



**Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**

**Testimony for the May 14, 2009 Hearing  
of the  
New York State Senate's Aging Committee Hearing  
on the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

Prepared By:

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My name is Kathy Fitzgibbons and I am the Senior Policy Analyst for Elderly Welfare and Youth Services from the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). I would like to thank the Aging Committee and its Chairperson, Senator Diaz for holding this hearing and for providing the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of increased funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

FPWA is an alliance of nearly 300 human service agencies and churches providing human services to city residents of every age, religion and race. Our diverse membership includes child care centers, after-school programs, adoption and foster care agencies, family support programs, nursing homes, senior day care centers, mental health clinics, AIDS service organizations, Y's and settlement houses. In combination, these agencies serve more than 1.5 million New Yorkers. Among FPWA's membership are 58 agencies that provide services to seniors throughout New York City. We share a particular concern for the elderly.

FPWA offers its strong support for S.3340/A.7152 which would provide full funding for SNAP home delivered meals. This legislation will have a very positive impact throughout the state if enacted in that it will help to eliminate waiting lists for home delivered meals and will also provide necessary funding for the program reducing the financial burden on counties throughout the state administering the program.

There is currently a waiting list of at least 1,000 elderly for the home delivered meals program in New York City. This waiting list combined with the projected growth of seniors throughout the coming decades, demonstrates the critical need for additional meals for our elderly population. For example, those elderly aged 65 years and older grew nationwide from 35 million in 2000 to 37 million in 2006; representing a 5% increase in the elderly population within this six year timeframe.<sup>1</sup> Between 2015 and 2025 the population of those 60 years of age and older in New York State is projected to increase to 4.4 million with the influx of baby boomers comprising 22.2 percent of all New Yorkers. Baby Boomers will reach 85 years of age during the period 2035 to 2055. As the largest growing elderly population, the number of people 85 and older will increase from 277,000 in 1995 to a projected 391,000 in 2025-a 41% increase in just over 30 years throughout the State.<sup>2</sup> New York City will see dramatic increases in its elderly population. The number of persons ages 65 and over is projected to rise 44.2 percent from 938,000 in 2000 to 1.35 million in 2030.<sup>3</sup> As of now, it has been reported that 70% of the seniors who need home delivered meals are unable to access them due to inadequate funding. The growth in the population and the fact that seniors are living longer, necessitates the allocation of additional resources into community-based supports such as the SNAP program.

Community based programs such as SNAP cost far less than nursing home placements and create a "win-win" situation for seniors and for government. While accessing community-based services and supports the senior is able to stay in the comfort of their own homes and communities for as long as possible, averting premature nursing home placement. Government in turn, spends far less on community-based services than nursing homes.

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<sup>1</sup> Aging, American Fact Finder, U.S. Census Bureau, [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).

<sup>2</sup> New York State Office for the Aging, Demographic Projections to 2025, page 7.

<sup>3</sup> New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex & Borough, The City of New York, Department of City Planning; [http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/projections\\_briefing\\_booklet.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/projections_briefing_booklet.pdf), December 2006.

SNAP helps seniors access proper nutrition which reduces a senior's level of hunger and malnutrition, and helps prevent nutritional related illnesses. Research indicates that older adult patients who were malnourished had three to seven times the risk of life threatening complications while hospitalized. <sup>4</sup> Proper nutrition also leads to increased safety for seniors and lowers the risk of falls. The level of nutritional risk is a significant determinant of falls as those who are not eating properly risk the risk of having such conditions as brittle bones for example due, to a lack of calcium. <sup>5</sup> Thus those seniors who suffer from brittle bones would be at an increased risk of fractures and other serious injuries when falling.

Proper nutrition leads to a decrease in the mortality rate of older adults who have been discharged from hospitals. The mortality rate of older adults once discharged from hospitals was 44% among malnourished patients and 18% among adequately nourished patients. <sup>6</sup> Malnourished individuals are more susceptible to illness and injuries and are slower to recover from them. For individuals who become extremely sick, malnourishment can make surgery more risky and can lead to longer and more expensive hospital stays. <sup>7</sup>

Recognizing that the Bloomberg Administration is proposing to reduce funding for the home delivered meals program in the 2009 - 2010 budget, SNAP funding is critical to assist those seniors who are on waiting lists and to accommodate the anticipated growth in numbers of seniors throughout New York City who will need home delivered meals. With the economic downturn, more seniors are requesting access to food programs and community-based supports, thus another reason to ensure sufficient funding is allocated to meet the current and future demands. With 70% of the current senior population unable to receive home delivered meals due to inadequate funding, fully funding this program makes perfect sense.

Thank you.

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<sup>4</sup> Malnutrition: A Hidden Cost in Health Care, Economic and Human Costs of Malnutrition, Page 12.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, page 17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, page 16.

<sup>7</sup> <http://bexar.tx.networkofcare.org/aging/library>.