



MET COUNCIL

The Largest Jewish Communal Social Safety Net in America

Hello Chair Weinstein, Chair Krueger, and fellow members of the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2022 - 2023. I want to thank you for inviting us to speak today on the issue of food insecurity and emergency food funding in New York State. My name is Jessica Chait, and I am the Managing Director of Food Programs at the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty.

Met Council's Kosher Food Bank and kosher pantry network are the largest kosher emergency food operations in the country. While our emergency food network is accessible to all New Yorkers, we focus our work on kosher-and-halal-observant households that trust us to provide the highest quality food through models that emphasize client choice, dignity, and cultural competence.

In addition to our operations work, we have a food policy team that recently released a policy report on GetFoodNYC, a New York City program that delivered nearly 130 million meals to New Yorkers from March 2020 through October of 2021. Through this program, the City of New York offered multiple meal options including, kosher and halal, and collected meal-type data for the first time. In partnership with the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), we analyzed the data generated through this program and found that almost **21 percent of all meals delivered between March 2020 and September 2021 were kosher (13.71%) or halal (7.17%).**ⁱ There were **17.6 million kosher meals** and **9.2 million halal meals** distributed.ⁱⁱ

Our state is one of the most demographically diverse states in the country, and it is home to the largest Jewish and Muslim populations in America. While we celebrate this at Met Council, we also work daily to make sure that struggling New York Jewish and Muslim residents' needs are met. Through our work we know that both populations face additional burdens to food access that amplify their food insecurity. Kosher food is more expensive, kosher and halal products are available from fewer vendors, and public food sources at the local, state, and federal levels often stock limited quantities and varieties of kosher-and-halal-certified food. Moreover, many pantries don't have the knowledge or resources to be able to support requests of this kind.

Due to these factors, the results of our analysis, and the persistence of the COVID-19 economic downturn, we know the food insecure New Yorkers that we serve have been hit particularly hard by the effects of the pandemic, making their reliance on emergency food deeply urgent. Over the last two years, Met Council's food programs have grown over 250 percent. Our food bank, in partnership with our network of pantries, an average of 95 pantries a month, 20 of which are halal emergency food programs, has delivered over 30 million pounds of kosher and halal food to over 300,000 New Yorkers. Given the "k" shaped recovery we are experiencing and the vast underutilization of emergency food resources prior to the onset of COVID-19, we expect the need for emergency food in the communities we serve to remain high in the coming years.ⁱⁱⁱ

We join you today to advocate for the needs of food-insecure New Yorkers with religiously informed dietary needs. The FY 23' budget must ensure that Kosher and Halal emergency food providers are appropriately accounted for in all state programs – and that they have access to culturally appropriate food products with proper certifications and adequate infrastructure investment to expand our capacity to serve more New Yorkers.

With our considerations in mind, we respectfully submit the following budgetary requests:

- **Increased funding for New York State's Hunger Prevention and Nutritional Assistance Program (HPNAP) to \$54 million** - The Governor's proposed budget provides no increase to HPNAP funding from prior years, yet in the past five years, the per capita funding of HPNAP has fallen over 30%. Additionally, due to inflation, consumer food costs have risen steadily since May 2021, totaling to a 6.4% overall increase in November of 2021.^{iv} HPNAP funds are the backbone of emergency feeding in NYS, and increasing the FY 23' allocation to \$54 million would account for this decrease and bring HPNAP funding back in line with its previous per capita standard.
- **Increased funding for Nourish New York (Nourish NY) at \$85 million** - Through its provision of local produce, Nourish NY meets the needs of those we serve that rely on fresh produce as healthy, culturally competent, and nutritious food options that are often not subject to stringent certification requirements. Nourish NY is an innovative program that is very important to both upstate farmers and the emergency food providers who rely on their production. It must be funded adequately to meet the needs of New Yorkers struggling with hunger.
- **A new Capital Program for emergency food providers funded at \$10 million** – No pantry or food bank should have to turn down food due to limited storage capacity or equipment. Yet, often community organizations that run on tight budgets limit their capacity due to capital and infrastructure constraints. New capital investment from the state directly to small programs in need would help to expand their ability to serve more New Yorkers, fresher foods, on a regular basis. This new funding must account for the needs of smaller emergency food operators and ensure that any capital funding makes its way into the hands of all emergency food programs in need.
- **At least 20% of all emergency food funds that come to New York City must be allocated to the procurement and distribution of kosher and halal food products by organizations that have the cultural knowledge and capacity to ensure appropriate certification requirements and handling processes** – In light of our previously mentioned analysis that showed **21 percent of the nearly 130 million meals delivered by GetFoodNYC program were either kosher or halal meals** we maintain that this be a minimum allotment.^v While 20 percent is an astonishing figure, we estimate that this need is even higher due to certain restrictions within the operations of the GetFoodNYC program.^{vi} Additionally, many emergency feeding programs do not operate in a manner that meets the cultural standards of hungry New Yorkers with religiously informed diets. To ensure the best use of the requested kosher and halal product allotments it is imperative that this support go direct to organizations that have both deep cultural competency and proper inroads with the communities that rely on these resources. This data makes it clear that we must adequately fund Met Council and its partner pantries and programs to the fullest extent possible.

We want to thank this body for your continued support of emergency food programs and respectfully request your utmost consideration of our FY 23' budget requests. If you or your staff have any specific questions about our requests, please do not hesitate to contact Jessica Chait, Managing Director of Met Council Food Programs, at jchait@metcouncil.org.

Thank you,

Jessica Chait

Managing Director, Food Programs, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

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- ⁱ “MetCouncil–GettingFood.Pdf,” 11/12, accessed January 5, 2022,
<https://gettingfoodnyc.metcouncil.org/dist/pdf/MetCouncil%E2%80%93GettingFood.pdf?v=1.1>.
- ⁱⁱ “MetCouncil–GettingFood.Pdf,” 11/12.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Food-Forward-NYC.Pdf,” 36, accessed January 12, 2022,
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/Food-Forward-NYC.pdf>.
- ^{iv} “Consumer Price Index Summary - 2021 M11 Results,” accessed January 11, 2022,
<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/cpi.nr0.htm>.
- ^v “Home | MMZ,” accessed January 5, 2022, <https://gettingfoodnyc.metcouncil.org/>.
- ^{vi} “MetCouncil–GettingFood.Pdf,” 17, accessed January 5, 2022,
<https://gettingfoodnyc.metcouncil.org/dist/pdf/MetCouncil%E2%80%93GettingFood.pdf?v=1.1>.