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Poverty Rate Still Stagnant in Staten Island, Despite Improvements in US Economy;

Advocates Call on President-Elect Donald Trump to Make Hunger-Reduction a Priority and Oppose Ryan Cuts

New Report Says Nearly Half of All Food Insecure Adults in NYS and NYC Are Working;

Advocates, Officials Decry “Epidemic of the Working Hungry”

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 Hunger Free America, formerly the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

Announcing the survey on Staten Island at the El Centro del Inmigrante Food Pantry, advocates called on President-elect Donald Trump to commit to ending U.S. hunger by creating jobs, raising wages, and ensuring an adequate federal nutrition assistance safety net. They also called on Trump to vigorously oppose House Speaker Paul Ryan’s proposals to slash the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly called the Food Stamps Program.

In both the state and city, the minimum wage is now \$9.00 per hour, equaling \$16,380 for a year of full time work, leaving a worker with two children below the federal poverty line. Many New Yorkers are paid at or near the minimum wage – and significant numbers are illegally paid even below that. As a result, according to the new report, in 2013-2015, 864,053 New York State residents lived in households that included at least one person working, but were still food insecure and unable to consistently afford enough food. Statewide, out of adults who were food insecure, 46 percent were working.

In New York City alone, in 2013-2015, fully 424,307 residents lived in households that included at least one person working but remained food insecure. Forty-five percent of all adults in the city who were food insecure were employed. The New York City minimum wage will hike to \$11 per hour in December, and then to \$15 by 2018.

“Despite a slight hike in wages in the last year, New York State and City face an epidemic of hunger among workers,” said Joel Berg, CEO of Hunger Free America. “This shameful data is the latest evidence that the American dream is seriously at risk unless we change our current economic and political policies nationwide. Low wages are still the top cause of U.S. hunger and malnutrition. The good news is that New York wage hikes will soon provide food life preservers to New Yorkers drowning in hunger.”

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



Berg continued, “Disproving the stereotype that SNAP recipients are all in ‘inner cities’ or blue states, out of the top ten SNAP-utilizing states, eight voted for Trump in the general election. This proves that large numbers of Americans who rely on federal nutrition assistance live in rural, mostly white, areas. Considering that 44 million Americans – living in suburban, rural, and urban areas of every state – count on SNAP, the ‘they’ is really ‘us.’ America can only be truly great if it feeds all its own residents, which is why we hope that President-elect Trump commits to ending U.S. hunger by creating jobs, raising wages, and bolstering the federal food safety net. At a bare minimum, we hope President-elect Trump pledges to stop Speaker Paul Ryan’s misguided plans to again slash food aid to vulnerable Americans in order to pay for more tax cuts for the mega-rich.”

The national recession ended seven years ago, but 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, and far higher than before the full impact of the recession. The study found that, statewide, nearly three million people, and citywide, approximately 1.4 million people, lived in food insecure households in

2013-2015, meaning that they couldn't always afford enough food. In contrast, in 2006-2008, before the full impact of the recession, 2.3 million people were food insecure statewide and just under one million were food insecure citywide.

While food insecurity nationwide dropped in 2015 due to the improving economy, and there are some initial signs that it may be starting to drop in New York State and City, whether hunger is significantly decreasing in New York State and City won't be clear until 2016 data is released by the federal government next year.

Statewide, in 2013- 2015, nearly three-quarters of a million children, about one in seven, lived in food insecure homes. Citywide during that time period, about 429,000 – or one in five – of the city's children struggled against hunger.



“It is unconscionable that, in the richest city in the history of the world,” said Berg, “one in five children still can't always count on enough food. It is equally unacceptable that a third of our food pantries and soup kitchens lack the resources to meet the growing need. 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.”

The study, “The State of the Working Hungry: Low Wages Chief Cause of Malnutrition,” is available on Hunger Free America's website, www.HungerFreeAmerica.org, through which anyone can also donate or volunteer, or find food if they need it. Members of the public who need food help can also call the USDA National Hunger Hotline (run by Hunger Free America), at 1-866-3-HUNGRY.

