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**Testimony of  
Hunger Solutions New York, Inc.**

Submitted by Linda Bopp, Executive Director  
to the  
Joint Legislative Budget Subcommittee on Human Services  
on  
The 2013-2014 Executive Budget Proposal for Human Services  
February 5, 2013

Thank you, Senator DeFrancisco and Assemblyman Farrell for holding this important hearing and inviting us to share some insights with you regarding the Executive Budget proposal for Human Services.

**Who we are**

Hunger Solutions New York is a statewide anti-hunger organization dedicated to alleviating hunger for all New Yorkers. Our primary approach to alleviate hunger is to maximize participation in the underutilized, federally-funded, nutrition assistance programs; namely, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program), the School Breakfast Program (SBP), and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP).

Our perspective and expertise are the result of managing the state and federally-funded Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP). NOEP is one of the largest SNAP outreach, education and application assistance programs in the country. Prior to July of 2012, NOEP outreach workers were in 36 counties across the state. Today, thanks to an additional appropriation in the 2012-2013 enacted budget, services are now available in 52 counties.

Hunger Solutions New York also works to raise awareness of programs that address crisis and chronic hunger. In addition, as the voice for hungry New Yorkers, we advocate for public policy recommendations at the federal and state level.

**Hunger and food insecurity**

It has been a critical time for hunger and food insecurity across the country with incidence rising most notably since 2008; the onset of the great recession.

In the first half of 2012, more than 1 in 6 New Yorkers reported struggling to afford enough food for themselves and their families. Six years ago, that number was 1 in 10. This statistic is derived from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. The specific food question that Gallup has been posing is very similar to one of the questions asked by the federal government in its

annual survey of Americans' food security. Gallup asks: "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?" The national Food Research and Action Center counts "yes" answers as evidencing "food hardship."

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) has done similar research and has found that more than 13 percent of New Yorkers have low or very low food insecurity based on 2011 data. More than five percent fall into the very low food security category.

#### The impact of hunger and food insecurity

The results of food insecurity and hunger are felt in every community across the state. Working adults skip meals to pay for heat or rent, leading to difficulty focusing on assigned tasks. Children go to school without breakfast, which can lead to behavioral problems in school and poor educational outcomes. Seniors struggle to afford food and medications. Malnutrition affects one in four older Americans living at home and is a factor in half of all hospital admissions and readmissions of older people.

According to a 2011 report by the Center for American Progress called "Hunger In America," hunger cost New York State more than \$9 billion in 2010. This amount is a combination of "lost economic productivity per year, more expensive public education because of the rising costs of poor education outcomes, avoidable health care costs, and the cost of charity to keep families fed." This does not include the cost of SNAP. SNAP is a cost effective and efficient way to both meet the needs of hungry New Yorkers and help New York's economy.

#### The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

SNAP, the new name for the Food Stamp Program, is our nation's primary nutrition assistance program, stretching the monthly food budgets of all who meet program guidelines. It has been our nation's first line of defense against hunger for more than 70 years and has been in its current form for nearly 35 years. Monthly benefits are automatically deposited into participants' accounts. Using an electronic benefits transfer (EBT) card, participants may buy most foods and food-producing seeds and plants from many local stores, bodegas and farmers' markets. Eligibility and benefit amounts vary based on household size, income, expenses and other factors.

More than 3 million New Yorkers feed their family each month with SNAP benefits, combatting the negative impacts of food hardship and bringing billions of federal dollars into local economies. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 72% of potentially eligible individuals in New York State participated in 2010. This ranks New York State 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation in reaching eligible households.

SNAP participation rates are on the rise, which is a good thing, given the economic devastation that still exists for millions of households. SNAP is responding, as it should, to the economic downturn, making sure millions of Americans can feed themselves and their families. Hunger Solutions New York, along with Governor Cuomo, wants to reach more than 72% of the

potentially eligible households; hence the Governor's anti-hunger agenda which included an increased investment in the NOEP last year.

#### SNAP: A Great Investment with Great Human and Financial Return on Investment (ROI)

During the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding debate, SNAP benefits were determined to be the best economic stimulus (Moody's [www.Economy.com](http://www.Economy.com) 1/22/09) because the funds were immediately spent in the community at grocery stores, bodegas and farmers' markets. Moreover, every \$5 in SNAP benefits generates \$9.20 in economic activity (USDA).

