



**MET
COUNCIL**

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.
Changing lives.

**2026 Joint Legislative Hearing of
the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee
on the FY 2027 Budget for the New York State Department of Health**

Chair Krueger, Chair Pretlow, and fellow members of the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee,

Thank you for holding this budget hearing on the Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget for the New York State Department of Health (NYS DOH). We want to begin by clearly stating that we are extremely grateful for the Governor's increased funding for HPNAP. We have been advocating for this for years, and the Governor's proposed budget goes a long way toward meeting the needs of the communities we serve. However, we are submitting testimony on behalf of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) to request \$75 million each for the New York State Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and Nourish New York, for a total of \$150 million. These programs provide vital resources to Met Council's Food Programs, which meet the emergency food needs of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers.

For over 50 years, Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments ranging from 100% affordable housing to our award-winning family violence program, comprehensive Holocaust survivor assistance, senior programming, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher emergency food network. Over the past five years, we have also expanded our emergency food services in halal-observant communities. We serve a growing network of halal pantries meeting the needs of Muslim New Yorkers, have hosted convenings of halal food assistance stakeholders, and are currently in the middle of our fourth annual Ramadan halal emergency food distribution. Met Council provides a wide array of support to over 320,000 New Yorkers annually, including those with religious dietary restrictions.

New York, a diverse and dynamic state, is a refuge for millions of people. Whether immigrants seeking a better life for themselves and their families or Americans pursuing opportunity in a state that supports their fundamental rights, New York provides a home. With this diversity also comes significant poverty that continues to affect millions of our residents. This poverty directly contributes to food insecurity and the need for emergency food in urban, suburban, and rural areas across the state. At a time when federal cuts and pauses threaten healthcare, food assistance, housing and shelter, and other vital programs, access to nutritious food through HPNAP and Nourish NY helps lower healthcare costs, reduces reliance on programs like SNAP, improves financial stability, and strengthens mental and physical well-being for all New Yorkers, including those with religiously informed dietary restrictions.

New York State is home to the largest Jewish and Muslim populations in the country, representing about 20% of the total United States Jewish and Muslim populations. With more than 2 million food-insecure residents, New York also has one of the largest food-insecure populations in the nation. While not all Muslim and Jewish New Yorkers are food insecure, research shows that Jewish poverty tracks alongside general poverty, and Muslim Americans face food insecurity at higher rates than nearly all other religious groups (Pew Research Center, May 11, 2021; Met Council, March 2023). These data indicate

that New York is home to one of the largest populations of food-insecure Americans with kosher or halal dietary needs, yet current programs do not fully meet these needs.

New Yorkers observing religiously informed diets are often forced to compromise their religious observance or go without food when attempting to use an emergency food system not designed to serve them. Products available through many anti-hunger programs often do not meet the standards of communities following religious dietary laws. Emergency food systems must be flexible, and this is where HPNAP and Nourish NY excel. These programs allow providers to purchase culturally and religiously appropriate foods, including both kosher and halal products, where other commodity-based programs cannot. This flexibility is rare, and New York State must continue to invest in programs like HPNAP and Nourish NY that meet the needs of kosher- and halal-observant New Yorkers.

Now more than ever, state-funded emergency food assistance programs are essential. Federal changes included in H.R. 1 to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), combined with broader reductions to the social safety net, rising healthcare costs, and declining affordability, will force more New Yorkers to rely on emergency food providers. SNAP remains the nation's most effective anti-hunger program, enabling families to purchase food that meets their dietary and religious needs. For every one meal a food bank can provide, SNAP provides nine. H.R. 1 enacted major changes, including expanded work requirements, elimination of eligibility for refugees and asylees, and a shift of program costs onto states. With the expiration of New York State's "Lack of Jobs" waiver on February 1, time limits for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents will begin on March 1. By June 1, an estimated 200,000 New Yorkers will lose SNAP benefits, with up to 1 million more at risk in the months that follow. Emergency food providers are already stretched beyond capacity, and these changes will further strain the system. Continued investment in HPNAP and Nourish NY is critical to preventing a rise in food insecurity and extreme poverty.

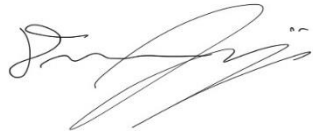
While Met Council primarily serves New York City and the southeastern counties, our research demonstrates need across the entire state. A total of 102 emergency food providers from 24 counties, representing all ten food bank catchment areas, reported unmet kosher and halal food need (Met Council, September 2024). This confirms that insufficient assistance for kosher- and halal-observant households is not limited to New York City. In response, Met Council launched and expanded the New York State Kosher and Halal Food Policy Coalition, bringing together more than 25 providers statewide. Participation in the coalition and research findings demonstrate that religiously informed dietary needs exist across New York, and HPNAP and Nourish NY funding must reflect this reality.

Our understanding of food insecurity and concern about the consequences of federal policy changes led us to join leaders across the state in requesting that both HPNAP and Nourish NY be funded at \$75 million. Food insecurity continues to rise, and both programs provide essential support for emergency food providers statewide. For Met Council and other providers serving kosher- and halal-observant communities, the value and flexibility of these programs cannot be overstated.

The funding and administrative decisions made by the Senate, the Assembly, and the Governor directly affect millions of food-insecure New Yorkers. Met Council's research shows that nearly 40% of New York's counties are home to residents experiencing food insecurity who require kosher or halal emergency food. Fully funding HPNAP and Nourish NY at \$75 million would significantly benefit all food-insecure New Yorkers, including those with religious dietary needs.

We thank you for your time and consideration and look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to better meet the needs of all New Yorkers experiencing food insecurity.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Dickran Jebejian', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Dickran Jebejian
Director of Policy
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty