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Almost 11 Percent of Working Adults in West Virginia Lack Sufficient Food, Finds New Report

“U.S. Hunger Atlas” Found 1 in 5 West Virginia Children Live in Food Insecure Households

Annual Cost of Ending Hunger in West Virginia \$137 Million

Advocates Call Hunger Crisis an “Affordability Crisis”

More than 22 percent of all children in West Virginia 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 84,458 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. West Virginia has the fifth highest rate of food insecurity among children compared to all other states. The total number of food insecure individuals in West Virginia from 2016-2018 was 295,260, making it the sixth 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 10.9 percent of working adults (80,368) in West Virginia suffered from food insecurity from 2016-2018. Minimum wage in West Virginia is \$8.75 per hour compared to the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour. 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:

- Nearly 10 percent of older Americans living in West Virginia, a total of 48,576 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 West Virginia residents would need nearly \$137 million in additional food purchasing power each year to meet their basic food needs, spending as much on food as do non-hungry West Virginia 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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