

Dinick Martinez

Safety Net Activists

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2025 Executive Budget Proposal:

Topic Human Services

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Dinick Martinez and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low income people in New York City. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a city that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

People who are living in shelters that serve three meals a day currently only get \$45 a month in cash from Public Assistance. That is my situation. I receive only \$22.50 every two weeks and am expected to survive on that as my only income.

Where do they get this idea that people are able to live on \$45 a month? Who told them that it is ok to live on \$45 a month? \$45 is not enough. I challenge you all to see if you could survive in a shelter on this amount of money. This comes out to just \$1.50 a day. That's enough to buy one coffee a day and nothing else. It's not even enough for a one way metrocard. People don't have money to buy the items they need, such as over the counter medications, clothing, hot food, transportation, or any other items that they need.

Minimum wage has gone up. Social Security benefits have gone up. Food stamps have gone up. Inflation and prices have gone up. Why haven't the Cash Assistance grant amounts gone up? Many of these grants haven't been increased since the 1980's or 1990's. That is inhumane and ridiculous.

These issues impact low-income people across the State - not just in New York City but in many parts of the State, including families, disabled people, and the elderly. It also particularly impacts Black and Latino people. If New York State thinks it's progressive, why have these amounts not been increased?

I see a lot of people who are affected by this in addition to myself. Many elderly or disabled people rely on Public Assistance while they are waiting to get approved for SSI benefits. Almost everybody gets denied when they first apply. It can take years to get approved. I know someone whose case took 13 years to get approved. I know other people who are seriously disabled but they still get denied. Some people eventually get approved for SSI but many other

people never get SSI because the process is so difficult. Instead, they are forced to survive on Public Assistance benefits that are so low that it makes it impossible to live.

Other states have been providing State stimulus payments to low-income people due to inflation and the pandemic. However, in New York, we are still waiting for the Governor and the State legislature to take action.

We also need to change the rent amounts for Public Assistance. A single person in New York City can only get \$215 in rent assistance each month even if they have no other income. This is completely wrong and incorrect. As we all know, rents in New York City are not \$215, they are above \$2,000. This is common sense and needs to be changed now.

Because the Public Assistance rent amounts are so low, many people are unable to keep their housing and end up having to go into the shelter. The shelter then costs the City and State anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per month. A lot of this could be prevented if the Public Assistance rent amounts were increased.

The Public Assistance grant amounts need to be raised as soon as possible. This would have a huge positive impact on millions of people.

We have spoken with City officials and they agree that the Public Assistance amounts need to be raised, but it is out of their hands. This has to be done by the State.

The coalition that me and other members of Safety Net Activists group are part of, “End The Poverty Now! Increase Cash Assistance”, calls the Legislature of New York State to pass two bills that would ensure that every New Yorker received the same amount of Cash Assistance and that the levels are increased by 100%.

The first bill is called “**Increase Cash Benefits for Homeless New Yorkers**” - **A.108 (Rosenthal)/S. 113 (Cleare)**

This bill would ensure that homeless New Yorkers receive **the same Cash Assistance benefits as New Yorkers who are housed. Cash Assistance grant levels for homeless New Yorkers in some shelters have not been increased in decades, since 1997.** It is not fair for New York to penalize homeless New Yorkers with even more inadequate grant levels than everyone else.

Currently individuals and families who reside in certain shelters receive **only \$45 per month (or \$1.50 per day)** in assistance for a single individual and **\$63 per month per household member for families with children**. These current grant levels are so **abysmally low**

families and individuals in these shelters cannot buy essential items like menstrual products, underwear, diapers, and laundry detergent. Although some shelters serve food, that does not mean that residents need less assistance for their basic needs!

The second bill that our coalition wants NYS legislators to pass is “**The Increase Cash Benefits to Reflect Increased Cost of Living**” - **A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud)**.

This bill would allow people who receive Cash Assistance benefits in New York to get an increase in their cash allowance by 100%, so that they won't have to struggle to make ends meet each month when buying basic necessities. A family of 3 with no other income on Public Assistance benefits currently receives **only \$389 per month, which is woefully inadequate**. These amounts **haven't updated since 2012**, and have never kept pace with inflation.

This bill increases the allowance to **\$778 monthly for a family of 3** and also **indexes the benefits to inflation going forward**.

