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## ***REMARKS AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY***

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Lucy and all of the members of the Food Bank for inviting me. I am happy to be here with you today.

One of the rewarding things about being the Speaker of the City Council is that you get to visit with New Yorkers from across the City and talk with them about the problems they face.

A couple of months ago, Council Member Eric Gioia and I visited a food pantry in Sunnyside, Queens where we helped distribute meals. There were 25 or 30 men and women, most of them senior citizens, waiting in line for food.

After the event, as we were coming back to City Hall, I noticed another group of people waiting in line. But this group wasn't outside a food pantry. They were teenagers outside a McDonalds.

When you see hungry seniors not far from teenagers about to eat unhealthy food, you come to a simple realization: hunger and obesity are two sides of the same problem - a lack of access to nutritious food. And if we are going to take on - and solve - the problems of hunger and obesity in our City, we need to start by increasing New Yorkers' food options.

Hunger and obesity are, without a doubt, major citywide crises. Indeed, an estimated 1.2 million New Yorkers-including more than 400,000 children-live in households where having food is in question. And one in four New York Public School children are obese.

For all of us on the frontlines of the fight to end this crisis, these frustrating facts are not new. We, the richest City in the world, must be able to feed our people. More than that, we must be able to give our people food that keeps them healthy. The City Council is committed to working with each one of you to reach this goal.

Our task is threefold: first, increase New Yorker's access to nutritious food; second, make sure government is helping - not hindering - New Yorkers obtain food assistance; and, finally, find out which services are and are not working, so we can improve our food system.

You know, six months ago the Council launched a campaign to reduce hunger and improve nutrition in New Yorker City. I am here today to let you know we have made great progress.

First, we realized that too many kids in this City needlessly go to school hungry. And, when children go to school hungry, they have trouble paying attention in class and focusing on their work.

To his credit, a few years ago, Mayor Bloomberg made it possible for every public school student in New York City to have breakfast at school for free. The problem is that only two students in ten participate in the program.

We can - and must - do better.

That's why we are working to increase participation by reaching out to parents, teachers and, most importantly, kids to tell them about eating breakfast at school. It's simple: when kids eat breakfast in the morning, they can do better in school all day long.

That's why, on National Hunger Awareness Day, a majority of Council Members ate breakfast with students in their local districts to promote the school breakfast program.

And just last month, we held a citywide competition where public school students submitted posters to promote the school breakfast program. We had over twenty submissions, and the Bloomberg Administration has agreed to use the winning poster to promote the school breakfast program in public schools throughout the City.

Second, people who receive food stamps have been unable to access fresh, local produce at farmers' markets.

In response, the Council has invested in a citywide pilot project to give farmers the technology to accept food stamps. Earlier this month, I visited a new greenmarket at Harlem Hospital with this technology. People were excited that they could use their electronic food cards to buy healthy fruits and vegetables. And farmers were of course pleased with the additional business.

Finally, many food assistance services, such as Citymeals on Wheels and soup kitchens, haven't had the resources they needed to provide the highest quality meals.

That's why the Council has invested more than \$7 million in this year's budget to help these essential community organizations provide healthier, more substantial meals. In particular, part of this money will help seniors access more nutritious meals at senior centers across the City. Specifically, the Council has increased funding for senior congregate meals by 35 cents per meal, to ensure that senior centers are able to pay for the more nutritious meals they provide.

Together, these steps are going to help more New Yorkers, especially senior citizens and low-income families, access the food they need to stay healthy.

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Now, while we've made some progress, we're not satisfied. If we're going to help more New Yorkers, we're going to have to change the way government operates.

Today, 600,000 New Yorkers who qualify for food stamps don't get them. The Administration has worked to enroll more families, but we are still leaving nearly \$1 billion in federal aid in Washington. The tragedy of this situation is that many New Yorkers don't sign up because they do not know they are eligible.

Government has to be a partner, and help New Yorkers learn about food stamps. For example, as many of you know, families eligible for free school meals are also likely eligible for food stamps.

Well, what if, when parents sign their kids up for free school meals, we gave them information about food stamps? That would make sense, right?

And what if, when New Yorkers who are eligible for public health insurance visit public hospitals, we let them know they may be eligible for food stamps? That would make sense, right?

Well, we are currently working with the Administration to make these things happen.

To do our part in promoting the food stamp program, I am happy to announce that the City Council is launching the "Food Today, Healthy Tomorrow" campaign.

As part of the campaign, my fellow Council Members and I will hit the streets and talk to key communities, such as seniors and the working poor, about food stamps and their possible eligibility. Through these efforts, the Council has set a goal of reducing the number of hungry New Yorkers by more than half over the next three and half years-- over this time we'll work with all of you to enroll 350,000 more people into the food stamp program.

Outreach isn't going to be enough, though. We also need to cut through governmental red tape and improve coordination across agencies.

Right now, over 20 City agencies have a role in procuring or serving food or administering food programs. Yet many agencies of these don't coordinate with each other.

A perfect example: a few weeks ago my office received a City guide of summer activities for kids. This 187-page resource was put in the hands of countless New York parents. Yet there is not one mention of the summer meals program, an historically under-enrolled nutrition program available to all of our city's youth.

What a missed opportunity.

That's why the Council has called for one body to have the sole responsibility of coordinating the City's food system. Our plan will make sure the right and left hands of the City's food system work together. Only then will New Yorkers have the information they need to access food assistance. Luke tells us that "to whom much is given, much is required."

Indeed, eliminating hunger and obesity across our City is not going to be easy - life-changing work rarely is. But with everyone --government agencies, community leaders, and most importantly, all of you-- who dedicate yourselves to serving meals to those most in need-by working closely together, I have no doubt that we can:

- \* Inform all New Yorkers about the food assistance available to them;
- \* Ensure that government helps New Yorkers obtain high-quality meals; and
- \* Create a City where every New Yorker has access to healthy, nutritious food, three meals day, seven days a week.

Every New Yorker should start the day with a nutritious breakfast.

Every New Yorker should go to sleep with a full stomach.

Every New Yorker should have access to healthy and affordable food.

When all New Yorkers are able to feed themselves and their families, we will have truly made the City better for every single New Yorker. Together, we will make it so.

Thank you.