



Safety
Net
Project

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2023 Executive Budget Proposal:
Topic Human Services

My name is Ethel Brown and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low-income people. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a city that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

I currently receive Public Assistance and have to survive off of just 91.50 in cash twice a month. It requires constant juggling and hardship just trying to pay for basic expenses. You cannot live off of this.

It is impossible for people to buy the basic things that they need to buy on the current amounts from cleaning supplies, to laundry, to transportation, to internet, to clothing, to underwear, to shoes, to personal hygiene products, to feminine hygiene products, to diapers, to school supplies. Even a hot sandwich or a cup of coffee needs to be purchased with cash since food stamps don't allow people to purchase hot food.

The insultingly low amounts impact my life and other people's lives every day. I have the Fair Fares card but sometimes I don't have any funds to put on the metrocard. I have been wearing the same pair of shoes for years. Recently, we couldn't wash clothes for a month because we didn't have the funds to do our laundry.

Many parents have kids going to school and don't have the money to buy their kids even the most basic things, including school supplies.

The amounts that Public Assistance provides are limiting and insulting. It stagnates you because you can't move forward because you don't have enough to provide for yourself and your family.

This situation can drive people to get worse and worse and worse.

My family of four recently moved into a new apartment after years of looking. Even the furniture allowance that Public Assistance provides is completely impossible. My family of four recently moved into an apartment with no furniture and Public Assistance only provided \$518 per person to cover all of our furniture. It is impossible to purchase furniture for a family of four with that amount.

If you are trying to look for work, people don't even have enough funds to travel to work or buy interview clothes. For years, I went to the Public Assistance work programs and was sent to the work programs for no pay. You're trying to better your life and you keep falling back into that quagmire.

Several years ago, some Congress people tried living off the food stamp amounts to see what it was like to live off of these benefits. We challenge the State legislature to try living off those amounts and see what it is like. If others can't live off of that, why should we have to live off of it?

Public Assistance also needs to offer people real training and real jobs. Why can't people on Public Assistance work for the City and get real jobs to help people?

New York State must treat this as the emergency that it is and to take action to immediately increase the Public Assistance grant amounts.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.