We call on the State legislature to treat this as the emergency that it is and to take action immediately to increase the grants. We need relief now so that people can survive. That is why I have been calling the State legislators for over three years to increase Cash Assistance levels for all New Yorkers and to pass the two bills mentioned above. I also testified at the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the Executive Budget Proposal regarding Human Services in 2023 and at the New York State Assembly hearing on Public Assistance Benefits in New York State in 2022. We need this change now!

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dinick Martinez

Safety Net Activists

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Diana Ramos

Safety Net Activists

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2025 Executive Budget Proposal:

Topic Human Services

My name is Diana Ramos and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low-income people. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a state that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

I came to New York in early March of 2020 from Florida. I entered the shelter system where I stayed for a year and a half. During my stay in the shelter I at first received only \$45 a month for my toiletries, feminine products, transportation and any clothing I might need to buy or replace. I had to call HRA to request for the \$183 a month so I could afford the items I needed while in shelter. This amount is the same amount I received after I moved into my apartment in September 2022. Now I was expected to not only get my personal items but also pay for my electric, cleaning supplies, household supplies such as toilet paper and trash bags, cover transportation, do my laundry and buy dog food and supplies for Emotional Support dog Roxie. This amount is not NEARLY enough to make ends meet or to survive! Electricity alone during the cooler months runs about \$40-\$60 and up to \$180-\$200 in the summer when I have to run my AC and fan. I have a condition where when overheated I become dizzy and could pass out.

I spend hours making my grocery list so that I can maximize my reward points to help purchase the items I need that are not covered by SNAP. I am a single woman with no children and I don't work because of medical reasons. If I had children I wouldn't have the time to spend on making such a list.

Prices have risen exponentially over the last five years. Cash Assistance hasn't been increased in decades. These abysmally low amounts don't allow New Yorkers to get the items necessary for themselves or their children. Families and individuals have to make tough choices on what to spend their money on. Parents are choosing between PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE or PAY THE BILLS or getting growing children new clothes to replace outgrown ones or much needed personal hygiene items. I myself had to choose between whether to pay for my electric bill or feminine hygiene products. I chose feminine products. I have Polycystic Ovarian

Syndrome(PCOS) which can cause very heavy menstrual cycles and I can't just get the cheaper brand of pads I have to purchase the ones meant for super heavy menstrual cycles. These pads can run from \$9.99 for a pack of 27 to \$12.99 for a pack of 36 in store. There are times I can find a count of 92 for \$20.94 on Amazon, which is about 2 cycles worth of a very heavy cycle. There are months I can go through two packs in one cycle. I am thankful ConEd has been willing to work with me on my electric bill and allowed me to pay it over an extended period of time.

New Yorkers use Cash Assistance as a bridge gap during a sudden crisis. I myself was on it while waiting for my SSI approval. There is currently a stigma about those on welfare. Some think we are lazy and don't want to work. Others think we are addicts or drunks who don't use the money for what we need but to feed our habits. This simply isn't true. Those on Cash Assistance are families and individuals who are going through a crisis or waiting for federal funds such as SSI, SSD, or Veteran benefits. Cash Assistance recipients can be the single mother with three children whose partner suddenly left or passed away and now has to try to pay for everything by herself while raising her children. The elderly man who had to leave his job because his health could no longer handle it, yet he is a year away from being able to apply for retirement benefits. I have neighbors who are on Cash Assistance because of job loss due to budget cuts and the pandemic. Some are still looking for jobs within their fields or training for new better opportunities. These are New Yorkers trying to keep their heads above water. New Yorkers who paid their taxes. New Yorkers who just need some help while dealing with sudden crises, often not in their control.

The coalition that me and other members of Safety Net Activists group are part of, "End The Poverty Now! Increase Cash Assistance", supports two bills that would ensure that every New Yorker received the same amount of Cash Assistance and that the levels are increased by 100%.

The first bill is called "**Increase Cash Benefits for Homeless New Yorkers**" - **A.108 (Rosenthal)/S. 113 (Cleare)**

This bill would ensure that homeless New Yorkers receive **the same Cash Assistance benefits as New Yorkers who are housed.**Cash Assistance grant levels for homeless New Yorkers in some shelters have not been increased in decades, since 1997. It is not fair for New York to penalize homeless New Yorkers with even more inadequate grant levels than everyone else.

Currently individuals and families who reside in certain shelters receive **only \$45 per month (or \$1.50 per day)** in assistance for a single individual and **\$63 per month per household member for families with children**. These current grant levels are so **abysmally low** families and individuals in these shelters cannot buy essential items like menstrual products, underwear, diapers, and laundry detergent. Although some shelters serve food, that does not mean that residents need less assistance for their basic needs!

