

TESTIMONY: UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK
Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature
Human Services Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026-2027

Submitted by:
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On behalf of UJA-Federation of New York, our network of nonprofit partners and those we serve, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of supporting the human services sector.

Established more than 100 years ago, UJA-Federation of New York is one of the nation's largest local philanthropies. Central to UJA's mission is to care for those in need — identifying and meeting the needs of New Yorkers of all backgrounds and Jews everywhere. UJA supports an expansive network of nearly 100 nonprofit organizations serving those that are most vulnerable and in need of programs and services and allocates roughly \$200 million each year to combat poverty and food insecurity, nurture mental health and well-being, respond to crises here and across the globe, and strengthen Jewish life.

Human Services Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII)

UJA's network of human service providers assists New Yorkers of all backgrounds throughout the five boroughs of New York City, Westchester, Nassau, and Suffolk counties. UJA's network provides a wide range of human services, including childcare, mental health supports, day, and residential programs for people with developmental/intellectual disabilities, case management services, older adult programming, services for survivors of domestic violence and supporting food-insecure populations. These services meet basic needs and support individuals to become thriving members of their communities. Unfortunately, nonprofits face many challenges while providing these essential services including delayed payments, insufficient overhead funding, inadequate wages and minimal capital support to address aging buildings and facilities. To maintain and strengthen human services programs, the **FY26-27 budget must include funding for a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (formerly referred to as a Cost-of-Living Adjustment) and ensure all state-contracted human services workers can access the TII by including language from S.1580A (Persaud)/A.2590A (Hevesi) in the enacted budget.**

The FY25-26 enacted budget included a 2.6% TII, bringing some relief to certain human services sector employees. Unfortunately, not all human services programs or titles were eligible for this increase. The statute, which lists the titles and programs eligible for the TII, was written decades ago. Since then, new human services programs and contracts have been developed and implemented. Programs such as LEAPS Afterschool, crime victim services, Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), supportive housing, Adult Literacy Education (ALE) and rape crisis counselors and others are not listed in the statute, and because of this are not eligible

for the TII. This is particularly problematic for multi-service human services agencies that receive a wide range of funding through state contracts. These agencies receive TII salary enhancements funding for some of their state contracts, while receiving no additional funding on others despite experiencing the same challenges of workforce retention and inflation.

UJA requests that the Legislature includes a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase, building off the 1.7% investment included in the Executive Budget and keeping in line with the Consumer Price Index. A 2.7% TII will help nonprofits address rising inflation costs and invest in their staff who provide vital services across New York State. More importantly, this must be inclusive of all state contracted human services programs, including contracts overseen by DCJS, DOH, NYSED, NYSOFA, OASAS, OCFS, OMH, OPDV, OPWDD, OTDA, and OVS. **UJA urges the Legislature to include language from S.1580A/A.2590A in the FY26-27 budget, which will update statute language and ensure all human services workers are eligible for TII funding.**

Services for Holocaust Survivors Living in Poverty

The New York State-funded Holocaust Survivor Initiative continues to be a lifeline for survivors grappling with poverty, food insecurity, isolation, medical challenges, and mental health issues. Sixty-one percent of Holocaust survivors emigrated from the former Soviet Union before coming to the United States; they came later in life, and as a result they receive little-to-no Social Security Income and are extremely poor. More than 50% of New York's remaining Holocaust survivors live in or near poverty.

While this last generation of survivors continues to astound us with their resilience, the past few years have been especially difficult. Trauma after trauma - Covid, the war in Ukraine, and the war in Israel accompanied by virulent antisemitism - have exacerbated survivors' already vulnerable mental health, and thanks to inflation, the astronomical cost of living is making it harder for them to make ends meet. We must not put aside our promise to "never abandon, never forget" Holocaust survivors.

