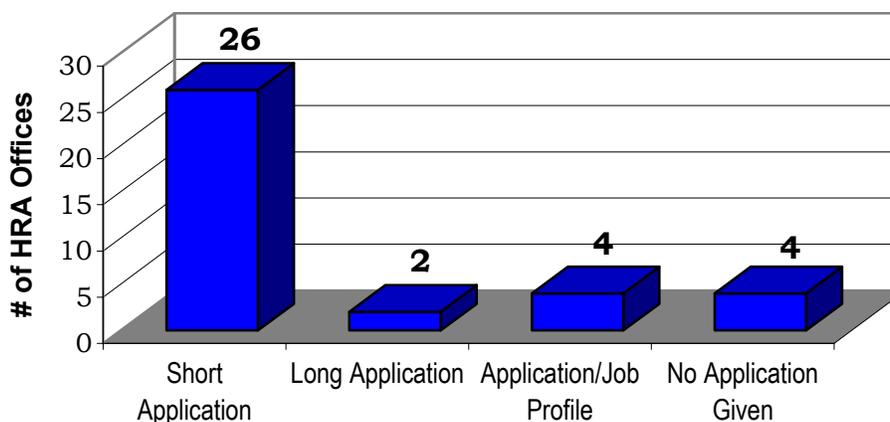
- Investigators obtained a short, four-page food stamp application at 26 sites (72%).
- Two sites (6%) provided a long food stamp application instead of the short, four-page application.
- Finally, at the remaining four sites (11%), investigators were given a combined application/job profile.⁴³
 - Staff at three of these four sites informed investigators that they could use the application/job profile to apply for food stamps, even if they were applying for food stamps only.
 - At one of these sites, staff told investigators that they could not use the application/job profile to apply for food stamps only.

Hence, investigators were able to obtain, upon request, some form of application that could be used to apply for food stamps at 31 locations (86%). Of these, five (14%) provided applications that were longer than four pages.

The chart on the next page illustrates these findings.

⁴³ The application/job profile is an application formulated by HRA for applicants who wish to apply for a combination of services, such as Food Stamps, Public Assistance and Medical Assistance.

Food Stamp Applications Issued, 2004



Availability of Written Food Stamp Information

Twenty-two sites (61%) had written food stamp information (e.g. booklets, brochures, etc.) available on site. Fourteen (39%) didn't have any written information readily available, contrary to State regulations.⁴⁴

Requests for Personal Information by HRA Staff

At ten locations (28%), investigators were asked to provide personal information before a food stamp application was given to them. Often, the information requested included personal income, zip code, social security number, age and address.

Other Barriers

Finally, at three sites (8%), investigators were turned away altogether. Staff at two of these locations—32-28 Northern Boulevard in Queens and 444 St. Mark's Place in Staten Island—told investigators that they could not be served without a referral from another food stamp office or job center. At one site, 225 East 34th Street in Manhattan, investigators were

⁴⁴ OTDA, Food Stamp Source Book.

told that the office would soon close down and were referred to a different site.

