

LOCKED OUT:

New York City Working Families Unlawfully Denied Access to Food Stamps

A Report by the Office of the Public Advocate of New York City

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum
November 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
Enrollment Alternatives for People Who Work.....	8
Public Advocate Office’s Investigation	9
How Other Cities Successfully Serve Low-Income Workers.....	11
Recommendations	12
Appendix A:	
Table 1 U.S. Major Cities: Food Stamp Use Percent Change June 2002 – June 2003	13
Table 2 New York State Counties: Food Stamp Use Percent Change June 2002 – June 2003	14
Appendix B: Survey Results by Borough	15
Appendix C: The Survey Instrument.....	19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an in-depth look at the level of access working families have to the Food Stamp Program in New York City. Enrollment figures from June 2002 to June 2003 show that New York City is slightly improving its rate of food stamp use in comparison to other areas. However, New York City still ranks third from the bottom among nine of the country's major cities and is tied for last among the state's six largest counties (see Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2.)

This report finds the Human Resources Administration (HRA) failing to follow federal regulations requiring it to provide alternatives for people whose work or job training schedules conflict with regular food stamp office hours. These alternatives are intended to minimize the amount of time applicants and participants need to spend at a food stamp office during the day. In addition, we found through visits and calls that despite claims by the Bloomberg administration of extended hours at some food stamp centers, the reality is that few people are actually served when working individuals and families are most likely to need assistance. Among other problems, our investigators were locked out of buildings during extended hours, rejected for evening appointments, and couldn't get phone calls answered.

HRA is contradicting the Bloomberg Administration's priority of promoting work as the escape route from poverty. The Administration needs to support those who find work by making it possible for them to participate in the Food Stamp Program – referred to widely as the nation's foremost work support program. U.S. Department of Agriculture officials, along with nutrition experts and social scientists, credit food stamps with helping low-income people retain jobs. The program allows workers to obtain a consistent source of food and improves their overall nutritional status and attention span. It is also common sense. People who do not have to worry about where their next meal will come from are able to use their time and energy to apply for work and keep a job.

FINDINGS

HRA is breaking the law by failing to uniformly provide any of following required alternatives:

- Office hours that accommodate those who work
- Phone interviews in lieu of face-to-face interviews
- Permission for a representative to file a worker's food stamp application
- Allowance for applicants/participants to mail, fax, or electronically submit an application and supporting documents.

HRA's Extended-Hours Food Stamp Offices Are Failing to Serve Working New Yorkers.

While HRA publicly maintains that four of its twenty-four food stamp offices are open during weekday evenings and on Saturdays to accommodate those who work, a three-part investigation conducted by The Public Advocate's Office found that little to no direct assistance of food stamp applicants and participants is actually accomplished outside traditional office hours. As a result, low-income New Yorkers who work are excluded from participating in the federal program. Key investigation findings include:

- During three out of ten in-person visits made to the four extended-hours food stamp offices, investigators found the buildings locked – one hour before the offices were supposed to close.
- On every additional visit, investigators were refused an evening appointment.
- Offices reported upon further inquiry that no appointments are ever scheduled during the evening.
- Investigators were told to resolve their needs by calling offices during the day or scheduling Saturday appointments.
- Less than one-third of phone calls to offices were answered. The only time an investigator got through at one office, he was put on hold and disconnected.

- Investigators were frequently denied the option to mail, fax, or have a representative submit their food stamp application, and told that such approaches would merely lead to lost paperwork.
- The Council of the City of New York recently found the mandatory short application form is still not in use at all centers.¹ In addition, the Office of the Public Advocate found that in two of four offices surveyed applicants received the long form.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Advocate makes the following recommendations to help low-income workers obtain and maintain access to food stamps:

- Make extended hours food stamp offices operate as intended. Ensure caseworkers schedule appointments for applicants and participants throughout the entire day until 6 p.m.
- Re-educate food stamp employees and provide guidance to help them abide by federal regulations (e.g. conduct phone interviews, receive applications by fax/mail/representative.)
- Publicize the various ways low-income workers can apply for and maintain eligibility without having to skip work.
- Equip offices open on Saturday with staff who have the necessary authority to process applications and handle client needs.
- Recognize the Food Stamp Program as a work support program.
- Make the food stamp application available on HRA's website.

