A.2409-B/S.5664-B (Ortiz/Klein)
An act to amend the agriculture and markets law and the education law, in relation to authorizing school districts and institutions of higher education to donate excess food to local voluntary food assistance programs

The New York State Association of County Health Officials (NYSACHO) supports the above-referenced legislation, which would establish a voluntary program to allow school districts and post-secondary schools to donate excess, unused food to food assistance programs.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that over 14% of New Yorkers, or over 2.6 million people, face food insecurity, and cannot always afford to meet their basic nutritional needs. 31% of New Yorkers have incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty limit, making them eligible for certain state and federal hunger prevention programs, such as Food Stamps. 42% of children in New York live in low-income households, and 56% of school children are eligible for free/reduced lunch programs.

Food insecurity affects health disparities and educational outcomes. This legislation offers an opportunity to provide nutritious foods to children and families outside of the school setting, while also reducing food waste, thus maximizing the public benefit of school food programs.

This bill would create uniform guidelines, including safe food handling procedures, which will allow schools to donate excess, unused food to soup kitchens, food pantries and other food assistance programs. NYSACHO believes that this voluntary program, when operated using current regulations regarding food safety, can improve access to healthy, nutritious meals to the 1 in 7 households in New York State who struggle to put food on the table.

NYSACHO, therefore, supports this legislation and recommends it be enacted into law.

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