



Thursday, September 6, 2012
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington hunger reaches all-time high

More families join the ranks of hungry households as economic downturn persists

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THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2012 – Data released yesterday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) indicates that the lingering effects of the recession have pulled 75,000 more Washingtonians into hunger.

From the beginning of the recession in 2008 to when data was collected in December 2011, the number of hungry families in Washington jumped 85 percent from 88,000 to 163,000. Only six other states besides Washington experienced more growth in the rate of hunger between 2010 and 2011.

The Children's Alliance now estimates that more than 440,000 children in Washington – about 1 in 4 – live in homes that struggle with hunger on a regular basis. The state's hunger rate is at its all-time high (6.2 percent) since the federal government began keeping records 16 years ago.

“Childhood hunger has many causes but one very simple solution: feed kids three meals a day,” says Jon Gould, deputy director of the Children's Alliance.

The USDA's data documents a continued steep increase in hunger at a time when Congress contemplates deep reductions in spending on the food stamp program. But new poll data released the same day found that 75 percent of Americans do not support proposed major cuts to nutrition programs being debated in Congress. The majority of respondents stated that the existing food stamp program is good for the country.

In Washington, recent budget cuts have taken their toll on families already. More than 11,000 families in Washington saw their State Food Assistance benefits cut in half July 1st, putting more families at risk of hunger or increasing hunger among those already struggling with it.

With recent cuts, food banks and other private food providers across the state are experiencing increased demand.

“Our rural families who are out of work with nowhere to go are getting lost and falling through cracks,” says Susan Urhausen, director of the Kettle Falls Community Chest in northeast Washington.

Nationally, more than 50 million Americans – 14.9 percent — experienced food insecurity, up slightly from 14.6 percent in 2010. African-American and Latino households had



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significantly higher rates than the national average — 25 and 26 percent, respectively. In addition, more than 22 percent of children struggle with hunger.

“As federal and state lawmakers make critical decisions in coming months, feeding families by protecting our anti-hunger infrastructure is critical,” says Gould. “Cutting food stamps and school nutrition programs would impose more distress on hungry families.”

In order to reverse the hunger trend captured in the 2011 survey, immediate federal and state actions need to be taken:

- A final 2012 Farm Bill must not include reductions in the food stamp program. With more than one million Washingtonians receiving food assistance, and demand increasing every month, this is not the time to cut funding, reduce state options to streamline the program, or end the program's ability to respond to tough times.
- The 2013 state legislature should reverse cuts to State Food Assistance. In 2011, the legislature cut State Food Assistance benefits by 50 percent, targeting a small group of households (11,000 out of more than 600,000) that are primarily families of color. In July 2012, these cuts went into effect. Documented immigrants receiving benefits across Washington found themselves with a food budget of less than \$2 per person per day.
- Congress should protect the WIC program from planned cuts that are part of “sequestration” mandated by last year's debt ceiling agreement. The National WIC Association estimates that more than 16,000 women, infants and children in Washington would be cut from the program should current sequestration plans move forward. WIC provides specific, nutritious food to moms and babies, and links families with health care and nutrition education. WIC works, saving billions in health care costs and providing specific health and nutrition interventions when they matter most.
- Additional state and local action is needed to link more children to critical child nutrition programs. The Children's Alliance's Fuel Up First for Breakfast Challenge asks schools to try innovative ways to provide breakfast so that more kids can participate.

[Read the Children's Alliance report, “Hungry in Washington.”](#)

[Learn about the Fuel Up First for Breakfast Challenge.](#)

[Read the Food Research and Action Center's \(FRAC's\) press release.](#)

[View the full USDA report.](#)

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The Children's Alliance is a statewide public policy advocacy organization that works at the state and federal level to ensure that all children have what they need to thrive. To learn more about the Children's Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org.