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October 30, 2017

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Testimony before the New York City Council Committee on Education**

Int 461-2014: Summer Meals Information

My name is Gale Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you Chair Dromm for including the Int 461-2014 regarding the Summer Food Service Program on the agenda for today's hearing.

As you know, the Summer Meals program is federally funded and serves free, nutritious meals for kids during the summer at hundreds of public schools, public pools and recreation centers, and other sites. The program is a crucial element in our city's fight against childhood hunger and poverty. The staff at the Department of Education Office of School Food and Barbara Turk, Director of the Mayor's Office of Food Policy and her staff deserve much credit in their concerted efforts to feed our children better, healthier and through engaging access points like food trucks. The program can only help families that know about it which is why I am proud to have introduced Int 461-2014 with my friend and colleague, Jimmy Vacca. This practical measure gets the information out early and to electeds and community partners who can reach out to families in their schools while school is in session and throughout the neighborhood.

According to the Food Bank of New York City's 2013 Hunger Safety Net Report, sixty percent of emergency food program participants with school-aged children reported that their children participated in a school breakfast program; seventy percent reported that their children participated in free school lunch. The City's recent expansion to universal free lunch will only further bridge the meal gap.

The same study found that only one-third of emergency food program participants with school-aged children participated in the Summer Food Service Program with the remaining two-thirds of parents participating in the city's emergency food programs not taking advantage of summer meals because they are unaware of its existence or haven't received details from schools about where and when to take their kids to be fed.

My staff analyzed the changes in site locations from 2015 and 2016 – only 12 sites were removed from the previous year and 24 were added. While there is minimal change in annual

summer meal location siting, for years the information has been publicly released toward the end of the school year if not when school is effectively out due to the whirlwind of activity including field trips and graduations. When parents don't know where to send their kids, many go hungry. For years I along with food and family advocates have urged city officials to publish detailed information on the Summer Meals program earlier in the school year, before the start of exams and graduations, to make it easier to get detailed information to parents and families in multiple languages.

The City's fliers have improved over the years, with general program information in multiple languages. While including a list of locations by borough, they were missing site specific details like the dates of operation (for example, NYCHA, Department of Education and Parks' sites have different start and end dates), meals and service times in English and other languages. The fliers also prominently promote the SchoolFood App – an application that is only available in English. As you know, not all families may be able to afford a smart phone – particularly those who are food insecure and many older adults, including grandparents who care for their grandchildren, may not utilize this type of technology.

Every year since I was elected to this office, my staff creates detailed neighborhood specific fliers for the Summer Meals program from info we receive from the DOE and NYCHA in the first week of June - although it's not publicly made available until later in the month. In addition to English, we produce fliers in Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, French, and Haitian Creole to help parents navigate programs whose starting and closing dates, days of week, hours of operation, and meal offerings vary from site to site. Principals, teachers, advocates, volunteers and staff then distribute these fliers at our borough's Title I elementary schools and deliver thousands of additional fliers to schools, libraries, tenant associations, NYCHA developments, park sites, and senior centers while school is fully in session and throughout the summer. I know that many of my Council colleagues have produced similar fliers for their districts but the inconsistent availability of this information makes it difficult to prepare and distribute fliers in a timely manner.

Int 461 requires the Department of Education to share summer meal information publicly by June 1st of each year, disseminating it to Council Members, Borough Presidents, community boards, community education councils, parent associations, and parent teacher associations. The Department will also have to translate this information into, at a minimum, the top six languages other than English spoken by the population of the city of New York.

I also want to add that with Local Law 25 of 2016, the Council sought to improve language access for the low English proficiency population. While the Department of Education's failure to offer translated versions of the SchoolFood App does not violate the letter of the law or Chancellor's regs on language access, the DOE should work expeditiously with developers to expand access to this vital information on school meals served throughout the year.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer testimony today in support of Int 461-2014, a common sense approach to increasing access to essential summer meals and nutrition. I also want to thank our partners including school principals, teachers, volunteers, Hunger Free America, Community Food Advocates and others for their partnership in distributing flyers every year since 2014.