



## CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute Testimony on Groceries to Go Subsidized Grocery Program (Chapter 34 to Title 24 of the Rules of the City of New York)

January 12, 2023

The CUNY Urban Food Policy Institute, a research and action organization based at the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, supports the addition of Chapter 34 to Title 24, which would establish rules for a subsidized grocery program (Groceries to Go). This important program has the potential to help food-insecure New Yorkers with hypertension, diabetes, and other diet-related diseases to afford and access groceries that support a healthy diet.

With this rule change, participants will be able to access food at local grocery stores using a subsidy to help cover the cost of their groceries. This is especially important for low-income families and individuals, who may struggle to afford the rising cost of food. This change will also provide support for ordering groceries online to communities that may not have been able to utilize this option before.

Furthermore, online ordering is particularly helpful for mobility-impaired New Yorkers and those who live far from full-service supermarkets. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, many New Yorkers have increasingly utilized online grocery ordering services, but the barriers to participation are well-documented, including increased costs related to service and delivery fees, difficulties receiving deliveries at multi-unit apartment buildings, and not all local retailers being able to accept SNAP online. Programs such as Grocery to Go, which reduce barriers to online grocery ordering, are essential to reducing inequities in food access and food insecurity in New York and elsewhere.

In addition to offering financial assistance to shoppers, the Groceries to Go program will likewise help to support local businesses by encouraging consumers to shop at participating stores. This not only helps store owners, but also helps to bolster the neighborhood economy.

We support this rule and offer four suggestions for expanding its scope and effectiveness. The rule should include language that:

- Prioritizes enrolling New Yorkers with mobility limitations (e.g., older adults, those with physical disabilities) and ensure delivery services meet the specific and varied needs of these groups (e.g. ensuring deliveries are made directly into apartments of the home bound).
- Prioritizes enrolling New Yorkers from low-resourced neighborhoods, such as areas that qualify for FRESH supermarket incentives.
- Enables and financially supports community-based organizations (e.g., cornerstone facilities at NYCHA developments, community development corporations, etc.) to sign up groups of households, offer technical assistance, facilitate group buying, and streamline receipt of grocery deliveries.



- Establishes key evaluation requirements such as those that enable the use of de-identified program data on purchases, delivery/pick-up methods, and other metrics to track program processes and outcomes.
- Lastly, the rules should require annual evaluation and reporting on the program, and the sharing of de-identified data on NYC Open Data.

Overall, the Groceries to Go program is a win-win for both low-income New Yorkers and the local community. We strongly encourage the adoption of this new chapter and would also urge the City to consider increasing funding for this program to make it available to as many residents as possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Willingham". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Craig Willingham

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