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Testimony prepared by

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for the

New York City Council Committee on Contracts

on

**Introductions 452 and 461 of 2011, and
Resolutions 627 and 628 of 2011**

February 28, 2011

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good morning. The Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the New York City Council Committee on Contracts today regarding legislation to change the City's food procurement policies to maximize the purchase of New York State and regional food, as well as to encourage more environmentally sustainable practices.

First, we would like to acknowledge the continued commitment of the Council under the leadership of Speaker Quinn to addressing the problem of food poverty in New York City. The Food Bank commends the City Council's ongoing efforts to ensure all city residents have both financial and geographic access to affordable, nutritious food.

The Food Bank For New York City works to end hunger through a range of programs and services that increase access to nutrition, education and financial empowerment. We warehouse and distribute food to approximately 1,000 emergency and community food programs citywide; provide food safety, networking and capacity-building workshops; manage nutrition education programs for schools and emergency food programs; operate food stamp outreach and education programs; coordinate the largest Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) volunteer tax preparation program in the country; and

conduct research and develop policy to inform community and government efforts to end hunger throughout the five boroughs.

As the main supplier of food to food pantries and soup kitchens in New York City, the Food Bank For New York City distributed more than 14 million pounds of fresh produce last year to approximately 1,000 emergency and community food programs citywide. We are proud to note that approximately 2 million pounds of the food we distributed was grown in New York State, and more from regional sources. Working with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the Food Bank Association of New York State, we have developed partnerships with New York State farmers in Orange County and beyond to ensure that the food pantries and soup kitchens in our network are able to provide the 1.4 million New Yorkers we collectively serve with access to fresh, healthy food.

In addition, we routinely recycle wooden pallets, as well as any plastic and cardboard packaging in which our food is delivered. In this fiscal year alone, we have recycled more than 20,000 wooden pallets.

While the Food Bank strongly supports local and regional food purchasing, we are concerned that without amendment, the legislation being considered today, Introduction 452, could result in a decrease in the amount of food procured by the City of New York for food pantries and soup kitchens that rely on the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) – leaving an emergency food network already struggling to meet unprecedented need with even less. Consistent with the intent of the legislation, we ask that Int. 452 be amended to ensure that a New York State food purchasing mandate safeguard against a diminishment in the quantity of food provided by EFAP.

EFAP, a \$10.2 million City-funded program that supplies food to approximately 500 New York City food pantries and soup kitchens, is the second largest single source of food in the emergency food network. The Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) contracts for EFAP food purchases through a competitive bidding process. Both the food purchasing and distribution are directed by the Human Resources Administration (HRA). Unlike food procurement for our schools, prisons, hospitals and senior centers, which is based on an estimate of the number of meals and/or people to be served year-to-year, EFAP's funding for food is a fixed amount that has remained flat for at least the past eight years.

Although we know that DCAS and HRA have made efforts to leverage as much food as possible through EFAP, we have seen the same EFAP dollars buy less and less food as food costs have climbed. Since fiscal year (FY) 2003, wholesale food costs have risen approximately 33 percent.¹ The number of pounds of EFAP food procured annually in that time has dropped 27 percent, from approximately 13.5 million pounds in FY 2003 to 9.5 million last year.

In the meantime, the proportion of New Yorkers experiencing difficulty affording food has increased 48 percent.² Nearly half of food pantries and soup kitchens across the city

¹ Preliminary figure based on Producer Price Index, Jun. 2002-Jan. 2011. Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

² *NYC Hunger Experience 2010: Less Food on the Table*. Food Bank For New York City.

last year reported having had to turn people away for lack of food.³ Even as demand has increased, rising food costs have whittled away 25 percent of EFAP's buying power.

While it is clear the intent of the current legislative language is to ensure that NYS food purchasing does not make providing food to people more expensive for City agencies, it may not adequately protect the ability of EFAP to provide food for as many people as possible. We believe that with a relatively minor change in the language, this legislation will ensure that EFAP can provide nutritious NYS food for low-income New Yorkers who rely on food pantries and soup kitchens without compromising the City's ability to secure the most food for the dollar. We would give our full support to such a bill and will work with you to realize it.

Thank you.

³ *NYC Hunger Experience 2009: A Year in Recession*. Food Bank For New York City.