The Governor included \$1 million in the Executive Budget to support New York's remaining survivors. **UJA respectfully urges the Legislature to continue its critical support of this vulnerable population and include an additional \$4 million in the FY26-27 budget, bringing the total investment to \$5 million in the enacted budget.**

Today, the youngest survivors are almost 80 years old and, as they age, they require even more care. While every year the number of Holocaust survivors declines, the cost of care significantly increases due to the nature of their complex cases. These individuals survived concentration camps or were forced to flee their homes and countries, experiencing long periods of malnutrition, physical assault, and exposure to severe weather conditions with minimal clothing and footwear. These circumstances had a direct impact on their physical and mental conditions, leading to brittle bones, stomach disorders, impaired vision, heart and circulation problems, high blood pressure, dental problems, foot problems, post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic depression, anxiety, and sleeping issues. For many survivors, it is important that they are able to remain in their homes, as being placed in institutional care is both costly and can re-awaken overwhelming fear related to the trauma they underwent in the Holocaust.

A total investment of \$5 million will support:

- **Case Management** to access benefits and support. Case Managers are specially trained in the psychological impact of the Holocaust.
- **Mental Health Services**, including home visits to help survivors work through the traumas that now manifest in sleep disturbance, anxiety, depression, and inability to trust.
- **Trauma Informed Care** provided by professionals who recognize and avoid possible triggers, thereby reducing the potential for re-traumatization.
- **Transportation** to doctors, family, synagogues, older adult centers, and other activities.
- **Crisis Prevention** to help stave off eviction and hunger.
- **Legal Services** and entitlement counseling.
- **Emergency Financial Assistance** for food, housing, prescriptions, medical, and dental care.
- **Socialization Programs** to reduce isolation.
- **Training & Support** for caregivers and home health aides working with survivors.
- **End of Life Care** which includes hospice and ethical wills.

New York must continue its commitment to Holocaust survivors by providing specialized care and support programs to enhance their quality of life and allow them to live out their remaining years with dignity. There is only a limited time left to help survivors. **UJA asks that the FY26-27 enacted budget include \$5 million for the Holocaust Survivor Initiative to support survivors living in poverty throughout New York State.**

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities

UJA is grateful to Governor Hochul for recognizing the value and impact of Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NNORCs). The Governor's FY26–27 Executive Budget includes a significant investment that **doubles funding for these programs, with an additional \$4 million for NORCs and \$4 million for NNORCs**. This commitment represents an important and timely step toward strengthening a proven, cost-effective model that enables older New Yorkers to age safely and independently in their homes and communities.

UJA urges the Legislature to support and fully enact the Governor's proposed investment in the FY26-27 budget. This funding is critical to sustaining and expanding N/NORCs at a time when New York's older adult population is growing rapidly, and the demand for community-based support continues to increase.

Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs) and Neighborhood NORCs (NNORCs), collectively referred to as N/NORCs, are integrated care models that bring together social services and health care to meet the needs of older adults where they live. Established more than 40 years ago, N/NORCs transform residential buildings and neighborhoods into supportive communities that help older residents remain independent, thrive socially, and delay hospitalization or nursing home placement. By leveraging the density and proximity of older

adults, N/NORCs deliver services efficiently and effectively, including case management, on-site nursing services, recreational, social, and cultural programming, volunteer opportunities, and other supports tailored to the needs of each community, with culturally and linguistically responsive staff.

The need for N/NORCs will only continue to grow. New York is home to approximately 4.84 million older adults; a number projected to reach 5.3 million by 2030. N/NORCs are a key part of the state's aging services infrastructure and are among the most fiscally responsible ways to meet this demographic shift. In New York, a private room in a nursing home can cost nearly \$159,000 per year¹, while NYSOFA estimates the average cost of serving an older adult through a State-funded N/NORC program is approximately \$480 per year. By providing preventive health care and social supports close to home, N/NORCs reduce hospitalizations, emergency room visits, and premature institutionalization, generating significant savings for the Medicaid system while improving quality of life for older New Yorkers.

There is also strong unmet demand for program expansion. The last statewide expansion of N/NORCs occurred in 2019, when 14 new programs were added, bringing the total to 43. At that time, more qualified applications were received than the state could fund, underscoring the need for continued investment to bring this successful model to additional communities.

