



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Acting Commissioner

Annual Report of Activities of the Food Service Establishment Inspection Ombuds Office

This report summarizes activities by the New York City Health Department's Food Service Establishment Inspection Ombuds Office (the Office) from July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025, as required by LL89/2013 of the New York City Council.

Number, Nature and Resolution of Questions, Comments, Complaints and Compliments received by the Ombuds Office

Complaints about Food Service Establishments Regulated by the Health Department

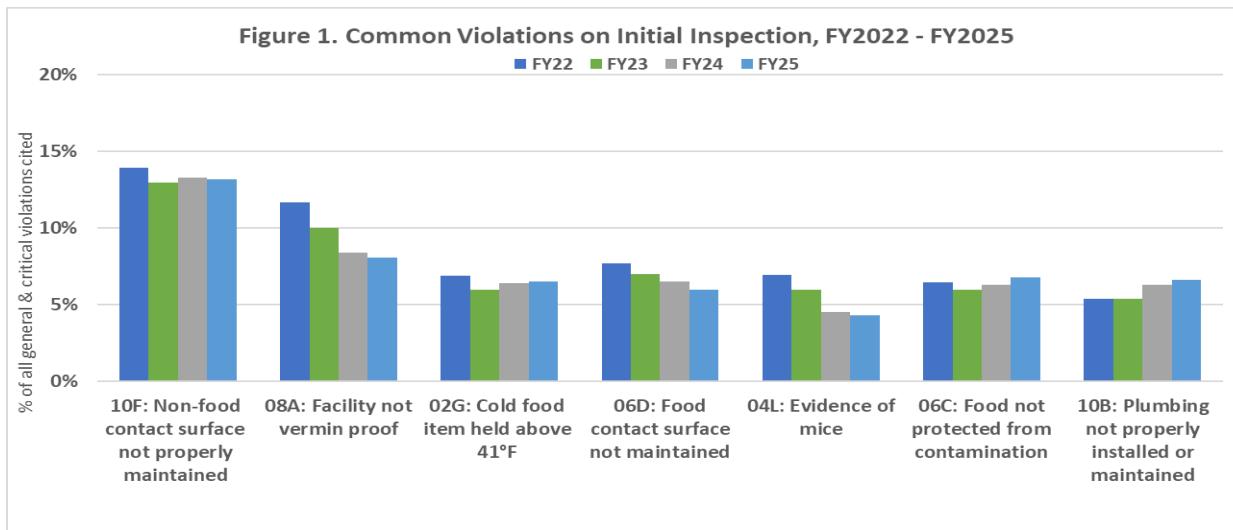
The Health Department received 12,650 complaints via 311 directed at food service establishments (FSEs) regulated by the Department. Complaints fell into the following categories:

Descriptor	# of Service Requests
Rodents/Insects/Garbage	3,837
Pet/Animal	1,469
Food Spoiled	1,055
Letter Grading	920
No Permit or License	745
Bare Hands in Contact w/ Food	658
Food Contaminated	637
Food Contains Foreign Object	463
Kitchen/Food Prep Area	394
Food Worker Hygiene	380
Food Temperature	355
Toilet Facility	334
Odor	314
Food Protection	244
Food Preparation Location	144
Handwashing	107

Descriptor	# of Service Requests
Permit/License/Certificate	105
Dishwashing/Utensils	84
Food Worker Activity	73
Ventilation	49
Facility Construction	46
Sewage	42
Allergy Information	41
Toxic Chemical/Material	37
Plumbing	32
Food Worker Illness	26
Pesticide	23
Water	17
Sign	13
Milk Not Pasteurized	3
Sodium Warning	2
Lighting	1

