



**Testimony of Edible Schoolyard NYC
Before the New York State Assembly and New York State Senate
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the FY 2025-FY 2026 Executive Budget
Topic: Human Services**

**Assembly Committee on Ways & Means, Assemblymember Gary Pretlow, Chair
Senate Committee on Finance, Senator Liz Krueger, Chair**

**Assembly Committee of Social Services, Assemblymember Maritza Davila, Chair
Senate Committee on Social Services, Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Children and Families, Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi, Chair
Senate Committee on Children and Families, Senator Jabari Brisport, Chair**

**Assembly Committee on Aging, Assemblymember Rebecca A. Seawright, Chair
Senate Committee on Aging, Senator Cordell Cleare, Chair**

February 12, 2025

On behalf of the students, families, and school communities we serve, Edible Schoolyard NYC urges state leaders to ensure that the FY 2025-2026 New York State Budget includes investments in strengthening access to food benefits for the most vulnerable communities by supporting a *guaranteed SNAP minimum benefit of \$100 per month* and the New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council's (CPRAC) proposal to *create a state-funded food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP due solely to their citizenship status*. New York is facing an escalating food insecurity crisis, exacerbated by the lingering economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, rising costs of living, and systemic barriers that prevent many families from accessing federal nutrition assistance. Ensuring food security for all requires concrete investments that remove barriers to essential resources like food. Food is a basic human right, and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance.

Guarantee a \$100 SNAP Minimum Benefit for All Participating New Yorkers

Today, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) provides nearly 3 million New Yorkers with monthly food assistance benefits. The program is widely understood as the nation's largest and most impactful anti-hunger program. Despite the program's success in helping New York households afford a more nutritious and well-rounded diet, far too many New Yorkers receive inadequate benefits. While SNAP benefit levels are determined by Congress and the federal government, states, including New Jersey and New Mexico, have used state funding to raise SNAP benefits for participating households. New York should take the lead as well.



Data from New York’s Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) shows that over 107,000 New Yorkers currently receive monthly SNAP benefits that amount to less than \$100, while some receive just \$23 per month. These individuals are typically older adults with an annual income of around \$16,000 per year, over a quarter of whom are actively receiving [SSI](#) benefits. It is simply impossible to afford a month of groceries, let alone a day or two of food, with just \$23. Low benefit amounts are often cited as a barrier to SNAP participation—suggesting that a more adequate minimum benefit could draw down more federal dollars. That is why raising the SNAP minimum benefit has bipartisan cosponsorship in both the Assembly and Senate ([A.1318](#) / [S.665](#)), endorsements from over [250 New York-based organizations](#), and broad-based support from [66% of New York voters](#).

Local Impact: At Edible Schoolyard NYC, we know firsthand how much the purchasing power of SNAP means to the health and wellbeing of our school communities. We believe that edible education - where students experience hands-on cooking and gardening education - helps kids build healthy relationships with food, their community, and their environment. A healthy diet [has been found](#) to contribute to students’ improved cognitive function and increased attention spans, and helps fuel their bodies and brains to succeed socially, emotionally, and academically. However, it is impossible to achieve these important positive outcomes without the resources and supports which promote students and their families’ ability to implement the lessons they learn in our school gardens and kitchen classrooms in their own communities. SNAP is one of the key supports our students and their families rely on to access fresh, healthy ingredients to cook culturally relevant meals together.

For these reasons, we respectfully request that the FY2026 Enacted Budget appropriates \$70 million to ensure that all New Yorkers participating in SNAP receive a more adequate benefit of at least \$100 per month. This initiative would directly help New Yorkers better afford food, while also supporting grocers, retailers, and farmers’ markets across the state.

Expand Food Assistance for Non-citizen Households with Children

In addition to raising the SNAP minimum benefit and investing in SNAP application assistance, we must also ensure that vital nutrition benefits are available for New Yorkers excluded on the basis of their immigration status. Arbitrary barriers to SNAP access—which include both harmful waiting periods and outright exclusions—exacerbate food hardship for many immigrant New Yorkers, who contribute over \$27 billion in state and local taxes. We must ensure that all of our families can afford healthy food in their communities.



The New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC), established by the Governor through the Child Poverty Reduction Act, has set an ambitious and necessary goal: to cut child poverty in half by 2031. CPRAC [recently recommended](#) that Governor Hochul create a state food benefit for households with children who are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status, as a pathway towards cutting child poverty by half by 2031. That policy is expected to cost \$140.8 million and reach 64,600 households with children each year. The program would be run through the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) with administration led by local social service districts, and provide benefits equal to the benefits provided for similarly situated SNAP-eligible households. All currently-excluded immigrant groups would be eligible, including those on 5-year waiting periods.

Research published in the [American Journal of Preventive Medicine](#) (AJPM) finds that noncitizens are nearly twice as likely to be food insecure compared with U.S.-born and naturalized citizens. According to the American Community Survey, the number of foreign-born NY residents who receive SNAP benefits has increased by 19 percent since before the pandemic in 2019.

To address these disparities, there is growing momentum around the country for more equitable SNAP access. For example, in 2022, California expanded its state food assistance program to provide benefits for Californians aged 55 and older, who are currently excluded on the basis of their immigration status. Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington have each implemented similar state-funded programs to provide food assistance for excluded immigrant households. Further, [80+ organizations](#)—including groups focused on health, food security, immigrant rights, and agriculture—have joined the SNAP4All New York Coalition, calling for a state-funded food benefit for all income-eligible households currently ineligible for SNAP due to citizenship status.

While we believe that this state-funded program should benefit all excluded New Yorkers, including households without children, we respectfully request that the FY2026 Enacted Budget include \$140.8 million to provide vital food assistance for non-citizen households with children as outlined in CPRAC's recommendations as an important first step.

We also recognize that the new federal administration has created widespread fear in its targeting of immigrant communities. In this climate, New York State has an even deeper responsibility to support and protect all of its residents. To ensure the success of this program, we would also need to prioritize the safety of those who participate. For example, the "NY4All" bill in the Assembly and Senate ([S.2235/A.3506](#)) would create deeper protections for immigrant New Yorkers by ending State government agency collusion with federal immigration



officials. That is why we urge the legislature to pass NY4All, which would help protect immigrant families and ensure that SNAP4All is a safe, accessible program for New Yorkers around the state.

Conclusion

Every New Yorker deserves the basic human right to food and an adequate benefit to afford groceries, regardless of their citizenship status. Investing in a \$100 SNAP minimum benefit, SNAP4All, and NY4All ensures every New Yorker has the food they urgently need. We urge State leaders to invest in these programs in the FY 25-26 Budget.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of
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