

**Attendance and Minutes of  
The SNAP Task Force Meeting of February 16, 2017**

**ATTENDANCE SHEET**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| 1) Derek Singh - NYC HRA-FIA   | 23) Lori Andrade – Health & Welfare<br>Council of Long Island ( <i>via teleconference</i> ) |
| 2) Milagros Rodriguez – HRA SNAP<br>Outreach Services  | 24) Michelle Zambrano – Health Leads NY   |
| 3) Brenda Williams – HRA SNAP Outreach<br>Services   | 25) Miguelina Diaz - Hunger Free NYC  |
| 4) Damaris Sorrentini - HRA SNAP<br>Outreach Services  | 26) Jim Wengler – Hunger Free NYC   |
| 5) Stephanie Ida Jean - HRA  | 27) Long Ho - LiveOn NY   |
| 6) Ilana Yamin - HRA   | 28) Rachel Patterson - Manhattan Legal<br>Services  |
| 7) Chris Anna Nisbet – USDA Food &<br>Nutrition Service ( <i>via teleconference</i> )        | 29) Tom Furstenberg-Carroll – Met Council   |
| 8) Ellen Vollinger – Food Research and<br>Action Center (FRAC) ( <i>via teleconference</i> ) | 30) Langina Pena – Met Council  |
| 9) Saima Akhtar – Empire Justice Center<br>( <i>via teleconference</i> )                     | 31) Juana Almonte – Part of the Solution<br>(POTS)  |
| 10) Dawn Secor – Hunger Solutions NY   | 32) Ailin Liu - Public Health Solutions   |
| 11) Madeline Grunewald – Office of State<br>Senate Liz Krueger                               | 33) Ed Ortiz – Urban Justice Center   |
| 12) Kiana Davis – Bronx Defenders  | 34) Emanuel Negrón – FBNYC  |
| 13) Rebecca Cespedes – Catholic<br>Charities / Feeding Our Neighbors                         | 35) Anaeltzin Sarabia – FBNYC   |
| 14) Lourdes Rosa-Carrasquillo – CEO NY   | 36) Mark Herreros – FBNYC   |
| 15) Gia Mui – Chinese-American Planning<br>Council (CPC)                                     |   |
| 16) Suyin Mui – CPC  |   |
| 17) Esther Schwartz – Community Council<br>and Consulting                                    |   |
| 18) Christine Lawson – Community Service<br>Center of Greater Williamsburg (CSCGW)           |   |
| 19) Sabrina Simon – CUCS Single Stop   |   |
| 20) Taylor Kuhn – Design for Agency  |   |
| 21) Evalevi Lopez – Fifth Avenue<br>Committee  |   |
| 22) Nicholas Posada – Fortune Society  |   |

## **The meeting began at 1:07PM**

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.

### *I. Outlook in Congress on SNAP and National Updates*

SNAP is currently authorized through the end of fiscal year 2018. By September 2018, SNAP will need to be reauthorized. FRAC and anti-hunger advocates are watching to see what happens in the budget cycle, including funding levels and directions given to the Agriculture Committee in regards to SNAP-related items. Congress will start work to consider budget priorities, and they usually aim for a budget resolution by April. The resolution is usually a blueprint framework, but it is an important document. There may be attempts to push for a fast-track reconciliation in May, and there are a lot of unknowns as to what it could mean.

Meanwhile, work has already begun planning the 2018 Farm Bill. Subcommittee hearings will soon begin around the country. The House Agriculture Committee recently held a hearing exploring the pros and cons of restricting the types of items households can buy with their SNAP benefits. Although several witnesses proposed restrictions, Ellen commented that the discussion was an interesting back-and-forth exchange.

Ellen reminded Task Force members about an opportunity to sign-on to a national advocacy letter on the FRAC website demonstrating their support to safeguard federal nutrition programs like SNAP. This letter will close out on March 1<sup>st</sup>. FRAC will have the document available for FRAC's upcoming Anti-Hunger Conference. Though much of the conference involves training workshops, some of the time will be devoted to advocacy, including an advocacy day on Capitol Hill. Ellen said she hoped participants would be able to take this letter and show their Congressional representatives who signed on.