The second bill that our coalition wants NYS legislators to pass is “**The Increase Cash Benefits to Reflect Increased Cost of Living**” - **A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud)**.

This bill would allow people who receive Cash Assistance benefits in New York to get an increase in their cash allowance by 100%, so that they won't have to struggle to make ends meet each month when buying basic necessities. A family of 3 with no other income on Public Assistance benefits currently receives **only \$389 per month, which is woefully inadequate**. These amounts **haven't updated since 2012**, and has never kept pace with inflation.

This bill increases the allowance to **\$778 monthly for a family of 3** and also **indexes the benefits to inflation going forward**.

The following bills passed together would greatly help all New Yorkers on Cash Assistance. These two bills will not only give equal amounts to ALL New Yorkers whether housed or unhoused but will also be a step closer to ending child poverty. No New Yorker should be penalized because they are going through a sudden crisis. Whether in shelter or housed Cash Assistance should be the same for all. Please remember it only takes one accident, job loss, sudden medical crisis or natural disaster for anyone to end up needing Cash Assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today and for your leadership in helping New Yorkers get through the current crisis.

Respectfully Submitted,

Diana Ramos

Safety Net Activists

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Maria Teresa Walles

Safety Net Activists

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2025 Executive Budget Proposal:

Topic Human Services

My name is Maria Teresa Walles and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low-income people. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a state that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

I am writing this testimony because we need to increase Cash Assistance this year as part of the New York State budget. Things are getting expensive and the grants haven't increased in so many years, even as inflation, cost of living and prices have increased. The Cash Assistance grant for most people has not increased since 2012, and for some people in shelters, the Cash Assistance grant hasn't increased since 1997.

I currently get Cash Assistance for myself and my daughter. I only get \$145.50 twice a month. It's impossible to meet all our expenses every month on that amount. The money I receive to pay for my phone, internet, metrocards, personal hygiene, clothes, school supplies, laundry, cleaning product, shoes, the grant just isn't enough. I have to get a hot sandwich or a cup of coffee that needs to be purchased with cash since food stamps don't allow people to purchase hot food.

The insultingly low amounts impact my life and other people's lives every day. I have the Fair Fares card but sometimes I don't have any funds to put on the metrocard. Many parents have kids going to school and don't have the money to buy their kids even the most basic things, including school supplies.

The amounts that Public Assistance provides are degrading and insulting. You can't move forward because you don't have enough to provide for yourself and your family.

And this doesn't just affect me. It affects more than six hundred thousand people who receive Cash Assistance across New York State.

The coalition that me and other members of Safety Net Activists group are part of, "End The Poverty Now! Increase Cash Assistance", calls the Legislature of New York State to pass

two bills that would ensure that every New Yorker received the same amount of Cash Assistance and that the levels are increased by 100%.

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Currently individuals and families who reside in certain shelters receive **only \$45 per month (or \$1.50 per day)** in assistance for a single individual and **\$63 per month per household member** for families with children. These current grant levels are so **abysmally low** families and individuals in these shelters cannot buy essential items like menstrual products, underwear, diapers, and laundry detergent. Although some shelters serve food, that does not mean that residents need less assistance for their basic needs!

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This bill increases the allowance to **\$778 monthly for a family of 3** and also **indexes the benefits to inflation going forward.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today and for your leadership in helping New Yorkers get through the current crisis.

Respectfully Submitted,

Maria Teresa Walles

Safety Net Activist

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Charisma White

Safety Net Activist

**Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2025 Executive Budget Proposal:
Topic Human Services**

My name is Charisma White and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low-income people. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a state that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

Some may say my testimony doesn't belong in this space. I have been a recipient of HRA my whole life while retaining a job from the time I was 14 years old because a single mother would never make it on Public Assistance alone and my income was needed at a young age. It's a good thing I graduated at 16 years of age from Abraham Lincoln High School. At the age of 26 my mother passed away with not much real world knowledge. I had to continue to live below poverty level raising a son and several neighborhood kids. It was a big struggle at times when benefits would get distributed out of nowhere. The case worker would not answer the phone, when you get assaulted by employees of HRA, when you don't receive benefits in a reasonable time. All arrows point to the disappointment of my country failure to protect and support my family.

