



**National Commission on Hunger Public Hearing
Public Testimony**

May 13, 2015 ♦ 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government
411 State Street, 2nd Floor
Albany, NY 12203-1003

Commissioner: The public testimony for the afternoon, we are available between 2:00 and 4:00 today. This is for the National Commission on Hunger. We're very delighted that you're here. We have currently five people who have signed up to provide their public testimony. So the way that this will roll is that we will give you a maximum of 10 minutes to speak. You do not need to take all of that time and if you start to take that time and the 7 minutes go past, you will get a 3-minute warning because we do want to be able to have an opportunity to ask questions and have a little bit of a dialogue back and forth. Please remember that this public testimony is being recorded and it will be made available to the public on our website and for the public record. Please, make sure that your cell phones are on silent, so that we can hear every last word of what you want to say. And we'll just go, you can have this, it'll be more informal. The first person that we have on our list is Susan Zimet, the Executive Director of Hunger Action Network of New York State. So before you begin, I probably mispronounced your name but if you could say who you are and your organization or just a little bit about yourself before you begin, that would be very helpful. Please, make sure that, please, don't leave here today without letting us get your e-mail address or if you don't have an e-mail address, some way for us to get back in touch with you. Thank you Susan.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #1

Participant #1: Thank you and you actually said my name right and I'm Susan Zimet. I'm the new Executive Director of Hunger Action Network of New York State, an advocacy group for the state and I'm also the Town Supervisor of the Town of New Paltz and I bring that up because I'm going to get into that a little bit more later when I talk about what's really going on, on the ground and I don't the state or federal level has seen and I think all of those of us on a local level actually really have a better insight to an extent. So anyway, I'm really new to this issue. I became the Executive Director probably like at the beginning of January, so this is really new for me. I have never been in the hunger field. I've done a lot of work on the environment. I do a lot of work on property tax reform but hunger was just sort of never in my realm. So all of a sudden I come and I'm the new Executive Director and I start to learn about this issue and what I have to say, which most of the people who've been working in this for a long time, including a lot of people, you and the people who are in the field behind me, you all know how staggering hunger is in the United States. You guys know it firsthand and personally and the people who are the providers know it firsthand and personally but the rest of us, who are not suffering from hunger have no clue of the devastation of hunger in this country and when I look at the statistics of like 50% of our kids, you know, are going hungry, I then feel like they live in a third world country. I've already heard from a woman this morning from, you know, Egypt saying how Egypt actually has better programs or helps people more than we do. And I really do believe that if the everyday American public understood how many people are starving in this country, that people would really be in an uproar and I just don't see how we can, you know, consider ourselves like the greatest country and one of the wealthiest countries and have this kind of hunger. Of course, you know, again, you know, we all know and I'm not going to go through statistics because you've had much smarter people than me talk this morning but seniors, children, disabled, college students, veterans.

I've done a lot of work on veterans as a county legislator, which I also was for a number of years and when I was down at the FRAC Conference and I learned that how many of our veterans are on Food Stamps, the fact that they're actual putting food pantries on military bases, I don't understand how we can stand here and hold our head high. We're asking these people to go overseas, fight for our freedom, they're leaving their families back here on Food Stamps and we can hold up our high and wave the American Flag and say, "This is America." I mean, honestly, of a government, I know this is going to sound really rough but I'm sorry, I feel like our veterans and our military people go live alone and they're fighting and putting their life on the line for the 1% because the rest of the people they're fighting for are just like them. They can't put food on the table and I just can even not believe that this is happening. Something's really wrong. The demand, you know, for emergency food is just growing and growing and growing and we talk about the recession being behind us. It is not behind us and I will get into that when I get to the local government. What we're finding is that, you know, basically, religious organizations are actually, okay, I'm sorry, this



is, in Ulster County we have a religious organization, I'm not going to mention their name but they're a very big religious organization. They did a survey in Ulster County that they sent out to all of the food pantries and soup kitchens to say, "After you get your HPNAP money, how much do you still need to be able to keep your shelves with food and provide for the people you provide 'til the end of the year?" And they all wrote back, all the money that they needed because the money that they're getting will go six, seven months and this organization's going to write a check to every food pantry and soup kitchen in Ulster County. Well, we're lucky in Ulster County but what about all the other 61 counties and then, you know, in New York that don't have a religious organization who has the wealth to be able to reach into their pocket and hand out.

On my Board I have a Reverend and when she learned I was speaking this morning, she texted me and said, "Please, talk about when they talk about private/public partnership," which I know you've brought up, "That what's going on right now is that the government is looking at the religious organizations to pick up, you know, to basically be there for taking care of the people and they can't do it. They don't have the wherewithal. Most of the churches and synagogues and whatever are also just trying to keep their doors open and, you know, do religious work with their people and we're just looking at them more and more and more and the [inaudible] more and more to take care of what's a government function and it's really not fair. They're there to help. They have the soup, you know, the kitchens and whatever but to expect them to step up to the plate to do what the government is responsible to do, which is to take care of our people, it's just not right." And she asked me to please say it, so on behalf of Reverend Deb, I actually said it and she said, "Too much reliance on the private sector and faith sector to pick up responsibility of government to take care of the needy," and she said, "They need living wages and jobs." Now questions asked earlier, you had asked about, one of you had asked about personal responsibility at the very beginning to the first person and when I was down at the FRAC Conference, it was the first conference, I'm sure you're all familiar with FRAC and I had just come on and I was, you know, invited to go there and it was really an amazing, amazing conference and I just learned so much.

And some of the things that I learned while I was down there, there was a guest speaker, she was a nun who does this thing called A Nun on the Bus. And she talked about going around and she talked about a particular person that she met and the guy said to her, "My wife has diabetes." He said, "The money that I get from SNAP, I can't buy good food for her to be able to take care of her diabetes, so I either have to buy good food for her and we run out of food by the end of the month or I have to buy food that's going to only make her diabetes worse. My hands are tied. What can I do?" And, you know, this is a story that you hear over and over and over again. People that are on SNAP all of a sudden now you have all these kids on diabetes. We talk about obesity. Well, what I've learned recently is that you think of skinny kids who are starving but actually, no, we have very, very heavy kids now who are suffering from obesity because of malnutrition and I don't think it's just sugar. I've

been doing a lot of research on gluten because of my own health issue and I think there's other reasons why we have obesity in the country but what's happening is we have all these obese kids but they're on Food Stamps and so we have a really, you know, it's just a really crazy situation. Going back onto a local level, oh, just before I get off of FRAC, what I learned at the FRAC Conference, again, as somebody totally new, just listening to everybody and every once in a while getting up and making a statement but what I learned at the FRAC Conference is everybody who's a provider, who works in the soup kitchens, who works in the food pantries, who work on the food banks, they all believe SNAP is perfect. Not to say there's, maybe it does need to be tinkered a little, there are smarter people than me that can talk to you about this but what they said over and over and over again is that it's the best run government program that the government provides with very little fraud and very little waste and they just all talked about how great SNAP was and they talked about not doing the block grant, that that could be the worst thing that could ever, ever happen. So those were two things that I learned at, you know, at the FRAC Conference. Now just going back and I'll wrap up with this, as I said, I'm the Supervisor of the Town of New Paltz and what I'm seeing on a local level is basically, our social services costs have risen dramatically every single solitary year, even this past year. So we talk about the recession being over. It's not over. It's not over on a local level and it's not over for the everyday people on the street. It might be over for the 1%, you know, but it's not over for the people on the street and what we're seeing, our social services [inaudible] have gone up exponentially, foreclosures are going up like crazy, and what you see and what I'm seeing, okay, when I was down at FRAC, again, we had a member of the USDA and the guy from the USDA said that the Obama Administration is trying to take the lower class and raise them to the middle class and I said, "That's wonderful but what you guys are not seeing but I'm seeing is the middle class is falling down to the lower class. You just haven't seen it yet because the middle class that's now the lower class, you take somebody who's used to like never having to ask for anything and now get them to figure out what they're going to do when they have to try to figure out how they're going to manage their money and what they're going to do." We haven't even gotten to that point of that rolling up to the state and the federal government and the guy from the USDA actually said, he goes, "Susan," he goes, "You're absolutely right." He goes, "People that used to give money to the food pantries are now on the lines of the food pantries and we're seeing that." So it's not just the poor people, you know, that need for us to help them, you know, lift them out of poverty and we do and we need to do that with like a minimum wage. We need to do that with living wage jobs. We need to do it with a lot of different issues but there's a whole middle class that is falling into the lower class that we haven't even begun to address. So I just will wrap up with saying I appreciate you guys doing what you're doing and I just, again, I'm like really staggered by this issue and I can't believe what I'm learning and what I'm seeing and quite frankly, it's pretty overwhelming and I guess the one last thing I'll just, you know, we talk about the universal breakfast and all that, which I just completely support. Again, in New Paltz, which is somewhat considered an affluent community, I recently found out that 20% of our kids are on free and reduced meals, which you would never expect [in] a community like New