¹ The Council of New York City, "Stamping Out Hunger: Access to Food Stamp Applications in New York City," September 2003. The report found that in twelve percent of cases, food stamp offices are continuing to use the long form.

INTRODUCTION

Working families provide a barometer for how well the Food Stamp Program meets the needs of those it was designed by Congress to serve. This report looks at how New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) is providing working New Yorkers access to food stamps, and demonstrates that the city needs to make significant improvements in how it runs the program.

Last year, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum released "Stamping Out Hunger: Why New York City is Falling Behind in Food Stamp Registration." The report compares food stamp enrollment rates among America's largest cities and New York State's most populous counties. It found the New York City enrollment rate was the lowest of all, and the only locale to actually experience a decrease in participation. This year, an update of enrollment figures from June 2002 to June 2003 shows that New York City is slightly improving its rate of food stamp use in comparison to other areas. But New York City still ranks third from the bottom among nine of the country's major cities, and is tied for last among the state's six largest counties (see Appendix A, Tables 1 and 2).

The Public Advocate's 2002 report made four recommendations to bring enrollment rates up to an acceptable level. Two of the recommendations were implemented: partnership with local not-for-profits to conduct outreach² and use of a shortened application form.³ However, a recent report by the Council of the City of New York found that the short form is still not in use at all centers.⁴ The Public Advocate's two other recommendations were not implemented. Both called on the city to increase food stamp access for working families and the unemployed. HRA refuses to provide single, unemployed adults with access to food stamps for more than three months within a three-year period, which would help provide a consistent source of food to those searching for work. The city also did not make wider use of flexible office hours, known as "extended hours," to allow working families to apply for food stamps during weekday evenings and on Saturdays.

This report evaluates food stamp accessibility for one of the major groups advocates believe is excluded from participation: working families and individuals. The Community Food Resource Center, a leading New York City anti-hunger direct service and advocacy organization, states "HRA centers are ill-equipped to serve people who work," and the organization encourages the city to use extended hours at more food stamp offices.⁵ Seedco, a New York City based national organization that focuses on community and workforce development, sites in a report released two months ago that fewer than half of eligible working families participate in the food stamp program.⁶ The Washington, DC based Food Research and Action Center, the country's most well-known anti-hunger policy group, states that "low-wage jobs rarely give their employees paid time off, so those workers have to lose income – or even risk their jobs – in order to apply."⁷

² Public Advocate Gotbaum raised private funds to help support an HRA-United Way food stamp outreach partnership that involves four nonprofits and five local community-based organizations.

³ The State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance reduced the application form from fifteen pages to four, and the city started using it during Summer 2003.

⁴ The Council of New York City, "Stamping Out Hunger: Access to Food Stamp Applications in New York City," September 2003. The report found that in twelve percent of cases, food stamp offices are continuing to use the long form.

⁵ Community Food Resource Center, "Missing Millions/Missing Meals: New York City's Food Stamp Crisis," December 2002.

⁶ Seedco, "Benefits and Low Wage Work," September 2003. Reference to Fishman, Michael E. and Harold Beebout, "Supports for Working Families: A New Approach," The Lewin Group/Mathmatica, December 2001.

⁷ Food Research and Action Center, "Good Choices in Hard Times," February 2002.

This report is being released just weeks after the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that hunger and food insecurity increased in the United State for the third year in a row.⁸ It begins by outlining different ways the USDA allows agencies to provide enrollment alternatives for those who work. The report then describes findings of an investigation conducted to determine whether working individuals have access to the application process for food stamps and maintain eligibility once enrolled, and discusses best practices used in cities across the country to implement federal regulations intended to help those who work. The report concludes with six recommendations from the Public Advocate on how the Bloomberg Administration can unlock the doors to food stamps for working New Yorkers.

Food Stamps Help Workers Keep Jobs

The Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University published several reports that attribute to food stamp use improved nutrition and well-being, increased attention span, the ability to retain information.⁹ Low-income workers will be in a better position to keep their jobs, and those who are unemployed better able to look for work, if they participate in the Food Stamp Program.

