

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS AND COMMUNITY SUPERVISION ANNOUNCES PILOT PROGRAM TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AMONG FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

In Partnership with Columbia University's National Executive Council (NEC), Social Services, and City University of New York (CUNY)

Allows Incarcerated Individuals to Apply for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) Benefits 30 Days Prior to Release

New York – The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS), Columbia University's National Executive Council (NEC), Social Services, and City University of New York (CUNY) researchers are expanding a collaboration utilizing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) pilot to address the critical issue of food insecurity among individuals transitioning from incarceration to New York communities. Under the leadership of DOCCS's Acting Commissioner, Daniel F. Martuscello III, and the NEC, this initiative is set to drive meaningful change for those re-entering society.

New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision Acting Commissioner Daniel F. Martuscello III said, “It is DOCCS’ mission to improve public safety by ensuring individuals returning to their communities receive supportive services that promote a successful transition. In that vein, food insecurity due to waiting periods for SNAP is not a hurdle that releasees should have to face. As we work to continue to eliminate barriers to reentry, this initiative will have a measurable impact on formerly incarcerated individuals as they start a new chapter of their lives. I thank Columbia University's National Executive Council, the New York City Department of Social Services, and the City University of New York for their ongoing partnership.”

The pilot was initiated in 2021 at Queensboro and Edgecombe Correctional Facilities. With the appointment to Acting Commissioner of DOCCS in June of this year, Daniel F. Martuscello III, has expanded the pilot to the following correctional facilities: Sing Sing, Greene, Fishkill, Bedford Hills, and Taconic.

The Department will continue to engage with Social Services organizations in communities with large numbers of returning individuals in order to expand the benefits further. As of December 31, 2022, the in-state releasee population under Community Supervision was 19,067. Forty-two percent lived in New York City, seven percent on Long Island and fifty-one percent in Upstate regions.

With the assistance of DOCCS staff, incarcerated people returning to New York City can apply for SNAP benefits 30 days prior to their release. Once approved, the food benefits are made available at the day of release. In the past, incarcerated individuals had to wait until they were released before applying for SNAP benefits, delaying food assistance by up to 45 days and putting additional stress on a person at a particularly vulnerable time.

One of the pilot participants scheduled to be released in the coming weeks shared his thoughts after being notified that his application was approved and benefits would be available the same day he returns back to his New York City neighborhood, "Being hungry and desperate in my past got me here. These benefits can help keep me straight until I get on my feet," **said the 40-year-old returning citizen**, reinforcing the vital connection between food security and successful reintegration.

K. Bain, co-Director of NEC & Executive Director of Community Capacity Development (CCD), underscored the transformative nature of the partnership.

"Together with DOCCS, social services and community stakeholders, we are taking a Human Justice approach that recognizes the vital connection between food security and successful reintegration. This initiative is not just about providing meals, fostering stability, and empowering individuals, it is also about providing relief to neighborhoods."

The initiative has already served a few hundred individuals on the day of release as they rejoin their neighborhoods. **A 36-year-old participant preparing for his upcoming release date** explained how the SNAP benefits would impact his family, "My people held me down during this [prison sentence]. It will be good for me to bring something back to the household as soon as I get out."

In order to better understand the impact of this initiative, the NEC has assembled an inter-campus research team led by Jay Holder, Dr. Brett Maricque, Dr. Van Tran, and Dr. Brittany Fox-Williams. In addition to her research role on NEC, Dr. Brittany Fox-Williams is Assistant Professor in the Department of Sociology at Lehman College, CUNY and reaffirmed the evidence-based foundation of the project.

Dr. Fox-Williams expressed that, "Our work is grounded in a robust scientific approach designed to capture the impact of food security on the reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals. We hope to shape lasting change by aligning research insights with practical solutions."

“Food insecurity has far-reaching consequences, impacting individuals returning from prison and their entire neighborhoods,” **said Jay Holder, co-director, Columbia University’s NEC at the Center for Justice.** “The NEC’s goal with our colleagues including Sean Pica and Lucy Lang is to eliminate this serious burden of food insecurity on returning citizens, their families, and the wider community.”

About DOCCS

The New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision’s mission is to improve public safety by providing a continuity of appropriate treatment services in safe and secure facilities where the needs of the incarcerated population are addressed and where individuals under its custody are successfully prepared for release and parolees under community supervision receive supportive services that facilitate the successful completion of their sentence.

About NEC

The National Executive Council (NEC) at the Columbia University’s Center for Justice is an entity of educators, researchers, and conflict resolution practitioners who support communities impacted by unhealthy outcomes correlated with the conditions of poverty. We promote neighborhood wellness by bringing together neighborhood, business, and government leaders to co-design community-centered programs and policies.

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