Paltz but above and beyond that, I constantly hear about the teachers who have money in their pocket and snacks in their classroom because they see all these kids that are coming to school, who are not fed and who are hungry and who can't learn and so the teachers and the guidance counselors are the ones who are stepping up to the plate in schools to make sure our kids don't go hungry. So this is a big issue. It's a deep issue and I wish you luck solving this issue. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Did you have any questions?

Commissioner: No, I do not. Thanks.

Commissioner: I'm just curious, yeah, I have one question. Over what period of time would you say in New Paltz you've noticed the sort of migration downward of the middle class to the lower class?

Participant #1: Well, it's been the past four years that I've come back to the county. I was a Supervisor back in '96 to 2000. Then I was a county legislator for 8 years and then the town was in a really bad fiscal situation and I was begged to come back by Democrats and Republicans, [laughter] which is, you know, really usually unique. So I went back in 2012. So it's been over this 2012 to 2015 period that I've been noticing, you know, more and more and more foreclosures than ever before and, and even there because I was in the legislature for 8 years and in the legislature we actually have to in accounting, we have to put the houses up for sale. We do the tax collections and stuff and I've seen it grown even from then. So we've got more foreclosures in these past four years. I think since the housing crisis really. I think the housing crisis is probably when you could, you could probably put the housing crisis as the middle class who had all of their money in their houses, you know. When all of a sudden that was just wiped off the table, their retirement and everything was wiped off the table and then a lot of these people were older, 50 and 60 years old and also may be let go from their jobs and so now you have people who, A, don't have the job that they always had and all of a sudden they don't have the income in their house that they always had and all of a sudden at 50, 60 years old, it's like, "Holy mackerel, what do we do," and there's more people out there than you know. It's just because we talk about pride of kids not wanting to eat the school program, try to think of the pride of a 65-year-old person who's always, you know, supported his family and all of a sudden now can't even like, you know, pay the mortgage.

Commissioner: Right, well, if your observation's right, that certainly doesn't bode well for our national and state economy.

Participant #1: And I agree with you wholeheartedly and that's why I think it's really important for me to be speaking this because that's my fear is that we sit here and we talk about the recession, the recession and everything's getting better and things are getting



better and I'm telling you they are not getting better and I don't care what they say, they're not getting better. Everybody who's on a local level will say the same thing that I say, we see what we see, it just hasn't started to emanate up. It hasn't been reported and it's yet to first come and so.

Commissioner: Well, thank you.

Participant #1: You're welcome.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony, appreciate it.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #2

Commissioner: Next on our list is Triada Stampas from the Food Bank for New York City.

Participant #2: Good afternoon, wow, this is for somebody much taller than I am. [laughter] My name's Triada Stampas. I'm Vice President for Research and Public Affairs at Food Bank for New York City. Food Bank for New York City is one of the country's largest food banks and we have a longstanding and very strong partnership with our Department of Social Services, the New York City Human Resources Administration, had enjoyed a very productive relationship with Commissioner Doar when he was Commissioner there, continued to do a lot of work in tight and close partnership with HRA. Last year our food bank distributed food for more than 63 million meals to a network of approximately 1,000 food pantries, soup kitchens, community-based organizations and schools, relied upon by 1.5 million New York City residents. We also worked to connect New Yorkers to more sustainable income supports, like SNAP and the Earned Income Tax Credit and helped them get the most nutritional value out of low budgets by providing both nutrition and financial education. I'm going to use my allotted minutes to address just a few questions and issues that have come up over the course of the day's testimony and I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today and to hear the very rich discussion over the course of the entire day and your very good questions of all of the witnesses who spoke here and who were invited to speak. The biggest standout issue as I was listening was the issue of SNAP benefit adequacy. It was addressed to some extent by Angela Rachidi earlier and was alluded to in some of the earlier testimony and we recommend that the real issue of SNAP benefit adequacy be acknowledged and addressed by this Commission. If you were considering what to do about SNAP, starting with do the benefits get to where people need them to be, should be your starting question. The flood and outdated calculations that Jan Popen dieck referenced about, you know, about poverty leave SNAP, which is our country's first line of defense against hunger, at benefit levels that are woefully inadequate and we heard Nermein's real life example earlier today. In New York state average SNAP benefits purchase approximately 49 meals per person. That is only slightly more than half the food a person needs in a given month.

In New York City, because of higher food costs, benefits get to approximately 45 meals a person. Again, only about half of the food that a person needs in a given month. We, therefore, caution against split issuance of SNAP benefits of biweekly issuance or however you would slice and dice because it could very well deprive recipients of opportunities to meaningfully plan and achieve savings through bulk purchasing. One of the big criticisms we hear about people who attempt the SNAP challenge is that they're only working with one week's budget at a time and they therefore can't do things like buy things in bulk where they can achieve real savings. That applies in real life, too. If you start to chop up benefits, the real savings that people can achieve by buying in bulk are lost. You're actually risking further reducing the already limited choices that people on SNAP are faced with. It



should also, it should come as no surprise, given how, given the amount of food that SNAP benefits can actually purchase, that substantial numbers of SNAP recipients also rely on emergency food. In 2012 42% of all SNAP recipients in New York City were also turning to food pantries and soup kitchens. That is a shockingly high percentage. While SNAP is supposed to be supplemental, what it was supposed to be supplementing was a person's income, not the food that they were getting from food pantries and soup kitchens but the reality is that more than half of all people on food pantry and soup kitchen lines in New York City also are receiving SNAP and the high cost of living in a city like New York and competing cost of living like housing and health care and transportation and utilities cut into the theoretical food budget that the SNAP calculations assume are available to the household.