President George W. Bush, Mayor Bloomberg and HRA Commissioner/Administrator Verna Eggleston all express support for helping low-income families escape poverty through work, not welfare.¹⁰ In March 1998, the city began converting welfare offices into Job Centers, and according to HRA's website, "this bold re-organization of NYC's welfare system emphasizes 'work first.'"¹¹

Despite this focus on work, the city is failing to properly implement the nation's foremost work support program. Acknowledging the link between food stamps and work in testimony to the City Council, HRA Executive Deputy Commissioner Seth Diamond stated, "For some working families struggling to pay bills in a difficult economy, food assistance allows them to continue using their limited income for other critical needs."¹²

A report commissioned by the USDA asserts that food stamps play an "important role as a safety net for... working persons with low earnings, including those who have successfully made the transition from cash welfare to work."¹³ Researchers express concern that while welfare reform was intended to reduce the number of welfare recipients, the associated decrease in food stamp use is alarming. They state that, "low [food stamp] participation rates may be an indication that the [program] is not fulfilling its mission."¹⁴

Not All Eligible Low-Income New Yorkers are Participating

According to the Community Service Society, more that 600,000 New Yorkers earn between \$5.30 and \$10 per hour.¹⁵ Yet the USDA reports that less than half of eligible workers participate in the Food Stamp Program, citing lack of information, difficulty getting to the food stamp office, and time-consuming re-certification meetings as major barriers.¹⁶ According to the most recent U.S. Census, as of 2000, over two million New Yorkers live in households with incomes that would qualify them for food

⁸ U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Household Food Insecurity in the United States, 2002," October 2003.

⁹ Studies can be found on the Center on Hunger and Poverty's website at <http://www.centeronhunger.org/pubs.html#HFI>.

¹⁰ "Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg Announces Proposal for New Federal Legislation to Keep New York City the Leader in Welfare Reform," press release May, 15, 2002.

¹¹ Human Resources Administration website, http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/serv_welfarework.html.

¹² Testimony of Seth Diamond Executive Deputy Commissioner December 16, 2002.

¹³ Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., "The Reaching the Working Poor and Poor Elderly Study: What We Learned and Recommendations for Future Research," December 1999.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Referenced on New York City Coalition Against Hunger website <http://www.nyccah.org/hunger/hunger.html>.

¹⁶ Mathematica Policy Research, Inc., "The Reaching the Working Poor and Poor Elderly Study: What We Learned and Recommendations for Future Research," December 1999.

stamps if they also meet other eligibility requirements.¹⁷ However, at high points over the past three years, only between 800,000 and 900,000 people participated in the program in New York City each month.¹⁸

Advocates in New York City, after conducting outreach in poor neighborhoods, report that nearly a quarter of new program enrollees have earned income. When low-income workers are informed of ways they can gain access to the program, they enroll.

Nationally, 28 percent of food stamp participants have earned income.¹⁹ New York State ranks low on the list with just 16.7 percent of households reporting earned income, compared to Texas with a rate of 40 percent.²⁰ National figures support the premise that, when states and cities track enrollment rates among working families and combine this awareness with the use of USDA-required enrollment alternatives for working families, more eligible workers participate.

Soup kitchens and food pantries report that working families need food. Data collected before 2001 shows that 23 percent of people who receive community food assistance in New York City live in families with at least one working family member.²¹ Since 9/11, 60 percent of these food programs reported serving more working families.²²

Food stamps are not only an economic development tool because they help stimulate and preserve employment. They also help finance the food industry and economy at large. According to a report just released by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, “Without food stamps, some grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods... likely would go out of business during recessions, causing further loss of jobs and making food shopping more difficult for all families in the area.”²³ The report goes on to quote testimony of USDA Undersecretary Bost as saying, “Because benefits automatically flow into communities... that face rising unemployment or poverty, the program tends to soften some of the harsher effects of an economic downturn.”²⁴

One estimate determines that New York City loses out on one billion dollars in federal revenue and an additional \$1.4 billion in related economic activity each year, because over 800,000 eligible New Yorkers do not participate.²⁵

HRA Fails to Track Working New Yorkers in Food Stamp Program

Despite spoken emphasis on serving working families, New York City is not able to report the percentage of employed individuals who participate in the food stamp program.²⁶ This lack of awareness reflects the minimal effort the city places on evaluating how well it serves those who work. Except for Los Angeles, where participation decreased over the last year, and Detroit, every city contacted by the Public Advocate’s Office tracks the percentage of food stamp participants in their locale who have earned

¹⁷ Bureau of the U.S. Census, U.S. Census 2000, data set SF-3.