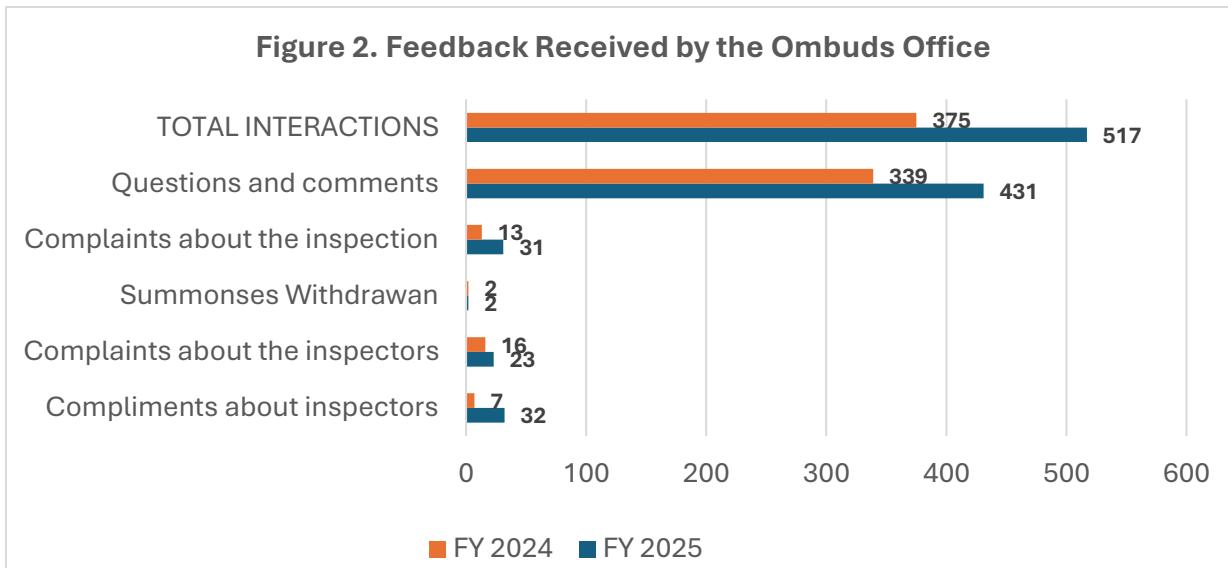
Annual Report on Activities of the Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office

General and critical violations most frequently cited on initial inspections over the past four years remained consistent and generally reflect the category of complaints submitted by the public (Figure 1).



Analysis of Trends Across Inspection Results (Figure 2)

The Department conducted more than 38,000 food service establishments inspections in fiscal year 2025 compared to over 30,000 inspections last year. The Office received feedback regarding 517 interactions. The Office thoroughly investigated 31 disputed violations and two were withdrawn.



Annual Report on Activities of the Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office

Investigation Process

The Office oversees the investigation process for inspector- and inspection-related complaints. Initially, the Office follows up with the complainant to inquire about the incident and discuss their concerns. For each complaint about an interaction with an inspector, a Health Department supervisor meets and discusses the concern with the inspector, asking generally about that inspection and then about the specific complaint and may reach out to the complainant to obtain additional information. The supervisor counsels the inspector about effective ways to handle similar situations in the future when warranted. The supervisor continues to closely monitor inspector performance and schedules periodic follow-up meetings to focus on professional development. When a complaint reflects a pattern of behavior by an inspector, the poor performance is documented, and the employee is referred for disciplinary action.

Analysis of the Existing Language Access Tools and Policies

Ensuring language access for restaurant operators continues to improve and be an important priority of the Department. The Department translates printed and online educational materials into at least the top 13 languages used in the city; provides inspectors and customer service representatives with Language Line interpretation services; trains and requires inspectors to follow a language access protocol; and equips the Customer Service Office for Food Establishments with dual handset phones to assist non-English speakers. Furthermore, in FY25, the Department provided simultaneous translation in three languages, including Cantonese, Mandarin, and Spanish, for the in-person and virtual food safety workshops and restaurant industry meeting.

The NYC Health Code requires that supervisors of food service establishments be certified in food protection. Completion of this course and passing of the final exam satisfies that requirement. There has been marked increase in the number of operators who pass the food protection course (FPC) examination in other languages, specifically, Bangla and Spanish. The Department enhanced the online Spanish course to prompt users to request the final exam and course review in Spanish which increased the passing rate by 10% for students taking FPC exams in Spanish. To address low passing rates among Bangla speakers who completed the English online course, the Department developed a Bangla course review video and used the video to assist test takers prior to them taking the final exam. The Department strongly encouraged Bangla speakers to take the in-person FPC in Bangla which resulted in a passing rate of 89%. In sum, the Department continues to provide sufficient tools and policies to serve the language needs of food service establishment operators.

Guidance Documents

The Department publishes a variety of guidance documents for the food service industry on matters pertaining to rules, regulations, food safety and sanitary inspections.

Annual Report on Activities of the Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office

Guidance documents are distributed in multiple ways including at the Customer Service Office for Food Establishments, Department's Health Academy, industry partnerships, community events, 311, Health Department's [website](#), mailings, email blast, and inspection reports.

