



Testimony Submitted by:
Chef Gregory Silverman, Executive Director
West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH)
Testimony at General Welfare Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17 2021

My name is Chef Gregory Silverman, and I am the CEO of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). Thank you for inviting WSCAH to testify at this General Welfare Preliminary Budget Hearing.

I am here today, representing the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH) and our **community** of almost 50,000 New Yorkers who come to us from across NYC to gain access to healthy food and supportive services. Founded in 1979, WSCAH launched the country's first supermarket-style, multi-service food pantry. Today it is one of the largest emergency food providers in New York City. WSCAH alleviates hunger by ensuring that all New Yorkers have access with **dignity** to a **choice** of healthy food and supportive services.





In the words of the City Council Speaker Johnson, "**Access to adequate nutritious food is a human right...**" WSCAH shares this conviction, and providing access to the best possible food is at the heart of our mission. In the last year, we provided 25,000 households over 2.5 million pounds of food, over 50% of which was fresh fruits and vegetables.. Our customers deeply appreciate the high percentage of fresh, healthy produce, which helps us battle not only short-term food insecurity but support the long-term health and well-being of families in need.

ADVOCATING FOR CHOICE IN EFAP

Over the last two years, WSCAH and several other large emergency food providers in NYC created a collective purchasing initiative to help get better, healthier products at better prices for our communities. WSCAH worked with consultants Karen Karp and Partners, alongside Project Hospitality, New York Common Pantry, Met Council, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, and St. John's Bread and Life. The initiative also was also supported by Robinhood, Sea Change Capital, NY Community Trust, and NY Health Foundation. Together, we advocate on behalf of our customers for better food for themselves, their families and their communities.,

The collective purchasing initiative was created in part because programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) are not providing the necessary choice of fresh and healthy products agencies and communities want or need. At WSCAH, we survey our customers; they demand healthy food, fresh food, local food, organic food, all the same foods that any New Yorker

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wants and needs. Our job as members of the emergency feeding community is to provide our customers access with dignity to a choice of healthy food and supportive services.

EFAP has been touted as a huge win in NYC with its 22 million dollar baseline budget. But let us be clear that the 50% 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.** EFAP provides no options for fresh products nor any incentive to purchase New York State products. This is a tragedy for the health and dignity of our NYC community!

It is well past time to align EFAP (RFP, City Charter, budget, etc.) with food-insecure New Yorkers' real needs. We advocate for a reinvigorated and reimagined EFAP, operating on similar lines to HPNAP (The New York State Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program), providing a greater choice of products and incentive for more local purchasing. By incorporating choice with a commitment to nutritional health and incentivizing investment in New York State producers, EFAP will improve our customers' health and the economic well-being of our city and region.

Serving New Yorkers well is also about more than just providing food. EFAP should also consider allocating additional funding to support innovation in the emergency food provider network to ensure that providers can serve the community in the most dignified and customer-centric manner possible. It's time to demand better help. Our community deserves it!

INNOVATION VIA PFRED And GETFOOD

NYC has demonstrated its ability to create powerful new models for food distribution. PFRED and GetFood placed customers' needs front and center. Although these programs have faced issues, such as a lack of fresh, healthy, culturally appropriate food via GetFood, and the sluggish bureaucracies of PFRED that have increased hurdles and time of engagement for organizations, there are many successes that must be embedded into the models of how we distribute food to community members in need now and into the future. PFRED has brought in a choice of healthy, fresh food where EFAP has only focused on processed shelf stable foods. GETFOOD individually brought food directly to customers' homes where traditional food distribution has forced community members in need to go to the product.

THE FUTURE

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In our increasingly customer-centric world, solutions must move toward and not away from the customer and the community. Emergency feeding solutions such as EFAP, PPRED, GETFOOD must focus on bringing healthy food options direct to people. PFRED and GETFOOD have successfully tested new approaches. Our hope at WSCAH is that these programs can continue to grow and evolve in conjunction with a choice-centric EFAP. We envision a purpose-built citywide, open data model allowing collaboration across the anti-hunger community and giving all organizations ability to deliver the choice of healthy, culturally appropriate foods that are needed.

We thank you, NYC Council. Together, as a community, we will ensure that all New Yorkers have access with **dignity** to healthy food and supportive services.

Thank you,

Gregory Silverman
Executive Director & CEO, West Side Campaign Against Hunger

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