A defining feature of the N/NORC model is access to on-site nursing services, which are required under NYSOFA contracts. Nurses provide critical health supports that may not otherwise be available in the community, including medication education, chronic disease management, vaccinations, mobility and balance screenings, and assistance connecting residents to physicians. However, these nursing services have long been an unfunded mandate. In recent years, Medicaid Redesign and billing changes have sharply reduced the availability of pro bono nursing support from hospitals and other partners. At the same time, rising labor costs and workforce instability - including recent nurses' strikes across the state - have driven hourly nursing rates significantly higher, in some cases exceeding \$100 per hour. As a result, N/NORCs are spending more simply to maintain the same level of required care for an aging population with increasingly complex needs.

The Governor's proposed investment will go a long way toward stabilizing and strengthening N/NORCs. **To ensure these programs can continue to meet mandated nursing requirements and adapt to rising workforce costs, UJA also respectfully urges the Legislature to continue its support for these programs by including an additional \$1 million for N/NORCs in the FY26-27 budget.** This investment would help address escalating nursing costs, reinforce the Legislature's longstanding leadership and partnership in supporting N/NORCs, and ensure these programs remain sustainable and responsive to community needs.

Together, the Governor's proposed funding and a modest investment from the Legislature, will allow NYSOFA to expand N/NORCs to new communities, stabilize essential nursing services, and advance the goals of the State's Master Plan for Aging by enabling older New Yorkers to live with dignity, independence, and security in the communities they call home.

¹ https://www.dfs.ny.gov/consumers/health_insurance/long_term_care_insurance/cost_ltc

Afterschool Programs

The Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports (LEAPS) grants brought significant changes to afterschool funding, addressing long-standing issues but also introducing some challenges that require prompt resolution to ensure a solid foundation for ongoing improvement. For many communities, LEAPS offered a new opportunity to provide high-quality afterschool programming. However, organizations that did not secure a LEAPS award still face unmet afterschool needs, including former Advantage and Empire state grantees.

Six of UJA's nonprofit partners applied for LEAPS funding. All six were approved, but only two of the six were approved and funded - ultimately receiving LEAPS' contracts. Two of the approved and not funded providers were former Advantage or Empire state grantees and were forced to tell the families they previously served at their programs that their schools were no longer hosting a free afterschool program for their children. When families attempted to locate another afterschool program in their community after they found out their current one was no longer funded, many were left with no place to access care. One of the nonprofits was able to secure one-year funding through their state legislators to cover the expenses of their program that was once funded by Advantage Afterschool. It is unclear if they will be able to access this funding and operate this program next year.

Data indicates that for every applicant that received LEAPS funding, three others did not, highlighting a significant funding gap. Furthermore, according to the Network for Youth Success, for every child participating in an afterschool program in New York, four are waiting for an available program. Additional nonprofit providers are available and willing to serve children and youth in need of afterschool programs across New York State. The Executive Budget included \$116 million for LEAPS-a \$7 million increase from the FY 2026 adopted budget. This increase is dedicated to addressing meeting rising minimum wage requirements and will not increase slots in the program. Because of this, **UJA is requesting an additional \$180 million be allocated to the Learning and Enrichment Afterschool Program Supports grant.** One-hundred fifty-five million dollars of this funding will be used for eligible, but not funded, LEAPS applicants while the other \$25 million will be used to restore afterschool access to middle and high school students left out of LEAPS funding. This investment would allow over 48,000 children and teens to be supported in a state funded afterschool program.