FY25 guidance documents included:

- **Stay Informed About Food Recalls** (*emailed 7.30.2024*) informed operator to be aware of food-related recall alerts to keep their customers and business safe.
- **New Added Sugars Warning Requirement for Chain Restaurants** (*emailed 9.4.2024*) notified chain restaurant operators of the new local law enacted by City Council requiring chain restaurants to post a warning icon and warning statement next to menu items that contain high levels of added sugars.
- **Best Practices for Preventing Rats in Your Outdoor Dining Setup** (*emailed 11.4.2024*) offers guidance for keeping the outdoor dining area rodent-free.
- **NYC Health Department's Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office** (*emailed 11.12.2024 and 2.12.2025*) promotes the Ombuds Office and its many services.
- **City Drought Warning Notice** (*emailed 11.19.2024*) notified restaurant operators of the current drought conditions and how to conserve tap water.
- **Achieve an A Grade at Your Upcoming Inspection** (*emailed 4.9.2025*) alerted restaurant operators of their upcoming initial inspection and included a list of resources to help them practice A-grade food safety.
- **How to Identify a Health Inspector** (*emailed 5.9.2025*) provided guidance on how to better identify official NYC Health Department inspectors.
- **Notice of Opportunity to Comment on Proposed Rules**
 - Chapter 23 (Food Service Establishment Sanitary Inspection Procedures and Letter Grading) (*emailed 6.6.2025*)
 - Chapter 32 (Dogs in Outdoor Dining Areas) of Title 24 of the Rules of the City of New York (*emailed 6.23.2025*)

Ombuds Office Industry Outreach Initiatives

- **NYC Small Business Services (SBS) Industry Meetings:**
 - Business Express Service Team (BEST) Boot Camp virtual sessions and presented information on the permit process, inspections, and available support services.
 - SBS State of Nightlife Town Hall meeting as a panelist.
 - SBS Small Business Month Expo provided information on the food safety requirements.
- **NYC Health Department and Restaurant Industry Meeting:**

The Restaurant Industry Meeting discussed Active Managerial Control and reviewed the Department's resources and services. It also provided an opportunity to talk with Health Department representatives. Ninety industry

Annual Report on Activities of the Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office

representatives participated in the meeting. This meeting is part of our expanding efforts to help restaurants get an A grade.

- **Food Safety Workshops:**

The Office organized and conducted a series of free food safety workshops in July with the goal of providing industry operators with assistance and incentive to achieve and maintain better standards in food safety. The in-person workshop was held in Queens and was co-sponsored by the Borough President, and two virtual sessions were provided. Over three hundred people attended the workshops: 63 attended in Queens and 245 attended virtually.

Workshop participants received information from the Department regarding food safety updates, and policy updates designed to reduce the burden of chronic disease for the patrons. Other presentations addressed equal access, delivered by the NYC Commission on Human Rights, and the NYC Department of Sanitation reviewed rules on organics collections. Participants received an individualized Inspection History Report that highlights the restaurant's cited violations and explains the steps necessary to correct conditions. All participants had the opportunity to ask questions and obtain immediate guidance from Health Department staff on improving food safety practices.

The Office also organized a tabling portion of the Workshop, featuring other city agencies. Participants were given the opportunity to interact with representatives from the NYC Departments of Buildings, Consumer and Worker Protection, Small Business Services, Transportation, Environmental Protection, Sanitation, Fire Department, Office of Administrative Trials & Hearings, Commission on Human Rights, and NYS Liquor Authority.

The Office marketed the workshops by sending an email blast to food service establishments with information in English, Spanish, Traditional Chinese, Simplified Chinese, and Bengali. The email provided a direct link to the registration page.

- ***International Restaurant and Food Service Show of New York***

The Office participated as an exhibitor by providing food safety and public health information in the largest food and beverage experience in the Northeast. The Office responded to many questions and concerns and provided FSE operators with assistance and incentive to achieve and maintain better standards in food safety. The Department distributed over 1,000 no smoking signs, hundreds of allergy posters, bags, and pens.

This year, colleagues from Pest Control Services and Permits and Licensing joined the Office to provide additional information to operators. Over 8,200 attendees had the opportunity to see the newest in food trends and technology affecting the foodservice trade industry.

Annual Report on Activities of the Food Service Establishment Ombuds Office

- ***Inspection History Report***

The Inspection History Report (IHR) is an individualized report that shows repeated violations from a restaurant's past three years of inspections to help operators focus on areas that need improvement. The IHR also provides detailed instructions on how to correct food safety violations. The Department continues to increase access to and promote the availability of the IHRs. FSE operators can request the IHR on the Department's [website](#). The Department has improved the efficiency of the report's fulfillment process by automating the requests. IHRs are emailed instead of being manually processed, generated, and emailed. The Office received and fulfilled 269 requests in FY25.