



For Immediate Release:
November 24, 2015

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Hunger Surges in People with Employment, Says New Report; Advocates, Officials Decry “Epidemic of the Working Hungry”

**One in Five NYC Kids Still Lack Enough Food, Six Years after End of Official Recession;
Federal Food Aid to NYC Half a Billion Dollars Less This Year;
Half of NYC Pantries and Kitchens Lack Resources to Meeting growing Need;
Advocates Call for Wage Hike to \$15 per Hour and Restoration of Nutrition Aid Cuts**

Nearly half of all working-age New York City and New York State residents who can't afford enough food, live in households that are employed, according to a new report by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

In both the State and City, the minimum wage is now \$8.75 per hour, equaling \$15,925 for a year of full time work, leaving a worker with even one child below the federal poverty line. Many New Yorkers are paid at or near the minimum wage – and significant numbers are even illegally paid below that. As a result, according to the report, in 2012-2014, one million New York State residents lived in households that included at least one person working, but was food insecure, unable to consistently afford enough food. Of the adults between the ages of 15 and 65 in the state who were food insecure, 47 percent were working.

In New York City alone, in 2012-2014, fully 450,000 residents lived in households that included at least one person working but were food insecure. Fully 48 percent of all adults between 15 and 65 in the city who were food insecure were employed.

“New York State and City now face an epidemic of working people’s hunger,” said Joel Berg, executive director of the Coalition. “This shameful data is the latest evidence that the American dream is seriously at risk unless we change our current economic and political policies. For starters, we need to immediately raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.”

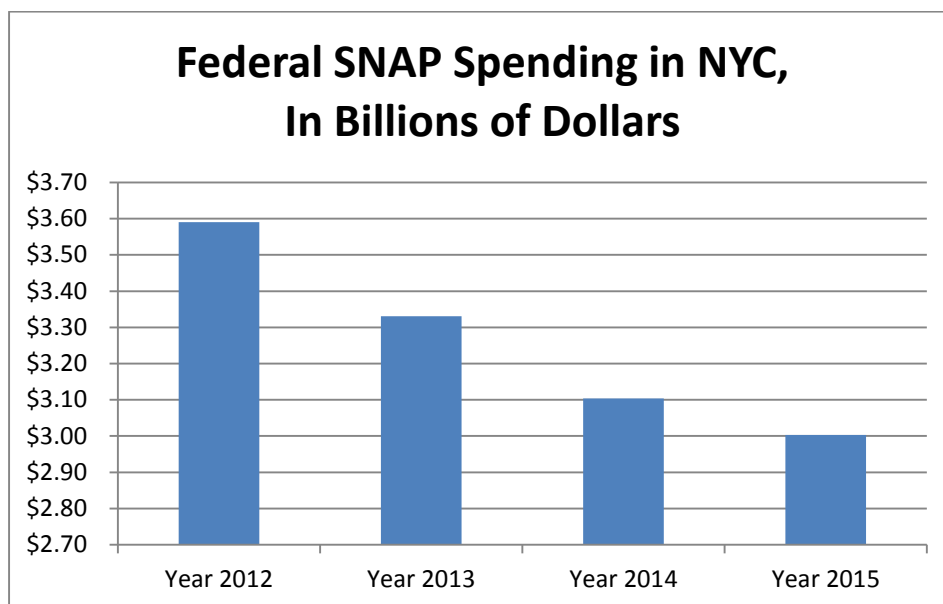
Nearly *half* of all working age people in New York State and City who suffer from food insecurity and hunger are employed.



The national recession, which began in 2007, formally ended in 2009, but, six years later, overall hunger and food insecurity are still sky-high in New York State and New York City, at virtually the same levels as at the height of the recession. Statewide, three million people, and citywide, 1.4 million people, live in food insecure households, meaning they can't always afford enough food.

The study, “Working But Hungry: Low Wages and Federal Cut-Backs Keep NYC Hunger Sky-High,” is available on the coalition’s website, www.nyccah.org, through which anyone can also donate or volunteer to help or find food if they need it. Members of the public may also call the USDA National Hunger Hotline, at 1-866-3-Hungry, to get food help.

Between December of 2012 and September of 2015, participation in New York City in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP (the legal name for the old Food Stamp Program), dropped from 1,898,028 to 1,696,174, a 201,854-person (11 percent) reduction. At the same time, President Barack Obama and Congress cut the average size of SNAP benefits. While Governor Andrew Cuomo was able to take executive action to ameliorate some of the federal cuts, much of the reduction was beyond the power of the State or the City. In addition to this, the average SNAP benefit in New York City declined from \$162 per person per month in December of 2012 to about \$148 per person per month in September of 2015. The combined impact of the lower average benefit size and the lower caseload decreased the annual federal SNAP spending in New York City from \$3.539 billion in 2012 to an estimated \$3.003 billion in 2015, a \$536 million (15 percent) drop.



On top of that pain, food prices during that time period rose in the New York metropolitan area by more than five percent, higher than the overall rate of inflation during this time period, according to the federal Consumer Price Index (CPI), further reducing the food purchasing power of low-income New Yorkers. As a result, despite some marginal improvements in the economy, hunger and food insecurity are still sky-high in New York City.

