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## **New Report: NYC Child Hunger Soars While Local Feeding Programs Close Due to Federal Cuts**

### **USDA Data: 1 out of 4 Children in NYC is Food Insecure**

*Advocates ask, “Why aren’t kids and local food programs ‘Too Big to Fail’?”*

New analysis of recent U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) data, conducted by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger and released today in their annual citywide hunger report, found that nearly 500,000 city children, or one in four, live in families that cannot afford an adequate supply of food – what the government calls “food insecure.” The Coalition’s calculations also showed that one in six New York City residents, 1.47 million New Yorkers, live in food insecurity, struggling against hunger.

A separate survey of New York City soup kitchens and food pantries, also included in the Coalition’s report, found that even as demand at city food pantries and soup kitchens grew by 12 percent this year – on top of a seven percent increase in 2010 and a 21 increase in 2009. In 2011, nearly fifty of these strapped emergency feeding programs closed their doors due, in part, to government cut-backs and decreases in private donations.

The Coalition’s report, “Not Too Big to Fail: As NYC Hunger Soars, Feeding Programs Close Due to Government Cuts,” (full report available: [www.nyccah.org/2011annualhungersurvey](http://www.nyccah.org/2011annualhungersurvey)) was released by the Coalition and leading New Yorkers at a press conference at the Holy Apostles soup kitchen in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan. It also found that 79 percent of New York City’s soup kitchens and food pantries suffered from cuts in government food and funding in 2011.

One of the reasons that this number is so high is that the federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program, which funds hundreds of city pantries and kitchens, was cut by 40 percent as part of the budget deal that President Barack Obama struck with the Congressional leadership to keep the federal government running in 2011. In New York City, those cuts resulted in a reduction in funding for emergency feeding programs from \$5.1 million to \$3.5 million. To make matters worse, the Coalition’s survey showed that 55 percent of the city’s pantries and kitchens obtained fewer private donations in 2011 than in 2010.

Largely as a result of these cuts, many agencies were forced to close down entirely and the ones able to stay open often had to cut back on their services. The Coalition’s survey found that at least 47 feeding programs citywide have shut down entirely over the past few years. While leadership transitions and management challenges certainly contributed to some agencies’ closures, many cited cuts in federal government funding as the most important reason they had to close their doors.

“Child and adult hunger levels are soaring, while our front line nonprofit feeding agencies are being starved out of business by government cuts,” said Joel Berg, executive director of the Coalition. “How is

it that our leaders in Washington find Wall Street firms ‘too big to fail,’ but lose little sleep allowing American children to go without food and allowing soup kitchens and food pantries to close?”

As many food programs in New York City were forced to close or to cut back, increases to the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (or “SNAP,” formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) provided critical nutrition support for hungry residents. As of September 2011, 1.8 million New Yorkers received SNAP benefits. The program will provide an estimated \$3.4 billion worth of food to low-income city families in 2011 alone, a \$1.5 billion jump over 2008. It is important to emphasize that the average SNAP benefit in New York City in August 2011 was \$285 per month per household, which dwarfs what even the most generous food pantry or soup kitchen could distribute in a month to a family.

Unfortunately, SNAP funding levels may also be cut in the next year, despite the fact that this program has provided critical nutrition assistance to millions of low-income Americans in New York City and across the country.

“While millions of New Yorkers have been at the edge of an economic cliff, with many being pushed off into hunger, the only reason more haven’t fallen was the temporary growth the SNAP program,” declared Berg. “Unfortunately, to pay for other priorities, President Obama and Congress cut SNAP funding twice last year by phasing-out the stimulus-based increases earlier than planned. Now Congress is – unconscionably – considering a plan to take billions of dollars more out of the program, with an annual cut of \$150 million in New York State alone. We are grateful that Senator Kristen Gillibrand is taking a leading role in opposing this later cut, and we hope other elected officials will do so as well.”

In response to these findings, the Coalition called for the federal, state, and city governments to: implement significant new programs to create living wage jobs in low-income communities; bolster safety net programs such as SNAP, WIC, and school meals; and ensure sufficient government funding for charitable food distribution organizations.