Ellen said USDA has not gotten its political appointees in place yet. The Cabinet Secretary is working through the confirmation process. Once in place, there will likely be a flow of appointments of political-level decision makers who will each require their own confirmation process. However, Ellen said it could be a lengthy process. The previous Undersecretary of the Food and Nutrition Service took until August after the election year in order to be confirmed.

### *II. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

Emanuel Negrón introduced Chris Anna Nisbet from the USDA Food & Nutrition Service to present updates<sup>1</sup> from the agency. Chris Anna introduced herself as a program specialist for FNS program operations, and mentioned that she will be working more closely with New York State in the months ahead.

#### Reaching Those In Need: Estimates of State Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Participation Rates in 2014

- This report presents estimates of SNAP participation rates for all eligible individuals in fiscal year 2014 and the two previous fiscal years

#### USDA Economic Research Service: Low-Income and Low-Supermarket-Access Census Tracts, 2010-2015

- This report provides estimates and trends of food access from 2010-2015, exploring census tracts that are low-income and have low access to supermarkets

### III. Mediation

#### Mediation Analysis Report for January 2017

Emanuel Negrón (FBNYC) reviewed highlights<sup>2</sup> from the January 2017 Mediation Analysis Report. The report is based on a total of 230 mediation requests submitted by Mediation Model participants in the month of January 2017. 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” increased slightly over December 2016, from 9 percent to 10 percent of cases
- Issues related to “not receiving ongoing benefits” slightly decreased over the month, occurring in 13 percent of cases in the month of January
- Issues related to not receiving phone interviews have significantly declined, occurring in 3 percent of cases in January compared to 13 percent in December
- Issues related to “no benefits after recertification” significantly increased in prevalence to 23 percent in January, compared to 4 percent in December
- Issues related to “not receiving ongoing benefits” increased slightly over the month from 9 percentage points to 10.

Christine Lawson (CSCGW) expressed concern that her some of her cases were not included in the Mediation Analysis Report. Ana Sarabia (FBNYC) explained that the analysis reflects those cases that were resolved, not pending cases. However, the number of pending cases is included in the report. Ana offered to speak with Christine

---

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

<sup>2</sup> See pg. 3, December '16 Mediation Analysis Report, for full highlights

after the meeting. Christine explained that some of her cases remained pending because she was unable to reach an HRA liaison, even after escalating her cases to the highest level under the Mediation Model. Esther Schwartz (Community Counsel and Consulting) noted that she encountered similar issues. Derek Singh (HRA) advised Christine and Esther to forward cases directly to him when Mediation is not working. Derek explained that there have been challenges at TIPS 24. He said HRA has received approval to hire additional staff, but for the time being there are extended wait times for recertification.

Rachel Patterson (Manhattan Legal Services) said that she has been able to successfully mediate on behalf of her recertifying clients. However, although her clients' cases have been reopened, Rachel said some have not received retroactive benefits. Derek advised Rachel to not start a new mediation request, but to follow-up with the liaison through the same request used to resolve the recertification issue.

Rebecca Cespedes (Catholic Charities) said that some of her clients are waiting on their ongoing benefits after recertifying. Derek reiterated that there have been delays with benefit processing. Rebecca asked Derek how she should explain the situation to clients. Derek said that clients should be informed that HRA will not skip benefits. The agency is processing benefits, and clients will receive the benefits they deserve. He added that most of the clients who do not have benefits are due to the delays in recertification.

Christine Lawson said that her office has received a massive amount of calls related to recertification issues. Derek asked if Christine has consistently mediated for these issues. Christine responded affirmatively, adding that many of her cases have escalated to Level 3 and 4. Derek said he did not see the volume of cases that Christine was referring to, and asked her to follow-up with him. Esther Schwartz mentioned that the recertification notices sometimes do not reflect accurate dates, which can also create confusion.

Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) asked about the proper procedure for contacting a liaison under the Recertification Improvement Project (RIP). She said that it's unclear whether to call or email the liaisons under the project. Ana Sarabia (FBNYC) advised Kiana to contact her POS coordinator to clarify the correct procedure. Kiana said that the RIP liaisons each have different styles for how they like the recertification cases to be reported as completed. Derek Singh (HRA) said there should be no differences. If there is any follow-up required on the part of the client, HRA should issue an FIA-1146 requesting more documentation. Derek said that when Kiana calls the liaison, she should send a follow-up email solely to the person contacted. If she is informed of a different procedure, Derek recommended she contact him. Kiana followed-up by asking if she should contact the RIP liaison before pursuing mediation, or forward the

case directly to mediation. Derek advised Kiana to contact the RIP liaison first, and if no response is received then a mediation case may be opened.

Rebecca Cespedes (Catholic Charities) said her clients have waited up to several hours trying to call the On-Demand hotline to recertify their SNAP case. She said that the issue occurs every day, and commented that it is difficult for her clients who have to work and cannot be on hold on the phone. Rebecca asked if there is an alternative way to complete the interview, adding that some of her clients were turned away at the SNAP Center and told to call the On-Demand hotline. Derek Singh said that the option to have an In-Center interview remains available, though clients may be given a date for a return appointment. He asked Rebecca to let him know which staff or Centers are turning people away.

Langina Pena (Met Council) said she had clients who were due for recertification, and received a notice indicating they had a scheduled interview, rather than have the On-Demand option. Derek responded that HRA no longer schedules interviews for recertification. Langina asked if there is a separate due date to complete the required phone call. Derek said there are notices that encourage clients to complete the interview in advance. These notices will go out even if the phone call was completed.

Christine Lawson said that all of her clients who have recertified through RIP have encountered issues with their benefits. Ana Sarabia (FBNYC) responded that the issues are reflected in the analysis, and Task Force participants have been trying to resolve these cases through mediation.

Rebecca Cespedes asked if there is an alternative number to call to complete a recertification. Derek said the On-Demand hotline is the only number available. Rebecca then asked what she should do if a client tries to go in-person to complete the interview at the Center, but is turned away and instructed to call On-Demand. Emanuel Negrón (FBNYC) said if the client is at the Center, he/she should contact their community-based organization. The CBO should then get in touch with the supervisor at the Center.

Nicholas Posada (Fortune Society) asked if there was a referral letter or policy document that the client could bring with them to let the SNAP worker know that he/she must be given an appointment for a face-to-face interview. Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) advised Nicholas that it is better to just be aware of the rule, and insist on speaking with a supervisor. Rachel Patterson (Manhattan Legal Services) added that a policy document likely would not change the worker's mind.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads NY) asked if a phone number is available to schedule a face-to-face interview. Derek said that the request needs to be made in-person.

However, if a client applies online via ACCESS NYC, they may have the option to choose between a phone interview and a face-to-face interview. Michelle asked when the client will be seen when they go to the SNAP Center. Derek responded that there is no guarantee that clients can be seen the same day they walk-in. They would have to go to the Center to see if there is availability. If the client cannot be seen that day, an interview will be scheduled for a later date.

Derek noted that before On-Demand, the recertification package was sent out six weeks in advance. Now that there is no scheduled interview date, HRA has been sending out the packages later. In light of this change, Derek asked if there have been any issues submitting cases. Tom Furstenburg-Carroll (Met Council) said that he has been getting locked out of the Paperless Office System two weeks before the recertification case is due. However, Tom said that he can still submit the case via ACCESS NYC.

Miguelina Diaz (Hunger Free NYC) said that some of her clients who have had long wait times for On Demand ask for an interpreter, but the worker says that there is no one available in their preferred language. She mentioned that some of these clients were able to get through the interview with minimal English, but commented that it is a concern for clients who do not speak English. Derek asked Miguelina to report the case to him so he can communicate with the On-Demand workers. Jim Wengler (Hunger Free NYC) said that even if a live person is unavailable, the worker should be able to connect via the language line. Derek agreed, commenting that the language line is a simple conference call.

Miguelina also asked if a confirmation number could be made available to clients who completed their On Demand interview. Derek said he would pass the idea along, commenting that it has been suggested before. He commented that he thought it was a useful idea, just as it is for IVRS.

Long Ho (LiveOn NY) asked for clarity on the timeframe for processing reported changes after submitting a Request for Change form. Derek responded that it depends on the submission method. Long said that he usually sends the reports via mail, and the changes have sometimes taken longer than 6 weeks. He said he wanted to give his clients a clear time frame. Derek said changes should generally take effect sometime in the month following the time the change was reported. He said there is no broad-based solution, but offered to forward any related cases to the correct SNAP Center.