As a result of the combined impact of low wages, SNAP cuts, and food inflation, 1.4 million New York City residents lived in food insecure homes in 2012 - 2014. One in five New York City children – an estimated 403,780 – experienced food insecurity in 2012 – 2014. One in ten New York City seniors – an estimated 164,695 – suffered from food insecurity in 2012 – 2014.

CHILD HUNGER STILL SKY HIGH

NUMBER OF NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN LIVING IN FOOD INSECURE HOMES

In 2006-2008, 19% of NYC kids lived in food insecure homes. By 2012-2014, 21% of NYC kids faced food insecurity.



FROM 2012-2014, 1 IN 5 NYC CHILDREN LIVED IN FOOD INSECURE HOMES.

Continued Berg, “It is unconscionable that, in the richest city in the history of the world – one in five children can’t always count on enough food. It is equally unacceptable that half of our food pantries and soup kitchens lack the resources to meet the growing need. In addition to raising wages, we need to immediately restore the half a billion dollars that were cut from federal nutrition assistance spending in New York City.”

Quotes from Elected Officials, Advocates, and Partners:

“As the numbers in this report show, nearly half working adults in the state are food insecure. This is a crisis and a shame for the richest city in America. Not only have food prices risen, but access to key food programs has decreased due to Republican budget cuts. We need to address this issue quickly by helping make sure vulnerable families and hunger organizations have access to the financial support they need to access and provide food. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee, I have always made this issue a priority, and I will continue fighting to support the work of local food pantries and to restore SNAP funding cuts.” -**Congressmember Jose E. Serrano (NY/15)**

“Unfortunately, as hunger continues to plague our city and food costs continue rising, some in Congress have endeavored to cut nutritional programs that benefit working families, children and seniors. We must continue working to highlight this problem, speak out against hunger and oppose cuts to initiatives like SNAP, which ensure our most vulnerable neighbors do not go hungry.” --**Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-NY 7th Congressional District)**

"While I'm proud to say that The Bronx is growing and developing every day, we cannot ignore the fact that many of our neighbors and their families continue to go hungry. With the Annual Hunger Survey provided by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, we can see the areas in our community that need the most help, and we'll be able to channel our attention and efforts accordingly. Let's use this data and the resources that we have to make a difference - one plate at a time." --**Assemblymember Michael Blake (AD/79)**

“In the fight against hunger, the New York City Coalition Against Hunger continues to lead in the effort to ensure every man, woman, and child is fed and that our local food pantries and kitchens are well-stocked. With recent cuts to SNAP benefits, the New York City Coalition Against Hunger’s mission has become even more vital in the fight against hunger. I will continue to support the efforts of the Coalition Against Hunger and you have my commitment to do what I can on the State level to fight for funding to aid in the fight against hunger.” - **Assemblymember Mike Miller (AD/ 38)**

“It is shameful when a person who is working a full-day of work cannot afford food for their family,” Senator Toby Ann Stavisky said. “The report issued by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger should be a wake-up call to all of us, especially so close to Thanksgiving. As we gather around our dining room tables, let us appreciate the fortunes we have, but also think of those who have not. One person going hungry is one too many, and yet we have one million New York State residents – including many children – living in households where at least one person was working, but could not afford enough food. It is time to end hunger in New York State.” - **Senator Toby Ann Stavisky (16th Senate District)**

"In spite of the apparent recovery of our State's economy, millions of New Yorkers in communities such as the one that I represent, continue to struggle to afford enough food to feed themselves and their families. We need to continue to work diligently across all levels of government to find comprehensive solutions to the difficult realities our residents face every day and this report will go a long way in providing sensible recommendations to help fight hunger." - **Senator Gustavo Rivera (33rd Senate District)**

"New York is one of the richest cities in the world, and it's a shame that anyone here should go hungry. This survey shows that hundreds of thousands of households with working adults can still barely put food on the table. No one working full time should have to worry about feeding their families, and I commend the New York City Coalition Against Hunger for bringing this critical issue to light." - **Public Advocate Letitia James**

"The prevalence of hunger and food insecurity in New York City is staggering. While an increase in the minimum wage for some workers will help those families put food on the table, there are still more mouths to feed. Thanksgiving is the time of year to reflect on the progress we've made, but also to renew our commitment to protecting SNAP, and other critical benefit programs that help New York City families in need." - **New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer**

"The Coalition Against Hunger and its annual report perform an essential role in keeping the City and the Nation focused on the fact that far too many of our people don't have enough to eat. That's why we are working so hard to make it easy for everyone who qualifies to sign up for federal SNAP/food stamp benefits. We urge everyone who needs help to go to www.foodhelp.nyc to learn about how to apply and where to find food banks and community kitchens in their neighborhood." - **Commissioner of the New York City Human Resources Administration Steven Banks**

"This Thanksgiving, as thousands of Brooklyn's families gather around the dinner table for a hearty feast, thousands more of our neighbors will face empty plates and empty hearts. We cannot forget, as parts of this city experience economic recovery, that so many of us are facing the physical and psychological pain of hunger. Our nation is better than this; Congressional leaders must open their hearts and pass compassionate legislation that helps put food on every Brooklynite's table." - **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**