Additional evidence of resource insufficiency in New York City is that the average food pantry visitor visits 3.4 times a month. It may not be the same food pantry. A lot of food pantries limit a household to one visit per month and then that results in people seeking out additional food pantries to go to and the average soup kitchen visitor makes 13.3 visits a month. It should also come as little surprise, to me at least, hopefully to you, that when SNAP benefits were cut in November 2013 demand immediately rose and has remained high at food pantries and soup kitchens. In New York City alone these cuts accounted for a loss of 56 million meals within the first 10 months of that cut. So while TFAP is an existing government program and I understand it is within your charge to think about ways to best leverage existing government programs, we urge this Commission to recognize that emergency food is not a substitute for a resource like SNAP. In New York City SNAP provides more meals in 2 months than my food bank, again, one of the largest in the nation, distributes in a year. If in thinking about public/private partnerships, you're considering whether the charitable sector can take on more of this lift, the answer is no. The question of personal responsibility came up early in the day. I do want to share that more than half of emergency food program participants get most of their fruits and vegetables from food pantries and soup kitchens. And nearly half say they get most of their protein from food pantries and soup kitchens. They are exhibiting the rational behavior when benefits are inadequate to seek out the most expensive and most perishable foods where they can access it for free. Unfortunately, also the most nutrient-dense foods, so that they can use their benefits on the shelf-stable products that will keep. This is what our members tells us happen all the time. I think you would agree that given the choices out there, that's probably a smart way to behave but a growing body of research shows that when people have the funds, the quality of food that they're able to buy for themselves immediately improves.

And the Chicago Fed did an amazing study that found that among households that received the Earned Income Tax Credit, their food spending increased in the months that they received their EITC but increased most dramatically in the food categories of protein and produce, again, the expensive, perishable, most nutrient-dense food categories out there,



the stuff they can least afford at other times of the year. So we see this as further evidence of the need for adequate SNAP benefits in order for recipients to actually be able to afford the nutrition that they need and we also recommend that the Commission consider expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and other tax credits, like the Child Tax Credit, as a core part of addressing food insecurity and food insecurity broadly. We do not agree that very low food security should be the exclusive focus. As you've heard here today, very low food security is often a transitional state and that food security more broadly represents people at different points of the spectrum of need. And then, and last, [inaudible] research has also found connections between household financial management skills and household food security because low income families subsist on such low margins, it actually requires a fair amount of financial savvy to get sufficient food out of limited dollars.

My organization has piloted for the past year a financial counseling program for parents of school-aged children. We screen people for food insecurity using the same questions that the USDA asks and we found that more than half of the parents in our program reported low food security in the 30 days prior to their first counseling session and 21% reported very low food security and 21% is among the highest rates of food insecurity you see in populations anywhere and four times the rate of our city or our state as a whole. So this is a highly needy population seeking help and almost every success story out of this program has been a SNAP success story. So for those who are not seeking SNAP, who are not receiving SNAP, for whatever reason and lack of information and lack of awareness, it was oftentimes the case and there are also large numbers of mixed eligibility households, where children are eligible but parents are not because of immigration status and the revelation that food benefits are available for their children is something they learn through these financial counseling sessions. For those households getting the benefit has provided them with the financial breathing room that they never previously had and so it actually helps them catch up on bills and budget and plan for the future. So we do urge a holistic focus that recognizes the interconnectedness of different benefits. The competing costs of living really affecting food security status and the ability of households to purchase food. I mean, real inadequate, inadequacy of SNAP going fundamentally to the way that benefits are calculated as being one of the core issues for why hunger persists in our city, our state, and our country. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. She has some questions or comments.

Commissioner: I do. Triada, thank you. You and your organization were a pleasure to work with, as well.

Participant #2: Thank you.



Commissioner: So I appreciate your kind words. I am curious about the bulk purchasing question. Do you have data on the extent to which SNAP recipients do bulk purchasing? Is there any data on that?

Participant #2: We don't have large scale data. We have heard anecdotally there are food pantry participants who will group together and take shopping trips together, particularly when a supermarket is not nearby, so that they can actually make their bigger purchases all at a time but also there are some staples that are really hard to afford unless you have some amount of money right upfront.

Commissioner: Right, and that's what I was wondering about, was do you have USDA or has anyone ever told you that because they monitor the purchasing or they have those resources, the power to investigate purchasing patterns of SNAP recipients, that they knew or that they've never told you that, they never tell us what that data is. It would be interesting to know.

Participant #2: It would be and—

Commissioner: Because if people are buying large quantities of staples at the beginning of the month, that would be a very effective way to say that this kind of change would be a mistake.

Participant #2: Yeah, and we do hear from, again, from participants in food pantries and soup kitchens or from people who have come to us for SNAP benefits, the, you know, we do hear from them about things like buying the bigger bag of rice that they can afford when they have, you know, the money and things like that but again, a big data source, none that I'm aware of.

Unidentified: No database.

Commissioner: And then I'm just curious about, do you ever hear anything about milk?

Participant #2: More specific, please?

Commissioner: Well, milk is a product that has a limited shelf time.

Participant #2: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: So if you buy, if you have money and you buy milk at the beginning of the month, by the end of the month, if you don't have any money—



Participant #2: Right.

Commissioner: —you’re not able to buy milk and I was just curious, has that issue come up either in the food bank context or in the SNAP context?

Participant #2: In the food bank context we stock shelf stable milk. So the irradiated milk in cartons that keeps for an exceptionally long time, you know, more so than—

Commissioner: So you don’t have the regular milk or—

Participant #2: Typically not because of the—

Commissioner: You would know.

Participant #2: No, I mean, we do distribute dairy products like yogurt but because there is a shelf, a more shelf stable option for milk, we opt especially when it comes to our own wholesale purchasing to use our purchasing dollars towards the things that more of our food pantries and soup kitchens can supply and not every food pantry, we’re still not at a point where every food pantry in New York City has adequate refrigeration. Even those who have gotten refrigerators in years past, wear and tear, the refrigerator breaks and the budget doesn’t exist to replace it. These are shoestring operations typically, so.

Commissioner: Right, so just so I’m clear, the food bank programs in New York City that I’m familiar with do not have that, you know, that regular 1-week milk that people buy because of this issue, of shelf space, so—

Participant #2: Typically not, unless a donation were to come in.

Commissioner: —right, so if SNAP recipients were finding that they, because you said, “Produce”?

Participant #2: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: They didn’t have enough money to purchase milk at the end of the month, they, going to you guys and getting the milk from you, you wouldn’t know because you don’t have that kind of milk. That’s all I wanted. It’s okay. I just wanted to get, thank you.

Participant #2: You’re welcome.

Commissioner: Rushad a question.



Commissioner: Yeah, I'm glad you brought up the dual-issuance matter, the two times a month. I mean, I hadn't thought of the bulk purchase issue but, you know, having run the Food Stamp Program in New York, there are, we're open-minded to it if it'd really help but I'm thinking that's going to be balanced against the fact that it requires system changes in the issuance systems. It also requires more administrative costs for dual-issuance every month and I guess what I think I'd like to hear more from anyone, yourself included as you think through is, do we think, you know, do we think that it would help enough to offset those increased costs?

Commissioner: And she doesn't think so.

Commissioner: Yeah.

Participant #2: We don't think so—

Commissioner: I was sort of throwing that out to the room, too, as—

[Overlapping conversation and laughter.]

Commissioner: Because we've had some differences of opinion this morning, others that were in favor, so I'd sort of like to hear collectively from what people might think.

Commissioner: I have some questions about the other services that you provide at the food bank.

Participant #2: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: You talk about maybe taking a holistic approach. What other types of services are you offering? Are you offering SNAP outreach and access to other public assistance programs, job search, mental health assistance, those kinds of things, referrals?

Participant #2: Yes, we actually offer a very wide range of benefit referrals. We run one of the biggest SNAP outreach operations in the country because we work in the biggest city in the country and we're a citywide organization. So that scale is where we operate. We offer health care navigation, workforce development referrals, so to other providers that are providing them that are incentivized referrals from food pantries and soup kitchens to, for unemployed clients to get the services directly that they need. And we provide nutrition education. We have an enormous school-based SNAP Ed Program called Cook Shop that reaches about 45,000 people a year, mainly elementary school aged children and their



parents and as I mentioned before, a financial counseling program and one of the country's biggest VITA operations. This year we reached, we prepare taxes for 85,000 New York City residents. It was more than ever before and were able to secure \$141 million dollars in refunds and credits in New York City and we screen, we do, do a quick screening for SNAP on intake and we also do a food insecurity screening on intake, so that we can do things like immediate pantry referrals for those who present with very low food security and to prioritize our SNAP outreach follow up calls for those who might be income eligible for SNAP. So we are, we will be, there's sort of forthcoming data that we're going to publish about the food security status of our VITA population, as well.