Wait Time at HRA Offices

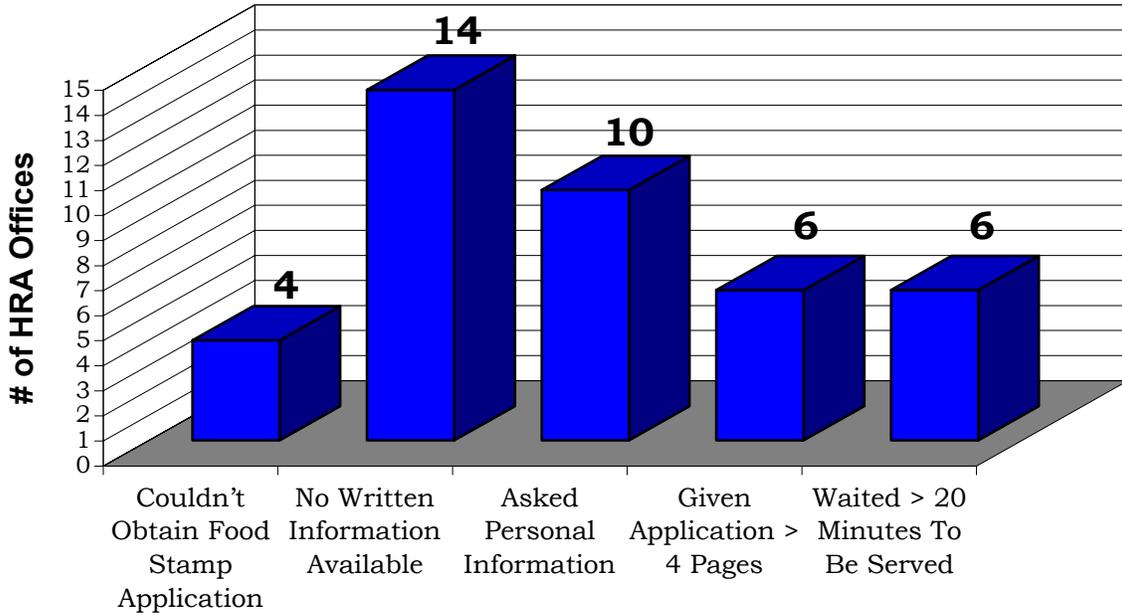
The table below categorizes the wait time at each of the 36 food stamp offices and job centers to obtain food stamp information and applications:

Wait Time	Total Number of Locations
0 Min. 0 Sec. – 10 Min. 0 Sec.	23
10 Min. 1 Sec. – 20 Min. 0 Sec.	7
20 Min. 1 Sec. – 30 Min. 0 Sec.	2
30 Min. 1 Sec. +	4

The longest wait time investigators experienced was 51 minutes and 21 seconds. Instances in which investigators were immediately assisted when seeking a food stamp application were recorded as 0 Min. and 0 Sec., that is, they spent no time simply waiting. The average wait time for all food stamp offices and job centers was 11 minutes and 8 seconds.

The chart on the next page summarizes this investigation’s key findings.

Food Stamp Application Investigation, 2004



Comparative Findings

The following compares the findings of the New York City Council's three investigations (Dec. 2002, Sept. 2003 and Nov. 2004), calculated as a percentage increase or decrease:

Accuracy of Website

- The accuracy of HRA's website has increased 3% since the 2003 investigation.
- Since the first investigation in 2002, the accuracy of the website improved by 12%.

Availability of Written Food Stamp Information

- The availability of written information at food stamp offices and/or job centers was 12% higher in this investigation than in the 2003 investigation.
- The availability of written information found in this investigation was 5% higher than found in the 2002 investigation.

Requests For Personal Information

- There were 24% fewer instances in which investigators requesting a food stamp application were asked for personal information in this investigation, as compared to the 2003 investigation.
- There were 5% fewer instances in which investigators had to provide personal information in this investigation, as compared to the 2002 investigation.