Kiana Davis (Bronx Defenders) said that when she pursues Mediation for Periodic Report, she usually forwards the cases to the client's Home Center. However, she said that the liaisons informed her that she should forward the cases to a separate

processing unit that is not part of Mediation. Derek advised Kiana to copy him on emails relating to these cases.

Nicholas Posada (Fortune Society) said he has encountered issues with ACCESS NYC, and asked if HRA had a tech support department. Rebecca Cespedes added that she sometimes sees error messages, and then gets logged out of the account. Derek offered to follow-up with more information about technical assistance. Emanuel recommended Nicholas make of a log of issues that can be reported to the ACCESS NYC team at the Task Force meeting.

#### IV. Human Resources Administration (HRA)

Mark Herreros (FBNYC) presented the following updates<sup>3</sup> released by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA):

##### Policy Bulletin #17-06-OPE: Changing Gender Designation in the Welfare Management System

- This policy describes the procedure for transgender program applicants and participants to request a change in their name/gender

##### Policy Directive #16-27-OPE: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Reasonable Accommodations (RA)

- This directive provides a revised process for disabled individuals who request a Reasonable Accommodation to access HRA programs, benefits and services

##### Policy Bulletin #17-07-OPE: Non-Cash Assistance SNAP Cases Closed In Error

- HRA has identified several hundred SNAP cases that were closed in error due to failure to recertify
- Affected households were notified and invited to complete the recertification before January 31

##### Policy Bulletin #17-10-ELI: Revisions to the SNAP Benefits Household Composition Desk Guide (LDSS-4314)

- HRA has produced a new version of the SNAP Benefits Household Composition Desk Guide

#### V. Update from Jim Wengler, Hunger Free NYC

Emanuel Negrón introduced Jim Wengler to discuss a leaked draft executive order titled “Protecting Taxpayer Resources by Ensuring Our Immigration Law.” If signed in its current form, the order would impact immigrants who apply for public benefits, as well

---

<sup>3</sup> See pgs. 5-7, January 2017 RP, for full summaries of all HRA items covered

as their sponsors. Jim commented that the last few weeks have been frightening for many of Hunger Free NYC's clients. He said that some households have refused to apply for benefits or requested that their cases be closed. Jim mentioned that the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) has published talking points for those who wish to advocate against some of the proposals made in the executive order. He emphasized that the order is just a draft that was leaked to news organizations. Emanuel offered to share the talking points via email. Jim said that Task Force Members could sign up for updates from NILC as well. There will likely be a national conference call ahead with analysis and additional talking points for clients.

Jim mentioned that there have been rumors that teams from the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were targeting individuals in parts of New York City. He said that targeting has occurred under previous administrations, but commented that ICE teams are starting to pick up people even if they do not have a criminal record. Jim highlighted the efforts of Legal Aid Society, which has opened up an immigrant rights hotline. Rachel Patterson (Manhattan Legal Services) mentioned that Legal Services NY also has a general hotline to refer people for immigration help and advocacy. Jim said the Legal Aid Society's hotline is recruiting volunteers, and is hoping to get up to 24/7 capacity.

Gia Mui (CPC) said that she noticed that the Paperless Office System asks a question prompting specialists to report the information of an immigrant sponsor. Emanuel said that the policy has always been in place to request sponsor information. Derek asked Gia to forward the screenshot to him for further review.

Michelle Zambrano (Health Leads NY) said there are resources available for immigrants to learn what they can do if an ICE officer comes to their door. She also mentioned that although none of her clients have requested to close their cases, some clients have been more hesitant to apply for benefits.

Jim Wengler said that he forwarded an example case to HRA Commissioner Steven Banks and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's office. He added that according to the draft order, it has been proposed to have sponsors pay back both SNAP and healthcare benefits received by the immigrant they are sponsoring. Emanuel said that there is a story bank where anonymous stories and experiences can be shared. He also advised Task Force members to refer to the Public Charge fact sheet to inform clients that as of the moment, nothing has changed.

***The Meeting Adjourned at 2:40PM***