Lastly, the Youth Development Program (YDP) allows counties to determine programming that will best meet their local needs. In New York City, the YDP partially funds COMPASS and SONYC after school programs. The YDP was funded at \$21 million in the Executive Budget. **UJA urges the Legislature to maintain the \$21 million included in the Executive Budget.**

Child Care

Families need access to safe, affordable, and reliable child care to thrive in New York State. Low-income families especially struggle to maintain care for their families, forcing them to choose between working and providing care for their children. Without child care, parents and guardians are unable to work effectively, regardless of the location. The child care workforce is largely under-compensated, which directly impacts a provider's ability to retain staff and maintain quality care for families. The Executive Budget proposal includes historic investments in the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP), 2-Care program in New York City, universal pre-

kindergarten and child care pilot projects. If included in the adopted budget, and implemented with the input of providers and families, these investments will provide financial relief for families and move New York closer to achieving statewide universal child care.

Creating a universal child care system is dependent on fixing its current issues while also building on the strengths that already exist. Child care cannot be thoughtfully expanded without investing in the workforce. UJA urges that the Legislature **include \$1.2 billion in the enacted budget to create a permanent state fund to increase child care worker compensation**, as detailed in The Child Care Workforce Pay Equity Fund Bill (S.5533/A.0492). A plan should also be developed by the state to establish a minimum pay scale and career ladder for child care workers based upon criteria to inform compensation supplement levels after the base pay scale for all has been increased.

The \$1.2 billion proposal included in the Executive Budget for the CCAP must be adopted and an additional \$500 million must be included to address the current needs of the program. Due to underfunding and program closures waitlists for CCAP have been instituted in more than 30 counties across the state. New York City's Administration for Children's Services recently shared it requires a \$1.2 billion increased budget to maintain current caseloads and prevent attrition. Enrollment trends and waitlists outside New York City project that \$500 million is needed to meet childcare needs covered by CCAP in their communities. Any investment in CCAP must be baselined due to steadily growing demand. Counties must be assured the new level of funding will continue and they will be able to accept new CCAP families. Funds must also be distributed to counties in an equitable manner as soon as possible.

Lastly, UJA supports the **\$60 million proposal included in the Executive Budget to create Community Care models in three counties and urges the Legislature to include this funding in the enacted budget**. Access to these child care slots should be open to all families and be administered similar to state-funded pre-kindergarten programs, available to all with minimal enrollment requirements. Community Care models should be treated as a bridge to universal child care and more than one-time pilots.

UJA commends Governor Hochul on her proposed child care investments. **We urge the Legislature to include the additional funding listed above and look forward to working with the state on creating a universal child care system that pays providers fairly and offers equal access to families across the state.**

Child Welfare

Providing a Career Pathway for the State's Child Welfare Workforce

Child welfare staff report needing support in pursuing higher education. The NYS Child Welfare Worker Incentive Scholarship and the NYS Child Welfare Worker Loan Forgiveness Incentive Program help the child welfare workforce attain their higher education goals. UJA recognizes the Legislature's commitment to expanding the Scholarship and Loan Forgiveness Program by including an additional \$100,000 for each in the FY24-25 and FY25-26 enacted budgets. The FY26-27 Executive Budget does not include this additional funding with both the Scholarship and Loan Forgiveness Program being funded at \$50,000 each (\$100,000 total). **UJA**

recommends the Legislature restore and increase funding to \$2 million (\$1 million for each of these programs) in the enacted budget.

Many staff members working in child welfare programs struggle each month to pay their student loan bills, often amounting to several hundred dollars — comparable to a rent or mortgage payment. Increased state investment into the child welfare workforce’s higher education pursuits will not only assist in staff recruitment and retention efforts but will also create the next generation of child welfare leaders in the field.

Stabilizing Liability Insurance for Foster Care Providers

New York operates a state supervised, county administered, foster care system. Most of the state’s approximately 14,500 children and youth in foster care are placed with private non-profit Voluntary Foster Care Agencies (VFCAs). Counties contract with VFCAs for foster care placements. VFCAs are required, according to their contracts with counties, to carry certain levels of commercial general liability insurance, professional liability insurance, and, depending on the county requirements, potentially excess umbrella liability coverage. Foster Care agencies in New York State and nationwide are experiencing significant challenges in accessing and affording liability insurance coverage.

