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for the

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on

Oversight: Reducing Food Waste in New York City

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on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chairman Reynoso and members of the City Council's Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of Government Relations at Food Bank For New York City. Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council about reducing food waste in New York City.

First, Food Bank For New York City thanks the City Council for your continued commitment to addressing the issue of hunger and ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food. The City Council has long played a leadership role in this arena, and we are pleased to see continued strong leadership on anti-hunger initiatives this past year. The Council's instrumental role in expanding the in-classroom School Breakfast Program, implementing universal free school meals in stand-alone middle schools, increasing enrollment of eligible households in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as increasing funding for emergency food are especially appreciated.

For more than 30 years, Food Bank For New York City has been the city's major hunger-relief organization, working to end food poverty throughout the five boroughs. Nearly one in five New York City residents relies on our programs and services. Through our network of more than

1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank's food distribution program provides approximately 64 million free meals for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including SNAP enrollment and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$150 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. In addition, Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 44,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet on a low budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts.

Reducing Food Waste in New York City

Food waste reduction is an important topic and one of the many strategies that Food Bank For New York City employs each year to provide 64 million meals to our network of more than 1,000 charities and schools, as we work to close the Meal Gap. The Meal Gap, New York City's official food insecurity metric, is the most sophisticated food insecurity metric available, representing the translation into meals of the financial resources needed by food-insecure households to secure an adequate diet year-round. .

New York City's meal gap (as of 2013, the most recent year for which data is available) is 241 million meals. In terms of a borough breakdown, the meal gap for:

- the Bronx is 46.5 million;
- Brooklyn is 89 million;
- Manhattan is 43.6 million;
- Queens is 53.1 million; and
- Staten Island is 8.8 million.

Food Bank For New York City employs other strategies to close the Meal Gap and to support our network with food such as wholesale purchasing, donated food and government commodities. Government commodities, such as New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), provide a tremendous amount of food to the emergency food network.

With regard to food waste reduction, some specific strategies that Food Bank For New York City and our member agencies employ include:

- **Hunts Point Market** – Food Bank For New York City maintains a 90,000 square foot warehouse in the heart of the Hunts Point Market. Due to our location, we are able to receive donated food from our neighbors -- wholesalers and distributors -- that supply our city's supermarkets, bodegas, restaurants, and delis.
- **Retail Recovery** – Food retailers such as grocery stores, wholesalers and large-scale food distributors donate products such as meat, fish, dairy, produce and shelf-stable products (canned goods/pre-packaged items). In some cases, they are also able to donate needed non-food items, such as cleaning products, household paper good, menstrual hygiene products and similar items. When Food Bank receives donations of mixed products (i.e., donations of multiple item types), they are sorted in our warehouse, gleaned to remove any unsafe, inedible or inappropriate goods, repacked, and entered into our inventory and online ordering system, which is available to our member food pantries and soup kitchens across the five boroughs. It is important to be aware of the

handling that mixed donations require; by taking on the gleaning, sorting and repacking at our warehouse, Food Bank allows community-based food pantries and soup kitchens – many of which are shoestring operations without any paid staff – to focus their energies and resources on directly serving the New Yorkers on their lines.

- **Farmers' Markets** – Food Bank For New York City helps to align select farmers' markets with local emergency food providers who are able to take unsold produce to distribute at their agencies once the market is closed for the day. This helps to ensure that safe, nutritious, and healthy produce and other products are able to be distributed to people rather than left for waste.
- **Urban Farms and CSAs** – Food Bank For New York City has agreements with local urban farms and CSAs to recover leftover product that is not picked up or sold. We ensure that it is given to local emergency food providers to distribute to clients across New York City.
- **Event Food** – Food Bank For New York City often receives phone calls from companies or organizations with leftover food (from conferences, events, etc.) that they would like to donate. We connect them with emergency food providers or other non-profits in the area to determine if the food is fit for consumption. If so, they can then pick up and share with clients at their agencies.

Food Bank For New York City learned early in its 33-year history serving our city that donations alone could not provide the quantity, variety and reliability of supply to ensure that vulnerable New Yorkers have consistent access to the basic nutrition they need to thrive. Indeed, what made the City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) so significant when it was created in 1984 was that it filled those gaps by providing a stable, year-round supply of a full complement of food, including hard to procure items like protein (like tuna) and vegetables. EFAP is the second biggest source of food for food pantries and soup kitchens and continues to play that same significant role today. It has also come to play an important role in helping to fill a kosher gap in the emergency food supply. I want to commend the City Council for continuing to prioritize funding for EFAP in the city's budget this year and in prior years.

While we are excited about the potential for New York City to adopt a food waste reduction policy, we are also cognizant that in other areas that have adopted such policies, our sister food banks have not seen a sustained increase in food donations.

We know that there are many positive policy goals that are achieved by reducing food waste. We certainly want to ensure that safe, wholesome, nutritious food that is fit for consumption goes to individuals who need it – not to a landfill. With respect to increasing donations of food for food pantries and soup kitchens, however, a food waste reduction policy should always be seen as a complement to -- not as a replacement for -- other strategies to increase an emergency food supply that routinely falls short of the need. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the City Council and the Administration to craft a strong food waste reduction policy that effectively drives an increase in donations of safe, nutritious, wholesome food to organizations that help New Yorkers in need.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.