Commissioner: That sounds good and where does the funding come from, not only for your food, I know that you're participating in some of those federal programs? What kinds of donations do you receive and how do you support all of these other types of activities that you're providing?

Participant #2: It is a mix. The government funding accounts for about half of our operating budget and the rest is private, whether foundation or individuals and it is the intense and very hard work of our development department to chase down every dollar for the work that we do and to be able to continue to do it at the scale that we need to be doing it in a city like New York City. So, yeah, it's federal, state, and local. New York City is one of the few cities in the country that has its own emergency food assistance program. It's something that has been around since the early 1980s and is a model for other cities. New York state with its Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, again, was a model program created in the early 1980s that has helped spark a lot of advocacy around the country and other states for development of emergency food, local and state emergency food assistance programs.

Commissioner: One more comment/question for you, the VITA work is very impressive, working with IRS and their volunteer and tax assistance and the numbers are impressive and that's great and we're spoiled in this state because we have the largest state EITC, the city has its own EITC and our child, the BENE credit is refundable, which is unlike almost any other state, so it does more than offset liability. It actually returns money. I'm curious when you say that you would urge expansion of the EITC, do you have anything specific that you've been talking about or thinking about?

Participant #2: You know, the Obama Administration has proposed that EITC eligibility expand for older Americans beyond the current eligibility age and that EITC for tax filers without dependents be increased to act as more of a work incentive. We are actually part of a demonstration project that's being evaluated as we speak, called Paycheck Plus, to supplement the Earned Income Tax Credits of tax filers without dependents to monitor long-term workforce participation and engagement.



Commissioner: Thank you.

Participant #2: You're welcome.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Participant #2: You're welcome.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Participant #2: Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #3

Commissioner: Next up we have David DeVaughn from City Harvest. David, can I ask you a favor, if you can unscrew the middle part and lower the microphone a little bit because all I can—

Commissioner: He might need to leave it up—

Commissioner: Maybe when you leave. You, I can see. [Laughter] The rest of the other two people, all I could see is the microphone, so when you leave, could you lower it down for them?

Participant #3: I will, yes, I don't perform often, so it may take me a couple takes. [Laughter] All right, thank you. Good afternoon Chairpersons Chilton and Doar and then Commissioner Sykes. Thank you for having me this afternoon. A lot of the things that I was going to speak to have been covered, so I will not repeat some things that have been said but I just want to talk a little bit about City Harvest, what we're seeing around hunger in the city and what we see as some important steps to take around Child Nutrition Reauthorization and protecting the SNAP Program. So City Harvest is the world's first and New York City's only food rescue organization. We've been in operation for more than 32 years and rescue food from all segments of the food industry that would otherwise go to waste and distribute it to soup kitchens and food pantries, about 500 programs in the city. We're feeding the hungry New Yorkers through food that's coming from restaurants, farmers markets, grocery stores, Hunts Point and corporations and businesses within the five boroughs and this year we'll rescue about 50 million pounds of food that will go to that network of emergency food providers, 75% of that being nutrient dense. So as we are, this food rescue organization we are really trying to ensure that the food that is going to New Yorkers in need is the right type of food, so that's why we're trying to get, when we continue to work towards that 75% nutrient dense, I think now we're at just over 50% produce that's being distributed.

A lot of people will say when I go to a food pantry, it's very difficult to get produce and that's something that we really focus on. So we also take a long-term approach to fighting hunger by partnering with residents, local organizations, and businesses with our Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative and this increases the ability, the availability of affordable fruits and vegetables in low income communities and provides nutrition education and other resources that I'm happy to talk about to encourage wholesome meal choices. So we've all heard today about 1.4 million New Yorkers struggle with food insecurity, nearly one in four children, so the thing that really comes up is that people are not thinking about what can I have to eat tonight or this afternoon or for breakfast but will I eat and so one thing that we did that I'm really excited about, I'm relatively new to the organization but we worked with a Women's Center for Education and Career Advancement on the 2014 self-sufficiency



standard report. And so this, the self-sufficiency standard measures the household income necessary to meet very basic needs in New York City without any public or private support. And the standard is a more nuance than what we think is an accurate measure than the federal poverty level for understanding income and equality because it takes into account where a family lives, how many people are in the household, and the number of, and the ages of the children. So based on this report, it found that 42%, you know, nearly half of New York City households, 2.7 million men, women, and children lack the income needed to cover basic necessities like food, shelter, clothing, transportation, and health care. So New York City has an income inadequacy rate that is higher than that of Mississippi, which consistently has the highest, one of the highest poverty levels in the country.

This gap or the disconnect between how a family needs to, how much a family needs to meet their basic needs and where public assistance starts is growing and on average, the amount of income that a family needs to meet their basic needs grew by 45% since 2000, which is the first time the Women's Center helped with this study. So households are juggling these costs like housing and childcare but food is an elastic cost and an elastic expense, I mean, so as housing, childcare, other things go up, the budget for food has, we are seeing is going down. So families are skimping on meals. They're skipping meals and looking at this study, you can see that food costs have increased about 59% since the first time they were doing, they did this study in 2000 in New York City while all the median earning have increased about 17%. There's a big, there's a gap there, so another thing that this study looks at is the, how people are working in the households that, with the different household compositions and 83% of the households studied had one or more workers, so that are below self-sufficiency. Similarly, many residents are forced to turn to soup kitchens and food pantries who are working. So it's not maybe the narrative that we've all heard of who's in those lines.

So just some quick figures of the, what we're seeing with our network of soup kitchens and pantries. We've seen, I know Triada said 42, we've seen around a 43% increase since 2008 of people coming to the soup kitchens and pantries and this varies based on the borough. So in the Bronx we've seen about a 76% increase, Staten Island 53%, and Brooklyn 40%, and Queens about 40%, as well and so while we're helping to meet these immediate needs across the city, we're also recognizing and I mentioned our Healthy Neighborhoods Program, that we need to work at a, I think a, on a little bit more specific level in certain communities and so we're working in the North Shore, Staten Island, the south Bronx, northwest Queens, Bed-Stuy Brooklyn, and then Washington Heights in Inwood where we have additional programming like nutrition education classes, working with bodegas and supermarkets on revamping produce sections and different things like that. So let me get to the Child Nutrition Reauthorization. I'm sure you all are aware that the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act, the Child Nutrition Act expires September 30 of this year and I know in the testimony I've heard in the Senate and the House so far, people have been touting this figure as a warning sign of the first time in our country more than half the students



attending public schools qualify for a free or reduced price lunch. This figure is 75% in New York City and in New York state alone 1.8 million children in New York state alone more, over 1.8 million children eat school lunch every day and nearly half those meals are eaten in New York City schools.

