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## **New Study Finds that Although 67 Percent of Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens in the Bronx Can't Meet Demand, Federal Funding Surge Prevented Problem from Becoming Catastrophic**

In a study conducted by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, 96 percent of emergency food providers in the Bronx experienced an increase in demand for their services over the past year. Additionally, they reported seeing the fastest growth in need from families with children (43.6 percent) and immigrants (41.7 percent). Fifty-nine percent of Bronx agencies had to turn people away.

While the number of New Yorkers forced to use the city's soup kitchens and food pantries soared by 21 percent in the last year, because federal anti-hunger spending through the economic recovery bill and the Food Stamp Program increased in New York City by more than \$500 million in the same period, fewer agencies ran out of food than the year before, according to the annual survey by the Coalition.

"The economic downturn has created a hurricane of suffering for hungry New Yorkers, but the good news is that a massive increase in federal funding has provided a food life-raft for struggling families," said Joel Berg, executive director of the Coalition. "While it is obviously appalling that more than half of the feeding programs in the city still need to ration food, the situation is far less catastrophic than it would have been had the President and Congress not increased anti-hunger funding in the recovery act and had not protected the Food Stamp Program as an entitlement that expands when times are rough."

The survey, titled, "*NYC Hunger Catastrophe Avoided (For Now): Soaring Demand at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Counter-Balanced by Food Stamps Surge and Extra Recovery Bill Funding*" is available at [http://nyccah.org/files/AnnualHungerSurveyReport\\_Nov09.pdf](http://nyccah.org/files/AnnualHungerSurveyReport_Nov09.pdf). Fully 91 percent of agencies city-wide responding to the Coalition's survey reported feeding an increased number of people in the last months. More than 58 percent said this number increased "greatly." However, the percentage of agencies forced to ration food and turn people away dropped from 59 to 48 percent, and the percentage of agencies able to meet the growing demand increased from 31 to 45 percent. Also, the percentage of agencies reporting decreased overall government funding dropped from 72 percent last year to 52 percent this year.

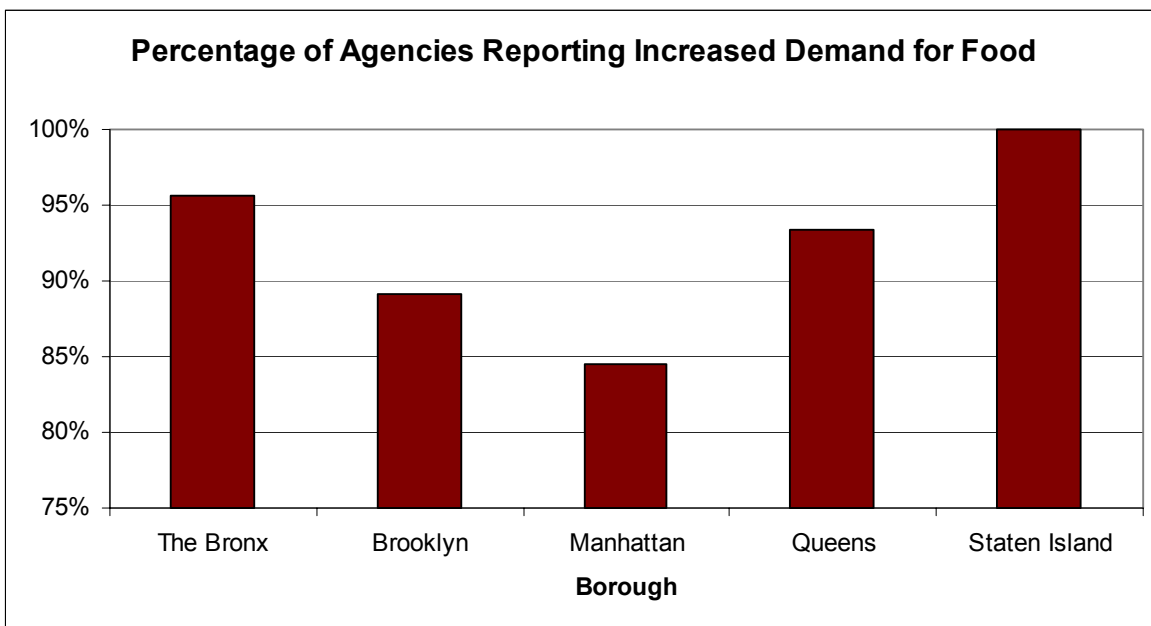
Funding for NYC in the federal FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), distributed through the United Way of NYC, rose from \$4,581,417 last year to \$7,492,125 this year, of which \$2,340,980 was from the recovery bill. This equals a 64 percent increase in that one year. Survey respondents also noted this growth in EFSP funding with 59.4 percent reporting an increase. Fifty-one percent of survey respondents also reported an increase in federal funding from the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through the USDA.

