



Hunger up 36 percent in Washington state

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WEDNESDAY, NOV. 17, 2010 – A report released Monday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) shows that hunger in Washington is taking a higher toll on families in 2009 than in previous years. Since the economic recession took root in the state in 2008, the number of Washington families struggling to put food on the table has spiked.

The number of Washington households that are food insecure, meaning they struggle to afford enough nutritious food, rose from **288,000 to 367,000 in 2009, a 27 percent increase over the prior year.** The rise in households that are hungry was even more striking: **152,200 Washington households met the definition for hunger** (called “very low food insecurity” in the report), **up 40,200 or 36 percent.**

The survey’s data were gathered in December of 2009. The results confirm what emergency food providers, advocates and those who run programs like food stamps have already seen day-to-day: the severity of the current economic recession has yet to show significant recovery for low-income Washingtonians when hunger rates are intensifying and escalating.

“This new research confirms that the continuing recession is making it much more difficult for low-income families to afford a healthy diet,” said Children’s Alliance Deputy Director Jon Gould. “Hard-working families who do the best they can to put food on the table for their children need food assistance more than ever.”

Nationally, more than 50 million people lived in households that were food insecure in 2009 – up from 49.1 million in 2008 and 36.2 million in 2007. Of these households, African-American and Latino homes had disproportionately higher hunger rates, 25 and 27 percent, respectively. In addition, children account for more than 23 percent of the hunger-afflicted. While the USDA report does not breakdown childhood hunger at the state level, the Children’s Alliance estimates that more than 400,000 children live in households that struggle to put food on the table on a regular basis.

“It is more crucial than ever that federal and state lawmakers take care of all of Washington’s families and address the hunger crisis,” Gould said. “We must meet our family’s most basic needs by strengthening, and not cutting, effective programs that feed our families. Without adequate support for the families in most need, we can’t even begin to recover from the recession.”

In order to reverse the hunger trend captured in the 2009 survey, immediate federal and state actions need to be taken:

- **The Basic Food Program (or food stamps), is our number one defense against hunger.** Changes made in local Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) offices over the past several years have resulted in improved program accuracy. This has allowed them to handle dramatically increased levels of applications for assistance quickly despite major staffing reductions in local DSHS offices. USDA recently awarded Washington \$6 million in bonuses for exceptional program administration, but **outreach and information services that link families to available resources are often on the chopping block.** As the USDA report reminds us, there is a continued need to provide information and application assistance in ways that reach vulnerable populations. **Washington state must protect investments in outreach and maintain the ability to process applications and deliver benefits in a timely and efficient manner.**
- **Congress shouldn't cut the food stamp program to pay for school meals, and should immediately pass Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation to reflect this.** Congress is holding its 2010 "Lame Duck" session. S 3307, the most likely vehicle for Child Nutrition Reauthorization, has been approved by the Senate and awaits House action; unfortunately, the bill includes a **\$2.2 billion cut to food stamp benefits beginning in 2013. Before the end of the Lame Duck session, Congress should pass a child nutrition bill to protect the most critical program in the fight against childhood hunger: food stamps.**
- **The stakes are very high for Washington's most vulnerable families in the state's budget crisis.** The Department of Social and Health Services has proposed a February 2011 elimination of the 11-year-old program that provides food assistance to legal immigrants who are not eligible for federal food stamps. **If the elimination takes place, over 31,000 people will be affected, 47% of whom are children.**
- **State agencies, the Governor and the State Legislature are considering even deeper funding cuts to the last line of defense against hunger.** Support for farm-to-school programs, which are leading the charge to improve the nutritional quality of school meals, are critical, as are state funding for Washington's emergency food providers and crucial state investments in school and summer meal programs that fill a significant gap for low-income families. **We must keep these off the chopping block and protect the gains we've made in child nutrition programs and keep the anti-hunger safety net intact.**

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To read the Children's Alliance report, Hungry In Washington:

<http://www.childrensalliance.org/resource-center/hungry-washington-2010>

To read the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC's) press release:
<http://frac.org/one-in-seven-americans-struggling-against-hunger>

To read the USDA report: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/err108

The Children's Alliance is a public policy advocacy organization that works at the state and federal level to ensure that all children have what they need to thrive, especially our most vulnerable children, who are disproportionately those in low-income families and communities of color. Current campaigns focus on health care, early learning, ending childhood hunger, and foster care. Our membership includes 125 organizations and more than 10,000 individuals statewide. To learn more about the Children's Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org. To sign up for our media list, e-mail Adam Hyla at Adam@childrensalliance.org.