So these meals serve as a stop gap measure, preventing millions of children from going hungry by providing nutritious meals and during this reauthorization, I think we need to make sure to work on protecting these programs from those aiming to potentially soften the nutrition standards or limit access to children in need. Another one thing we're doing in the city is leading the NYC for CNR or the New York City Alliance for Child Nutrition Reauthorization, where it's a diverse coalition of stakeholders working on making sure we have a strong reauthorization this year and we're also working on a public awareness campaign just out of City Harvest called Feed Our Kids. So with SNAP, I'm sure you also saw that the recent House and Senate Conference Committee Joint Budget Resolution and subsequent budget amounts passed along to the Agricultural Appropriations Committee assumed significant cuts to these program. These programs include SNAP, of course, and while the budget amounts did not suggest specific policy areas or programs to cut, we know that SNAP is on the chopping block and as a result of the cuts, as we heard in November 2013, nearly 2 million New Yorkers saw a cut in their monthly benefits by an average of \$30.00 to \$50.00 per household. So further reducing these resources for individuals and families struggling is just bad policy and I think it also hurts small businesses. Some of, I know, we've talked to in the south Bronx bodega owners who say 60% of their revenue is from EBT, so that would have a big effect. So I ask that the Commission prioritize programs and funding to ensure that New Yorkers have the resources to put food on their tables and when that is not enough that soup kitchens and food pantries have the food they need to feed the growing numbers of families and children and elderly that are forced to turn to them and again, thank you for your attention to these urgent matters and for all the work that you're doing to improve the lives of Americans, New York Staters and New Yorkers in need.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Do you have some comments or questions?

Commissioner: I have a question but I defer to you.

Commissioner: I have one, too.

Commissioner: Go ahead.

Commissioner: David, thank you very much. I enjoyed your testimony. This is, I'm going to ask a statistical question, so and I have problems with statistics but I think



you said that 75% of children in New York City qualify for free or reduced lunch, is that what you said?

Participant #3: Yes.

Commissioner: Does that include the children who qualify because they go to a district, school district that is in a, that breaks the barrier on poverty, in other words, they themselves may not qualify based on their own income, they would qualify because they go to a school where a high percentage of kids are in poverty? Is that right? Have I got that right?

Participant #3: That's not my understanding of that stat but I'm sure there are people in the room that can [laughter] specify, especially Jan, I know could.

Commissioner: She has—

Jan: I think it's the—

Commissioner: He'll repeat it. You can repeat what she says into the microphone.

Participant #3: Okay.

Jan: That figure is from before the CEP was implemented and I don't even think that it's influenced by the Provision 2, I think that's the number who are income eligible—

Commissioner: Thank you.

Jan: —or are in foster care.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: I'm sorry to ask you to repeat that but could you please repeat that?

Participant #3: Yes, Jan stated that the 75% figure is not taking into account Provision 2 or the Community Eligibility Provision or Program but is actually based on income forms and those who are in foster care.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: That's the only question I had.

Commissioner: All right, my question is just, it's an interesting observation. In past lives I did a lot of work on the self-sufficiency study with [inaudible] and I mean, EJ alluded this morning to the notion, I don't know whether he did clumsily but I think what I was taking from his comments were that back in '69 when Nixon had embarked on the Family Independence Program, which is a guaranteed annual income, its intention at that point in time with the gestures over the years was to actually provide a guaranteed income and not have all these transfer kind of programs and the logical conclusion of the self-sufficiency study since you described it, [inaudible] that it's what it would take a family to live on without any federal intervention—

Participant #3: Yes.

Commissioner: —would be basically to cash out all these programs and use the money and give it to families and one time at the well and I just, you know, that's obviously something well beyond our cannon but that's really what the self-sufficiency, so I just wonder what you think about that, in general terms. [laughter]

Participant #3: Well, I think and I can provide the Commission with a link to the most recent New York City report because the Executive Summary has a list of policy recommendations but yeah, that's, I think that ultimately getting families the income that they need to meet all their basic needs is what the self-sufficiency standard is getting at but looking at it specifically, there are recommendations around EITC. There are recommendations around the minimum wage. There are recommendations around childcare credits and different things like that but I think Joel and other people have spoken to the fact that we believe that people who are low income, who are doing many things to be able to juggle expenses across the board, if with higher incomes would be able to meet their needs and so in the meantime strengthening these programs before we get to that point is something that we would like to see.

Commissioner: Thanks.

Commissioner: Thank you very much David. We appreciate it.

Commissioner: Thank you.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #4

Commissioner: Okay, next on our list is Reverend Philip Grigsby.

Participant #3: He'll need this up still.

Commissioner: Okay.

Participant #3: How many copies would you like?

Commissioner: Three, one for each of us and then please, submit a digital version to the website or somehow through an e-mail to Mary Council.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Participant #4: Thank you members of the Commission. It's good to see an old friend, Rus, again, from our prior life and appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this afternoon.

Commissioner: Can you introduce yourself again into the microphone?

Participant #4: Yes, I'm Reverend Philip Grigsby. I'm the Executive Director of the Schenectady Inner City Ministry, affectionately known as SICM and minister in the United Church of Christ. SICM is a faith-based group of congregations that seeks to express the social concern of our member congregations and we succeed because we're also a public/private partnership, so we can talk about that, as well, if you'd like. I've seen from those who testified, you've heard much from the state or national perspective.

I want to share with you from a local or more grass roots perspective. However, this local work indicates and supports various policy perspectives. When I went to seminary they said I would probably be a resident grass root and that's where it comes from. Schenectady is nearby, a little west and north of here. Rus knows it well. We were once known as the city that lights and hauls the world because Thomas Edison got General Electric going and the American Locomotive Company, ALCO, once produced the largest steam engines in the world. ALCO is long gone and GE moved most of its work elsewhere. We're glad for that which remains but much of it is gone. Everything that GE produced began in Schenectady but then went somewhere else. Schenectady experiences many of the dramatic demographic shifts in the Great Northeast, loss of economic base, loss of manufacturing, in and out migrations, et cetera. We are mostly in a large metro area with pockets of intense poverty. The most recent American Community Survey showed over half, 50.6% of our children living in child poverty. Unfortunately, we rank 13th from the bottom in the nation and that's not a race that anyone wants to win. I knew that Rex Smith was here earlier from the Time Genie and the Time Genie indicated that this whole area is at the bottom in terms



of the 100 metro areas, in terms of opportunities for African-American youth and so, although, we're smaller urban areas, we have many challenges of intense poverty.

Our responses to hunger and food insecurity have been ones that address these issues. We have a large food pantry, a summer meals program, and a new pilot CSA Program. We previously had a fourth that was referred to earlier. Some years ago we were one of the first sites for the New York State Nutrition Outreach and Education Program, which seeks to expand participation in federal food programs. New York was one of the first states to have such an effort, so it's very commendable. Locally, we led several campaigns to restore lunch in the schools, believe it or not, years ago we did not have lunch in the schools. Add school breakfast, which was an easier sell and significantly expand SNAP, then, of course, Food Stamps and we transitioned that to Catholic Charities because that's what we do from time to time, even with a good program but that program is still available to us at the pantry. That program, of course, has now expanded statewide, and as you heard, a model for other places.

Due to a variety of factors, our food pantry is a major one in our county, providing about $\frac{3}{4}$ of all the temporary, emergency food that's provided. We've moved into an old A&P Store around the time of the economic downturn in 2008 due to exploding demand. Like others, we help people who have too much month at the end of the money. What's different about our pantry is that we have several hundred volunteers regularly involved, in addition to a core staff. We are one of the first to be able to give out fresh produce regularly because of our scale and accommodations we have something called Mass Distribution, terrible name but that's the term, where the Regional Food Bank, a strong partner, sends a tractor trailer load of food, which we give out at the end of the month. The need is so great we have people start to line up at 5:00 in the morning. It reminds me of the earlier cheese block distribution days, where you had people lined up and also reminded in the death of the late Mario Cuomo of that speech about two cities. We really do have two cities in upstate New York. The major shift we were going from is from being an emergency food provider to really a supplemental food provider. With state support through HPNAP, which you've heard about, we could expand. People also can come back once a week for produce, as well as baby items, interested in milk, local phenomena. We have [inaudible]. We give out milk cards. It's now 1% milk instead of whole milk, a little better for you.