Quotes from Elected Officials, Advocates, and Partners:

"No New Yorker should ever go hungry, As a representative of one of the lowest income neighborhoods in New York, where food insecurity and access to healthy meals is a challenge for so many, I understand the importance of fighting hunger. I thank Hunger Free America for their premier annual hunger survey and applaud them for their continued advocacy on this issue." – **New York City Council Member Rafael Espinal, 37th District, Brooklyn**

"New York City is the food capital of the world and yet many of our neighbors still do not have options for affordable, healthy food. Food insecurity remains at persistently high post-recession rates and the soup kitchens and food pantries that City Harvest serves continue to see new faces every day. Having enough food for yourself and your family is a fundamental human right, and we join with Hunger Free America to shine a spotlight on the issue of hunger and call on government, business and nonprofit organizations to help fight it." – **Jilly Stephens, Executive Director, City Harvest**

"In order to keep up with providing enough food at our food programs we have had to seriously deplete our general reserves, making it tough to keep our other programs in operation. If we do not see an increase in funding for our food programs this year, we will have to cut back on the amount of food served, specifically at our soup kitchen, which we really don't want to do." – **Cassandra Agredo, Xavier Mission – Manhattan**

"No one should be going hungry in 2016 in the great city of New York, Hunger Free NYC's valuable work pushing for anti-hunger policies benefiting adults and children ensures that those less fortunate have a voice and a partner in the fight against food insecurity. The Annual Hunger Survey is essential for measuring the severity of the challenge we face. Thank you to Hunger Free NYC and the many volunteers who make its important work possible." -**Council Member Ben Kallos, District 5, Manhattan**

"Hunger and food insecurity continue to be serious problems affecting too many New Yorkers, especially in communities such as the ones I represent," I commend Hunger Free America for presenting their yearly report, which clearly indicates the work we need to do across all levels of government in order to find comprehensive solutions that will help those who are struggling to feed themselves and their families." - **State Senator Gustavo Rivera, the Bronx**

"We know that access to affordable food is the foundation to improve one's health and well-being; however for many New Yorkers hunger is an all too common and harsh reality. The statistics are alarming. One in five children in New York City live in food insecure homes. That is why Affinity Health Plan is a proud supporter of Hunger Free America's movement to enact policies and programs which ensure that all New Yorkers and all Americans have sufficient access to nutritious food." – **Denise J. Pesich, Chief Marketing Officer, Affinity Health Plan, Queens**

"As we come together for Thanksgiving meals across the city, we need to recognize what is truly important – seeing and caring for our neighbors. It's when we come together to feed the hungry and care for our neighbors that we show what kind of a city and what kind of society we are." –**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President**

Staten Island:

“As rents rise, the cupboards grow bare. We need to find a path to livable wages and affordable housing before we can end hunger.”

-Reverend Terry Troia, Executive Director, Project Hospitality

Other findings of the study

While there is not enough food insecurity data for Staten Island to calculate borough-specific food security numbers, the poverty rate, according to the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, was 14.5% in 2015, 15% percent in 2014, up from 13 percent in 2013, and nine percent in 2008. This 3.9 percent increase equals a whopping 63 percent increase in poverty in just six years. One in seven Staten Island residents now live in poverty. In 2014, 13 percent of Staten Island children lived in poverty. The overall food insecurity rate and child food insecurity rate for Staten Island are likely similar.

However, we are able to report on significant other food pantry and soup kitchen data from Staten Island.

- 33.33 percent of responding agencies reported not having enough food to meet current demand.
- Of those who reporting not having enough food to meet current demand 75 percent of responding agencies reported that if they received more food, they would have enough capacity (storage space, refrigeration, staff, and/or volunteers) to increase the amount of food they distribute; 25 percent believed that they would not have the capacity to accommodate an increase in the amount of food they distribute.
- 75 percent of agencies reported an increase in the number of people they served over the past year. 16.67 percent reported a great overall increase.
- The following increases were reported:
 - 42 percent: People with paid work
 - 75 percent: Families with children
 - 25 percent: Immigrants
 - 50 percent: Seniors (age 60 and older)
 - 16.67 percent: Homeless
- 83.33% of agencies reported that they could benefit from having additional access to funding to buy and distribute more food
- 25% of responding agencies reported the desire for additional resources/assistance in building partnerships/collaborations with other community organizations/initiatives to provide referrals or do joint programming and to keep in touch and build relationships with community members, public officials and the media.
- 50 percent of responding agencies reported the need for more volunteers to serve customers/clients directly; 41.67 percent reported not needing any additional volunteers.

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