



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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Washington's Food Insecurity Rate Drops for Second Straight Year

Strong Farm Bill Nutrition Title next step in plan to End Childhood Hunger

November 14, 2007 (Seattle) – Washington's food insecurity and hunger rankings have finally fallen below national levels, after 11 years of higher-than-average rates and rankings. However, more than 250,000 Washington households continue to struggle to put food on the table and nearly 88,000 experience hunger.

The percentage of Washington residents who were food insecure for the 2004-2006 period is 10.3%, down one percentage point from 2003-05. Hunger also declined to 3.6% from 3.9%. The drops in these rates when compared with 1996-98 numbers represent a statistically significant decrease in hunger and food insecurity in Washington. These numbers, from the annual survey of Household Food Insecurity in America, were released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Census Bureau today.

"Seven years ago we were the 2nd hungriest state in the nation; this year we're the 32nd," said Linda Stone, Eastern Washington Director for the Children's Alliance. "That tells us that the steps we've taken so far are working. We can build on this success to ensure that all residents have enough to eat over the holidays and throughout the year."

The Children's Alliance has embarked on a two-year project, called End Childhood Hunger in Washington, aimed at ensuring that every child in every corner of Washington State gets three nutritious meals each and every day. The Children's Alliance will work with concerned individuals and organizations across the state to develop a blueprint for change--one that removes obstacles to participation in proven federal programs and gives parents the information they need to keep nutritious food on their tables and in their children's bellies. The project is supported by Share Our Strength, a

national anti-hunger organization, and will draw on local resources to fully implement the plan to End Childhood Hunger in Washington.

Right now, Congress has the chance to keep Washington moving in the right direction by enacting increases in Food Stamp benefits through the Farm Bill. In 1996 Congress cut benefits – even now families receive \$400 less than they would have before the cuts. Currently the average person receives \$1.03 per meal.

“With food prices increasing faster than other expenses – at a rate of 4 to 5 percent according to USDA – and gas remaining over \$3.00 per gallon, low-income families are caught between a rock and a hard place,” Stone said. “Current Food Stamp benefits aren’t enough to keep food on the table every day.”

Also today, the Children’s Alliance released “[Hungry in Washington](#),” an overview of the latest data. The new hunger data rank Washington as the 30th hungriest state in the nation; last year’s ranking was 22. Despite declining rates of hunger, 251,000 households remain “food insecure,” meaning at least one family member goes hungry at times because there is not enough money for food.

As the report notes, Washington has improved on some—but not all—of the key indicators of hunger and food insecurity. Currently only 15% of low-income students with access to free and reduced-price school meals participate in a nutrition programs in the summer months, cutting them off from food programs their families rely on during the school year. Trends for two other key anti-hunger initiatives are improved, however. Food stamp participation has increased by 28,000 households since the last official USDA participation rate of 68% was reported for 2005. LINDA—WHAT’S THE OTHER INDICATOR THAT HAS IMPROVED?

The legislature has approved investments of \$4.2 million over the last two years to insure that all low-income children have access to school breakfast and K-3 students receive free lunch as well. The final piece of this investment, \$4.3 million to eliminate the co-pay for all students for reduced-price lunches, will be before the legislature in 2008.

“We are very pleased to see that our rate of food insecurity and hunger is down,” Stone said. “Kudos to the many people who work to help hungry families every day: the workers in food stamp offices, the school cooks, WIC clinic staff and food bank volunteers.”

Hungry In Washington, November 2007, is available online at <http://childrensalliance.org/publications/reports.cfm>

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For twenty-five years, the Children’s Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington. To learn more about the Children’s Alliance, go to www.childrensalliance.org