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THE COUNCIL  
OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
**DANIEL DROMM**  
COUNCIL MEMBER, 25<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT, QUEENS

CHAIR  
EDUCATION  
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IMMIGRATION  
OVERSIGHT & INVESTIGATIONS  
SUBCOMMITTEE  
NON-PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 22, 2016

Hon. Bill de Blasio  
Office of the Mayor  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

As New York City Council Members, we are asking you to expand universal free school lunch to all New York City public schools in the Fiscal Year 2017 Executive Budget. This program would address hunger in our schools by ensuring that all students have equal and universal access to healthy school meals, regardless of family income or immigration status. The time to do this is now – for a small investment, we can finally eliminate the current lunch system’s poverty stigma for all 1.1 million New York City public school students.

Students must be well-nourished to learn. Yet, in our public schools, 250,000 out of the 780,000 students who are income-eligible do not participate in the school lunch program due to the poverty stigma associated with traditional, fee-based school lunch. In the case of the 86,000 students who are homeless or in transitional housing, the lunch system is doubly stigmatizing. For these students, there is the added stigma of their housing status, which further discourages them from eating lunch, despite their great need for this meal. Many of these students—as well as others whose parents are not income-eligible for free lunch yet cannot afford to pay school lunch fees—consequently struggle through lessons on an empty stomach. In addition, despite urgent need, many immigrant parents are reluctant to fill out the school lunch forms for fear of government reprisal, and the pursuit of lunch fees from parents who cannot afford them puts principals in the uncomfortable role of bill collector and directly undermines our City’s efforts to increase parent engagement.

Not only would expansion provide educational and health benefits for students, but many families throughout New York City would stand to benefit financially. Parents who otherwise provide lunch for their child would save approximately \$900 each year per child. Based on the additional students who would eat lunch under expansion, this amounts to a total of \$42.3 million in financial relief for families across the City.

We were excited to work with you and Chancellor Fariña to bring universal free school lunch to our City’s stand-alone middle schools. However, the majority of our City’s students are still unnecessarily subjected to the inequities and stigma encountered in the income-based school lunch system. We cannot afford to ignore the direct health and educational benefits to our students and the financial relief to families of free, accessible school lunch. Now is the time to ensure this benefits all New York City public school students.

Sincerely,



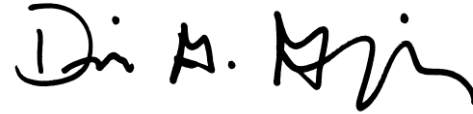
Daniel Dromm  
Chair, Committee on Education  
District 25



Corey Johnson  
Chair, Committee on Health  
District 3



Jumaane Williams  
District 45



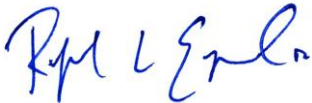
David G. Greenfield  
District 44



Annabel Palma  
District 18



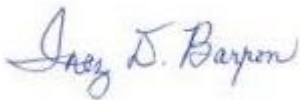
Elizabeth Crowley  
District 30




Rafael Espinal  
District 37



Helen Rosenthal  
District 6



Inez Barron  
District 42



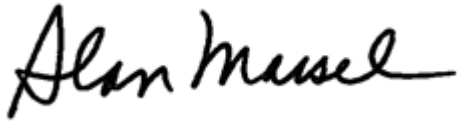
Carlos Menchaca  
District 38



Ritchie Torres  
District 15



James Vacca  
District 13



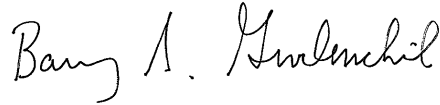
Alan Maisel  
District 46



Vincent J. Gentile  
District 43



Mark Treyger  
District 47



Barry Grodenchik  
District 23



Ben Kallos  
District 5



Ydanis Rodriguez  
District 10



Deborah Rose  
District 49



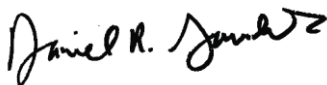
Costa Constantinides  
District 22



Donovan Richards  
District 31



Mark Levine  
District 7



Daniel R. Garodnick  
District 4



Paul Vallone  
District 19



Stephen Levin  
District 33



Rafael Salamanca  
District 17



Margaret Chin  
District 1



Brad Lander  
District 39



Andy King  
District 12



Rory Lancman  
District 24



Vanessa L. Gibson  
District 16



Andrew Cohen  
District 11



Karen Koslowitz  
District 29



Antonio Reynoso  
District 34



Robert Cornegy  
District 36



Peter Koo  
District 20

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laurie F. Cumbo". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Laurie Cumbo  
District 35