The coalition that me and other members of Safety Net Activists group are part of, "End The Poverty Now! Increase Cash Assistance", calls the Legislature of New York State to pass two bills that would ensure that every New Yorker received the same amount of Cash Assistance and that the levels are increased by 100%.

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Respectfully Submitted,

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Safety
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Urooj Rahman
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Benefits and Homelessness Unit at Safety Net Project

**TESTIMONY OF THE SAFETY NETWORK PROJECT
AT THE URBAN JUSTICE CENTER**

Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the 2026 Executive Budget Proposal: Human Services
February 12, 2025

Thank you to Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Senate Social Services Committee Chair Persaud, Speaker Heastie, Assembly Social Services Committee Chair Davila, the New York State Finance Committee, and the New York State Assembly Ways and Means Committee for holding this very important hearing. We welcome the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center concerning fiscal priorities for the coming

year in the area of human services. We are eager to continue working with the Committees to ensure that New Yorkers across the state have access to the support they need, particularly the lowest-income and most marginalized, against the disruption and destruction already being caused by the new federal administration, particularly in New York City, where the low-income communities we serve are experiencing worsening economic insecurity and disadvantage, and who, despite facing the crisis in affordability recognized by the Governor, see little in the Executive budget that will alleviate their poverty.

Indeed, the Governor's 2026-2027 Budget ignores many of our critical priorities in the area of human services: in particular, her failure to fund long overdue increases in the Cash Assistance program grants.

As we get ready to fight against anticipated cuts to SNAP, and foresee new hurdles to accessing both SNAP and Medicaid in the form of block grants and work requirements, New York is facing an urgent choice – whether, after decades of neglect, to shore up its foundational safety net program – Cash Assistance – or to continue to relegate thousands of New Yorkers to continue to live in a state of deep poverty, far less than 50 percent of the official poverty level.

Safety Net Project urges the Legislature to conclude that there is only one choice that makes sense for New Yorkers, our communities, and the State itself – to take immediate action to increase the amount of assistance available to recipients of the Cash Assistance program and to adopt additional reforms that would expand access to life-saving benefits.

This testimony will present a brief summary of the work of the Safety Net Project, discuss the primary problems facing our clients, and provide solutions we urge the Legislature to adopt in the final budget.

SAFETY NET PROJECT at the URBAN JUSTICE CENTER

The Safety Net Project fights to prevent evictions, illegal rent increases, uninhabitable living conditions, and other attacks on the social safety net, the homeless, and NYC's affordable housing stock. We launched in a burned-out building in East Harlem in 1984 to provide legal and social support to individuals and families with nowhere else to turn.

We were founded as the Legal Action Center for the Homeless. Our goal was to provide community legal services in soup kitchens and food pantries to individuals and families left with

nowhere else to turn. To this day, we continue to offer free, frequent, and easily accessible legal clinics located in established community-based organizations throughout the city. Along the way, we've won significant victories for economic justice. In 2008, we settled federal lawsuit *Williston v. Eggleston* with New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) and New York State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), which addressed a systematic breakdown in the processing of SNAP (Food Stamp) applications. We continue to monitor SNAP issues to this day so that everyday New Yorkers have access to healthy, nutritious food.

In early 2013, we changed our name to the Safety Net Project to better reflect the full spectrum of our services. The following year we opened an office at the Union Community Health Center in the Bronx, offering free legal services for community members in the Bronx seeking help with critical housing and benefits issues. We are proud members of New York City's Right to Counsel initiative in the Bronx Housing Court. This historic initiative, which is the first of its kind in the country, ensures that New York City's poorest tenants have access to an attorney to represent them in housing court in order to prevent evictions and ensure safe and adequate housing conditions.

Advocates thought that this would be a unique year in the quest to fight child poverty and poverty generally due to the work of the Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council ("CPRAC"), and CPRAC's short list of recommendations to the Governor delivered on December 18, 2024, which we understood to be destined for the Governor's inclusion in her budget proposal this year.

See: <https://otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>

Despite our hopes that these recommendations would be incorporated into the Governor's budget proposal this year, the Governor only included one of these proposals in the Executive Budget, an increase in the Child Tax Credit, and watered it down at that – reducing the annual credit from \$1,500 to \$1,000 and limiting the full credit to children under 4, and providing children under 17 with a \$500 annual credit. Although the Governor did include a supplemental payment for pregnant people (\$100 a month) and a one-time bonus for newborns (\$1,200), there are no increases in monthly Cash Assistance for the majority of families.