¹⁸ HRA Facts, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/html/hrafacts.html>.

¹⁹ USDA, “Selected Economic Characteristics of Participating Food Stamp Households, Fiscal Year 2002 Advance Report.”

²⁰ USDA, “Characteristics of Food Stamp Households 2001.”

²¹ America’s Second Harvest/Food For Survival, “Hunger in America 2001: The New York City Report.”

²² New York City Coalition Against Hunger, “Hunger Among Hidden Victims,” 2002.

²³ David A. Super, “Work and the Food Stamp Program,” Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, September 30, 2003.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Community Food Resource Center, “Missing Millions/Missing Meals: New York City’s Food Stamp Crisis,” December 2002.

²⁶ The Office of the Public Advocate requested the number of people in New York City who have earned income and are enrolled in the Food Stamp Program from the Human Resources Administration in October 2003 [10/17/03 Letter]. They did not respond to the request, and by phone we were told that this information was not available.

income. In the cities where earned income rates are highest, including San Francisco, Houston, San Antonio, and Dallas, food stamp offices are making aggressive use of alternatives to enroll working families (See Appendix A, Table 1).

HRA needs to track how many food stamp participants work so officials can determine which alternative enrollment techniques are most effective once they implement federal regulations. Maintaining awareness of this figure will also help HRA more wisely spend limited funding in locations where the most low-income workers are eligible but not yet enrolled.

ENROLLMENT ALTERNATIVES FOR PEOPLE WHO WORK

Under federal food stamp law, outlined in the *Code of Federal Regulations*, each state food stamp agency must provide a variety of alternatives for those who work so that participating in the Food Stamp Program does not inhibit their ability to maintain a job or participate in a work training program. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance has legislative authority for New York State's food stamp program. The Office codifies federal law at the state level in the *Food Stamp Source Book* and passes administrative responsibility to local county departments of social services²⁷. In New York City's case, the Human Resources Administration is responsible for administering the Food Stamp Program. The state grants HRA broad authority to oversee the administrative functions listed below.

The city is required to:

²⁷ The New York State *Food Stamp Source Book* specifically outlines procedure for: waiving office interviews for those who work (Waiver of the Office Interview: Section 4, Policy 2), allowing a family member or other individual to submit a food stamp application for those who cannot do so themselves (Authorized Representative: Section 4, Policy (1)(a)), and submitting an application by mail, fax or authorized representative (Application Processing Policy Section 4, Policy 1.)

- Hold office hours that accommodate those who work²⁸
- Provide phone interviews in lieu of face-to-face interviews²⁹
- Allow a representative to file a worker's food stamp application³⁰
- Allow applicants and participants to mail, fax or electronically submit an application and supporting documents³¹

Current city practice:

- HRA publicly maintains that it operates extended office hours by staffing one food stamp center in each borough (except for Staten Island) from 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays.
- The other twenty of the city's food stamp offices are open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.³²
- HRA food stamp staff generally work in three rotating shifts from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. (8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. and 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.) to accommodate both clients and paperwork.³³
- The city does not widely provide any other enrollment alternatives for working families.³⁴

PUBLIC ADVOCATE OFFICE'S INVESTIGATION

INVESTIGATION GOALS

The Public Advocate's Office conducted a three-part investigation to determine whether working individuals have the ability to apply for and maintain ongoing participation in the Food Stamp Program in New York City.

It evaluates access based on a working person's ability to:

- Obtain a food stamp application during extended office hours
- Schedule an enrollment or re-certification interview with a caseworker during extended office hours
- Obtain information and ask questions about the program by phone during the day

²⁸ 7 CFR 274.2 (f) "State Agencies are responsible for setting the hours of operation for their food stamp office. In doing so, State agencies must take into account the special needs of the populations they serve including households containing a working person."

²⁹ 7 CFR 273.2(e)(2) "The State agency must notify the applicant that it will waive the face-to-face interview... in favor of a telephone interview on a case-by-case basis because of household hardship situations as determined by the State agency. These hardship conditions include but are not limited to... work or training hours which prevent the household from participating in an in-office interview." 7 CFR 273.2(e)(3) "To the extent practicable, the State agency must schedule the interview to accommodate the needs of groups with special circumstances, including working households."