Ability To Obtain Food Stamp Applications

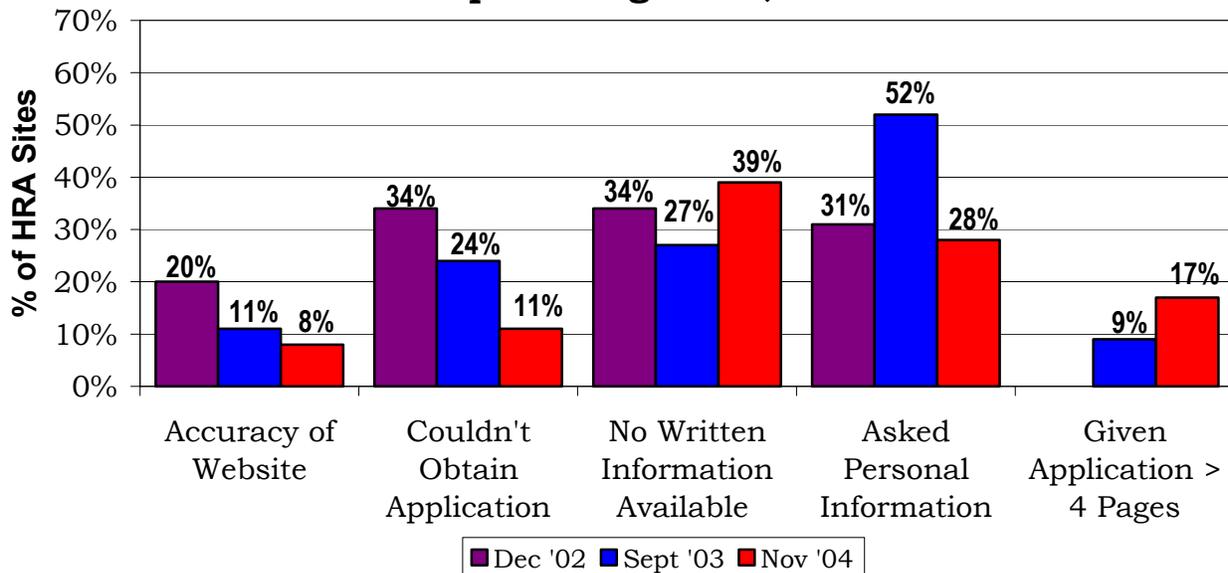
- The overall availability of food stamp applications at HRA offices was 3% higher than that found in the 2003 investigation.
- Food stamp application availability was 23% higher in this investigation than found in the 2002 investigation

Application Length

- Instances where investigators were given an application other than the short application increased 8% over the 2002 investigation.

- Short food stamp applications were not yet available from the state during the first (Dec. 2002) investigation.

Food Stamp Investigations, 2002-2004



Discrepancies in Address Information

- Three addresses from this investigation were not on HRA's website during the 2002 and 2003 investigations:
 1. 45 Hoyt Street, Brooklyn
 2. 25 Chapel Street, Brooklyn
 3. 1951 Park Avenue, Manhattan
- One site that was listed as having a correct address during the 2003 investigation was closed during this investigation:
 1. 233 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn
- One address that was found to be closed during the 2003 investigation and open during the 2002 investigation, was again found open during this investigation:
 1. 227 Schermerhorn Street, Brooklyn

CONCLUSION

While this third investigation demonstrates significant improvements in the accessibility of food stamps in New York City, the main findings of the previous two investigations remain unchanged: New York City residents are still facing substantial barriers in accessing food stamps.

- **Lack of information can be an obstacle to accessing food stamps.**

HRA has shown significant improvements in the correct listing of addresses on its website during this investigation. Yet inaccuracies remained, with three operating sites that provide and accept applications omitted from HRA's website altogether. Furthermore, three sites listed on HRA's website did not provide, accept or process applications. At two of these sites, investigators were told they needed a referral from another food stamp office or job center. At the third site, investigators were informed that the site would be closing down and were referred to another location. The omission of crucial information such as HRA food stamp office addresses can limit accessibility to food stamps and reduce an individual's chances to obtain nutritional food.

- **Some job centers and food stamp offices are not providing food stamp applications and information.**

Food stamp applications are not available at 11% of the 36 food stamp offices and job centers. Also, food stamp information is not readily available for potential applicants at 39% of food stamp offices and job centers.

- **Food stamp offices and job centers are not making sufficient use of the new four-page food stamp application.**

A longer-than-necessary application is an obstacle to applying for food stamps and can discourage potentially eligible applicants. Effective June 30, 2003, the State created a short, four-page food stamp only application to be used at local social service districts.⁴⁵ However, between October 18, 2004 and November 5, 2004, investigators documented that six, or 17 percent, of the 36 sites provided an application longer than the simplified four-page application.

- **Staff at HRA food stamp offices and job centers are asking applicants for unnecessary personal information.**

At 28% of locations, investigators were asked for personal information that is not necessary to obtain a food stamp application. Federal food stamp regulations mandate that all individuals have the right to obtain an application upon request.⁴⁶ Asking for highly personal information such as an individual's social security number, marital status, income and address can avert eligible applicants and presents an additional bureaucratic hurdle.