The “affordability” enhancing policies the Governor did include in the budget – school lunches, the \$500 tax rebate – combined with the Child Tax Credit increase and the Baby Bonus program are not enough to help the lowest income New Yorkers – those who are without any work income due to disability and crisis – escape deep poverty. Where these families are participating in the Cash Assistance program, they are trying to survive on the smallest budget – \$291.50 a month for a mother and child – which is only \$3,498 annually. Even an additional \$5,000 in affordability enhancements, assuming the family qualifies for all of it, still leaves that family far below the official poverty level for a family of two: \$21,150. Working families need help, of course, but the Governor’s policies reflected in the Executive budget completely leave out the lowest income New Yorkers at the expense of the high earners among us. Taxpayers earning up to \$323,000 for joint filers qualify for the \$500 tax rebate despite a lack of need. As set forth below, we look to the Legislature to adopt the following recommendations that would give the lowest income New Yorkers crucial assistance when they need it most.

The Safety Net Project together with our membership group, Safety Net Activists, directly-impacted people who fight for access to housing, food, and income for low-income people. Our members have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a State that it values human needs and human dignity over profits.

The coalition that Safety Net Project and the Safety Net Activists group are part of, “End The Poverty Now! Increase Cash Assistance”, calls the Legislature of New York State to pass two bills that would ensure that every New Yorker received the same amount of Cash Assistance and that the levels are increased by 100%.

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This bill increases the allowance to **\$778 monthly for a family of 3** and also **indexes the benefits to inflation going forward**.

The Safety Net Project is grateful to Social Services Chairs Davila and Persaud for carrying a package of legislation originally introduced in 2022 by Chair Rosenthal, that, for the first time in decades, would increase the amount of money that Cash Assistance recipients receive to meet their basic needs, and keep it tied to inflation going forward. See A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud). Relatedly, for the first time since 1997, there is a bill that would achieve justice and parity for homeless New Yorkers who reside in the shelters that serve three daily meals. See A.108 (Rosenthal)/S.113 (Cleare). As of now, the State is expecting these shelter residents to somehow live on \$45/month for a single individual (that is \$1.50 a day!).

The legislative leaders who carry and sponsor these bills recognize that for New York to neglect the needs of the lowest-income New Yorkers is inhumane and unjust. Governor Hochul ignored these needs in her proposed budget despite her own Council recommending them as essential. A quick look at the numbers involved illustrate how urgent and overdue these reforms are. *See the chart below:*

Existing Cash Assistance Program	Grant Component Name	Last Year Increased	Current Monthly Amount	Current Annual Amount
Basic Needs Grant (396,000 families)	Basic Needs	2012	\$183.10 a month/1 adult	\$2,197 a year for basic needs
	Home Energy Allowance (for basic needs and utilities)	1981	& \$291.50 a month for Parent & child	\$3,498 a year for basic needs
	Supplemental Home Energy Allowance (for basic needs and utilities)	1986		
Personal Needs Allowance/Special Needs Allowance (~ 9,000 families) For those residing in shelters serving three meals	Personal Needs Allowance (households with children)	1997	\$126 a month Parent & Child (\$63 per household member)	\$2,512 A year for basic needs
	Special Needs Allowance (adult only households)	1997	\$45 a month Adult	\$540 A year for basic needs

People with disabilities are disproportionately affected by the insufficiency of the basic needs grants for Cash Assistance. People with disabilities often need extra money for transportation, face challenges traveling to the least expensive markets, and have more out of pocket health expenses not covered by health insurance.¹ There are many people with severe medical and mental health conditions that receive Cash Assistance while they wait for federal disability benefits applications to be approved and appeals to be heard, a process that sometimes takes years. One of our members, Diana Ramos, was exactly in this situation. Here is what she wrote in her testimony for this hearing (included above, p. 4-6): “New Yorkers use Cash Assistance as a bridge gap during a sudden crisis. I myself was on it while waiting for my SSI approval. There is currently a stigma about those on welfare. Some think we are lazy and don’t want to work. Others think we are addicts or drunks who don’t use the money for what we need but to feed our habits. This simply isn’t true. Those on Cash Assistance are families and individuals who are going through a crisis or waiting for federal funds such as SSI, SSD, or Veteran benefits.”

While the state gets reimbursed by the federal government for the Cash Assistance received by clients who go on to become eligible for federal disability benefits, there is no way to reimburse clients who will never get back the months and sometimes years they are forced to live in an extreme level of scarcity and stress due to having inadequate assistance without the ability to work as an alternative.

