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New Study Finds that Although 59 Percent of Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens in Brooklyn Can't Meet Demand, Federal Funding Surge Prevented Problem from Becoming Catastrophic

Rep. Ed Towns Visits Local Pantry and Discusses Hunger in His Community

A study conducted by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger has demonstrated that the greatest increase in need at Brooklyn emergency food providers were among families with children (58.7 percent) and immigrants (45.2 percent). Fully 49 percent of Brooklyn study respondents were forced to turn people away, cut portion sizes, or cut hours of operation. An astounding 89 percent of Brooklyn agencies reported an increase in the number of people they've served in the past twelve months.

While the number of New Yorkers forced to use the city's soup kitchens and food pantries soared by 21 percent during 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 Coalition's annual survey.

"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."

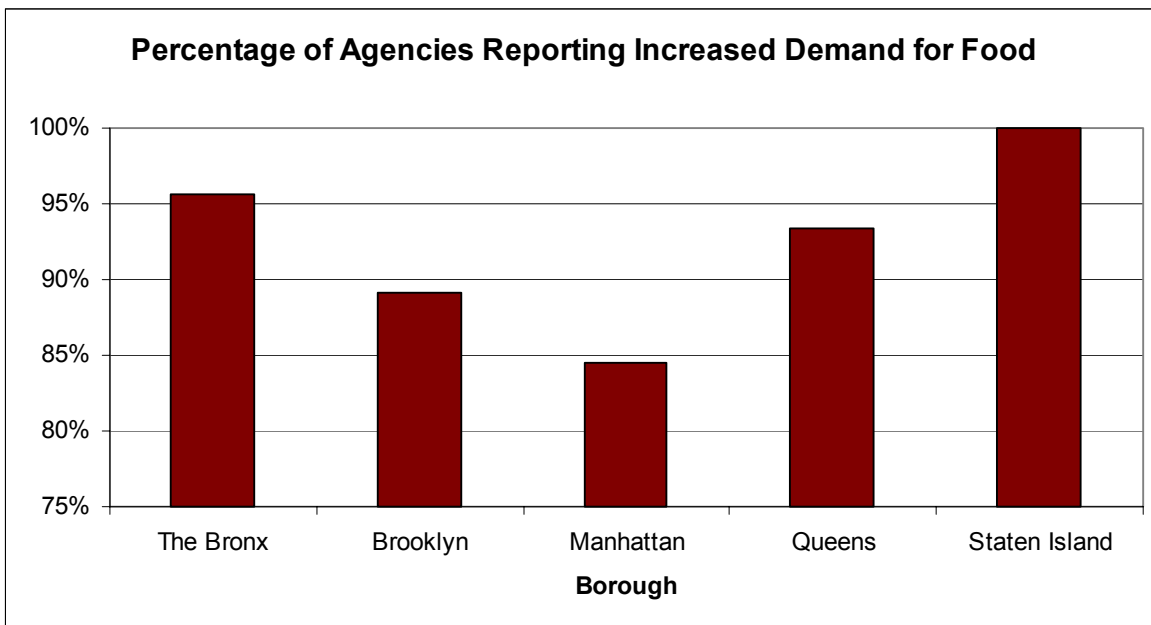
The survey, titled, "*NYC Hunger Catastrophe Avoided (For Now): Soaring Demand at Food Pantries and Soup Kitchens Counter-Balanced by Food Stamps Surge and Extra Recovery Bill Funding*" is available at http://nyccah.org/files/AnnualHungerSurveyReport_Nov09.pdf. Fully 91 percent of agencies responding 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 feeding agencies that reported decreased overall government funding dropped from 72 percent last year to 52 percent this year.

U.S. Rep. Ed Towns said, "Along with the good works of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger and St. John's Bread and Life, the stimulus funding that I supported is working to put an end to hunger in New York City."

Hunger affects thousands of New Yorkers every day, and it is my hope that this holiday season we recommit to helping those in need.”

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 increase 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.

State funding stayed relatively stable, and, because the New York City Council rejected Mayor Mike Bloomberg’s proposals to decrease City financing for pantries and kitchens, City funding also 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 Anthony Butler, Executive Director of St. John's Bread and Life, which hosted the press event, "At this time of year we see a large surge of volunteers to help with our services, but really, we need those volunteers year-round. We especially need people who can commit to long-term projects like providing legal assistance, literacy, website management and others to assist our guests in moving out of poverty."

Some Key Findings from Brooklyn Respondents to the Coalition's survey:

- 89.1% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of people in the last 12 months. 60.3% said this number increased "greatly."
- Of the populations that increased "greatly" at responding agencies, the fastest growth was seen among families with children (58.7%) and senior citizens (45.2%).
- 82.8% of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months and 48.3% of responding agencies believe it will increase "greatly."
- 53.7% of responding agencies reported receiving less *government* food and money in the last 12 months (and 20.4% reported no change).
- 58.0% of responding agencies reported receiving less *overall* food and money in the last 12 months (and 12.0% reported no change).
- 59.2% of respondents reported being unable to distribute enough food to meet current demand.
- 49.3% of responding agencies reported having to turn away hungry New Yorkers, cut portion sizes and/or cut hours of operation in 2009.
- 31.0% of respondents reported using their own personal money "often" or "always" to support their feeding programs (67.2% do this "sometimes," "often" or "always").

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