"Many of us are looking forward to the Thanksgiving holiday with visions of a big family feast. But for too many of my constituents who struggle to make ends meet, it is not a season of great joy. I know Staten Islanders are generous people, and so I ask my constituents to make a donation to a local food pantry during this holiday season, as these pantries are dependent on the generosity of our friends and neighbors. In the meantime, I continue to address the root causes of poverty by working for a higher minimum wage, and more affordable housing, economic development and educational opportunities for all New Yorkers. Together, we can address income inequality so that no one in our city goes hungry during the holiday season." - **Councilmember Debi Rose (Council District 49)**

"The Annual Hunger Survey from the New York City Coalition Against Hunger highlights the need for continued investment in resources that help New Yorkers, and residents of the Bronx in particular, achieve food security" said Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson. "Despite positive economic trends, working people, seniors, and children are still struggling and affected by hunger. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Council to help the city's food charities meet their rising demand and ensure no one in our City goes hungry." - **Councilmember Vanessa Gibson (Council District 16)**

“New York City is one of the most vibrant economic hubs in the world and yet City Harvest’s network of soup kitchens and food pantries has seen 1.3 million more visits since last year. We join with the New York Coalition Against Hunger to call on government, business and nonprofit organizations to increase efforts to help combat it.” --**Kate MacKenzie, Director of Policy and Government Relations, City Harvest**

“We know that 50 percent of New Yorkers are just getting by or finding it difficult to do so, and food insecurity is just one of the many struggles facing families in New York City. The good news is that there are policies we can put into place which have the potential to drastically reduce poverty in New York City. According to an anti-poverty study we conducted earlier this year, along with Catholic Charities and UJA Federation, a modest increase to a family’s monthly SNAP benefits can reduce poverty citywide by 13 percent and by 21 percent for children.” - **Jennifer Jones Austin, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**

"It is unacceptable that people can work full time and still not be able to feed themselves or their families due to the low wages they are paid. We need to increase the minimum wage to \$15/hour to give working people a fighting chance. In the meantime, we need to increase the HPNAP funding to at least 51 million, if not more, to make sure the food pantries and soup kitchens have enough to feed the growing demand. After all, food is a human right and no one should go hungry." --**Susan Zimet, Executive Director, Hunger Action Network of NYS**

“No one in New York City in the 21st Century should go to bed hungry. With the material and intellectual wealth in these five boroughs, we should be able to accomplish two goals: feed the hungry and to end food insecurity forever. Met Council continues to be in the forefront of that first goal. Our food programs are varied, culturally sensitive, nutritious, and dignified. We provide emergency food vouchers, home delivered meals, assistance in SNAP enrollment, and we operate the largest kosher food pantry system in the United States. And, we support the terrific work of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger in working toward the second goal – ending food insecurity here in the City and across the country. The Coalition’s annual survey of hunger in New York City provides the hard data that we need to raise awareness of the growing number of hungry among us. In Deuteronomy 15:7-8, we read, “If there be among you a needy man... thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut from thy hand thy needy brother, but thou shalt surely open thy hand unto him and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need...” We re-commit today with our partners in this endeavor to end hunger in New York City and in the United States.” --**Alan Schoor, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director, Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty**

"Despite signs of an economic recovery, the cost of living in New York is so high that most low-income, working New Yorkers are still affected by hunger and food insecurity. Economic recovery is still slow reaching for the New Yorkers we serve. And last year we served more than 2.9 million meals to more than 300,000 visitors. In the coming year, we expect to see a similar number of people using our services." - **Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry**

Other findings of the study:

- Statewide in New York, in 2012-2014, three million people lived in food insecure households. One in six children in the state – 726,317 – were food insecure. One in seven seniors in the state – 554,756 – were food insecure.
- New York City’s food pantries and soup kitchens faced an increased demand of five percent in 2015, on top of an increased demand of seven percent in 2014, 10 percent in 2013, five percent in 2012, 12 percent in 2011, seven percent in 2010, and 20 percent in 2009. Coupled with city data indicating near-record continuing levels of homelessness, this hunger data demonstrates that the city’s overall economic recovery has yet to significantly benefit its lowest income residents.
- Eighty percent of New York City food pantries and soup kitchens reported that the SNAP cuts had “increased the number of our clients and/or increased the food needs of our existing clients.” Thirty-eight percent said the demand had been increased “significantly” and 42 percent said their demand had increased “somewhat.” Only 10 percent said the cuts had no impact.
- Because their demand outstripped their resources, half of food pantries and soup kitchens said they could not meet the growing demand.

Concluded Berg, “The sky-high hunger level of New York and America harms health, hampers education, traps families in poverty, fuels obesity, eviscerates hope, and thus drags down our entire economy and places our national security at risk . Hunger harms us all. In contrast, ending hunger lifts us all. We must build the movement needed and force our political system to enact the economic policies and social programs necessary to end U.S. hunger once and for all.”

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