

**Attendance and Minutes of
The SNAP Task Force Meeting of January 19, 2017**

ATTENDANCE SHEET

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1) Derek Singh - NYC HRA-FIA | 24) Juana Almonte - Part of the Solution (POTS) |
| 2) Milagros Rodriguez – HRA SNAP Outreach Services | 25) Ailin Liu - Public Health Solutions |
| 3) Brenda Williams – HRA SNAP Outreach Services | 26) Rucha Gadre – United Way of NYC |
| 4) Chris Anna Nisbet – USDA Food & Nutrition Service (<i>via teleconference</i>) | 27) Shezza Dallal – Urban Justice Center |
| 5) Ellen Vollinger – Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) | 28) Merble Reagon – Women's Center for Education & Career Advancement |
| 6) Saima Akhtar – Empire Justice Center (<i>via teleconference</i>) | 29) Emanuel Negrón – FBNYC |
| 7) Dawn Secor – Hunger Solutions NY | 30) Anaeltzin Sarabia – FBNYC |
| 8) Bridget Gibbons – Benefits Data Trust | 31) Mark Herreros – FBNYC |
| 9) Kiana Davis – Bronx Defenders | |
| 10) Sharon Blount – Catholic Charities / Feeding Our Neighbors | |
| 11) Rebecca Cespedes – Catholic Charities / Feeding Our Neighbors | |
| 12) Annelise MacLeod – Central Queens Y | |
| 13) Chevon Humphrey – CEO Works | |
| 14) Gia Mui – Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) | |
| 15) Suyin Mui – Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) | |
| 16) Evalevi Lopez – Fifth Avenue Committee | |
| 17) Nicholas Posada – Fortune Society | |
| 18) Michelle Zambrano – Health Leads NY | |
| 19) Miguelina Diaz - Hunger Free NYC | |
| 20) Jim Wengler – Hunger Free NYC | |
| 21) Long Ho - LiveOn NY | |
| 22) Rachel Patterson - Manhattan Legal Services | |
| 23) Tom Furstenberg-Carroll – Met Council | |

The meeting began at 1:10pm

Emanuel Negrón (Food Bank For NYC) opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and introducing all attendees. After giving an overview of the meeting's agenda, Emanuel introduced Ellen Vollinger from the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) to present national updates.

1. Outlook in Congress on SNAP and National Updates

President-elect Trump announced Sonny Perdue as his choice for Agriculture Secretary, a former veterinarian and former Governor of Georgia. Though it's unclear what direction Perdue will take, Ellen commented that SNAP should remain unchanged for the time being. There are no major changes expected in the near future. Once Trump is inaugurated, Ellen said he will order 'beachhead' teams of political appointees to go into different federal agencies, working with career staff to get his agenda going. The President-elect has put forward all his Cabinet nominees, who are now pending confirmation by the Senate. Perdue was last in line to be nominated, and it is unclear when his confirmation hearing will take place. Ellen said it is likely Perdue will be confirmed, as he has had a fairly conventional political career.

Meanwhile, Congress has begun dealing with the Affordable Care Act through a fast-track budget process called reconciliation. Ellen said there is discussion of using this process to put forward another budget or tax bill in April where SNAP could be in play, but there is no guarantee this will actually happen. Speculators are keeping a close eye on the process. If it does move, Ellen said Congress will give instructions directing agencies to find budget savings from programs under their jurisdiction. However, no SNAP cuts happened when a similar situation happened during the most recent Bush administration. FRAC will keep the public informed of developments, but for the moment, nothing is changing.

Ellen said that advocates will likely hear more chatter about the Farm Bill. She commented that Farm Bill politics are very interesting, as they break down along regional differences. The next Farm Bill might return to a bipartisan effort, with divisions based more on region and ideology. Ellen said right-wing conservatives tried to take SNAP out of previous Farm Bills, knowing that the program would be weakened without farmer alliances. These alliances benefit from keeping SNAP in the farm bill because the program picks up urban votes, which farm programs typically struggle to gain. Though farmers might not lobby for SNAP, they will likely stick with keeping the program in the bill. Ellen said the most recent evidence of their commitment came from a recent meeting held by the Farm Bureau with grassroots farmers. Their policy platform indicates keeping nutrition programs in the Farm Bill. Though some members tried to take nutrition

out in a floor debate, three federations said they would have trouble passing a new Farm Bill unless these programs were kept in.