⁴⁵ N.Y. Soc. Serv. Law 95 (11) (2002).

⁴⁶ USDA, "Your Rights," Food Stamp Program. http://www.fns.usda.gov/fsp/applicant_recipients/rights.htm [accessed 21 Oct 04]

- **While food stamp enrollment has grown in the past year, it has not kept pace with increased hunger in New York City.**

Between November 2003 and November 2004, food stamp enrollment grew by 13 percent from 930,011 to 1,051,594.⁴⁷ This growth can be attributed to a variety of factors. One major consideration is the larger pool of eligible individuals that has resulted from changes enacted by the 2002 Farm bill. Furthermore, New York City has seen a growth in food insecurity over the years, suggesting an increase in the demand for food stamps. Outreach efforts by organizations such as the Community Food Resource Center and the United Way of New York City have also had a positive impact on the total number of food stamp recipients, enrolling as many as 6,884 individuals in the FSP in the past year.⁴⁸ Most importantly, HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), which partially funds and monitors more than 500 food pantries and soup kitchens citywide, served 885,400 people in November 2003 and 1,034,415 people in November 2004—a 17 percent increase.⁴⁹ Thus, while numerous factors point to a large growth in food stamp enrollment, growth in food stamp enrollment may have not kept pace with the increased hunger in New York City.

⁴⁷ HRA, "HRA Facts: November 2003;November 2004," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/hrafacts.html> [accessed Jan. 20, 2004].

⁴⁸ United Way of New York City, "Programs and Initiatives."

⁴⁹ Calculation based on monthly data reported by HRA in "HRA Facts," available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/hrafacts.html> [accessed Jan. 20, 2004]. HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program served 885,400 people in November 2003 and 1,034,415 in November 2004.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Make interactive online applications available.**

While New York State currently has an online paper application, it lacks an interactive online application. Creating an interactive application would streamline the application process by allowing applicants to electronically submit their application. The interactive application that is currently in use in West Virginia is a good model.

- **Proactively seek out and engage community organizations to make food stamp applications available at New York City’s 1,300 soup kitchens and food pantries, as well as other social service agencies.**

Food stamp outreach at agencies that already provide social services—such as Medicaid offices, unemployment offices, etc.—would give more people access to food stamp application and further increase participation. While HRA currently provides applications to community organizations that request them, it does not actively seek out other organizations who have not requested applications but equally serve New York City residents at risk of hunger. HRA should take proactively reach out to community organizations and work to increase the availability of food stamp applications at all locations that hungry New Yorkers seek, such as food pantries and soup kitchens.

- **Keep all food stamp offices open for extended hours on evenings and weekends to accommodate working New Yorkers.**

HRA currently operates only five food stamp offices that are open on weekdays until 6pm and on Saturdays from 9am to 5pm.⁵⁰ These “extended hours” sites increase access to food stamps by accommodating working New Yorkers who cannot submit applications and/or attend the required face-to-face interview during normal office hours. The five sites are each located in one of the five boroughs.

- **Increase the availability of short food stamp applications at job centers.**

Not all job centers have the short food-stamp-only applications available on site. Ensuring that all food stamp offices and/or job centers have short food stamp applications available will further increase access to food stamps and will simplify the application process for eligible New Yorkers.

- **Make food stamp information and applications readily available at food stamp offices and job centers so that applicants do not have to wait for excessive amounts of time.**

Investigators encountered excessive wait times at some food stamp offices and/or job center in order to obtain food stamp applications. The wait time ranged from a high of 51 minutes and 21 seconds to almost no wait at all. Unnecessary wait time to obtain application materials is a significant obstacle to potential applicants, especially to those who may be employed or care for a child. Therefore, arrangements that allow

⁵⁰ HRA, “Food Stamps.”

individuals to pick up an application as soon as they enter a food stamp office and/or job center should be made.

