

STUDENT NAME: Lauren Phillips

TOPIC: Food Response to the Coronavirus and Corresponding Economic Downturn

CLIENT: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

CENTRAL POLICY ISSUE: The need for social distancing protocols has caused economies to grind to a halt. This national economic crisis has caused a 2000% increase in unemployment, 22 million claims filed as of this writing. The USDA also reports the current SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps) caseload includes 35 million participants. These two figures combined represent an enduring economic decline for 60 million Americans.

The Senate Agriculture Committee must take this moment to propose a robust plan for the USDA to address the incredible need for access to food facing the American people. As a member of this committee representing New York State, the domestic epicenter of the Coronavirus, you have the position and leadership necessary to make this proposal. This document aims to determine which aspect of the US anti-hunger response will operate best as the keystone of the federal response to the urgent and ongoing need to address food insecurity.

RECOMMENDATION: I recommend you support an ARRA-style increase to SNAP as the cornerstone of the federal anti-hunger response to the economic crisis caused by Coronavirus. By boosting SNAP benefits by 15% and halting new restrictions and rule changes to the program, there is an opportunity to support food security and health for 60 million people contributing to spending that will move the economy forward. The application process can be burdensome and excludes some vulnerable populations. As the cornerstone of the anti-hunger response though, funding for TEFAP and the newest home delivery service and other food assistance programs provided by the USDA can help to fill gaps for those communities. A SNAP increase will help participants buy foods that their households can enjoy, passing down cooking traditions and respecting dietary needs. I recommend using 2008's ARRA legislation as a model for food assistance to the next Coronavirus response bill that will help to serve 60 million food insecure Americans.

STUDENT NAME: Shakti Robbins-Cubas

TOPIC: COVID-19 Rapid Housing Strategy for NYC's Shelter Population

CLIENT: Steven Banks, Commissioner, Department of Homeless Services

CENTRAL POLICY ISSUE: There are several barriers for shelter residents, particularly in congregate settings, to follow the most important COVID-19 guidelines because they do not have the safety and security of permanent housing. Social distancing, being able to maintain a 6ft distance between individuals, is impossible in congregate shelters. Isolation for individuals who present symptoms or test positive is difficult because there are not enough private spaces in these settings. Precautionary sanitizer practices, which involve frequent cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces also pose a problem. These barriers have been echoed by residents who claim they have no access to hand sanitizer, disinfectant, or PPE. They also complained about an inability to social distance and infrequent disinfecting of common areas. In some places, they no longer have access to their recreation spaces because of these concerns.

The impact of barriers to following COVID-19 guidelines is evidenced in how rapidly the disease is spreading among this population. The first case of COVID-19 among the homeless population was identified around March 19th. By the end of March, there were 120 confirmed cases across over 60 shelters and 4 deaths. By April 6th, confirmed cases more than doubled to 247 and 13 deaths. A week later, confirmed cases and deaths reached 370 and 23 respectively.

This brief seeks to address how we can ensure the shelter population in NYC is housed in spaces that allow them to follow guidelines and mandates to avoid transmission of COVID-19.

RECOMMENDATION: DHS should focus its resources on Alternative 1, moving the entire congregate shelter population into hotels. Repurposing public space is very time consuming given the emergency yet reaps no additional benefits in terms of effectiveness. Rapid re-housing, while both economical and highly effective, takes more time to implement than both alternatives and is already streamlined because it eliminates preconditions to qualify. The same process scaled up to meet the needs of all congregate residents would likely increase implementation time significantly.

Alternative 1 is the most expensive, however cost was not weighed heavily and there is also a high potential for federal reimbursement. FEMA has agreed to reimburse California up to 75% of costs to move their homeless residents into 15,000 hotel rooms[1]. Recent reporting suggests that the same opportunity is available for NYC[2]. If reimbursement can be secured, cost would drop drastically to about \$37,845,000. Though time could not be cleanly measured across all alternatives, it is still very clear that Alternative 1 has the shortest implementation. It can be more quickly scaled up because it takes advantage of existing infrastructure and programs. By taking on this universal approach to the congregate population, time spent trying to identify and move just the most vulnerable members can be also spared. Moderate effectiveness in this case still allows for enough private space to social distance and isolate because hotel rooms have their own bedroom and bathroom and residents have their meals delivered.

Working with this population is extremely complicated both from a logistical and social service standpoint. Hotels should be identified that are already within close proximity of existing congregate shelters to transition entire shelter operations. This will prevent residents from being transported long distances and allow for services to continue with existing staff in a safer and more comfortable environment. This should also limit any redundancies or shortages that may be created by having staff and residents split up between multiple locations. Residents should continue to have meals delivered to their rooms, freeing up any conference and dining spaces to administer services.

STUDENT NAME: Shana Sanichar

TOPIC: Protection for Immigrant Agricultural Workers in New York State during COVID-19

CLIENT: Jeanette Lazelle, Director of the Division of Immigrant Policies and Affairs (DIPA), New York State Department of Labor

CENTRAL POLICY ISSUE: COVID-19's work force reduction defined food-producing agriculture/farms businesses as an essential service in New York State. A significant number of essential workers in the agricultural field are immigrants, encompassing about 16% of the state's agricultural employees and estimated 24% of undocumented immigrant workers. However, immigrant farmworkers, both with temporary visas and undocumented, have limited access to healthcare, mobility, and legal protection. Lack of healthcare and income support can result in the immigrant worker continuing to work at the farm, which can spread the virus to others in proximity of the farm along with interfering with the nationwide food supply. In order to ensure the food supply chain on a nationwide level is protected, farms in New York State need to operate under compliant labor conditions that guarantee the health and safety for immigrant agricultural workers.

RECOMMENDATION: Creating an Agricultural Employer Immigrant Support Program that provides resources for employers to get legal services, both immigration services and business services, to support their immigrant agricultural workers. The program will accept requests on an application basis when employers express interest in gaining legal services to support visa petitions for their undocumented workers, apply to paycheck protection programs to help support their payrolls, or applications that help protect the safety of their farm. Additionally, DIPA will expand its

oversight capacity to conduct check-ins at the farms that were approved for this financial support to ensure that the services used were to help the immigrant agricultural worker.

STUDENT NAME: Gabrielle Vallese

TOPIC: Economic impact and recovery from COVID-19 Crisis on Freelancers/Gig Workers/Independent Contractors

CLIENT: NYS Governor Andrew Cuomo

CENTRAL POLICY ISSUE: How can New York State protect independent contractors who are increasingly vulnerable to economic disaster during the COVID-19 pandemic as well as during the economic recovery that will occur when businesses begin to re-open, given that several industries relying on independent contractor labor will be slower to restart?

RECOMMENDATION: NYS based 2-year employment program similar to the WPA of the Great Depression geared toward hiring low-income independent contractors in slow to recover industries (including the arts and domestic work). Employment program to include an artist based oral history project to document the pandemic and hiring domestic workers/home health aides to sanitize public spaces and provide essential food delivery to the homebound.