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

Legal Aid, NCLEJ, NMIC, NYLAG, File Contempt Motion Against City for Failing to Provide Expedited SNAP and Cash Assistance Benefits to the Most Vulnerable Families Facing Immediate Food Instability

Lawyers Petition Court to Force the City into Compliance with 2005 Court Order to Ensure Thousands of Food Insecure New Yorkers Have Access to Emergency Benefits

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, National Center For Law And Economic Justice, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC), and New York Legal Assistance Group filed a [motion](#) against the City of New York and its public benefits issuing agency, the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA), for [failing](#) to provide emergency expedited food and cash assistance benefits to extremely vulnerable families, as required by federal and state law.

Expedited Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, or E-SNAP, and “immediate needs” grants are intended to provide emergency assistance to the most vulnerable applicants for public benefits. In many cases, the New Yorkers who apply for and who are eligible for such benefits lack income or resources and completely rely on these benefits for groceries. Those who qualify for E-SNAP benefits include applicants who earn less than \$150 in monthly gross income and their liquid resources are \$100 or less, or migrant or seasonal farm workers with less than \$100 in liquid resources, among others.

In 1998, Legal Aid and co-counsel litigated *Reynolds v. Giuliani*, and secured a 2005 court order mandating that the City and HRA provide E-SNAP within seven days to desperate applicants without food or money to purchase food. The order also requires HRA to grant “Immediate needs” cash benefits on the day the application was submitted. In addition, the 2005 order requires HRA to report monitoring data on access to benefits.

For over three years, HRA failed to provide any monitoring data as required by the 2005 order. Finally, after numerous attempts by Legal Aid and co-counsel to obtain data, HRA provided data showing that from April to September 2023, 13,721 households went without critical assistance for purchasing food more than a week after applying for SNAP benefits. For every month in that period, HRA provided timely benefits to just over half of the eligible households.

Moreover, data from October 2022 showed that HRA’s rate of processing E-SNAP was particularly abysmal, with only 20 percent of eligible New Yorkers receiving the emergency benefits they were legally entitled to.

“The City’s broad and systemic failure to adequately provide E-SNAP and cash assistance to eligible New Yorkers has left thousands of families in dire straits struggling to feed themselves and their children and meet their basic needs,” said **Emily Lundgren, Staff Attorney with The Legal Aid Society**. “The consequences of food instability are far-reaching, impacting the health, emotional and mental well-being of individuals experiencing it. The City must immediately remedy their failures to provide emergency benefits and set forth a corrective action plan.”

“No one eats retroactively, and food benefits granted late do not remedy past hunger,” said **Saima Akhtar, Senior Attorney at the National Center for Law and Economic Justice**. “Until the City takes corrective measures to resolve its E-SNAP delays, struggling families will continue to go hungry. Our legal action intends to bring the City into compliance.”

“When it comes to accessing E-SNAP, SNAP, and cash assistance, delays are more than an inconvenience—they are a matter of whether a family can put food on the table or pay their rent,” said **Abby Biberman, Associate Director of the Public Benefits Unit at NYLAG**. “The City’s failure to issue expedited SNAP benefits combined with the failure to process applications timely sends clients who are already in a dire situation into a state of emergency.”

“It is unacceptable for the most vulnerable New Yorkers to go hungry due to the City’s failure to process and respond to emergency SNAP requests in a timely manner,” said **Jesenia Ponce, Coordinating Attorney for Policy & Advocacy, NMIC Legal Services**. “NMIC and its partners bring this action to hold the City accountable to these families and individuals, and create better transparency on how to address this critical issue moving forward.”

The contempt order seeks to enforce the 2005 Order; to find the City and HRA in violation of the 2005 Order; and to direct the agency to take the corrective actions necessary to bring them into compliance with the 2005 Order by January 19, 2024 date.

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