- **Allow all applicants to mail/fax food stamp applications.**

Currently, HRA allows only certain households, such as SSI recipients and homebound applicants, to mail their application to food stamp offices.⁵¹ HRA should allow all applicants to mail and/or fax their applications. This could increase food stamp participation by accommodating working New Yorkers and parents who care for young children.

- **Train workers so that they may provide accurate and uniform information to applicants.**

At certain job centers, investigators who were given an Application/Job Profile were informed that they could use this form to apply for food stamps only. In other instances, investigators were told they could not. HRA should train workers so that they can provide accurate and uniform information to potential applicants. Incorrect or misleading information can hamper an individual's access to food stamps, thereby reducing the individual's chances of obtaining nutritional food.

- **Call on HRA to update and maintain its website so that it provides the correct addresses of all functioning food stamp offices and job centers.**

HRA should provide all information that is essential to applying for food stamps, including addresses of all offices that can provide and accept food

⁵¹ HRA, "Food Stamps."

stamp applications. Likewise, HRA's website should not list offices that do not provide or accept applications.

**APPENDIX A:
Food Stamp Only Application**



FOOD STAMP BENEFITS APPLICATION/RECERTIFICATION



Applying For Food Stamp Benefits Only?

If you are only applying for Food Stamp Benefits you can use this shorter application. If you would like to apply for other benefits such as Temporary Assistance, Child Care Assistance, Home Energy Assistance or Medicaid please ask for a different application.

This application can only be used to apply for Food Stamp Benefits.

When You Are Applying For Food Stamps Benefits

- You can file an application the same day you receive it. If you are eligible, benefits will be provided back to the filing date of your application.
- You can file your application before you have an interview.
- We must accept your application if, at a minimum, it contains your name, address (if you have one), and a signature. This information will establish your application filing date. However, the application must be completed and we must interview you for us to determine your eligibility.
- You can apply for and get Food Stamp Benefits for eligible household members even if you or some other members of your household are not eligible for benefits because of immigration status. For example, immigrant parents can apply for Food Stamp Benefits for their children even if they are not themselves eligible for benefits.

Need Food Stamp Benefits Right Away? You May Be Eligible For Expedited Food Stamp Benefits Service

If your household has little or no income or liquid resources, or if your rent and utility expenses are more than your income and liquid resources, or you are a migrant or seasonal farmworker with little or no income or resources when you apply, you may be eligible to receive Food Stamp Benefits within 5 days of the date that you apply for benefits. Your worker will always review your circumstances to see if you are eligible for expedited processing of your Food Stamp Benefits application. A process is in place to ensure that benefits will be issued to all Food Stamp Benefits eligible households who meet the standards for expedited service.

Having Problems Coming To Us For A Food Stamp Benefits Appointment?

If it is difficult for you to come in for a Food Stamp Benefits application appointment (reasons may include employment, health issues, or child care problems), you may have someone else apply for you. You also can mail us your application or drop it off and, in some circumstances, we can interview you by telephone.

Please contact us at _____ if you need to set up a telephone interview.

Questions?

For any questions you have about completing an application or eligibility for Food Stamp benefits, you may contact us at _____.

In addition to the Food Stamp Benefits Application, make sure you have been given copies of:

LDSS-4748A: What You Should Know About Your Rights and Responsibilities

LDSS-4748B: What You Should Know About Your Services/Restrictions

LDSS-4748C: What You Should Know if You Have an Emergency

NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF TEMPORARY AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE
FOOD STAMP BENEFITS APPLICATION / RECERTIFICATION

Name: _____ Telephone Number: _____ Other phone where you can be reached: _____
 Residence Address: _____ Apt.# _____ City _____, NY Zip Code _____
 Mailing Address (if different) _____ Apt.# _____ City _____, NY Zip Code _____
 Other Name: _____ Are You: Applying or Recertifying Do you want to receive notices in: Spanish and English or English **Only**

List everyone who lives with you even if they are not applying. List yourself first.

