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Broad Array of Groups, People Boost Cuomo Child Hunger Plan Praise Governor's Decision to End "Wasteful, Harmful" Finger Imaging Process

Non-Profits and Religious Leaders Across the City Cheer Effort Governor's Web Site Enables All New Yorkers to 'Get Involved'

A broad-based group of nonprofit organizations, religious leaders, and community activists from across New York City issued statements today praising Governor Cuomo's pledge to end child hunger, including his call to stop the process of finger imaging food stamps applicants, which costs the State and City millions of dollars per year.

They urged members of the public to contact the Governor's web site to get involved in the effort to eliminate finger imaging by going to:

<http://www.governor.ny.gov/BuildingaNewNY/No-Fingerprinting-for-Food>

Joel Berg, Executive Director, of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, said the following: "The Governor understands that ending child hunger is not only the compassionate, moral thing to do, but it also would have the very concrete benefits of boosting educational performance, aiding our economy, reducing health care spending, and reducing poverty. Given that about half of all those who receive food stamp benefits are children – and that New York State has far lower program participation than similar states such as Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois – there is no question that one of the best ways to reduce child hunger in New York is to boost the number of eligible families who receive federally-funded food stamps benefits. It is also clear that one of the best ways to ensure that eligible families receive the benefits they need is to eliminate the wasteful, harmful process of finger imaging, which costs millions of dollars, yet fails to prevent any program fraud or duplication that is not more easily and cheaply detected through processes successfully used in the 48 other states that do not finger image applicants. The respected and non-partisan Urban Institute, hired by the City for other research, has found that finger imaging does indeed deter eligible, law-abiding people from applying for benefits. One reason the process is such a deterrent is that it forces parents to drag children to a government office, sometimes waiting outside in the cold. Governor Cuomo deserves great credit for recognizing that, as an initial step towards the vital goal of ending child hunger, the first thing we must do is eliminate pointless barriers against participation in existing programs."

"As the number of guests at emergency food programs continue to rise, it is shocking that only about half of them receive food stamps, even though almost all are income eligible," said Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network of New York State. "One major barrier that prevents people from seeking food stamps is the stigma associated with it. A major part of the stigma is that people are forced to be fingerprinted, which in most people's minds is what happens to criminals. We appreciate the Governor's leadership in eliminating this barrier."

"It sounds like a good idea; it would make me apply," said Diana Rivera, a client at the West Side Coalition Against Hunger in Manhattan. "... [as it is now] you have to go to that horrible office and wait for hours and hours... I'd do without first."

“The measure of a society comes in how its people care for others,” said Rev. Ann Kansfield, co-pastor of the Greenpoint Reformed Church in Brooklyn. “We would all sleep better if we knew that none of our neighbors is going to bed hungry. That's why so many New Yorkers donate to soup kitchens and food pantries. But emergency food programs are not a sustainable answer. Subsidizing food through programs like Food Stamps is a far more efficient way to reduce hunger. Eliminating finger imaging removes a tall barrier in the application process for food stamps, and will help more hungry people receive food. It will also increase spending at grocery stores, building the local economy.”

“Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC) of New York applauds Governor Cuomo's commitment to ending childhood hunger in New York State,” said Executive Director Jennifer March-Joly. “The need for such action could not be more pressing, given that in New York City alone, one in every four children lives in a food insecure household. Ending the harmful and unproductive practice of finger imaging food stamp applicants, which prevents so many hungry families from accessing critical food supports, represents a crucial and prudent effort in the fight against childhood hunger.”

“There is no excuse for hunger and poverty in one of the wealthiest cities in the United States. Unfortunately, hunger and poverty is a reality for the thousands of people we serve each year,” says Robert Siebel, Chief Executive Officer of Catholic Charities Brooklyn and Queens. “No one should go hungry. Last year alone, we provided four million meals to individuals and families in need. Many of them qualify, but do not apply for food stamps due to the humiliating finger printing process. With proper nourishment, children can do well in school, and with access to food stamps, families will be more self-sufficient, depending less on food pantries and soup kitchens that are already stretched thin. Dignity is a basic human right, not a luxury, and we are pleased that eradicating child hunger and ending the finger imaging process is a priority for Governor Cuomo.”

“City Harvest stands with other anti-hunger advocates in New York City in echoing the Governor’s call to eliminate the finger-imaging requirement for food stamps and applauds his pledge to eliminate child hunger,” said Jilly Stephens, executive director of City Harvest. “Food pantries and soup kitchens served by City Harvest are reporting record demand for food, and it’s critical to break down barriers to accessing food stamps and to strengthen programs that feed hungry New Yorkers. No child should go hungry in the five boroughs.”

“We commend Governor Cuomo for calling on NYC to stop fingerprinting Food Stamp applicants,” said Bishop Mitchell Taylor, the founder and executive director of the East River Development Alliance in Long Island City, Queens. “We know from our experience that requiring the fingerprinting of applicants for food stamps only stigmatizes families and serves as an unfortunate disincentive to accessing this critical income support. We are currently facing the greatest economic downfall since the Depression and we must do everything in our power to ensure New Yorkers can weather the crisis. Preventing families from accessing needed nutritional support by requiring fingerprinting is wrong, and we commend Governor Cuomo for his leadership.”

“There are many people that are embarrassed to apply for food stamps and if they have to be finger-imaged it is an additional embarrassment and therefore they will refrain from applying for food stamps,” said Rabbi Eidelman of the Mesivta of Staten Island, a kosher and non-kosher food pantry.

“Eliminating finger imaging of food stamp households is a critical first step in addressing the hunger epidemic in New York City,” said Lori McNeil, the director of Research and Policy for the Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project at Urban Justice Center. “Finger imaging is an outdated practice that does not reduce fraud but instead prevents eligible families from accessing life-sustaining benefits. The fact that practically every other state in the U.S., other than Arizona, chooses NOT to finger

image food stamp households serves as a true testament to its unworthiness and ineffectiveness in fraud detection. The Homelessness Outreach and Prevention Project at Urban Justice Center fully endorses the elimination of finger imaging as part of Governor Cuomo's quest to end child hunger."

"We applaud Governor Cuomo for taking the long overdue step of ending finger imaging for food stamp applicants, which in essence treats New Yorkers in need as criminals not to be trusted," said Cassandra Agredo, Director of the Xavier Mission. "We hear time and again from guests of our outreach programs that they would like to apply for food stamps but that the process is arduous, degrading and downright miserable. We hear them say that they can't take the time off of work to go through the process because they can't afford to miss the day's pay. These barriers prevent millions of dollars from entering the New York economy and prevent thousands of hungry New Yorkers, including children, from receiving the additional assistance necessary to put food in their stomachs. It is about time that a politician takes a strong stand against this arcane policy and regards the health and welfare of New York children as a top priority of government."

"We congratulate Governor Cuomo on his pledge to end childhood hunger and his leadership on eliminating food stamp finger imaging in New York State," said Fatima Goldman, President and CEO of the Federation for Protestant Welfare Agencies. "Ending food stamp finger imaging is one of the simplest and most direct ways to impact childhood hunger by removing a costly and unnecessary barrier to the primary food assistance program available to families."

"The Food Bank For New York City is pleased and grateful to hear Governor Cuomo's commitment to expand access to the Food Stamp Program, and remove the barriers and stigma -- including finger-imaging -- that keep eligible New Yorkers from participating," said Margarete Purvis, President and CEO of the Food Bank For New York City. "The Governor is right: no child in New York should go to bed hungry, and we look forward to working with his Administration to make that vision a reality."