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New Mexico has Highest Percentage of Working Hungry Adults, Finds New Report

“U.S. Hunger Atlas” Also Found 27.1 Percent of New Mexico Children Live in Food Insecure Households

Annual Cost of Ending Hunger in New Mexico \$214 Million

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

More than a quarter of all children in New Mexico 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 133,503 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 New Mexico from 2015-2017 was 411,730, making it the most food insecure state.

The report — the first ever “U.S. Hunger Atlas” — also found that 15.6 percent of working adults in New Mexico suffered from food insecurity from 2015-2017. With a state minimum wage at \$7.50 an hour, 135,514 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 analysis of federal data also determined:

- 12.1 percent of older Americans (ages 60 and older) living in New Mexico, a total of 57,376 people, were hungry during 2015-2017.
- New Mexico was the state with the second-highest rate of food insecure children (27.1 percent), surpassed only by Arkansas (27.5 percent). Louisiana (24.7 percent), Wyoming (22.9 percent), and Mississippi (22.1 percent) followed New Mexico.
- 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 New Mexico residents would need more than \$214 million in additional food purchasing power each year to meet their basic food needs, spending as much on food as do non-hungry New Mexico 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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