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, SNAP was second only to the Earned Income Tax Credit in helping Americans get out of poverty in 2010. Further, according to USDA, New York State remains the most effective at using SNAP to lift households above the federal poverty level. A full 34 percent of SNAP households in New York State are lifted above poverty when SNAP benefits are counted as income. In other words, SNAP has a large impact on the well-being of families and communities across the state.

#### Nutrition Outreach and Education Program: A Great Investment with Great Human and Financial ROI

With the goal of increasing SNAP participation, last year, New York State made additional investments in SNAP outreach. The enacted budget included a \$1 million increase to the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP).

New York State Public Health Law created NOEP in 1987 and it is now one of the largest SNAP outreach and education programs in the country. Administered by Hunger Solutions New York under a contract with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), NOEP outreach Coordinators, working at local, community-based organizations, conduct outreach and education for SNAP, SBP, and SFSP. In addition, NOEP provides application assistance for SNAP and resolves barriers to participation for applicants. Thanks to last year's investment, the program expanded its reach from 36 counties (5 NYC counties and 31 ROS) to 52 counties (5 NYC and 47 ROS).

Already, the new state investment in NOEP is making a big difference in the communities it serves. Compared with the same time period last year (July 1 – December 31) SNAP prescreenings conducted by NOEP have increased by 50%; households connected to SNAP have increased by 30%; and federally-funded SNAP benefits coming into the state to help households and economies have increased by 30% (from \$27.5M – \$35.7M) This additional \$8.2 in benefits already far exceeds the States' \$1M increase in NOEP program funding.

It also means 3,000 more families will be able to afford food this year. Hunger Solutions New York believes that is invaluable.

	<b>July 1 – December 31, 2011</b>	<b>July 1 – December 31, 2012</b>
<b>Counties with increased NOEP services (6)</b>	6,740 pre-screenings 3,104 Households approved for SNAP \$8.1 M – SNAP benefit *	11,954 pre-screenings 4,883 Households approved for benefits \$12.6 M – SNAP benefit *
<b>New counties (16)</b>		2,595 pre-screenings 674 Households approved for SNAP \$1.7 M – SNAP benefit *
<b>TOTAL NOEP program</b>	20,555 pre-screenings 10,612 Households approved for SNAP \$27.5 M – SNAP benefit *	30,843 pre-screenings 13,827 Households approved for SNAP \$35.7 M – SNAP benefit *

\*Based on an average monthly benefit/household of \$287 and an average time on SNAP of 9 months

This expansion of service also increased NOEP staffing in counties devastated by Hurricane Sandy prior to the storm. Ten of the additional 25 NOEP Outreach Coordinators were on the ground, in the counties most impact by Sandy, responding to the urgent needs of New Yorkers in the days, weeks and months following the storm.

The funding also enabled Hunger Solutions New York to provide increased communications, outreach materials, and technical assistance in the wake of the storm. NOEP Outreach Coordinators, and many community-based organizations in our network, shared this information. Hunger Solutions New York also deployed a Hurricane Sandy Resources web page for the public, featuring specific information related to nutrition assistance. This effort included:

- Outreach flyers for replacement SNAP benefits, emergency food locations, waivers for prepared food, and Disaster SNAP (DSNAP) information for Westchester and New York City.
- Training 19 NOEP Coordinators in NYC in D-SNAP outreach and pre-screening.
- Sending four emails sharing nutrition assistance information with more than 1,500 contacts statewide. Each had a nearly 30% open rate.
- Deploying “Hurricane Sandy Resources” web pages containing more than 30 specific resources, memos and flyers as well as links to key government and storm response web pages. The pages received more than 1,500 unique visitors in first week of storm, most from the New York City and Long Island regions.

There is still more to be done. We urge you to support Governor Cuomo’s continued investment in SNAP outreach and application assistance through NOEP. We hope that through explaining the depth of hunger and food insecurity across New York State, the benefits of SNAP,

and the positive impact the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) has across the state, you too will see the Governor's proposed budget for the program as a wise investment.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this issue. Please feel free to use Hunger Solutions New York as a resource during budget negotiations and other hunger related deliberations in the legislature. We look forward to working with you toward the goal of alleviating hunger for all New Yorkers.

