



New York City Council
City Preliminary Budget Hearing - General Welfare Committee
Testimony submitted by Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy
Tuesday, March 17, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary City budget.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people and no limits to their potential. By offering a comprehensive continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part-time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted, neighborhood-based spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need.

In addition to direct service delivery, Children's Aid engages in policy and advocacy at every level of government. Our policy priorities are shaped by what we know works for children and families and by the persistent barriers our staff encounter while serving the one in four New York City children living in poverty.

A thriving New York City requires a strong and dynamic ecosystem of programs that support children, youth, and families. The human services sector is essential to the City's social safety net, and organizations like Children's Aid are on the frontlines, partnering with government to ensure that communities remain resilient and empowered. As the City navigates ongoing fiscal uncertainty, we remain committed to caring for children and supporting families. Our work is critical, not just for today, but for building a stronger future for all New Yorkers.

Summary of FY27 Budget Recommendations

- **Response to the Loss of SNAP-Ed:** Coordinate a Citywide response to the elimination of SNAP-Ed by providing bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million and align Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), New York City Public Schools, (NYCPS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DOHMH) to mitigate nutrition-education gaps that increase reliance on the emergency food system.
- **Ensure access to SNAP benefits:** Fund staffing, training, and technology improvements within SNAP Operations and strengthen ACCESS HRA navigation through community-based partnerships.
- **Address human-services workforce and contracting stability:** Prioritize predictable baselines, timely contracting, and adequate indirect cost coverage to stabilize the nonprofit workforce delivering HRA-funded services.



I. Coordinating the City Response to the SNAP-Ed Funding Loss

Children's Aid's Go!Healthy program addresses food inequities and improves health outcomes for children and families in low- and moderate-income New York City communities. We engage families in nutrition education, healthy food access, culturally responsive activities, food resiliency, and gardening education. Our work examines food systems through a health equity lens, advancing food justice by providing education, leadership, and job opportunities. Each year, we serve over 3,000 individuals, including 1,665 participants in nutrition education. Go!Healthy tackles food insecurity in City Council districts 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 49, and 50 by providing access to affordable, fresh, and healthy foods. Since 2003, Go!Healthy has promoted wellness through programming such as nutrition education, culinary demonstrations, gardening, and food box distribution.

Notably, Go!Healthy's nutrition education is supported by federal SNAP-Ed funding, a long-standing and vital partner in ensuring these services reach communities with the greatest need. For three decades, SNAP-Ed has played a key role in advancing New York's public health and food access goals. In neighborhoods across the five boroughs, SNAP-Ed helps New Yorkers stretch their food dollars, navigate rising food costs, and make informed decisions about what they eat. Through partnerships with community-based organizations, schools, and local partners, SNAP-Ed delivers practical, culturally relevant education and connects New Yorkers of all ages to fresh, affordable foods in the communities where they live, work, and learn.

Despite the demonstrated importance of SNAP-Ed to preventive health efforts and its broad national success, the federal government eliminated this funding through H.R.1. As a result, New York City stands to lose not only a statewide network of educators, but also a deeply embedded set of programs operating in schools, community centers, food access hubs, and human-service providers across the city. Many providers have already begun terminating staff and winding down programming because the instability of SNAP-Ed's future makes it impossible to sustain operations or plan for upcoming program cycles. Without action, the City will see a rapid erosion of the infrastructure, partnerships, and neighborhood-level trust that has taken decades to build.

The scale of SNAP-Ed's impact is significant for New York families. In FY25, SNAP-Ed New York reached 1.845 million participants statewide and delivered more than 35,000 nutrition workshops, many of them in New York City schools, after-school programs, and community-based organizations. Participants also reported significant life changes, including 57% who improved fruit and vegetable intake, 57% who increased physical activity, and 58% who engaged in more price comparisons while food shopping. Overall, household food security improved by 25% after participating in SNAP-Ed programming.