We give out the equivalent of 600,000 meals over a year's period. Still we provide only about twelve meals for a family each month, while it's important, our food pantry and others are not a solution to hunger. And it's profiled well in *A Place at the Table*, which you know well, our pantry and others become busier and busier as federal food programs were less available. We bought a couple copies of the film and used them locally for trying to educate about advocacy. We experienced a real bump when SNAP was cut back to previous levels. The Governor provided supplemental assistance but there was no way it could make up for the broad loss of purchasing power. And so the main policy issues from our pantry



show that SNAP is critically important. It's working. It should be expanded and not reduced.

The Thrifty Food Plan is based, is based upon is just too thrifty. How's that for a campaign slogan? The Thrifty Food Plan is too thrifty. With many others, we support [inaudible] food plans that are more generous. In addition, New York State's HPNAP Program has been a model for others. It supports not only local food pantries but also food banks and other hunger fighting efforts since the contracts are 5 years in length, it provides a stability for programs such as ours. Summer meals was an outgrowth of nutrition outreach. It was also the summer when demand was higher at the pantry because kids were home and so that's why we started doing summer meals. We now provide about 2,000 lunches a day. Two years ago we were the first in the upstate to start a mobile program. This year with foundation [inaudible] support we have two custom vehicles who will go around and provide mobile meals and get to pockets of places where people are. Unfortunately, we're the only summer meals sponsor in our county. Even though we are one of the smallest geographic counties in our state, there used to be several more sponsors.

When we first started, there were startup grants. No longer. There were also equipment grants. No longer. As a reminder really that the threshold for an open site was once 33%. Now it is 50%. The reimbursement for administrative costs covers about $\frac{1}{3}$. Many can't afford to be sponsors. We can do it because we have had support to grow the program to a size where it theoretically breaks even but let's be real. We do this for love, not for money. And similarly, we're lucky if we provide for 25% of the kids who qualify in the summer. We found, like others, that had any activities and certainly partnering with others expands participation. We try to have volunteer teams as much as possible and they provide that sense of hospitality, as well as keeping costs down. There are various ways to grow the program but still, more needs to be done. The main policy issues are the support Senator Gillibrand's bill to make changes to the program that'll provide for expansion and hopefully, gain more sponsors. Changing the threshold of open sites to 40% as proposed would help in some areas. Just outside our city, of course, in the rural areas, we are regularly called upon to provide lunches for a site in a park just across the river but an illegal entity and the closest school has 43% eligibility. I tell them the regulation and also tell them they need to import more poor people. No, I really don't. We would like, also, to expand to afterschool meals after the summer, you know. The bill proposes to make this seamless, in our case, to transition requires going to another state agency with different regulations, different forms, less reimbursement. It's doable for us but it's obviously a barrier for participants. The other corollary lesson is as referred to, the Community Eligibility Provision, our Superintendent opted for this right away. It's a great success. It feeds kids. It cuts down on truancy. Please, support it, keep it going. Third, we are piloting a CSA Program, Community Support Agriculture subsidy program. Starting this year we are partnering with a local farmer, Fox Creek Farm. CSA, as many of you know, provide for a share of the farm's product over the season. Members share the risks as well as the



opportunities. Fox Creek will provide the usual share, which costs them \$20.00. We found grants to write it down to \$10.00. Participants will utilize SNAP and we are working on for them to pay the first week of the month for the entire month. The policy lessons we found is this is more difficult for a nonprofit to get EBT status than a local farmer. The local farmer got it. EBT rules only allow for one advanced payment. While one can understand the difficulties there in general for SNAP participants, there is a great value in being able to pay for the month right upfront.

Interesting, you heard data about, you know, who spends what when. In our experience anecdotally it's gone by nineteen days but there's no study on that. The pilot will show us what the price point is because the families in the north side of Schenectady, hire a taxi, you go to Wal-Mart, they go across the river. They do it all at one time and that's what they do to get their food needs met. Some of the taxis, by the way, if they're in a bad mood, they charge you by bag. It's not legal but they do it. There's some other broader issues just very briefly. They're state level. Time is probably up quickly but one, a couple of you may not have thought of or maybe you have elsewhere, addressing the inadequacy of the welfare standards, Rus's old bailiwick, because the amounts paid in New York state are just so far below that it's virtually impossible to live in decency on a welfare standard and it's hopelessly out of date. There is a food policy council that has not been well resourced. Some good people very involved but that's where they could be empowered and I brought to them about, "Couldn't you make the WIC payments part of the EBT system," and they said, "Great idea, it'll take another 5 years." Not sure why. New York State Anti-hunger Task Force Governor is to be commended for initiating this effort. However, the jury is out. The group has met but I think only in private and so far there's no public indication recommendations. Many of us hope this will bear fruit as the group is broadly representative. And finally, we're in the midst of something courtesy of the CDC, which is developing a local food plan. We have Alliance for Health because plans, Health Departments are going beyond clinics, into environmental change for us. I got a new produce cooler so we can give out a lot more produce. Now it's developing a whole local food plan with lots of stakeholders and some of the usual folks and less usual folks and they'll provide, I think, some models for some others to try to put together in these kind of areas. Thank you for your consideration. I appreciate all you do. Glad to hear of your work. Keep up the good work.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thanks Phil.

Commissioner: Do you have any questions or comments?

Commissioner: I have a question.



Commissioner: Go ahead.

Commissioner: Reverend, in the summer meal program, which I'm very interested in, you are providing, I think you say in the first paragraph 2,000 lunches a day.

Participant #4: Yeah.

Commissioner: You anticipate—

Participant #4: That's the high end. That's what we hope this summer. We gave out 65,223 last year. We hope to do 80,000 lunches this year.

Commissioner: And then later, in the second paragraph you say but that, we'll be lucky if we provide 25% of the kids who qualify in the summer.

Participant #4: Right, because in our city, small city, 65,000 in the city, 10,000 kids in the school system, we're serving 2,000 or less.

Commissioner: Right, so—

Participant #4: And all the kids, I mean, 83% at the last we knew in our city, qualify for free or reduced price lunch and that's just the city kids, not counting all the other kids who may not be in school.

Commissioner: Right, and I thank you for that and but the, and but the, you have several sites. You have mobile—

Participant #4: Uh-huh [yes]. Yeah.

Commissioner: —and then in the second, last part of the paragraph, you say that we've had, you found if we had activities, that brings others in.

Participant #4: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: We're having trouble getting older youth to come. It's not cool.

Participant #4: That's right. There's, the big \$64,000.00 question is the old image from my era of how do you get older youth to come to summer lunch? No one really knows how to do that.

Commissioner: Right, and the reason, and we're talking about people who based on the data and the statistic appear in need of food.



Participant #4: There are clearly people in the high school, for example, who qualify for free lunch, free or reduced price lunch but unless they're bringing a younger sibling, it's not cool for them to come. There's still a stigma and unless you wrap it around some other stuff, it's very difficult. There may be some models out there somewhere but we haven't found them in this state to really engage older youth a great deal, so it's a great question. We work on that.

Commissioner: Are you getting 100% of the younger kids?

Participant #4: The percentage of young kids is much higher, yeah.

Commissioner: Do you know what it is?

Participant #4: We don't, you know, it's open sites, so we don't tag it by age but we do, this year the United Way does a collaborative, so there have been some, there are going to be some studies this year with a local college, Sage, about who participates and best practices, so we hope at the end of the summer we'll have some more information to do.

Commissioner: Reverend, in other summer feeding programs I've talked to, they held the benefits of it being at a site where other services can be provided.