1	First Name	Last Name	Social Security Number (SSN) or applicant ID# (if applicable) NONE	Date of Birth	Marital Status	Applying		Blacks (African American)	Do you speak Spanish		Do you speak English		Ethnicity (check all that apply)		
						Yes	No		Yes	No	Yes	No	I	A	B
1						<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		self	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>						
2															
3															
4															
5															
6															
7															
8															

*Race/Ethnic Codes: I – Native American or Alaskan Native, A - Asian, B – Black or African American, P – Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, W - White
 Are you and is everyone living with you a US citizen? Yes No If No, who is not a citizen? _____
 Are you or is anyone living with you fleeing from a law enforcement agency on felony charges, or in violation of probation or parole according to a court? Yes No
 Have you or has anyone living with you ever been disqualified from receiving Food Stamp Benefits because of fraud or intentional program violation? Yes No
 Are you or is anyone in your household applying for or receiving Food Stamp Benefits or Temporary Assistance in another place? Yes No
 Are you or is anyone living with you blind, disabled or pregnant? Yes No If Yes, who _____
 Are you or is anyone living with you a veteran? Yes No If Yes, who _____
 Do you or does anyone live in a drug or alcohol treatment center, State-certified group living facility or State-certified supervised/supportive apartment? Yes No
 If you are recertifying for Food Stamp Benefits, list on the Page 6 what has changed since your last application or recertification (such as moved, had a baby, someone moved in or out).

We must accept your application if at a minimum it contains your name, address (if you have one) and signature in this box.

APPLICANT/REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE	DATE SIGNED
------------------------------------	-------------

INCOME

List **ALL** your income and the income of anyone living with you. This includes, but is not limited to wages, income from self-employment (for example: babysitting, cleaning, income from a roomer or boarder) child support, pensions, veterans benefits, disability, social security or SSI, grant for scholarships for rent or food, Public Assistance, and income from friends or relatives.

Name of Person Receiving Income	Source of Income	Hours Worked Per Month	How Often Received? (For example: weekly, monthly, bi-weekly)	Gross Amount Received (Before Deductions)

Do you or does anyone living with you have child/dependent care costs related to employment or training? Yes No If Yes, who _____

Amount paid \$ _____ How often paid (e.g., weekly, monthly) _____

Have you or has anyone living with you changed or quit jobs or reduced any form of income in the last 30 days - including reduced work hours or income? Yes No

Do you or does anyone living with you have any potential income that has not yet been received? Yes No If Yes, explain on Page 6.

Do you or does anyone living with you receive a Personal Needs Allowance (PNA) or a Meal Allowance? Yes No If Yes, who _____

Have you or has anyone in your household set aside any income under "PASS: Plan To Achieve Self Support" approved by the Social Security Administration?

Yes No If Yes, who _____

Are you or is anyone living with you participating in a strike? Yes No If Yes, who _____

RESOURCES

How much money does everyone applying have? (For example, on your person; in your home, in checking and savings accounts, or other locations, including jointly held accounts) \$ _____ Belongs to _____

Other financial assets? (For example, stocks, bonds, retirement accounts, savings bonds, mutual funds, IRAs, trust funds, money market certificates) Yes No

If Yes, amount \$ _____ Type _____ Owner _____

How many cars, trucks or other vehicles do you or anyone in your household have?

#1 Year _____ Make _____ Model _____ Owner _____

#2 Year _____ Make _____ Model _____ Owner _____

Do you or anyone applying own any property including your own home? Yes No if yes, list property _____ Owner _____

Has anyone applying sold, given away or transferred cash or property in the last three months to qualify for Food Stamp Benefits? Yes No

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND EXPENSES

Check all the descriptions that apply to your household:

Own home or paying for home Renting Migrant/seasonal farmworker No permanent residence Live with relatives or friends

List expenses:

Monthly rent or mortgage payment \$ _____ Tax on home per year \$ _____ Insurance on home per year \$ _____

Pay separately for Heat? Yes No If yes, specify type of heating: Gas Electric Oil Wood Coal Other (list) _____

Heat Co. Acct. No. _____

You may use the page if you need more room on this page for information that you think we might need.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS AND EXPENSES (Cont'd)

Pay separately for utilities (other than heating/cooling)? Yes No (for example, lights, cooking gas washer/dryer fee's, garbage/trash, water, initial installation of utilities).