These outcomes are especially important for New York City as more households struggle with high food prices, reduced SNAP benefits, and anticipated changes in Medicaid eligibility. Every



\$1 invested in SNAP-Ed saves up to \$9.54¹ in future healthcare costs—savings that directly benefit a City system already under strain. Losing SNAP-Ed programming now would increase demands on City-funded services, from emergency food programs to public hospitals, and would undermine the City’s own strategies around prevention, chronic disease reduction, and community health. SNAP-Ed is one of the most effective tools to provide families with the nutrition education, skills, and support needed to stretch limited food dollars and maintain healthy diets even as federal benefits decline.

At Children’s Aid, SNAP-Ed plays a central role in our work in the South Bronx, Harlem, Washington Heights, and the north shore of Staten Island, which host communities that consistently face some of the highest rates of food insecurity and nutrition-related health conditions in the City. SNAP-Ed enables Children’s Aid to offer steep discounts on locally grown fruits and vegetables, deliver interactive, evidence-based nutrition education workshops led by qualified nutritionists for youth and families, and operate school and community-based distribution sites where families can pick up both their children and fresh foods. This integrated model is only made possible through SNAP-Ed's funding. Without the City’s support, these programs will **fully cease operations by September 2026**.

We strongly support the inclusion of all affected providers in any City investment toward sustaining vital SNAP-Ed programming, and we recognize that many other organizations across the city are facing the same crisis. To help mitigate the immediate impact of the federal elimination, Children’s Aid has applied for \$200,000 in City discretionary funds to support this work. More broadly, we urge the City to act at scale:

- **Fund SNAP-Ed Continuation:** Establish City bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million to continue SNAP-Ed operations through community-based providers, so families retain nutrition education and cost-saving skills, preventing avoidable strain on HRA programs.
- **Align HRA, MOFP, NYCPS, and DOHMH to mitigate nutrition-education gaps that are pushing more families to emergency food.**

II. Ensuring Access to SNAP Benefits

As federal law imposes stricter requirements and shifts costs to states and localities in the coming years, timely SNAP processing and adequate staffing are essential to prevent administrative case loss and ensure households access benefits without interruption. Prior General Welfare hearings have flagged benefits processing challenges and underscored the need for investment in HRA’s frontline eligibility workforce.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget includes \$6.4 million in FY27, \$6.6 million in FY28, \$6.7 million in FY29, and \$6.9 million in FY30 to support SNAP Eligibility Specialists, who are critical to

¹ University of Illinois Extension. (2023, June 13). Available at: [Creating healthier Illinoisans: SNAP-Ed generates up to \\$135 million in future benefits | Serving Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan and Scott Counties | Illinois Extension | UIUC](#)



maintaining timely determinations and preventing backlogs for SNAP recipients. In addition, the budget baselines \$1.9 million for SNAP Trainers within HRA's Office of Policy, Procedure, and Training, which is essential to ensuring new and existing staff are prepared to implement evolving federal rules and meet rising administrative demands.

Continued improvements and community-based navigation through ACCESS HRA can further reduce incomplete applications, shorten processing times, and improve recertifications, especially as H.R.1's new eligibility rules increase administrative complexity for clients and staff alike.

Recommendations:

- **Fund staffing, training, and systems** in SNAP Operations to sustain processing timeliness and reduce backlogs amid federal changes, including continued investment in Eligibility Specialists and SNAP Trainers.
- **Expand ACCESS HRA navigation** and community-based partnerships to reduce incomplete applications and recertification losses.

III. Strengthening the Human Services Workforce and Sector Stability

New York's human-services providers are the operational backbone of the safety net. Persistent wage competition, recruiting challenges, and administrative delays threaten the continuity of services families rely on through HRA-funded programs. While this hearing focuses on HRA funding streams, we urge the Council and Administration to prioritize predictable baselines, timely contracting, and appropriate indirect cost coverage for City contracts that fund essential services across the human services sector. These steps reduce staff turnover, sustain quality, and prevent interruptions in services that keep families stable.

V. Closing

At a time of continued economic pressure and federal uncertainty, New York City cannot afford to retreat from its commitment to children and families. Children's Aid urges the Council and Administration to advance an FY27 budget that protects and strengthens HRA's core food security and benefits functions. These are not isolated line items. Together, they support children and families and help communities thrive.

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the Committee for its leadership and partnership. We welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as budget negotiations move forward. Please feel free to contact Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy, at mavila@childreaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.