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More than 10 Percent of Working Adults in Kentucky Lack Sufficient Food, Finds New Report

“U.S. Hunger Atlas” Finds Nearly 1 in 4 Kentucky Children Live in Food Insecure Households

Annual Cost of Ending Hunger in Kentucky \$327 Million

Advocates Call Hunger Crisis an “Affordability Crisis”

More than 24 percent of all children in Kentucky lived in households that couldn’t always afford enough food from 2016-2018, according to a new report by Hunger Free America, based on an analysis of federal data. That means 244,656 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. Kentucky is the state with the second highest rate of food insecure children; New Mexico is the only state with a higher rate at 25.2 percent. The total number of food insecure individuals in Kentucky from 2016-2018 was 704,856, making it the seventh most food insecure state.

The report, titled “The Affordability Crisis and Hunger: Soaring Costs for Housing and Other Basics of Living Leave Less for Food,” also found that 10.1 percent of working adults (197,163) in Kentucky suffered from food insecurity from 2016-2018. Kentucky has a minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour — the same amount as the federal minimum wage. Nationwide, states with minimum wages above the federal level correlated with declined hunger among working people.

“The bottom line is that the U.S. hunger crisis is, at its core, an affordability crisis,” said Hunger Free America CEO Joel Berg. “The only way to end U.S. hunger is to help Americans better

afford food, both by raising wages and ensuring a federal nutrition assistance safety net that is adequately-funded and easy-to-access, including benefits such as: SNAP (formerly known as food stamps); meals on wheels and senior center meals for older Americans; WIC for pregnant women and infants; and school breakfasts, lunches, and summer meals for children. Americans also need to be able to easily access affordable childcare, housing, and health care.”

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

- More than 8 percent of older Americans living in Kentucky, a total of 82,636 people, were hungry during 2016-2018.
- In states with a minimum wage set at \$10 or above, an average of 8.2 percent of employed adults were found to be food insecure, which is more than a full percentage point below the national average of 9.3 percent. In states with a minimum wage set at \$7.25 or below, an average of 9.5 percent of employed adults were food insecure, which is slightly above the national average.
- Food insecure Kentucky residents would need nearly \$327 million in additional food purchasing power each year to meet their basic food needs, spending as much on food as do non-hungry Kentucky residents. The increased food purchasing power could take the form of a combination of higher wages and increased federal nutrition assistance spending.

Berg added: “How can it be that, during a time when the official unemployment rate was very low and the wealthiest Americans were doing better than ever, that so many Americans were hungry and impoverished? The answer is simple: tens of millions of Americans earned too little to keep up with soaring costs for housing, health care, child care, and other basic costs of living. The national minimum wage in 2016-2018 was only \$7.25 per hour, the same level since 2009. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition calculated that a full-time worker would have needed to earn at least \$21.20 per hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment during that time period.”

The full report, “Affordability Crises and Hunger: Soaring Costs for Housing and Other Basics of Living Leave Less for Food,” 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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