"By any measure, the hunger crisis in New York City is getting worse. Food stamps are more than a lifeline for New Yorkers struggling in poverty—they help hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who live on the brink of insecurity to keep their families safe and healthy," said Public Advocate Bill de Blasio. "At a time when governments are separating programs that work from those that don't, there can be no denying that food stamps are worth every penny – and then some."

“We must do everything we can to eradicate hunger in our city,” said New York City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn. “At a time when struggling New Yorkers need more help than ever, the city’s soup kitchens and food pantries are operating under slashed budgets, while faced with an increased demand for services. I thank the New York City Coalition Against Hunger for their advocacy and will continue to fight to reverse detrimental policies that keep New Yorkers from receiving the assistance they need.”

“I’m deeply troubled by the Coalition’s findings that one in four children in New York City go hungry because their families cannot afford to feed them,” said New York City Council General Welfare Committee Chair, Annabel Palma. “It’s simply unacceptable that in this economic climate, the federal government refuses to do more to help New York’s neediest. If we want to make meaningful improvements to eliminate child hunger, Congress must reinstate cuts to SNAP immediately and vote down any proposal to reduce federal dollars appropriated to New York State.”

“The long line of men and women waiting for a meal and assistance with housing, jobs, and benefits do not grow shorter at Holy Apostles,” said Reverend Glenn Chalmers, executive director of the Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen. “What has diminished is our support from the state to address such basic human need. Losing over 50 percent of our government support to run the largest soup kitchen in New York is

taking a toll on our ability to serve. While the state of the economy impacts all of us, it is tragic to have such severe cutbacks affect the most vulnerable among us.”

In addition to the news reported above, other key citywide findings from the report include:

- Fifty-eight percent of pantries and kitchens reported having to turn away clients, reduce their portion sizes, or limit their hours of operation in 2011, an increase from the 51 percent rate in 2010, and the 55 percent rate in 2009. However, the rate is still lower than found in 2008 (69 percent), before extra funding for agencies was provided by the federal stimulus package also known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA).
- Sixty-two percent of agencies surveyed do not distribute enough food to meet current demand, up from 51 percent last year.
- Eighty-seven percent of agencies that don't distribute enough food to meet demand said that if they received more food, they would have enough institutional capacity to increase the amount of food distributed (nine percent of respondents reported that even if they were to receive more food, they wouldn't have the administrative capacity to distribute more).
- Of the populations that increased “greatly” in the past 12 months, responding agencies reported seeing the fastest growing need for their services among families with children.
- Eighty percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of families with children over the past 12 months (versus four percent reporting a decrease, and 11 percent reporting no change).
- Seventy-six percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of seniors over the past 12 months (versus five percent reporting a decrease and 13 percent reporting no change).
- Fifty-five percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of people with paid employment over the past 12 months (versus seven percent reporting a decrease and 13 percent reporting no change).
- Five-seven percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of homeless people over the past 12 months (versus two percent reporting a decrease and 18 percent reporting no change).
- Sixty-six percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of immigrants over the past 12 months (versus 23 percent reporting a decrease and 14 percent reporting no change).
- Eighty-eight percent of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months. Fifty percent of responding agencies believe it will increase “greatly.”
- Fifty-two percent of responding agencies reported using their own personal money “often,” “always,” or “sometimes” to support their feeding programs.
- Of the populations that increased “greatly” in the past 12 months, responding agencies reported seeing the fastest growing need for their services among families with children: Eighty percent of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of families with children over the past 12 months (versus four percent reporting a decrease, and 11 percent reporting no change).

This annual report is based on two different sets of data and allows the Coalition to highlight trends in hunger on a citywide level. The first data set was federal food insecurity/hunger information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau on behalf of the USDA and analyzed by Coalition staff. This data is based on three-year averages from 2008 to 2010. The second data set was collected by the Coalition from their annual survey of the city's soup kitchens and food pantries in the fall of 2011.

