



CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

A Voice for Washington's Children, Youth & Families

For Immediate Release

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One-half of Seattle's Poor Missing Out on Food Stamps

Low participation in metro area leaves \$54 million unclaimed

SEATTLE (October, 19, 2006) – The Washington, D.C.-based Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) yesterday released a report on food stamp participation in America's largest cities. Seattle (King County) joins five other cities at the bottom of the participation list, with barely half of eligible people receiving food assistance through the federal Food Stamp Program. The program is called the Basic Food Program in Washington State.

FRAC's data is based on a Local Access Indicator that compares persons below 130% of the federal poverty level to persons participating in the Food Stamp program in 2004.

Joining Seattle at the bottom of the list are San Diego, Las Vegas, Jacksonville and Los Angeles. Cities at the top of the participation list—with better than 90% participation—are Memphis, Indianapolis, Milwaukee and Detroit.

Families who are eligible to receive Basic Food but do not participate lack significant resources to purchase adequate food. A USDA report recently found that receipt of food assistance reduces the likelihood of household food insecurity and child poverty. Without Basic Food, families must turn more frequently to emergency food programs or go hungry. In addition, leaving food stamp dollars on the table deprives local communities of food buying power: in Seattle this lost buying power totals \$54 million annually.

“In addition to families missing out on key food resources, communities suffer when program participation is low,” said Linda Stone, Eastern Washington Director for the Children's Alliance, a statewide advocacy organization. “Think of Basic Food as a counter-recessionary program – when the

community's economy suffers, increased food stamp participation helps grocers, farmers and the community.”

The FRAC report does not provide information on the reasons for low participation in Seattle, but local advocates and outreach workers offered several possible explanations: continued confusion about Basic Food eligibility, misinformation about the program that discourages applying, language barriers, and the continuing stigma of receiving food stamps. Some families see the complex application and simply give up.

“Eligible families should not be missing out on Basic Food benefits,” Stone said. “We know that there are barriers like misinformation and language, but much has been done to make the program work better for everyone, including working families.”

Washington State has taken steps in the last several years to make receipt of Basic Food easier. These include simplified reporting of income and other changes once a family has been made eligible, changes in vehicle ownership rules that allow families to own operable cars and still receive assistance, and expanded use of telephone interviews instead of face-to-face office visits.

Much more, however, can be done to increase Seattle participation. Efforts already underway include Basic Food Outreach services coordinated by Hopelink, a Seattle-based nonprofit which provides information about the program and assistance in completing applications. If a family receives help completing their application from Hopelink or its subcontracting agencies, the family automatically is offered a telephone interview instead of being required to visit a local office.

“Applying for Basic Food is not as difficult as people may think,” said Alice Kurle, Program Manager, Basic Food Education & Outreach, at Hopelink. “A call to Hopelink for help in applying is the first step. If we help you with your application, you won't even need to go into the DSHS office, you can be interviewed on the phone.”

To reach Hopelink, call 1-877-644-3663. Operators are available in English and Spanish. For information on other nutrition programs, and in additional languages, contact Family Food Hotline at 1-888- 4-FOOD WA.

For a complete copy of the FRAC report and an explanation of the Local Access Indicator, go to www.frac.org.

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For more than twenty years, the Children's Alliance has advocated for children, youth and families in Washington.

The Alliance has 128 organizational members, and more than 7,000 individual members statewide.

For a [list of member organizations](#) and to learn more about the Children's Alliance, go to: www.childrensalliance.org