³⁰ 7 CFR 273.2(c)(1) "Households must file food stamp applications by submitting the forms to the food stamp office either in person, through authorized representative, by fax or other electronic transmission, by mail, or by completing an on-line electronic application. ...Applications signed through the use of electronic signature techniques or applications containing a handwritten signature and then transmitted by fax or other electronic transmission are acceptable."

³¹ Ibid.

³² HRA Website, http://nyc.gov/html/hra/html/serv_foodstamps.html.

³³ HRA Office of Program Reporting, Analysis and Accountability.

³⁴ Every advocate contacted by the Public Advocate's Office and every client interviewed confirmed this. In addition, the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance publishes a guide to help clients fill out their applications (LDSS-4826A). It states "If it is difficult for you to come in for a Food Stamp benefits application appointment (reasons may include employment...), you can have someone else apply for you. You can also mail us your application or drop it off and, in some circumstances, we can interview by phone. Please contact us at [blank] if you need to set up a telephone interview." Just one investigator received a copy of this guide from an office, and the contact number was left blank.

- Submit paperwork necessary to apply for food stamps and maintain ongoing eligibility by mail, fax, and authorized representative.

METHODOLOGY

From October 28 – November 12, 2003, a team of ten volunteers and interns from local colleges made ten visits, posing as single, low-income workers and attempted to use alternative methods to apply for food stamps. Investigators attended a training session in which they were provided with an overview of food stamp policy and procedures and trained to use the survey instrument (Appendix C). Detailed results of their investigation by borough are included at the end of the report (Appendix B).

Part A: In-Person Attempt

Investigators conducted in-person visits to each of the four extended-hour food stamp offices. Working in pairs, they visited each office at least twice, once on a weekday evening between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. and once on a Saturday. *Repeat visits were made to the Bronx and Queens because the offices were locked during hours they were supposed to be open.*

Part B: Telephone Attempt

Investigators called the extended-hours food stamp centers during the day to determine whether information is available to the working public by phone. Offices were called as many times as it took investigators to get all questions answered.

Part C: Client Interview

Investigators interviewed current and prospective clients who were at extended hour food stamp centers in the evenings and on Saturdays. These conversations provided investigators with a more detailed understanding of what happens to New Yorkers who attempt to apply for food stamps outside regular office hours.

FINDINGS

Some Food Stamp Centers Were Locked During Extended Hours. During three out of the ten in-person visits made to the four extended-hours food stamp offices, investigators found the buildings locked – one hour before the offices were supposed to close.

Evening Appointments Were Refused. On all the other visits, investigators were refused an evening appointment. Offices reported upon further inquiry that no appointments are ever scheduled during the evening, which explains why investigators found few clients in the offices during extended hours. Investigators were told to resolve their needs by calling offices during the day or scheduling Saturday appointments.

Food Stamp Offices Did Not Answer Phones. Less than one-third of phone calls to offices were answered. The only time an investigator got through to one of the offices, he was put on hold and disconnected.

Option to Mail, Fax, or Use Representative Frequently Denied. Investigators were frequently denied the option to mail, fax, or have a representative submit their food stamp application, and were told that such approaches would merely lead to lost paperwork.

Long Application Form Used. In two of the four sites visited, applicants were given the long application, despite a mandatory switch to a shorter form earlier this year.

HOW OTHER CITIES SUCCESSFULLY SERVE LOW-INCOME WORKERS

Chicago, IL

On page three of Chicago's food stamp application, clients can check a box that allows them to choose a phone interview instead of an in-person office interview if "hours of work or educational activities conflict with Department of Human Services office hours."³⁵ Chicago offices also accept applications by mail. The clear statement of the option to be interviewed by phone informs working residents up-front that they will not have to skip work to get their applications processed.

