



January 30, 2023

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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Legal Aid, NYLAG, Dechert LLP, File Federal Class Action Lawsuit Against City for Failing to Process SNAP and Cash Assistance Applications and Recertifications, Forcing Thousands of Families to Face Food Instability

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, New York Legal Assistance Group, and Dechert LLP, filed a [class action lawsuit](#) in the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York against the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) and Human Resources Administration (HRA) for failing to process applications and recertification for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and cash assistance – both essential forms of federal and state benefits for low-income people used for the purchase of food and other basic needs—within the 30-day timeframe required by federal and state law. These delays cause thousands of families to face food instability, as they are forced to make impossible decisions like whether to pay their rent or feed their children.

Under the [Food and Nutrition Act](#) and New York Social Services Law, DSS and HRA are legally mandated to ensure that all eligible households in New York City receive SNAP and cash assistance benefits to which they are entitled.

The lawsuit seeks to direct DSS and HRA to comply with their legal obligation to meet all processing timelines required by law regarding SNAP and cash assistance applications and recertifications and to maintain reliable and functional application and recertification application processes, such as eligibility interviews and verification procedures.

“It is unacceptable that thousands of families who are eligible to receive life-sustaining benefits are forced to suffer and go hungry while they wait for HRA to process their cases and issue the benefits they are entitled to,” said **Kathleen Kelleher, staff attorney in the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society**. “These households receive no substitute benefits or food during this time. Instead, they must go without benefits and miss meals until HRA gets around to processing their cases.”

The City’s pattern of noncompliance is systemic and severe. At the end of 2022, HRA’s own data showed that over 28,000 cash assistance and/or SNAP applications were overdue. As a result, thousands of New York City households eligible for SNAP benefits are being forced to forgo critically needed benefits.

“Our clients rely on these benefits to meet their basic needs, and no family should go hungry because of administrative delays they have no control over,” said **Abby Biberman, the associate director of the Public Benefits Unit at NYLAG**. “This noncompliance is an example of how systemic neglect can further marginalize people experiencing poverty. HRA and DSS’s failure to process these applications and recertifications mean that thousands of New Yorkers can’t put food on their tables or pay their rent.”

Additionally, SNAP and cash assistance recipients’ benefits are often stopped without any notification. In many cases, SNAP and cash assistance applications and recertifications simply fall through the cracks of HRA’s broken processing systems. Documents are either lost or ignored, and SNAP and cash assistance recipients cannot reach the agency via its outdated, overwhelmed, central phone line.

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The Legal Aid Society exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For over 145 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities. www.legalaidnyc.org

Founded in 1990, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a leading civil legal services organization combating economic, racial, and social injustice by advocating for people experiencing poverty or in crisis. NYLAG exists because wealth should not determine who has access to justice. Our services impacted the lives of 113,000 people last year. www.nylag.org