



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

December 10, 2018

Steven Banks
Commissioner
New York City Department of Social Services
150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Banks,

Like many New Yorkers, I am profoundly disturbed by the videos and eyewitness accounts that have surfaced of the violent arrest that occurred at the Fort Greene Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) center on Friday, December 7th. According to published reports, four hours after entering the center with her infant son to inquire about child care benefits, Jazmine Headley was arrested, and viral video shows her son being forcibly pulled from her arms. Four days later, she remains incarcerated at Rikers Island and unable to see her child, who is now in the care of Ms. Headley's mother.

Investigations to get to the bottom of exactly what led to this particular incident are already underway, and rightly so. However, reports of Ms. Headley's experience at the SNAP office that morning suggest that a number of structural issues may have contributed to the horrible outcomes in this instance. First, it has been reported that Ms. Headley had lost access to her child care assistance, and that is why she was at the center with her young son in the first place. Secondly, the center itself was reportedly overcrowded, which led Ms. Headley to sit on the floor as she waited to be seen by Human Resources Administration (HRA) staff.

New Yorkers who seek assistance from the City, whether it is by securing a child care voucher or enrolling in SNAP or cash assistance, should expect to be treated with dignity and respect in every interaction with City employees. In turn, City employees should be equipped with the tools, including the necessary resources and training, to be able to uphold this most essential but vital responsibility.

To better understand the issues underlying this horrific incident, and to address them moving forward, I respectfully request that HRA provide answers to the following questions:

- How many HRA staff, including Peace Officers, were working at the Fort Greene SNAP center on December 7, 2018?
- How often do HRA Peace Officers receive de-escalation training? What guidance is provided to Peace Officers, as well as benefits center staff members, in relation to engaging the NYPD for assistance?
- What is the process you use to determine the number of staff to assign to a benefits center? What steps, if any, do you use to determine the adequacy of staffing at any given center? How frequently are such determinations made? Do you produce and maintain evaluations of staffing adequacy at centers that provide SNAP benefits? If so, please provide my office with copies of the latest such evaluations for each center.
- What are average wait times at each of the SNAP Centers citywide?
- What protocols are in place to respond to overcrowding, and related accessibility issues, at centers, such as the SNAP center at which the incident involving Ms. Headley occurred? What training are staff members provided to deal with overcrowding issues?
- What agency guidance is provided regarding the care or treatment of children who accompany family members to centers? If no such guidance exists, what steps can reasonably be taken to provide further direction to center staff?
- How and when are clients typically notified of termination of benefits, such as child care assistance? Additionally, are there mechanisms in place to allow clients to renew eligibility without appearing in person at a center, thereby allowing for continuity of care?

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott M. Stringer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Scott M. Stringer