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COURT ORDERS THAT FOOD STAMP BENEFITS BE RESTORED

New York, NY – April 8, 2008 - In a groundbreaking victory for working families, the United States District Court of the Southern District of New York today ordered the State of New York and the City of New York to restore more than $7.2 million in food stamps to nearly 6,000 low-income families living in New York City. Under the terms of a settlement approved and ordered by United States District Judge William H. Pauley, federally-funded transitional food stamp benefits (TBA) benefits will be restored to thousands of families who participated in a Parks Department jobs program from March 2003 until October 2006.

Elena Goldstein, an attorney for the plaintiffs from the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) applauded the Court's ruling and said, "While it is unfortunate that the City and State delayed paying these families their rightful food stamp benefits for many years, this is an enormous victory for working families in New York who struggle to provide food for their families and make ends meet."

For years, New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) has assigned cash assistance (welfare) recipients to low-wage, short-term jobs while simultaneously denying them transitional food stamps, a federal program established in 2002 that allows states to temporarily freeze the food stamp benefits of families who leave cash assistance. For a number of years, HRA has been placing cash assistance recipients with the Parks Department in temporary, six-month jobs paying $7.50 an hour. Since it started this program, HRA has placed thousands of families with the Parks Department. When assigning households to work in the Parks Department, HRA simultaneously slashed households' food stamp benefits, denying these families transitional food stamp benefits provided to other, similarly situated households.

In 2004, NYLAG filed a federal court case, *Walker v. Eggleston*, as a class action challenging HRA's failure to provide transitional food stamps to cash assistance recipients who HRA placed in jobs with the Parks Department. HRA and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) had claimed that, for technical reasons, families who HRA placed with the Parks Department were ineligible for transitional food stamps.

This position caused severe hardship to individuals working in the Parks program such as in the case of lead plaintiff, Tanya Walker. When the City of New York placed Ms. Walker in a Parks job, HRA reduced her food stamps from $256 to $94 a month – a reduction of more than 60%. In hearing that the case has been settled, Ms. Walker said, "I am glad that the case has been settled and that the judge saw that welfare was wrong to not give us food stamps. These food stamps were not just for us, but were also for our kids."

Randal Jeffrey, an attorney from the New York Legal Assistance Group also representing the plaintiffs, projected that, under the settlement agreement, the families in the class will receive an average of $1200 in food stamps. He said, "We are pleased for our clients and that, under the settlement, the process for restoring food stamp benefits will begin immediately. Over the next nine months, families will be informed of the amount of food stamps that they will receive and how to access these benefits."

Founded in 1990, the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) is a not-for-profit law office providing free civil legal services to low income New Yorkers. A full service agency, NYLAG provides consultation, representation and advocacy. Last year, NYLAG handled 19,993 cases and impacted additional thousands through successful impact litigation and community legal education. NYLAG is a beneficiary of UJA-Federation of New York and is supported by numerous foundations, organizations and individuals. For more information on NYLAG, go to www.nylag.org.

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