Some of the contributing factors to this challenge in securing liability insurance are “social inflation,” referring to a trend of higher jury awards and higher claims payouts due to high-profile cases covered in the media. “Social inflation” is causing insurance companies in many instances to assess and drop their risk — and it is happening across the country, not just in New York State. Other contributing factors include insurers’ concerns about VFCAs’ unabated staff turnover, vulnerability to cyber-attacks, and a newer trend in the market called litigation financing. There are a limited number of insurance providers in the sector and recently the field has shrunk resulting in VFCAs struggling to locate and afford liability insurance

New York State is at a point where it must support VFCAs to access mandated coverage. If nonprofits cannot access mandated liability coverage, they will leave the foster care sector forcing the state to become the sole purveyor of these services. There is very limited infrastructure and capacity in New York for counties to directly provide foster care services should VFCAs lose coverage. In New York, VFCAs currently provide care for more than 75% of children and youth in foster care statewide, and 100% in New York City. Without state action to ensure adequate coverage options, children and youth, ultimately in the care and custody of the state, and their families will experience significant disruptions in their care. **UJA recommends the state proactively act with urgency to establish a risk pool for foster care programs to ensure continued access to insurance.**

It is important to note, when foster care agencies are able to obtain continued insurance coverage, they are often forced to accept lower levels of coverage at higher premiums while counties continue to maintain, and/or increase required coverage limits. Many foster care agencies have limited surplus cash, with many having savings equal to one to two months of expenses. Lack of endowments or reserves put a strain on agencies to address any increased costs.

The current administrative rate set by the state for VFCA's (the Maximum State Aid Rate) must be modified to capture the full scope of the rapidly increasing liability insurance costs and reimburse VFCA's for related expenses in the same fiscal year as they occur. MSAR rates currently use data from two years prior which do not capture these increased costs when providers are experiencing them. Moreover, by including liability insurance costs in a capped general administrative parameter, many foster care agencies are experiencing growth in costs that are excluded from rate calculations. Lastly, **the state must provide bridge funding to support VFCA's in addressing liability cost increases.** This will absorb what has not been captured in their current rates, until changes to those calculations are in place.

UJA urges New York State to assist the foster care agencies with these insurance access/affordability issues by passing A.9646 (Hevesi), which would:

- Establish an insurance risk pool in state statute (similar to the one established for auto insurance) which would ensure foster care service agencies have access to coverage, by requiring insurance companies providing general liability insurance in New York to cover a share of foster care providers, inclusive of professional liability and abuse coverage.
- Provide \$20 million in direct state support to address significant liability insurance cost increases as a holdover for longer-term solutions. UJA recommends additional, immediate support be provided for providers who can demonstrate hardship, to help cover increased premiums foster care agencies are experiencing in their mandated liability insurance coverage.
- Provide for the timely updating of MSAR Rates: Foster care agency insurance costs have increased 27% since 2023 on average, but MSAR rates use data from two years prior which do not capture these increased costs as providers are experiencing them. Additionally, many of our agencies are experiencing growth in costs that well exceed state provided parameter increases, meaning that the MSAR calculation could exclude much of the cost in future rate calculations. UJA requests that that the MSAR calculation be modified to capture the rapidly increasing costs related to liability insurance in the same fiscal year as they occur, and that the state also work with providers to adjust parameters upward to capture the full scope of the costs.

Establish the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund

Poverty, lack of investment in community resources and infrastructure and structural racism continue to fuel the overreach of local Child Protective Services (CPS). This results in more child removals and family separations for individuals living in poverty. Establishing the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund is a way to use state dollars that will better meet the needs of children and the communities they live-in.

The Legislature must include \$30 million in the enacted budget for the Child and Family Wellbeing Fund. This investment will:

- Target ten communities across the state that have the most contact with child protective services during a five-year pilot;
- Use state money to invest in local projects and initiatives that are usually not funded with state money;
- Build community capacity through technical assistance; and

- Reduce the likelihood of CPS intervention by investing in projects and resources known to reduce family stress and vulnerability to CPS intervention.