"Unfortunately, the results of this survey are not surprising or unexpected. It confirms what we have been witnessing at food pantries, soup kitchens and other food assistance programs – that record numbers of individuals and families are suffering terribly during this economic crisis to the point where they can't even put food on the table," said New York State Senate Majority Leader Pedro Espada, Jr. (D-Bronx, 33rd District).

“Calling attention to hunger is significant during this season of giving, but in reality, hunger is a year-round crisis. We must increase outreach so there is sustenance on the table for every child, family, senior citizen, and individual that has fallen on hard times,” Senator Espada added.

In addition, Senator Espada took the opportunity to draw attention to proposed legislation he has introduced in the Senate that would eliminate the requirement of people being fingerprinted before they can qualify for food stamps. “New York City is one of only four places in the entire nation that still uses this finger-imaging matching identification system in order for households to receive food stamps. Studies show that while this system is not cost-effective and does nothing to deter fraud, it has left many households destitute and without the public assistance they so desperately need,” Senator Espada explained.

State funding stayed relatively stable, and, because the New York City Council rejected Mayor Mike Bloomberg’s proposals to decrease City funding for pantries and kitchens, City funding remained constant too. Thus, although City and State resources didn’t increase, because federal funding grew so dramatically, overall government food and support to emergency food providers was also boosted significantly.



Borough	% of agencies at which demand for food increased	% of agencies at which the amount of food was not enough to meet growing demand	% of agencies forced to ration food by limiting portion size, reducing hours of operation, and/or turning people away
The Bronx	95.6%	66.7%	58.1%
Brooklyn	89.1%	59.2%	49.3%
Manhattan	84.5%	39.7%	35.8%
Queens	93.4%	60.4%	57.1%
Staten Island	100.0%	40.0%	12.5%

Not only did the government assist feeding agencies through stimulus funding for emergency food, increases in the SNAP/food stamp benefits program, significantly relieved the further strain that pantries and kitchens would have faced had SNAP funding not increased. The recovery bill also increased benefits for families participating in the program, thereby encouraging more people to apply. The results were positive: between September 2008 and September 2009, participation in SNAP rose from 1,297,108 to 1,583,581 (a 22 percent increase).

As a consequence of both the hike in the number of participants and the increased average benefits due to the recovery bill, the federal government will spend at least an extra \$568 million SNAP/food stamp benefit dollars in New York City this year, on top of the \$2.1 billion it was already slated to spend.

Said Assemblyman Michael Benjamin “As an Assemblyman from the Bronx, an area where food insecurity is not uncommon, it is critical that we take action to end hunger in New York City. We can do this by further expanding access to food stamp benefits and strengthening school nutrition programs.”

Said Anthony Jordan, Executive Director of St. Benedict the Moor Neighborhood Center, “Across the board we’ve seen more people needing assistance- working people, families with children, and seniors. It’s gotten to a point where we have to turn people away. To avoid that, sometimes the staff spends our personal money to supplement what we have.”

#### **Some Key Findings From Bronx Respondents to the Coalition’s survey:**

- 95.6% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of people in the last 12 months. 57.8% said this number increased “greatly.”
- Of the populations that increased “greatly” at responding agencies, the fastest growth was seen among families with children (43.6%) and immigrants (41.7%).
- 79.5% of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months: 46.2% of responding agencies believe it will increase “greatly.”
- 43.4% of responding agencies reported receiving less *government* food and money in the last 12 months (and 20% reported no change).
- 51.7% of responding agencies reported receiving less *overall* food and money in the last 12 months (and 13.8% reported no change).
- 66.7% of respondents reported being unable to distribute enough food to meet current demand.
- 58.1% of responding agencies reported having to turn away hungry New Yorkers, cut portion sizes and/or cut hours of operation in 2009.
- 20.6% of respondents reported using their own personal money “often” or “always” to support their feeding programs (47.1% do this “sometimes,” “often” or “always”).

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