Participant #4: Oh, absolutely, yeah, yeah.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Participant #4: Yeah, so we have pools we are at activities, parks. We do parks, churches, church lawns, programs, any place we can partner.

Commissioner: Got it.

Participant #4: Yeah.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Phil, just quickly, I just want to thank you for your tenacity and I think nothing, you've been doing this a long time and you're sort of legendary around here but it's clear that your one quote was real, that you do this for love, not money and that's for sure. I did want to ask you one specific question.

Participant #4: I also was going to say almost, you know, you don't have to be crazy to do summer lunch but it helps.



Commissioner: I was going to ask you about your comment about migration, in and out of Schenectady. I know we read a lot about that. We read a lot about migration from New York City to Schenectady and I wonder how particularly what kind of problems that and pressures that puts on the social services system in the work you do.

Participant #4: Because of our housing costs, which are less than around and less than New York City, it is kind of a magnet to draw people for the housing costs because it's lower. It's high for us but lower and that produces great instability in the housing. I mean, Hamilton Hill, which is the legendary area of low income and it's not true anymore but that's the legendary area. The home ownership rate is 10% or less and so when you have that level of instability and the migration we have, as I've said elsewhere, somebody will probably kill me on this, no, I probably, I shouldn't say that, we would just have a lot of instability and we have because we are not a Buffalo that has, say, blocks of abandoned housing, because we have a house here, a house there, or whatever, housing values are not wonderful, by any means, but they've stayed and so it produces just an instability and an absentee ownership and that draws people to come and people also still come for opportunity. The other dynamic, of course, with us is a previous Mayor encouraged a very strong immigration of a Guyanese community from Queens and elsewhere and it's a very interesting, very strong community and like all communities, you have people who do well and others who don't do so well and so you have a range of options of that but we are a much more diverse place and a strong Afghan community, a strong Russian community, Islamic community, a Hindu community. I mean, it's, we are much more diverse than we used to be, which creates, I think it's just that the neighborhoods are not stable like they were.

Commissioner: And I wonder if that is a stressor and that's, I mean, Food Stamps are all federally funded but at least on TANF and things, I wonder if it's a stressor around, on the local social service districts. You're very lucky to have a good Commissioner in Dennis Packard.

Participant #4: We have a very good, very stable Commissioner, who's brought some very strong improvements to the social services.

Commissioner: Great.

Commissioner: Thank you very much, Reverend, for your testimony. I wanted to ask you about what is the true value of the New York State Food Policy Council or this Anti-hunger Task Force? What could those endeavors really achieve and what would they need? What type of infrastructure or staffing or types of activities would help to strengthen those efforts?



Participant #4: They are so more knowledgeable than I am on this but from my outside perspective, the Food Policy Council was started by a couple of Governors ago and I think it mostly needs staffing. It has not really had staffing, adequate staffing to carry things forward and so therefore, it's largely invisible in the state. It's just not as, and Food Policy Councils elsewhere, if you follow that kind of discussion, you know, from the Hartford Food System on, have made a significant difference in places where they are and so with adequate staffing, I believe they could carry the agendas going. Anti-hunger Task Force, it was a pleasant surprise that the Governor proposed it and it just could be another voice to provide both to educate the public about what the needs are and then also go on and advocate for some particular changes. So I think it could be a strong voice and both could be a strong voice. I mean, Food Policy Council, obviously, had a broader agenda but many of the issues are intertwined and so therefore they work very closely together and I still don't understand why you can't run WIC off an EBT card. [Laughter] Because no one wants to be behind someone with all the coupons.

Commissioner: Right, well, that is in the works.

Participant #4: That's a challenge.

Commissioner: Thanks so much.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #5

Commissioner: Next on our list is Sister Betsy Van Deusen. Please do, thank you. I'd like to be able to see you as you're giving your testimony. Thank you.

Participant #5: Even on my tiptoes I wouldn't be able to do that. Well, thank you very much for this opportunity. I'm Sister Betsy Van Deusen and I'm the Director of Community Partnerships for Catholic Charities here in the Diocese of Albany. Catholic Charities serves fourteen counties, 10,000 square miles and so we have a large network of people who are about service through. Phil does another whole section and we do a whole bunch of other people in addition. You've heard the national statistics and the regional statistics regarding hunger. We know it's an issue in our communities. When someone is suffering from hunger or having difficulty knowing where their next meal is coming from, everything else is trickle down. How am I going to eat? How am I going to feed my kids? Where am I going to live? How am I going to work? And the solutions to those things are solving hunger, we think part of that is dealing with the issue of hunger, so that I can go to sleep tonight and I can get up and go to work and then because I put the pieces together, I can also be a productive person. Too many people live in this state of insecurity. Fred is a single dad. He works two jobs, trying to keep a semblance of normalcy for his two daughters and son. Between the rent and utilities in this past winter, he had nothing to spare and then one of his two jobs cut his hours. Fred knew that one of our food pantries was open so that he could go after hours on Saturday. And when our staff did the intake, Fred cried tears of gratitude because he knew with this extra help he could get to the next paycheck. There are thousands of Freds and Tinas and Jamals in our area in this state and in this country. Catholic Charities operates eight food pantries and Catholic Charities run, Catholic parishes run 43 more. We also have a soup kitchen and we have programs to try to address hunger at many different levels. Last year throughout the fourteen counties served by Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Albany, 34,274 people received help from our nutrition and hunger programs. This includes soup kitchens, food pantries, homebound meals for seniors, summer meal sites for children, congregate dining sites, WIC enrollments, and benefits advocacy. 67 of those people live in Albany County. The problem is widespread and largely hidden from view. The story behind those numbers is more of the working poor and seniors living on fixed incomes, trying to make ends meet but medical, housing, transportation and other costs are increasing. When unexpected bills hit often they come out of the food budget. People then have to turn to emergency food programs like food pantries or soup kitchens. We're innovating in a way that we deliver services. We're working with people and you heard earlier about financial insecurity and learning about banking and working to bank more of our folks. Also, advocating, continuing to advocate for SNAP benefits. We've started, again, as I mentioned before, programs on weekends and in the evening when our working people are going. 40% of the folks who go to our food pantries are working, the working poor. From the policy standpoint, we need to continue supporting the vital programs that make up the hunger safety network. Cuts and



reductions to assistance programs [inaudible] throughout people's lives. These reductions have a human impact that's often unseen. For the working poor at the heart, it's a living wage and affordable housing. Catholic Charities is here to help. We're all part of a connected society. As Pope Francis recently said, "I invite all of the institutions of the world, the church, each of us, as one single human family, to give a voice to all those who suffer silently from hunger, so that this voice becomes a roar, which can shake the world." Thank you for your time and appreciate your support.

Commissioner: Thank you very much. Do you have a question or a comment?

Commissioner: I don't.

Commissioner: It's a fourteen county area that you serve? Okay, and it goes, extends from where to where?

Participant #5: Herkimer, [inaudible] Green, Warren Washington, 10,000 square miles.

Commissioner: I do have a question.

Commissioner: Okay.

Commissioner: Okay, I have one, too.

Commissioner: Okay, well, you go first.

Commissioner: Okay, I was taken with your, the story of the gentleman that came to the food bank because they had cut his hours and that he had cried tears of joy so that, because he had enough help to get him to the next paycheck.

Participant #5: Uh-huh [yes].

Commissioner: Can you describe that dynamic a little bit more and maybe talk about some of the local companies that may be reducing hours? How are you working with the employers in the region to ensure that people who are working can make enough money so they don't have to show up to the food pantry?

