



**Testimony Submitted by  
Chef Gregory Silverman, West Side Campaign Against Hunger  
Before the City Council Committee on General Welfare**

My name is Chef Gregory Silverman, and I am the CEO and Executive Director of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH). We thank the New York City Council for holding today's hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Today, I am representing the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH) and our **community** of almost 77,000 customers who come to us from across NYC to gain access to healthy food and supportive services. Founded in 1979, West Side Campaign Against Hunger is the country's first supermarket-style, multi-service food pantry and one of the largest emergency food providers in New York City. The West Side Campaign Against Hunger alleviates hunger by ensuring that all New Yorkers have access with **dignity** to a **choice** of healthy food and supportive services.

In the last year, we provided over 4 million pounds of food, which included well over **TWO million pounds** of fresh fruits and vegetables, to nearly 77,000 individuals in need. Our customers are overjoyed that we serve over 50% fresh produce; this is unheard of anywhere else in NYC, let alone the United States. Fresh, healthy, tasty produce helps us battle short-term food insecurity and supports the health and well-being of families in need.

WSCAH provides benefits access services through our Social Service Department, serving our customers throughout the pandemic through a virtual call center. WSCAH conducts outreach to our new customers, ensuring they know about these vital sources of assistance. Last spring, one of my colleagues was helping a couple in their mid-50s apply for SNAP. They had little income, rented a room, and didn't have family in NYC to help or support them. When coming to WSCAH to drop off documents, the couple came together, holding hands, and the wife physically supported her husband, who struggled to walk. We soon learned the reason for his

frailty; he was in treatment for cancer. Their application was submitted and eventually approved for benefits. Just recently, the wife came back to WSCAH to submit a change form for her SNAP case, as her husband had passed away.

I share this story today because I find it grounding. It is a reminder of why we show up everyday to support our customers and community. A reminder that there are real people experiencing real pain and hardship on the other side of that phone, table, or window. In this woman's grief, she knew that she could trust our team to help her complete a painful, but important, task related to her benefits. So it's also a beautiful reminder of the impact we can have simply by being here and showing up as our best selves. Our customer needed support in navigating the safety net and organizations like ours are here to provide it!

New York emerged as the first American epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic. And although many restrictions are lifted, the crisis will continue to negatively impact poverty and food inequity across the city, the state, and our entire planet for years to come. Each and every emergency feeding organization in NYC has fought this pandemic battle in its own way and with power, grace, and innovation. We have moved operations to the street, moved social services virtual, created new partnerships, and engaged larger networks in need. Each and every one of us can tell this story.

Bringing food to people is an important and long overlooked way to ensure dignity in emergency feeding. Using technology to expand individual choice of food, delivery options, communications, etc is key for our efforts going forward. WSCAH is investing over a million dollars to build a collaborative, choice model food delivery technology platform to make these options and choices a reality for the community. We welcome city support.

But this investment is not enough. The city must fund technological solutions for the entire emergency feeding network. The City of NY must finally invest in supporting the training, technical assistance, software and hardware that front line food orgs need to efficiently and effectively support their communities with healthy food and supportive services. Whether it's WSCAH or any other organization, the answer to fighting hunger is not to have individual groups building their own platforms. The key is choice...which is not just about choice of food but a choice of technological support. In our amazing sector, we need a plentiful array of options, not

simply one archaic and inflexible platform. Every organization working to fight hunger needs city support so they can have their choice of training, of equipment, of staffing models to serve their customers in ways that work best for them. Period. This is the choice.

We don't do this work in isolation, it's only possible through collaboration. Over the last 3 years, WSCAH built out a collective model of engagement with 7 of the largest Emergency Food Providers in the city: St. John's Bread and Life, Project Hospitality, New York Common Pantry, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Met Council, Part of the Solution and the West Side Campaign Against Hunger. This collective has not only helped us save upwards of 20% on our food purchases, but it helped us navigate COVID safety issues, purchase equipment, advocate for city and state support and simply build an even stronger community of changemakers. In the future, this group will continue to grow to find new ways to leverage our strengths - whether it's via distribution, advocacy, technology platforms, program evaluation, etc - to help us all to make sure this city and all its people are fed with the food and support each and all want and deserve.

The community we serve has known and felt isolation and hunger well before this pandemic. COVID-19 has only exacerbated already difficult conditions. That is why we are calling on city leaders to allocate increased and longer-term funding to enable Emergency Feeding organizations across the city – to continue our important work, in collaboration, with effective data tracking and with high quality, fresh healthy food options to ensure that no New Yorker goes hungry.

WE THANK YOU NYC Council and together, as a community, we will make sure all New Yorkers have access with DIGNITY to healthy food and supportive services. Thank you.