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MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

LEGISLATIVE S.1678A – by Sen. Michelle Hinchey – Education Committee
REFERENCE A1941 – by M. of A. Gonzalez-Rojas – Education Committee

TITLE **AN ACT** to amend the education law, in relation to providing universal school meals to students

SUMMARY OF PROVISIONS

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Michelle Hinchey and Assembly Member Gonzalez-Rojas, aims to provide universal school meals to students across public school districts, charter schools, and non-public schools in the state participating in the national school lunch program or school breakfast program. Section one of the bill adds a new section, 915-a, to the education law, mandating all eligible schools to provide breakfast and lunch at no cost to students. In addition, section one of the bill addresses the following items:

Maximizing Federal Reimbursement: Schools are encouraged to maximize federal reimbursement for breakfast and lunch programs by adopting provisions like Provision 2 or the Federal Community Eligibility Provision.

Departmental Support and Reimbursement: The Department is obligated to reimburse the difference between the amount paid by the USDA and the free rate, promoting financial sustainability for schools implementing universal school meals.

Promoting SNAP: The legislation empowers the Department to promote the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) by providing application assistance or direct referrals to outreach partners.

Technical Assistance: The Department, in collaboration with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, will provide technical assistance in the transition to universal school meals, assisting with reimbursement eligibility, viability assessments, and maximizing federal funding.

Section two of the bill sets forth the effective date.

REASONS FOR SUPPORT

New York City strongly supports the expansion of the Universal School Meals bill as a critical initiative to ensure all students have access to nutritious meals without financial barriers. The proposed bill builds on the success of New York City's commitment to free school meals. This bill extends the city's efforts in tackling local food insecurity, advancing equity in education, and contributing to the creation of a healthier and more resilient community.

In FY24, a state investment of \$134.6 million amplified the provision of free meals through the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), with benefits across 1,200 schools, 400 districts, and 347,000 students. Despite these strides, an estimated 320,000 students are still left ineligible. This proposed bill serves as a direct remedy

for the 320,000 students currently excluded from universal free meals. Closing this gap is imperative, emphasizing the critical need for universal access to a fully funded statewide school meals program for all students.

New York City urges the Legislature to promptly and favorably consider the Universal School Meals bill. This legislation aligns with the City's commitment to principles of equity, accessibility to education, and the well-being of its youth. By eliminating financial barriers to school meals, the bill plays a pivotal role in fostering a healthier and more inclusive learning environment for all students.

Accordingly, the Mayor urges the earliest possible favorable consideration of this proposal by the Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,

CHRISTOPHER G. ELLIS, Jr.
Director

JD: 4/16/24