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Philadelphia Hunger Jumps by 22% Over Six Years

City and Region Defy National Trends of Slight Hunger Decreases

Cost of Ending Problem \$158 Million in City, \$355 Million Regionally

National, Local Leaders Call on Elected Officials to Bolster Both Jobs & Food Aid

Although hunger decreased in most of the United States over the last six years due to reduced unemployment and slightly increased wages, the number of people who couldn't afford enough food increased in the city of Philadelphia — and stayed very high in the Philadelphia metropolitan area — during that time period, according to a new report by Hunger Free America, a nationwide advocacy and direct service organization. The findings of the report were presented at the Philabundance Headquarters in Philadelphia this morning.

The report, based on federal data analyzed by Hunger Free America, found that, in the 2015-2017 time period, 302,685 residents of Philadelphia, 18.3 percent (one in five) of the total population, lived in households that were characterized by the federal government as "food insecure," meaning they were unable to always afford sufficient food. In contrast, 248,046, or 16.7 percent, of Philadelphians were food insecure in 2012-2014. Based on this data, the number of people struggling against hunger in Philadelphia increased by 22 percent over the last six years.

"While Philadelphia originally led the nation in freedom, it is heartbreaking that it now trails the nation in fighting local hunger," said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America. "A city and region with so many residents unable to afford a full supply of food isn't truly free."

The study also found that in the broader Philadelphia metropolitan area (which includes suburban counties in PA, MD, NJ, and DE, as well as the city of Philadelphia), the number of people struggling against hunger stayed statistically flat, at a very high plateau, with 11.3 percent (680,550) of the region's residents suffering from food insecurity in 2015-2017, compared to 11.6 percent (680,563 people) in 2012-2014.

During the same time period, food insecurity statewide in Pennsylvania increased by 7 percent, but food insecurity in neighboring New Jersey dropped by 26 percent and Delaware dropped by 8 percent. In 2017, the state minimum wage per hour was \$7.25 in Pennsylvania, \$8.25 in Delaware, and \$8.44 in New Jersey. The report found that 239,627 adults in the Philadelphia metropolitan region were working but still food insecure during 2015-2017.

Hunger Free America's report also calculated the "cost of ending hunger" in Philadelphia and the region by analyzing USDA data on how much people who are struggling against hunger spend on food versus how much non-hungry people spend on food. The organization calculated that, to end hunger, the food purchasing power of food-insecure families would need to be increased by \$158 million in Philadelphia and \$355 million in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. The full report, titled "Philadelphia Falling Behind in Freedom to Eat," is available at <http://www.hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research>.

Continued Hunger Free America's Berg: "The cost of ending hunger isn't nearly as high of the cost of accepting mass hunger, since hunger makes it more difficult for children to learn, workers to work, and older Americans to stay independent. Given the nation's epidemic of the working hungry and recent cut backs in safety net programs, it's clear that there is no way that even the most generous charities can pay for the \$355 million tab of erasing hunger in the region. That's why our solutions must go way beyond charity, and federal, state, and local elected officials should focus on creating jobs, raising wages, and ensuring an adequate safety net. In particular, Congress should use the pending Farm Bill to increase funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the Food Stamp Program, and certainly reject conservative proposals to slash it."

Melanie Cataldi, COO and Interim Chief Development Officer of Philabundance, commented: "These numbers are devastating, but not surprising. We concur with Hunger Free America that in order to end hunger, we can't just provide food, but must also offer better paying jobs, access to healthcare, financial assistance, education, and other social services that help alleviate the root causes of hunger. Collaborating on these issues through food will be Philabundance's focus over the next five years so we can help provide opportunities for our neighbors to rise up out of poverty."

Other findings of the report:

- Philadelphia's food insecurity problem is similar to the nation in one respect: the percentage of people food insecure in 2015-2017 was higher in both the country and in the city than it was in 2005-2007, before the recession of 2008. Twelve percent of city residents were food insecure in 2005-2007; 53 percent higher than in 2015-2017. Nationwide, food insecurity was 12 percent higher than a decade ago.
- In the Philadelphia metropolitan area in 2015-2017, fully 176,079 children and 76,206 adults 60 or over lived in food insecure homes.

Food insecurity rates track very closely to poverty rates. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Philadelphia's poverty rate in 2017 — 25.7 percent — was the highest among the nation's 10 largest cities. About 400,000 city residents — including more than a third of the city's children — lived below the federal poverty line, which was \$19,337 in annual income for a family of three. Almost half of all impoverished Philadelphia residents live in deep poverty, meaning they have income that is 50 percent below the federal poverty line.

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