Insufficient levels of Cash Assistance also contribute to food insecurity and hunger.² Some but not all Cash Assistance recipients receive SNAP (food stamps) benefits which can only be used for the purchase of food. The current federal SNAP allotment is inadequate: it does not cover the food costs of most households – forcing most people to use their Cash Assistance to help cover their food expenses and leaving little left for other basic needs. This problem was made even worse when the SNAP Emergency Allotments provided during the COVID public

¹ The Extra Costs of Living with a Disability in the U.S. – Resetting the Policy Table, National Disability Institute (Oct. 2020) (estimating that a household containing an adult with a disability that limits their ability to work requires an average of 28 percent more income to obtain the same standard of living as a household member without a disability), <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/extra-costs-living-with-disability-brief.pdf>.

² S. Carlson, J. Llobrera, B. Keith-Jennings, More Adequate SNAP Benefits Would Help Millions of Participants Afford Better Food, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (updated July 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/more-adequate-snap-benefits-would-help-millions-of-participants-better>.

health emergency ended in 2023, and we can anticipate SNAP cuts from the new federal administration. Moreover, not all families are eligible for SNAP, including many immigrant families. They are especially vulnerable to hunger. Meanwhile, inflation has compounded all of these problems.

Although the adverse impact of such scarcity is obvious to most of us, research has documented the adverse effects of living in such a state of deep poverty, and the especially negative impact on children.³

The inadequacy of the amount of money New Yorkers receive for basic needs is also an issue of racial justice. Cash Assistance is the safety net program originally authorized by the Social Security Act in 1935 and then replaced by the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) in 1996. Both of these programs carry a long legacy of racism, particularly against Black mothers, in terms of eligibility requirements and the low levels of benefits, particularly in States with the highest Black populations.⁴ New York State cannot undo the program's history, but it can make up for years of neglect by raising the grants to enable all New Yorkers, including low-income Black and Hispanic New Yorkers, to meet basic needs. As one of our members, Maria Teresa Walles, Black woman who is a single mother, wrote in her testimony for today's hearing (included above, p. 7-8): "I currently get Cash Assistance for myself and my daughter. I only get \$145.50 twice a month. It's impossible to meet all our expenses every month on that amount. The money I receive to pay for my phone, internet, metrocards, personal hygiene, clothes, school supplies, laundry, cleaning product, shoes, the grant just isn't enough. I have to get a hot sandwich or a cup of coffee that needs to be purchased with cash since food stamps don't allow people to purchase hot food. The insultingly low amounts impact my life and other people's lives every day. I have the Fair Fares card but sometimes I don't have any funds to put on the metrocard. Many parents have kids going to school and don't have the money to buy their kids even the most basic things, including school

³ See, e.g., M. Golani, *The Protective Power of Cash*, NYC Family Policy Project (Dec. 11, 2024), <https://familypolicynyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/NYC-FPP-Report-The-Protective-Power-of-Cash-web.pdf>; I. Dutta-Gupta, *The Enduring Effects of Childhood Poverty*, Center for Law and Social Policy (Aug. 14, 2023), <https://www.clasp.org/blog/the-enduring-effects-of-childhood-poverty/>

⁴ See I. Floyd, et al., *TANF Policies Reflect Racist Legacy of Cash Assistance, Reimagined Program Should Center Black Mothers*, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (August 4, 2021), <https://www.cbpp.org/research/income-security/tanf-policies-reflect-racist-legacy-of-cash-assistance>

supplies. The amounts that Public Assistance provides are degrading and insulting. You can't move forward because you don't have enough to provide for yourself and your family.”

New Yorkers need this help now. We look to the Legislature to address this problem in this fiscal year and pass two bills mentioned above **A.108 (Rosenthal)/S. 113 (Cleare) and A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud)**. These bills passed together would greatly help all New Yorkers on Cash Assistance. These two bills will not only give equal amounts to ALL New Yorkers whether housed or unhoused but will also be a step closer to ending child poverty. No New Yorker should be penalized because they are going through a sudden crisis. Whether in shelter or housed Cash Assistance should be the same for all. Please remember it only takes one accident, job loss, sudden medical crisis or natural disaster for anyone to end up needing Cash Assistance.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today and for your leadership in helping New Yorkers get through the current crisis.

Respectfully Submitted,

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