San Francisco, CA

On October 9, 2003, the California legislature passed legislation re-establishing its commitment to working families after lawmakers realized food stamp offices were not being responsive to their needs. AB-231 codifies federal law, stating that county welfare offices should exempt households from face-to-face interviews for reasons established by the federal government, including work hours.³⁶

In San Francisco, where the percentage of participants with earned income is 67 percent, Human Services employees enroll applicants at sites where low-income workers naturally congregate, such as medical centers and cultural centers. The Department of Human Services also makes it known on its website that applicants "may authorize another person to apply and be interviewed for him/her."³⁷

San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas, TX

In 2000, the Texas Department of Human Services reinforced the importance of food stamps as a work support program in a memo to all staff.³⁸ Since then, the state has focused on efforts to enroll and re-certify working families through the use of phone interviews in lieu of office visits.³⁹ In San Antonio, Houston, and Dallas, where food stamp participants with earned income make up 33 percent, 29 percent and, 23 percent respectively of the total, it is clear that working families are benefiting as a result.

³⁵ Food stamp application available on Illinois Department of Human services website at <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/ts/fss/pdf/IL444-2378b.pdf>.

³⁶ California law AB-231.

³⁷ San Francisco Department of Social services website, http://www.sfgov.org/site/dhs_page.asp?id=12883.

³⁸ USDA, The Nutrition Safety Net: At Work For Families," 2000.

³⁹ Regulations can be found at <http://www.dhs.state.tx.us/handbooks/TexasWorks/PartA/A100/tw-a130.asp#131>.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Public Advocate makes the following recommendations to help low-income workers obtain and maintain access to food stamps:

Make Extended Hours Real. Make extended hours food stamp offices operate as intended. Ensure caseworkers schedule appointments for applicants and participants throughout the entire day until 6 p.m.

Train Workers to Enforce Federal Food Stamp Laws. HRA must re-educate food stamp employees and provide guidance to help them abide by federal regulations (e.g. conduct phone interviews, receive applications by fax/mail/representative.)

Inform Eligible Workers of Various Ways to Apply for Food Stamps. HRA must publicize the various ways low-income workers can apply for and maintain eligibility without having to skip work.

Ensure Weekend Offices Can Help Applicants. Equip offices open on Saturday with staff who have the necessary authority to process applications and handle client needs.

Recognize the Food Stamp Program as a Work Support Program. Despite rhetoric recognizing the value of the food stamp program, the Bloomberg administration and HRA must put practices into place that encourage and facilitate food stamp use for working individuals and families, including recognizing and treating food stamps as an economic development tool.

Make Food Stamp Application Available on HRA's Website. HRA must make food stamps available to all who are eligible. Providing a form that one can download from HRA's website would create one more point of access.

CONCLUSION

Since beginning her term, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum has made it her priority to ensure New Yorkers receive all benefits they are eligible to receive. Access to and enrollment in the federal Food Stamp Program not only puts food on the table of eligible, needy New Yorkers. Food stamps also provide a needed boost to the local economy by bringing in federal dollars to the city's food industry.

Therefore, the Office of the Public Advocate is disturbed that not only are HRA's few extended hours food stamp offices not adequately providing services, but also that the Bloomberg administration is violating federal law by not providing alternatives for those whose work schedules do not permit daytime office visits. The Bloomberg administration and HRA must rectify these unacceptable violations immediately and continue to expand access in order to guarantee food stamp access to all who are eligible.

Appendix A

TABLE 1

Major U.S. Cities: Food Stamp Use Percentage Change June 2002 – June 2003

New York City Faring Slightly Better than Last Year But Still Third From Bottom

City	Participants June 2002*	Participants June 2003	Percent Change 2001-2002**	Percent Change 2002-2003	Participants with Earned Income
Los Angeles	663,140	639,950	5%	-3%	Not available
Chicago	420,243	438,881	16%	4%	12%
New York City	820,480	871,295	-2%	6%	Not available
Detroit	166,667	182,934	10%	10%	Not available
San Francisco	14,311	15,849	19%	11%	67%
Indianapolis	82,500	98,633	18%	20%	5%
San Antonio	124,330	148,923	14%	20%	33%
Houston	176,842	237,224	16%	34%	29%
Dallas	110,403	152,272	31%	38%	23%

*June 2002 participation figures vary from figures reported in “Stamping Out Hunger: Why New York City is Falling Behind in Food Stamp Registration” released by the Public Advocate in September 2002. Variations are due to revisions in city/state reporting or to more narrowly defined scope of geographic area by the reporting city.