Ellen praised Food Bank For NYC and Hunger Solutions NY for advocating against block-granting and cutting SNAP. Both organizations have circulated a letter for others to sign onto for forwarding to their state's delegation. Groups in California are engaged in similar efforts. In addition, Ellen said 1100 advocates are registered to join FRAC and Feeding America for their annual Anti-Hunger Conference. FRAC will encourage advocates to push back against block-granting SNAP. Ellen said the community is focused on a common message wherever the fight for nutrition may emerge. She ended by commenting that Task Force members are doing important work by running effective outreach programs.

II. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Emanuel Negrón introduced Chris Anna Nisbet from the USDA Food & Nutrition Service to present updates¹ from the agency.

Final Rule: SNAP Promotion

- USDA FNS has released final rulemaking regarding Section 4018 of the 2014 Farm Bill, which defines the acceptable types of SNAP promotion and outreach

Calculating the SNAP Program Access Index: A Step-by-Step Guide for 2015

- This update provides a step-by-step guide to the Program Access Index, which indicates the degree of SNAP access in each state

Press Release: USDA Announces Retailer Volunteers For SNAP Online Purchasing Pilot

- SNAP recipients will be able to purchase groceries online from seven retailer firms beginning in September 2017 as part of a pilot program

Press Release: Families Projected to Spend an Average of \$233,610 Raising a Child Born in 2015

- A middle-income married couple family will spend an average of \$233,510 to raise a child born in 2015 through the age of 17
- Costs are the highest in the urban Northeast

Mark Herreros (FBNYC) asked Chris Anna to elaborate on how comments from the public shaped the final rulemaking on SNAP promotion published by FNS. Chris Anna offered to reach out to a colleague with more information on the submitted comments following the meeting. Ellen Vollinger (FRAC) said that the submitted comments spoke

¹ See pgs. 3-5, January 2017 Research Packet (RP) for full summaries of all USDA items covered

to the “informed choice” standard, allowing activities so long as they are focused on helping a client make an “informed choice” as they decide whether or not to apply for SNAP. She credited USDA for taking this standard into account, and said she looked forward to getting more information from the expert on the subject matter.

III. Mediation

Mediation Analysis Report for December 2016

Emanuel Negrón (FBNYC) reviewed highlights² from the December 2016 Mediation Analysis Report. The report is based on a total of 190 mediation requests submitted by Mediation Model participants in the month of December 2016. Emanuel thanked the organizations represented in the report for submitting their issue logs.

Among the highlights:

- Issues related to “submitted changes not processed in a timely manner” remained at 9 percentage points, the same prevalence rate as the previous month
- Issues related to “not receiving ongoing benefits” slightly increased over-the-month, occurring in 9 percent of cases in the month of November
- Issues related to not receiving phone interviews have declined, occurring in 13 percent of cases in November
- Issues related to “no benefits after recertification” slightly increased in prevalence to 4 percentage points from November to December

Emanuel opened the floor for Task Force members to share comments and observations from the field. Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) said TIPS 42 has been largely unresponsive to her mediation requests. Derek Singh (HRA) said that there is a new list of liaisons which will be published shortly. Staff has just begun assisting with mediation. Derek acknowledged there has been confusion, and expressed hope that the new liaison list would be available on Friday, 1/20. He also reminded Task Force members that any urgent cases could be sent directly to him.

Miguelina Diaz (Hunger Free NYC) said that her staff sends many SNAP recertifications via fax. However, she said these recertifications are being indexed in HRA’s system as a new application. Clients later find out that there is no application in the system. Miguelina said she began noticing this in the beginning of 2017. Derek asked Miguelina to provide her with case numbers. Rachel Patterson (Manhattan Legal Services) said that her clients have had similar issues where their recertifications were not processed, and the cases would require mediation. She commented that this is a steady problem. Derek expressed concern that the recertifications were being tracked as new

² See pg. 3, December ‘16 Mediation Analysis Report, for full highlights

applications. He said this seems to be a systemic problem, and encouraged Miguelina and Rachel to forward him affected cases.

Tom Furstenberg-Carroll (Met Council) said that his recertifying clients processed through POS receive notices indicating that the phone interview has not been completed. Met Council served as the authorized representative for these cases. Derek said that the On-Demand system and recertification liaisons operate separately. In some cases, the notice may have been sent before the recertification liaison could process the case. Tom asked if he should tell his clients to disregard the notices. Derek said Tom would be better off checking with HRA to ensure the case is processed correctly. Derek encouraged Tom to email him with these cases if he served as the authorized representative.