The Child and Family Wellbeing Fund will support community developed initiatives and services that will directly support families. By targeting poverty-related conditions that are framed as neglect, families will be supported to address the issues that create instability in their lives and will no longer need CPS intervention.

Adult Literacy Education (ALE)

UJA thanks the Governor for including \$9.3 million in the Executive Budget for the ALE program. However, these funds do not meet the current need. ALE funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes and is one of the few state funding streams able to address the needs of lower-level learners. In New York State, there are 3.9 million individuals who lack their high school diploma, English language proficiency, or both.

Limited English-language proficiency or literacy skills make it difficult for individuals to support their children in school, access health care and other benefits, secure and maintain living-wage jobs, advocate for their rights as workers, and fully participate in the political process. Many adults in New York State with limited literacy skills are women and people of color; a majority are immigrant; others are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color who were born and raised in the United States but do not have a high school level education.

Adult literacy education is the key to economic security and social mobility. Median wages for adults with a high school diploma or its equivalent are 24% greater than for those without a diploma. Furthermore, higher levels of literacy are associated with greater health knowledge, more efficient use of healthcare services, and the ability to manage chronic health conditions and communicate with healthcare providers. Investing in ALE yields proven benefits for individuals and communities.

Less than 3% of New Yorkers (6,800 individuals) are served by state-funded adult literacy classes each year. To serve more New Yorkers in need of these vital classes and education, **UJA requests the Legislature add an additional \$3 million for a total of \$12 million for Adult Literacy Education in the FY26-27 Budget.**

Addressing Food Insecurity

Food access continues to be a concern among New Yorkers. As a result of the pandemic, the ensuing economic downturn, as well as high rates of inflation, more than 2 million New Yorkers are experiencing food insecurity, including 14.5% of children in the state.

The federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is a lifeline for over 2.9 million New York State residents. These funds are an electronic benefit that can be used to purchase food at authorized food stores. Recent policy changes at the federal level, including changing work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents, will make it more difficult for New York residents to benefit from this program and will put additional strain on local food pantries. The Nutrition Outreach and Education Program (NOEP) is a state funded

program that helps eligible low-income New Yorkers access SNAP benefits. This includes education about SNAP as well as application assistance. The federal government recently cut all funding that was used for similar outreach and education for SNAP. **This is why it is critical that New York State include a minimum of \$8.5 million for NOEP in the FY26-27 adopted budget.** New York residents will need assistance accessing SNAP more than ever due to federal policy changes and funding cuts. Investing in NOEP is one way the state can do this.

Food insecurity is further exacerbated by the growing prevalence of SNAP benefit theft otherwise known as Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card skimming. SNAP skimming is the practice of individuals attaching illegal devices to point-of-sale machines or PIN pads to steal card information from the magnetic strip on EBT, debit, or credit cards and record cardholders' PINs. This form of theft has had a devastating impact on New York families, leaving them without access to food and basic necessities through no fault of their own. Over the last several years, skimming has emerged as a significant and persistent challenge for low-income communities, particularly affecting older adults and families who rely on EBT benefits to feed their households. When SNAP benefits are stolen, families are often left without funds to purchase food for weeks at a time, forcing them to skip meals or turn to already overburdened emergency food providers. This crime directly undermines the effectiveness of SNAP and contributes to increased hunger and financial instability among New Yorkers who are already vulnerable.

The scope of SNAP skimming in New York is alarmingly large. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, New Yorkers received nearly \$51 million in replacement SNAP benefits between 2023 and the end of 2024. The true scale of the problem is likely significantly higher, as many thefts go unreported. In a recent survey of New York State SNAP recipients conducted by Propel, more than 2,500 respondents reported having their SNAP benefits stolen within the past year, and nearly 40% of victims did not apply for reimbursement, largely because they were unaware that replacement benefits were available. With the expiration of federal reimbursement funding in December 2024, even fewer victims are reporting thefts, making it increasingly difficult for New York State to fully understand the magnitude of this problem. **UJA strongly supports Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to transition New York's EBT cards to more secure chip card technology.**

According to Visa, EMV chip cards reduced fraud by 87% between 2015 and 2019 due to significantly stronger encryption. Several states, including California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma, have already moved forward with replacing magnetic stripe EBT cards. New York's transition to chip cards is a critical and long-overdue step to protect SNAP recipients and prevent future benefit theft. However, until chip cards are fully implemented, families whose benefits are stolen have virtually no recourse.