** Percent change 2001-2002 based on figures from “Stamping Out Hunger.”

Note: Alternative enrollment methods for working families prove effective in major cities. Table 1 details a positive relationship between increased participation rates and tracking of participants with earned income.

TABLE 2

New York State Counties: Food Stamp Use Percent Change June 2002 – June 2003

New York Faring Slightly Better than Last Year But Still Tied at Bottom

County	Participants June 2002	Participants June 2003	Percent Change 2001-2002[‡]	Percent Change 2002-2003
New York City[†]	820,480	871,295	-2%	6%
Albany (Albany)	17,702	18,769	5%	6%
Erie (Buffalo)	74,683	79,173	3%	6%
Westchester (Yonkers)	31,567	33,630	4%	7%
Monroe (Rochester)	60,738	66,892	10%	10%
Onondaga (Syracuse)	31,475	35,320	12%	12%

[†] New York City's five boroughs encompass five New York State counties, including Bronx County (Bronx), Kings County (Brooklyn), New York County (Manhattan), Queens County (Queens), Richmond County (Staten Island).

[‡] Percent change 2001-2002 based on figures from "Stamping Out Hunger."

Appendix B

BRONX RESULTS

Rider Office located at 305 Rider Avenue, 2nd floor, Bronx, NY 10451.

In-Person Attempts

Clients in Waiting Room⁴⁰: 7

Extended Office Hours Posted: No

Able to Get Application: Yes - received short form

Able to Mail Application: No (only allowed for homebound individuals)

Able to Fax Application: No

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: No

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 4 p.m.

- When an investigator tried to re-enter the building after 5 p.m. on a weeknight, he found the building had been locked – one hour before it was supposed to close.
- An investigator was told she could not speak to a caseworker, after stating she lived in Manhattan but worked in the Bronx – even though applicants can submit an application at any center regardless of where they live.
- An investigator was told no evening appointments are ever scheduled, and those who work should make Saturday appointments.
- When an investigator arrived at 4 p.m. on Saturday the office was locked – again one hour before it was supposed to close.

Client Interviews

- One applicant was told at the end of the day, after waiting nearly 6 hours to speak with a caseworker, that she needed to fill out a questionnaire before she could apply – this individual was denied the right to submit an application on the first visit.
- A mother who was a victim of domestic violence had to take the entire day off from work to meet with her caseworker.

Phone Calls

Calls Made: 14

Calls Answered: 1

- When the investigator finally got through to an employee he was asked for his Social Security Number and then put on hold until the call was disconnected.

⁴⁰ Number throughout findings are averaged for multiple visits.

BROOKLYN RESULTS

Boro Hall office located at 210 Livingston Street, 6th floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201.

In-Person Attempts

Clients in Waiting Room: 3

Extended Office Hours Posted: No

Able to Get to Application: Yes – received short form

Able to Mail Application: unanswered

Able to Fax Application: unanswered

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: unanswered

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 9:30 am

- When an investigator requested an evening appointment, he was told no evening appointments are ever made.
- When an investigator asked to schedule a Saturday appointment, the HRA employee stated she did not know the caseworkers' availability. The investigator was told to call the office for more information.

Client Interviews

- A single mother of six children who works as a nurse from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. on weekdays was told she could not schedule an evening appointment. An HRA employee told the mother if she attempted to see a caseworker without making an appointment, she could expect to wait all day.

Phone Calls

Calls Made: 5

Calls Answered: 2

Able to Mail Application: Yes – but told application would likely get lost

Able to Fax Application: No – stated application must have original signature

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: Yes

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 9:30 a.m.

MANHATTAN RESULTS

Union Square office located at 109 East 16th Street, 6th floor, New York, NY 10003.

In-Person Attempts

Clients in Waiting Room: 1

Extended Office Hours Posted: Yes

Able to Get Application: Yes – received long form

Able to Mail Application: No

Able to Fax Application: No

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: Yes

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 2 p.m.

- One investigator was told he could not apply for food stamps on his own because he was under twenty-one years old, even though he stated he earns his own income and does not cook meals with his family – he was wrongfully denied the right to apply.
- When an investigator insisted on not skipping work to apply for food stamps, he was told his only option was to return on Saturdays.