Annelise MacLeod (Central Queens Y) said she submitted a change report for one of her clients. This client received a request for additional documents which was dated prior to when the report was submitted. Derek said this may be a glitch, and asked Annelise to forward him the case.

Rebecca Cespedes (Catholic Charities) said her clients have had trouble getting their recertifications processed. Even though the cases were submitted and indexed properly, Rebecca said her clients are not receiving their ongoing benefits. Derek encouraged Rebecca to send him the list of cases for immediate review.

Miguelina Diaz (Hunger Free NYC) asked if there were any updates regarding the On-Demand hotline. She said that clients have called her office, indicating that the wait-time to reach a worker can reach 2-3 hours, sometimes resulting in dropped calls. Derek Singh (HRA) said that he hadn't heard about issues with dropped calls. However, he agreed that the wait times have increased astronomically. HRA is currently transitioning and training more staff, and they are now starting to come up to speed. Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) asked if the issue would be resolved in the next few weeks. Derek responded affirmatively.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads) said that her clients who use the On-Demand call-back option do not receive a call back from HRA. Derek said that the feature was initially available, but HRA did not have the staffing to call people back. As a result, the option is not available unless the client waits for two hours. He said that it is simply a matter of resources. Michelle asked for best practices to prevent recertification cases from being denied. Derek recommended that clients not call at the end of their certification period. Some Task Force Members shared times they thought were best to call the hotline. Derek said that all days/times have been busy, but added that things should get better as HRA workers get back up to speed.

Annelise MacLeod (CQY) asked if clients could schedule a face-to-face interview over the phone. Derek responded that this option is not available over the phone. Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) asked if clients could go into the SNAP Center to complete the interview. Derek said that the workers will schedule an interview for a later date/time.

Rebecca Cespedes (Catholic Charities) asked about the proper time to submit mediation for a client unable to reach the On-Demand hotline. Derek emphasized that he did not want Mediation Model participants to bypass the mediation process. He recommended participants begin the process within 3-5 days of their scheduled pickup date.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads) asked if issues remained with document return now that document intake has been moved to a centralized office. Derek said that he hadn't noticed many issues related to documents. Michelle asked if the fax numbers to return documents remain the same. Derek said nothing has changed. Emanuel added that Food Bank continues to keep track of the issue. Derek asked Michelle if her clients' document issues pertained to new applications or recertifications. Michelle said the issues related to new applications.

Rachel Patterson (Manhattan Legal Services) asked if it was possible to leave a note indicating that a client has a phone number with an extension. Derek said that the information written on the application will be added to the system. Rachel said she had a case where she served as the authorized representative, and she received call from HRA asking for the client's extension number. According to Rachel, the worker she spoke with said HRA cannot add an extension number into the system. Derek responded that she could mediate for this case. Nicholas Posada commented that ACCESS NYC allows clients to add an extension number. Derek said that the issue pertains to HRA's system, not the application itself. He asked Rachel if she received the feedback from a worker on the HRA Infoline. Rachel responded affirmatively, adding that workers at some Centers have also indicated that an extension cannot be added.

IV. NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA)

Emanuel Negrón (FBNYC) presented the following update³ released by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA):

Policy Bulletin #17-04-ELI: Change in the ABAWD Waiver Status for Certain Queens Households

- Effective January 1, 2017, all SNAP recipients who reside in Queens (with the exception of Community District 12) and are Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) are subject to ABAWD requirements

³ See pgs. 6-9, January 2017 RP, for full summaries of all HRA items covered

Food Bank For NYC has produced a provider flyer⁴ that describes the ABAWD requirements in detail. Food Bank For NYC will also send an email blast with an invitation to view an informational ABAWD webinar. The webinar will teach participants how to identify who is exempt from work rules, and become better familiar with the areas affected in 2017. Derek Singh (HRA) confirmed that all SNAP households in New York City containing an ABAWD member were mailed an informational letter describing these changes. The letter also explains how ABAWDs can meet the requirement.

Nicholas Posada (Fortune Society) asked if CBOs could submit documents through POS Easy Access to verify an exemption from ABAWD rules. Derek responded affirmatively. HRA will review all documents that may be used to verify if someone is exempt. Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) asked if there is a code that can be used to track documents used to verify an ABAWD exemption. Derek said that documents need to be submitted alongside a change report. If HRA is not aware that the ABAWD is working, they will be subject to the three-month time limit. He recommended Jim write "ABAWD exemption" on the change form. Emanuel added that it is a good practice to add notes in the POS system. Nicholas then asked if the ABAWD letter should be attached with the change request. Emanuel responded that Nicholas should provide the change form attached with a letter from a doctor. Derek added that attaching the ABAWD letter cannot hurt.

Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) asked what would happen in a scenario with a two-person household, in which there is one ABAWD member who fails to meet the requirement after three months. He asked if the household would lose their benefits, or if HRA would reassign the eligible household member as the payee. Derek said that HRA will remove the ineligible household member from the case. Another person in the household can be designated as the payee, or the ineligible member can still be listed as a payee. Emanuel added that income threshold will be reduced to the maximum limit for a household of one person. Jim asked if the case would need to be rebudgeted. Derek responded affirmatively.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads) asked why Queens was not issued an ABAWD waiver for 2017. Derek said that Queens is doing better economically, with the exception of Community District 12. Emanuel Negrón (FBNYC) said that Food Bank's flyer lists the zip codes that are exempt. Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) asked how many city residents would be affected. Derek said that HRA is still gathering data, and cannot share estimates at this time.

Annelise asked if HRA will send out a list of approved training programs to ABAWDs. Derek said SNAP recipients are notified of training programs, and will not have their

⁴ Contact Food Bank For NYC for a copy of this flyer

cases closed without receiving an opportunity to meet the requirement. Annelise asked how workforce sites can receive approval from HRA to be authorized training sites. Derek said that HRA is finalizing an approval process.

Nicholas Posada (Fortune Society) asked how ABAWDs can verify they are taking care of a disabled dependent. Emanuel advised Nicholas obtain a letter from a doctor verifying that the client is primarily responsible for providing the dependent with care. Tom Furstenberg-Carroll asked if the dependent needs to be part of the SNAP case. Derek said the dependent can be someone outside the SNAP household. Dawn Secor (Hunger Solutions NY) added that if a statement from a medical professional is unavailable, a statement from a case manager or social worker could also work.

Annelise McLeod (Central Queens Y) asked if she could provide SNAP assistance to clients who reside in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. Emanuel said that partners could not provide direct application assistance for out-of-city clients, because HRA only handles SNAP cases in the five boroughs of New York City.

Nicholas Posada asked what happens to an ABAWD if he/she applied for SSI and the application is eventually denied. Derek Singh (HRA) said that the agency will remove the exemption once the application is longer pending. Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) asked what happens if the client makes an appeal. Derek responded that the application would still be considered pending during the appeals process.

Mark Herreros (FBNYC) presented additional policy updates released by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA):

Policy Directive #16-25-ELI: January 2017 RSDI/SSI COLA Increases

- SNAP benefits were rebudgeted on January 1, 2017 to reflect a cost of living adjustment for Social Security/SSI recipients

Policy Bulletin #16-99-ELI: January 2017 Social Security COLA Changes for NYSNIP Households

- Individuals receiving SNAP under NYSNIP will see their benefits adjusted due to the cost of living adjustment described above

Policy Bulletin #16-100-EMP: Phasing Out of the Work Experience Program

- The Work Experience Program (WEP) has been terminated, and has been replaced with other options that may be used to fulfill work or training assignments provided by HRA

Policy Directive #16-24-SYS: Child Support Matches for Cash Assistance (CA) and Non-Cash Assistance SNAP

- Households applying for SNAP are subject to a data match for child support payments made and received

Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) asked if the data match will be based on child support payments actually received, or owed. Derek Singh (HRA) said that the match will reflect payments in the last six months, using a weighted average in the event that a payment is missing or significantly different from the regular monthly amount.

Policy Bulletin #16-97-EMP: Increase in the New York State Minimum Wage and its Effect on Cash Assistance and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

- New York State's minimum wage has increased in New York City, and will continue to increase every year until reaching \$15.00
- This increase may affect the number of hours that certain SNAP recipients may be required to work

Policy Bulletin #16-93-OPE: Schedules for January 2017-June 2017

- HRA has released updated semi-annual schedules, including a new version of the EBT Pick-Up Schedule.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads) asked for more information regarding Food Bank For NYC's Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. Emanuel asked Michelle to follow-up with him, and offered to forward a list of sites to the Task Force once it is finalized. He said that the location on 71 St. Nicholas Avenue will be offering tax services on weekdays and weekends.

The Meeting Adjourned at 2:46PM