



Citymeals Testimony for the New York State Joint Legislative

Budget Hearing on Human Services

Thank you Senate Finance Chair Kreuger and Assembly Ways and Means Chair Pretlow for the opportunity to provide written testimony. My name is Jeanette Estima, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Citymeals on Wheels.

Citymeals on Wheels provides a continuous lifeline of nourishing meals and vital companionship to homebound elderly New Yorkers. Since our founding in 1981, we've delivered over 70 million meals to older New Yorkers in need. We are committed to ending elder hunger in New York City by 2040.

For over four decades, Citymeals has worked to supplement New York City's home-delivered meals program, filling critical gaps by providing meals for older homebound New Yorkers on weekends, holidays and during emergencies.

For the entirety of the organization's history, we have raised money from generous New Yorkers most recently totaling \$25 million to provide meals to seniors. We have never received any money from the state and receive some very targeted operational support from the city. We can say that with this support 100% of the donations made went to the preparation and delivery of meals.

However, with the need so great, and the cost of food so high, we are now seeking support from New York State for two very promising and affordable pilot programs in the delivery of nutritious meals to older New Yorkers.

New York's aging population is rapidly growing, and unfortunately, so is the number of older adults facing food insecurity. Given these factors and to enhance and improve our work, Citymeals partnered with CUNY's Urban Food Policy Institute and surveyed participants in the City's home-delivered and congregate meal programs, revealing alarming findings:



- 60% of home-delivered meal recipients experienced food insecurity in the past year.
- 65% of respondents have household incomes of \$15,000 or less, with 30% receiving no Social Security income.
- 40% of those surveyed were unable to shop for or prepare their own meals regularly.
- Only 18% utilized food pantries, and a mere 4% used mobile food pantry services.

These statistics highlight the urgent need for targeted, sustainable solutions to ensure no older adult in New York goes hungry.

Citymeals has set an ambitious but necessary goal: to end elder hunger in New York City by 2040. Achieving this requires:

1. Ensuring all anti-hunger initiatives are inclusive of older adults and responsive to their unique needs.
2. Advocating for comprehensive programs under the Older Americans Act (OAA) that provide seven-day meal service for those in need.
3. Developing and scaling innovative programs that deliver nutritious food in ways that are accessible and desirable for older adults.

Citymeals' Pilot Programs: Addressing Food Insecurity Today

To address immediate gaps, Citymeals has launched two critical pilot programs aimed at increasing food access and improving health outcomes for homebound older New Yorkers:

The first is a Breakfast Box program. It is a delivery of thirty breakfast meal equivalents, including four frozen meals, and seven pounds of fresh produce delivered once a month to current meal recipients. This is currently being piloted in every borough except Staten Island.



The second program is the Mobile Grocery Delivery Program, which is a monthly delivery of nine meal equivalents with shelf-stable, ready-to-eat food and three pounds of fresh produce.

Our Ask: A \$2 Million Investment

To sustain and expand these pilots, we are requesting \$2 million from the State of New York. This funding would:

- Provide one year of service for approximately 1,000 older New Yorkers in need.
- Support both programs at a cost-effective \$4.23-\$4.33 per meal.
- Enable continued scaling and evaluation of these programs to continue growing the number of residents served.

Conclusion

Food insecurity among older adults is a solvable crisis. A modest investment today will ensure thousands of homebound older adults receive the nutrition they need to remain healthy, independent, and aging with dignity in their communities. Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions you may have, please feel free to contact me at jeanette@citymeals.org.