Client Interviews

- One applicant was only given the option to see a caseworker on the following Monday at 8:30 a.m., even after stating she could not attend because of her work training schedule. She was not informed of Saturday appointments.
- A college student stated he had to miss class whenever he needed to speak with his caseworker.

Phone Calls

Calls Made: 4

Calls Answered: 3

Able to Mail Application: No

Able to Fax Application: No

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: No

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 2 p.m.

QUEENS RESULTS

Jamaica office located at 90-75 Sutphin Boulevard, 4th floor, Queens, NY 11435.

In-Person Attempts

Clients in Waiting Room: 7

Extended Office Hours Posted: Yes

Able to Get Application: Yes – received long form

Able to Mail Application: Yes – but told form would most likely get lost

Able to Fax Application: Yes – but told form would most likely get lost

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: No

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 3 p.m.

- When investigators arrived on a weeknight at 5 p.m., the door to the building was locked – one hour before the office was supposed to close.
- A security guard stated all visitors who arrive after 5 p.m. must either be escorted by an employee or have a referral slip from a caseworker.

Client Interviews

- A client who was recovering from surgery came on Saturday and waited from 10:15 a.m. to 12 noon. He was eventually told the right caseworker was not there to handle his needs and the employee offered him an appointment on Monday. The participant stated it was unlikely he could return during the week because he depends on working family members for transportation.
- Another participant who arrived for an appointment on Saturday, because he works from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. during the week, was told to come back at another time because the computer system was not functioning.

Phone Calls

Calls Made: 6

Calls Answered: 3

Able to Mail Application: Provided conflicting information

Able to Fax Application: No

Able to Have Family Member Deliver: No

Latest Daily Appointment Possible: 3 p.m.

Appendix C

FOOD STAMP SURVEY

Interviewer Name: _____ Day: _____ Date: _____

Interview #: _____ Center: _____

STEP 1 - Office Observation

1. How many people are in waiting room? _____
2. Take note of faces so you can identify them later.
3. How many clients are behind counter being served? _____
4. Are office hours posted anywhere? () yes () no
If yes, what are they? _____
5. What does the office look like? How is it set up? Busy? Calm? _____

If no clients are in office go to STEP 2.

If clients are in office go to STEP 3.

STEP 2 - Office Interview

See if it is possible to schedule an evening appointment (don't actually make one).

PROFILE: No children. Earn \$5.15 per hour; \$216 per week; \$11,250 per year.

How do I apply for food stamps?

How much can I make? \$ _____

Can I have an application? () yes () no

Can I mail or fax in the application? () mail () fax () other

Can someone else in my family bring it in? _____

Can I come back another night to talk with someone about applying?

() yes () no

If yes: Thanks, I'll come back another night.

When is the next appointment? _____

If no: Are there any evening appointments? _____

What is the latest time I can make an appointment? _____

How can I talk to a caseworker if I work during the day?

STEP 3 - Client Interview

Talk with people outside as they leave the center.

PROFILE: Student/volunteer doing a study on food stamps.

Do you work here? () yes () no

Continue only if no.

Did you go to the FS office? () yes () no

Continue only if yes.

I'm doing a quick survey about fair access to food stamps. Do you have a minute?

The study is for the Public Advocate. She helps people gain better access to city services.

What time did you come to the office? _____

Did you come to apply for food stamps or to see your caseworker?

() food stamps () caseworker

If here to apply:

Were you able to get an application? () yes () no

Did you talk to a caseworker? () yes () no

If yes, did they help you? _____

If no, did you get told to come back at another time? _____

Did they schedule a future appointment for you? When is it? _____

Have you applied for food stamps before?

If no, why not? _____

If yes, why are you applying today?

Did you choose at some point not to participate?

Do you work or have training during the day? What are your hours?

Does your work/training schedule make it hard to get food stamps?

Continues to next page

If here to see caseworker:

Were you able to see your caseworker?

If yes, how long did you wait? _____

In no, were you told to come back at another time? When? _____

Do you work or have training during the day? What are your hours?

Does your work/training schedule make it hard to stay on food stamps?

Did you ever get sanctioned because you couldn't make an appointment due to work/training?

At 5:40pm (or sooner if there is no one left to talk to) go to Step 2.