

Chair Levin, Chair Chin, and Committee Members:

On behalf of Single Stop, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to testify about the issue of pervasive hunger in New York City.

Since 2007, Single Stop has partnered with community-based organizations and colleges to operate 70 sites in all five boroughs throughout New York, including at seven sites in the city's largest food pantries, where we connect people to benefits and resources such as SNAP. In 2015, Single Stop partnered with the Department for the Aging's Integrated Benefits Pilot to address the issue of under-enrollment in federal assistance among the senior population in the city. We are currently partnering with a coalition of public, corporate, and community-based organizations across New York City on the Robin Hood Foundation's *Start by Asking* campaign to help eligible New Yorkers access several poverty-fighting benefits, including SNAP, WIC, and the EITC.

We applaud the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on Aging for coming together to put a spotlight on the issue of hunger among seniors, an often-overlooked population. Seniors have a high rate of food insecurity and struggle with health issues, mobility, and technology prowess, which contribute to difficulties with accessing help to connect with food benefits and emergency food. Over 170,000 seniors in New York City live in food insecure households.

I hope you will refer to my written testimony for our full comments and recommendations, but I'd like to discuss the lack of understanding among seniors of SNAP's complicated eligibility rules. Many seniors mistakenly believe that they either do not qualify for SNAP or that they only qualify for the minimum amount, discouraging enrollment and recertification. A large contributing factor is that they are often unaware that reporting medical expenses can help increase their benefit amount. As a result, many seniors underreport their expenses or do not report their expenses at all.

Consider a senior with \$1,800 per month in income. Without reporting medical expenses, that senior may only qualify for the minimum of \$16 per month in SNAP benefits. If that same senior submitted \$300 in doctor's bills, she would qualify for over \$100 per month. If the senior also submitted bills for \$150 in prescriptions and \$40 in receipts for transportation to go to her doctor's visits, she would then qualify for the maximum monthly benefit of \$194 per month.

Therefore, we believe that SNAP eligibility outreach efforts should be enhanced to help seniors understand their unique circumstances and corresponding SNAP eligibility. Greater transparency about the program's income limit for seniors and about the importance of recording and submitting all medical expenses with a SNAP application could encourage more seniors to apply, qualify for a greater benefit amount, and to recertify.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to speak here today.