



Testimony Submitted by
Chef Gregory Silverman, Executive Director
West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH)
Before The New York City Council Committee on Economic Development, Committee on
Education and Committee on General Welfare

Joint Meeting on Growing Food Equity Bills
September 18, 2019





My name is Chef Gregory Silverman and I am the Executive Director of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). Thank you to Chairpersons Paul Vallone, Mark Treyger and Steven T. Levin as well as the members of the City Council Committees on Economic Development, Education and General Welfare for holding today's joint hearing on legislation to advance food equity in New York City.

I am here today, representing West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH) and our **community** of almost 12,000 families who come to us from across NYC to gain access to healthy food and supportive services. Founded in 1979, West Side Campaign Against Hunger is the country's first supermarket-style, multi-service food pantry, and one of the largest emergency food providers in New York City. The West Side Campaign Against Hunger alleviates hunger by ensuring that all New Yorkers have access with **dignity** to a **choice** of healthy food and supportive services.

In the last year, we provided over 1.6 million pounds of food, which included over 600 thousand pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables, to nearly 12,000 households. Our customers are overjoyed that we serve 41% fresh produce, this is unheard of anywhere else in NYC, let alone the United States. Fresh, healthy, appetizing produce helps us battle not only short term food insecurity but support the health and well being of families in need. As the speaker has said, ***"Access to adequate nutritious food is a human right..."***

EFAP (Emergency Food Assistance Program) has been touted as a huge win in NYC with its 22 million dollar baseline in the budget. But let us be clear that this 41% fresh, healthy, nutritious, produce we distribute at WSCAH does not come from EFAP. EFAP distributes 22 million dollars of processed foods to New Yorkers in need. There is no ability within EFAP to

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give any choice of fresh product to any New Yorkers and this is a tragedy for the health and dignity of our NYC community!

We remind City Council members of the state of EFAP as an example of the importance of the city of New York to focus its efforts on a joined up approach, a collective action to change the food system in New York City. While we support the passage of all of the worthy bills being considered in today's hearing, we submit this testimony regarding:

- **Int 1660 - In relation to creating a good food purchasing program.**
- **Int 1664 - In relation to requiring the office of food policy to formulate a 10-year food policy plan.**
- **Int 1666 - In relation to the establishment of an office of food policy.**

Today I am here to highlight the importance of INT 1664 requiring the formulation of a 10 year food policy plan. One of the largest metropolitan areas on the planet is neglecting its population without having a 10 year plan like many other progressive cities around the world have formulated. Its high time to put time and energy into our food system.

In order to give real meaning to this effort of both a 10 year plan we encourage the city to support the creation of an independent Food Policy Council made up of community based groups, community leaders, and other stakeholders with expertise in food justice, policy, access and insecurity that the Director of the Office of Food Policy would be required to work with and consult in the creation of the 10 Year Food Policy Plan. This council should not be made up of Mayor and Speaker appointees, but rather of community food experts identified through a public open call for nomination process.

I would recommend within this plan of INT 1664 to build out INT 1660 creating a good food purchasing program which will help guarantee a healthy, and equitable food supply chain, building out INT1666 establishing an office of food policy and INT nt 1663 - to establish an office of urban agriculture and an urban agriculture advisory board. The incredibly important laundry list of items on today's agenda is evidence of the need for a joined up approach, and mostly can be built out through this ten year plan. This is a priority. A city the size of New York is running too many parallel programs, with lack of engagement or efficiency for our community and has no joined up policy approach to tackling hunger, poverty, food waste, ag and the food shed, or simply making sure all have access to healthy, affordable, sustainable food.

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Truth be told, our WSCAH community of 22,000 customers care less about plans and bills. Our community care firstly about feeling safe and supported and our city, state and federal government are not taking care of this. Over 73% of our customers who are part of WSCAH are LatinX, many first generation immigrants and in a sanctuary city such as New York, they do not feel safe. Just last week three customers asked to get taken off SNAP and Medicaid due to fear about immigration issues. In NYC these friends, neighbors, colleagues are refusing public sector benefits and prefer to be supported by charity.

Creating office and policies is important but today in America, our community demands protection and support. Elected officials must stand up, not with words, but with actions to gather funds and support for all the people living, working, and surviving in NYC. The West Side Campaign Against Hunger would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today. WSCAH and our community look forward to helping continue to strengthen our food system as a core piece of helping make sure we provide all New Yorkers access with dignity to a choice of healthy food and supportive services.

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