



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, Dec. 5, 2018

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27.5 Percent of Arkansas Children Live in Food Insecure Households, Finds New Report

“U.S. Hunger Atlas” Also Found Arkansas has Second Highest Percentage of Working Hungry Adults

Annual Cost of Ending Hunger in Arkansas \$290 Million

Advocates Say Findings a “Wake-Up Call for Policy Makers”

More than a quarter of all children in Arkansas lived in households that couldn't always afford enough food from 2015-2017, according to a new report by Hunger Free America, based on an analysis of federal data. That means 197,753 children in the state lived in households that did not always know where their next meal was coming from during the three-year time period. The total number of food insecure individuals in Arkansas from 2015-2017 was 557,070, making it the second most food insecure state.

The report — the first ever “U.S. Hunger Atlas” — also found that 13.8 percent of working adults in Arkansas suffered from food insecurity from 2015-2017. With a state minimum wage at \$8.50 an hour, 171,701 adults in the state worked but still struggled against hunger. Nationwide, increased state minimum wages correlated with declined hunger among working people.

“It’s no surprise that we again found that states with higher minimum wages have less hunger among working people and states with lower minimum wages had more hunger among working people,” said Hunger Free America CEO Joel Berg. “The claims of opponents of wage hikes —

that such increases will harm employment rates and thus increase poverty and hunger — are clearly unfounded. This report should be a wake-up call to elected officials at the federal, state, and local levels that we need bold, comprehensive new economic and public policies to raise wages and ensure an adequate anti-hunger and anti-poverty safety net.”

Hunger Free America’s “U.S. Hunger Atlas” also found:

- 9 percent of older Americans (ages 60 and older) living in Arkansas, a total of 61,744 people, were hungry during 2015-2017.
- The states with the highest rates of food insecure children following Arkansas were New Mexico (27.1 percent), Louisiana (24.7 percent), Wyoming (22.9 percent), and Mississippi (22.1 percent).
- In states with a minimum wage set at \$10 or above, an average of 8.6 percent of employed adults were found to be food insecure — more than a full percentage point below the national average of 9.7 percent. In states with a minimum wage set at \$7.25 or below, an average of 9.9 percent of employed adults were food insecure.
- Food insecure Arkansas residents would need more than \$290 million in additional food purchasing power each year to meet their basic food needs, spending as much on food as do non-hungry Arkansas residents. The increased food purchasing power could take the form of a combination of higher wages and increased federal nutrition assistance spending.

Berg added: “While the nation rightfully focuses on whether a blue wave or a red wave changes our political leadership any given year, we must also focus on the reality that, since the 1980s, a red, white, and blue wave of hunger has submerged each of the fifty states of the U.S. in suffering, making America the only Western industrialized democracy with this level of food hardship. We simply cannot let mass deprivation be considered any sort of ‘new normal.’”

The full report, “The Red, White, and Blue Hunger Wave: A 2018 United States Hunger Atlas,” can be found on Hunger Free America’s website, www.HungerFreeAmerica.org, through which anyone can also donate, volunteer, or find food resources for those in need. Anyone needing food can call the USDA Hunger Hotline, managed by Hunger Free America on behalf of the federal government, at 1-866-3-hungry.

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