Participant #5: Many of the folks who come to our food pantries work hourly and are in the retail business and we've seen certainly a lot of conversation about the Wal-Marts and the Wal-Marts, people striking because they don't make a living wage. So a lot of the folks who come are involved in that way, McDonalds and so in terms of bigger companies, typically, there's more stability, not so much but in retail it's a very up and down and very difficult,



they have not folks who have not very many rights there because, “Oh, gosh, there’s somebody behind you who would like your job,” often.

Commissioner: Okay, thank you.

Commissioner: But it was an interesting example but it was hours cut, tell me, Catholic Charities, I’ve worked with Catholic Charities in the past but I forget, besides feeding programs, do you have education programs or young people, mentorship programs and what are the size and scale of them?

Participant #5: We do, we have a whole variety of things. In this system of fourteen counties, we have four domestic violence shelters. We have dispute mediation. We have homeless shelters. We have two here in Albany. We have two homeless shelters and we have SROs. We have six SROs in our system, Single Room Occupancy residencies. We also do afterschool mentoring in six programs here in the capitol district and then in Otsego County, in Fulton, Montgomery County. We’ve have a residence in Fulton, Montgomery County that works with dually diagnosed people who are mentally ill and addicted, which is not, not that many people want to shelter folks because it’s such a struggle. Let’s see—

Commissioner: So I want to preface my question by saying that I’m a Catholic.

Participant #5: Yeah, certainly.

Commissioner: And a practicing Catholic, too, so that’s just background. [laughter] In any of those programs that you have, do you talk to young people about the disparity in outcomes for children between households with children, households that are raised in married coupled families versus children that are raised in single parent families?

Participant #5: Interesting, not to my knowledge we don’t.

Commissioner: You don’t do that ever? That’s interesting. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much for your testimony.

Commissioner: Good, thank you so much for your time.



PUBLIC TESTIMONY PARTICIPANT #6

Commissioner: And next on our list is Barbara Hart, aka Pinky the Poet.

Participant #6: Last but not least. [Laughter] Okay, hi everyone, my name is Barbara Hart aka Pinky the Poet and I am the proud leader of the Coalition Against Hunger and I also do community service at Cole Jones Pantry on Staten Island and Stuart Coleman is the Director, he told me not to forget to say that, so I'm not. And I'm just happy to be here today. I was, I went to the Anti-hunger and I've been trying to get there for a couple of years but my children are too young, so once they became of age, I said, "I'm going. I'm out," and I went for three days and I had such a wonderful time. I came with people on Staten Island, people from the Bronx. We all met down in Manhattan and we came and we did what we did and I also went to the Legislation Breakfast, I had a great time there, you know. I hear a lot of people saying that they do this for love and not the money. I don't think nobody would pay me enough money but I love doing this because it's, I think I'm the world's most, you know, greatest monetarian but some people might differ that and I'm going to do a poem. I wrote a poem when I knew I was coming to Albany and it's called *Stop Hunger Today*, so I'm going to go over here [laughter] because I want to see you guys. I don't want you all to think that I am trying to not see. I don't want my back against you guys like that. So it's called *Stop Hunger Today*. So it go like this, "Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today, New York City is [inaudible], we're calling a motion against hunger. If you're [inaudible], I'm a legislation thunder, [inaudible], thank God you guys don't plunder, let's make a change November, we all are here for thunder, don't mix us up with [inaudible], we'll move this place with sunder, [inaudible], I wonder. Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today, Stop Hunger Today. Thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you. [applause]

Commissioner: Did you have a willingness to answer some questions?

Participant #6: Yeah, of course.

Commissioner: Do you have some questions or comments?

Commissioner: What brought you to poetry? That was certainly a nice ending to our day, more than anything, very uplifting.

Participant #6: Thank you, so like English is my major and Math, I'm not that great at, so when I was in grade school, they told us to do some poetry and just make up anything and I was going, "Why would you make up something? Why don't just tell the truth?" So that's what started my poetry and I've been doing it ever since.



Commissioner: Are you a recipient of SNAP benefits?

Participant #6: Yeah, I'm a recipient of SNAP benefits. I've been having quite difficulty and I guess like everybody said, if you not paying rent, you paying [inaudible] and you paying [inaudible] and the Food Stamps, it comes short at the end of the month and I do go to the pantry and I, you know, I even went to a nutrition class to learn how to eat better and we all talking about food and that's a wonderful thing but the bottom line is to have nutrition because you can eat but it's a nutritionist. So my children have a little problem with eating light, so I thought that if I start eating light, they be looking at me saying, "Oh, mommy, what you eating," and if I'm going to snack, snack on good stuff. So I [inaudible] and I read labels. I'm so proud of myself. I read labels. I read, oh, Lord, and [inaudible] I'm going to say this, spaghetti and meatballs and ravioli is like my favorite thing but when I look at the contents of the salt, I was like, "Oh, my God," and I put it back on the shelf and I'm just happy. I feel, I don't want to feel bad about what I eat because I'm going to, I don't have sugar diabetes, high blood pressure, none of that and why should I try to get that? So do something now, you know, if you don't want the headache, think about what you're putting in your body. So that's what I do now.

Commissioner: Yeah.

Commissioner: Great.

Commissioner: Thank you.

Commissioner: Ms. Hart, I wanted to ask you what brought you to want speak out about the issue of hunger? How did you get involved with the New York City Coalition Against Hunger and what's the meaning of it? What's the point?

Participant #6: Well, actually Stuart Coleman is a friend of mine and he was telling me that he was opening up this new pantry on Poulston and Decker and I was like, "Oh, okay," and he was like, "I'm trying to get it started, Barbara. Would you come and do some service?" I was like, "Yeah, let me know." So he let me know. I came and I'm only just, you know, stock the food, give the food out but I do like some of the women's talked about the different services like we have like a [inaudible] but, you know, sometimes he'll say, "Barb, I want you to do this," and I am, as the clients come, I let them know that we have a lot of services that you can be involved in. If you have any issues, you know, fill out the application and then they'll fax over the information to food bank and food bank will give you a call, morning, noon, or night, whatever you prefer and try to get you the services that you might need. And, you know, I just feel like, you know, Oprah can go on to Africa and start a new school and everybody can send money and but if I had it, I would take the food with me on



the plane, take it to the people and give it to them, just give them a mixture of [inaudible] and but hey. [laughter]

Commissioner: Do you have another question?

Commissioner: That's wonderful, thank you.

Commissioner: Thank you very much.

Commissioner: Thanks so much. I just want to, you're going to close this out, Mariana, but I just want to say one thing. I just want to, again, thank the Rockefeller Institute staff and everyone. You guys have been great. You've endured all day the mics work, the audiovisual went without a hitch, the phone conference went without a hitch and so thanks for the use of the lovely facility and all your help. You close us out and Robert, whatever you want to say in closing.

Commissioner: I also want to say thank you and thank everybody that participated. The testimony was excellent. It was a great day and thank you Rus for setting it up as well you did. So it's all a good day for the National Hunger Commission.

Commissioner: Yes, thank you all for being here and for sticking with it. The three of us will be here until 4:00 as promised, in case there are stragglers. We want to make sure that they get heard. Please do spread the word that we are starting to go across the country. So if you think that today's experience was good, please let your friends and people know across the country that the National Commission is listening in. So thank you very much.

Commissioner: Do we want to mention the website, too? [applause]

Commissioner: Sure, you can go to the National Commission on Hunger website, just Google it, you'll find it that way. I can't remember the URL. Please follow us on Twitter. Mary, do you want to say something?

Council: HungerCommission.rti.org.

Commissioner: HungerCommission—

Council: .rti.

Commissioner: .rti

Council: .org.



Commissioner: .org.

Council: And Twitter.

Commissioner: Our Twitter handle is—

Council: NationalCommHunger.

Commissioner: @NatlCommHunger. All right, thank you all.

Commissioner: Thanks again everyone.