The federal government previously provided replacement funding for stolen SNAP benefits, but that support ended in December 2024. As a result, many families are left without food, increasing reliance on emergency food programs and deepening food insecurity. **UJA urges the State to establish a SNAP skimming victims compensation fund of approximately \$20 million to ensure that individuals and families who have had their benefits stolen can receive timely replacement funds.** It is essential that New York act swiftly to replace stolen

SNAP benefits once claims are filed and substantiated. While federal funding would be the most appropriate source for these replacement benefits, it is unlikely in the current political climate. Therefore, the State must step in to absorb these costs and ensure that New Yorkers are not pushed into hunger as a result of this preventable crime.

Lastly, the importance of supporting emergency food providers through state funds cannot be understated. Programs like Nourish New York and Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) enabled New York food banks to distribute over 50 million pounds of food last year. But it is becoming increasingly more difficult to address the rising nutrition needs of communities with stagnant resources. In the Executive Budget, Nourish New York was funded at \$55 million while HPNAP received a \$72.8 million investment. **UJA urges the Legislature to fund Nourish NY at \$75 million and HPNAP at \$75 million in the FY26-27 Budget.** Increased funding for these programs is vital to strengthening our emergency feeding system, ensuring that all New Yorkers can access the food they need, and securing New York's future in the face of ongoing federal threats.

Both HPNAP and Nourish NY offer providers flexibility in purchasing products, enabling them to meet the needs of communities with specific dietary requirements, including kosher and halal. **UJA recommends that New York State require all direct contractors for its Nourish NY and the HPNAP to complete training on Kosher and Halal food provision standards.** Direct contractors include large organizations such as food banks and other intermediaries that manage contracts on behalf of multiple providers. Given that New York is home to the nation's largest Jewish and Muslim populations, it is essential that state-funded services are equipped to meet the needs of the diverse communities they serve.

Direct contractors of HPNAP and Nourish New York play a central role in determining which products are available to the organizations within their networks. When contractors lack adequate training on the requirements for serving Kosher or Halal observant communities, eligible foods may be mishandled, rendered unusable, or ultimately wasted. Requiring all direct contractors to receive and maintain training or certification in kosher and halal food provision would help ensure that products are distributed appropriately, reduce waste, and expand access to nutritious food for all New Yorkers.

UJA also proposes that New York State should, using a data-informed approach, allocate a regionally appropriate percentage of HPNAP and Nourish New York funding to provide Kosher and Halal food. Access to funding that adequately supports communities observing religiously informed diets is often limited, inconsistent, and poorly aligned with the realities faced by providers serving these populations. Kosher and Halal foods may be harder to source and subject to stricter handling and certification requirements. Yet providers that specialize in serving Jewish and Muslim communities frequently receive little to no dedicated support to offset these additional costs. By drawing on available data on kosher and halal observance and food insecurity, the state should allocate targeted resources to ensure that these historically underserved communities receive equitable access to emergency food assistance.

These recommendations offer a clear path toward a more equitable and responsive emergency feeding system for all New Yorkers. By investing in training, strengthening program funding,

and directing resources based on demonstrated need, the state can ensure that providers are equipped to serve kosher- and halal-observant households with dignity and consistency.

Conclusion

UJA-Federation of New York respectfully urges your consideration and support of these vital programs that assist our state's most vulnerable and neediest individuals and the organizations that serve them. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please contact Faith Behum, behumf@ujafedny.org with any questions.