Pay separately for air conditioning? Yes No

Does anyone else pay any of these expenses for you (some examples are Section 8 or other subsidy program)?

Yes No If yes, who pays what? _____

Do you or does anyone living with you pay court-ordered child support? Yes No If yes, who _____

Name(s) of child(ren) support is being paid for _____

Payment amount \$ _____ Frequency of payments (for example, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly) _____

Are you, and/or anyone living with you, blind/disabled or at least age 60? If so, does such person have medical bills? Yes No If yes, list on the page 6 what they are for, how much and who is responsible for payment.

Are you, and/or anyone living with you (16 years old or older) enrolled in school or training? Yes No If yes, who _____ where _____

You may use the page 6 if you need more room or there is other information that you think we might need.

READ THE IMPORTANT INFORMATION BELOW

FOOD STAMP BENEFITS (FS) PENALTY WARNING – Any information you provide in connection with your application for FS will be subject to verification by Federal, State and local officials. If any information is incorrect, you may be denied FS. You may be subject to criminal prosecution for knowingly providing incorrect information.

You will **never** be able to get Food Stamp Benefits (FS) again if you are found guilty in a court of law for the second time of buying or selling controlled substances (illegal drugs or certain drugs for which a doctor's prescription is required) in exchange for FS; or found guilty in a court of law of selling or getting firearms, ammunition or explosives in exchange for FS; or found guilty in a court of trafficking in FS worth \$500 or more. Trafficking includes the illegal use, transfer, acquisition, alteration or possession of FS, authorization cards or access devices; or found guilty of committing a third Intentional Program Violation (IPV).

You will not be able to get FS for two years if you are found guilty in a court of law for the first time of buying or selling controlled substances (illegal drugs or certain drugs for which a doctor's prescription is required) in exchange for FS.

If you have committed your: ■ First IPV, you will not be able to get FS for one year. ■ Second IPV, you will not be able to get FS for two years.

A court could also bar you from receiving Food Stamp Benefits for an additional 18 months. If you make a false statement about who you are or where you live in order to get multiple FS, you will not be able to get FS for ten years (or **permanently** if this is the third IPV).

You may be found guilty of an IPV if you make a false or misleading statement, or misrepresent, conceal or withhold facts; or commit any act that constitutes a violation of Federal or State law for the purpose of using, presenting, transferring, acquiring, receiving, possessing or trafficking of coupons, authorization cards or reusable documents used as part of the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) system.

You could also be fined up to \$250,000, sent to jail for up to 20 years, or both.

READ THE IMPORTANT INFORMATION BELOW (cont'd)

CONSENT – I understand that by signing this application form I agree to any investigation made by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance or my local social services district to verify or confirm the information I have given or any other investigation made by them in connection with my request for Food Stamp Benefits. If additional information is requested, I will provide it. I will also cooperate with State and Federal personnel in a Food Stamp Benefits Quality Control Review.

SUA (STANDARD UTILITY ALLOWANCE) INFORMATION – I understand that Food Stamp Benefits (FS) recipients are categorically income eligible for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP). If I am not included in the annual automatic HEAP payment process for certain FS recipients, I intend to apply for a benefit within the next 12 months. If I decide not to apply for HEAP within the next 12 months, I will let my worker know.

TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE INFORMATION – I understand that Food Stamp Benefits recipients are eligible for a telephone allowance if they pay to use a home phone, cell phone, phone, phone calling card or coin operated phone. If I do not have any cost to make phone calls, I will let my worker know.

CHANGES – I agree to inform the agency **promptly** of any change in my needs, income, property, living arrangement or address to the best of my knowledge or belief in accordance with my reporting requirements.

