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Hunger's spike still hurts

Children at greater risk for food insecurity

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2013 – The prevalence of hunger in Washington state that appeared during the worst of times remains unchanged, according to data released today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

At 6.1 percent, the state's hunger rate in the three-year period from 2010 through 2012 is about the same as the all-time high of 6.2 percent in 2009-2011. More than 160,000 Washington families are hungry, meaning they skip meals on a regular basis. Our state is ranked 15th among all 50 states in the number of families experiencing hunger, and 22nd in the number experiencing food insecurity. Food insecurity is a measurement of financial hardship that can be a precursor to hunger. The Children's Alliance estimates that 400,000 children – about 1 in 4 – live in food-insecure households.

The rate of food insecurity in Washington dropped in the period 2010-12, indicating that families on the margin of hunger may be experiencing improvements in the economy. Food insecure households are those that are unable to afford an adequate diet at any time in the past 12 months. Hungry households are defined in the USDA report as those who cut back or skip meals on a more frequent basis. Families in poverty, families with children, African-American and Latino households are disproportionately impacted by hunger, according to the USDA's national-level aggregate data.

“Hard times and hunger go hand in hand for too many Washington children,” says Jon Gould, deputy director of the Children's Alliance. “This news is a call to action to policymakers to do no further harm and stop trying to balance budgets on the backs of hungry kids.”

As Congress returns to work next week, the House majority leadership is expected to introduce a bill that would strip \$40 billion in funding from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps), throwing millions of people out of the program. A steep and sudden drop in food stamp benefits is also just two months away, when the 2009 federal stimulus expires in November.

State budget cuts have also put more families at risk of hunger. State Food Assistance, which provides food stamps to thousands of children in immigrant families, was cut by 50 percent in 2012, then partially restored to 75 percent of monthly food stamp benefits in the 2013 legislative session. Advocates are calling on state lawmakers to fully restore State Food Assistance in 2014.

Read the Children's Alliance report, “Hungry in Washington”:
<http://www.childrensalliance.org/resource-center/hungry-washington-2013>

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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.