REQUIREMENT TO REPORT/VERIFY HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES – I understand that my household must report child care and utility expenses in order to get a Food Stamp Benefits (FS) deduction for these expenses. I further understand that my household must report and verify rent/mortgage payments, property taxes, insurance, medical expenses and child support paid to a non-household member in order to get a FS deduction for these expenses. I understand that failure to report/verify the above expenses will be seen as a statement by my household that I/we do not want to receive a deduction for those unreported/unverified expenses. A deduction for these expenses may make me eligible for FS or may increase my FS. I understand that I may report/verify these expenses at any time in the future. This deduction would then be applied to the calculation of FS in future months in accordance with the rules for change reporting and processing changes.

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT – COLLECTION AND USE OF SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN) – The collection of SSN's is authorized for each household member with respect to Food Stamp Benefits pursuant to the Food Stamp Act of 1977 (as amended, 7 US Code 2011-2036). The information we collect will be used to determine whether your household is eligible or continues to be eligible for benefits. We will verify this information through computer matching programs. This information will also be used to monitor compliance with program regulations and for program management. The information will be used to check identity, to verify earned and unearned income, and to determine if applicants or recipients can receive money or other help. The information may be disclosed to State and Federal agencies for official examination and to law enforcement officials for the purpose of apprehending persons fleeing to avoid the law.

If you do not have an SSN and need to get one, the information you give to the social service district may be used to get one for you.

CITIZENSHIP/ALIEN STATUS– I swear and/or affirm under penalty of perjury that the information I have provided about the citizenship and immigration status of my self and everyone living with me is true and correct. I understand that any information I provide to verify the immigration status of anyone applying for Food Stamp Benefits may be checked for authenticity with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service.

READ THE IMPORTANT INFORMATION BELOW AND SIGN AT THE BOTTOM (cont'd)

NON-DISCRIMINATION NOTICE – In accordance with Federal Law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) policy, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, political belief, or disability. To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (202) 720-5964 (voice and TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE – You can authorize someone who knows your household circumstances to apply for Food Stamp Benefits (FS) for you. If you do, have them sign in the signature section at the bottom of this page. You can also authorize someone outside your household to get FS for you and to use them to buy food for you. If you would like to authorize someone, print the person's name, address and phone number below.

LIFELINE: For applicants/recipients of Food Stamp Benefits: Do you authorize the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to disclose your name, address and telephone number to Verizon. Verizon may use this information to automatically enroll you in their Lifeline Service for a discounted telephone rate? YES NO

CERTIFICATION: I swear and/or affirm under the penalties of perjury that the information I have given or will give to the local Social Services district is correct.

APPLICANT/REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE	DATE SIGNED	HUSBAND/WIFE SIGNATURE	DATE SIGNED
X		X	

IF APPLYING FOR SOMEONE ELSE AS AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE, PRINT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS HERE. YOU MAY ALSO VOLUNTARILY PRINT YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER.

Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____

IF YOU HELPED COMPLETE THIS APPLICATION / RECERTIFICATION FOR SOMEONE ELSE, PRINT YOUR NAME AND ADDRESS HERE. YOU MAY ALSO VOLUNTARILY PRINT YOUR TELEPHONE NUMBER.

Name _____ Address _____ Phone _____

Use this area for additional information:

Who: _____ Explanation: _____

Who: _____ Explanation: _____

Who: _____ Explanation: _____

CONSENT TO WITHDRAW MY APPLICATION I understand that I may reapply at a w time

SIGNATURE: _____ DATE: _____

For Agency Use Only: _____

Eligibility Determined by: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Who Obtained Eligibility Information: _____ Date: _____

Employed by: _____ (Social Services District) _____ (Provider Agency) (can provider agencies determine eligibility?)

Specifying: _____

Reason: Withdrawal Initial Recant Closing

Eligibility Approved by: _____ Date: _____

ES: Authorized Person Initials: _____ No

Comments: _____

**APPENDIX B:
Food Stamp Investigation Survey**

9. Whom did you ask for an application? _____

Comments:
