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New York Has Nation's Hungriest Congressional Districts

New Data: More than Half of NYC's Districts Face Severe Food Hardships; One Fifth of Households with Kids in Metropolitan New York Lacked Food Money; Senators Charles Schumer and Kristen Gillibrand, U.S. Reps. Jose E Serrano, Ed Towns, Charles Rangel, Speaker Christine Quinn and Public Advocate Bill De Blasio Respond

People in seven of the 13 congressional districts in New York City faced severe food hardships, with more than 20 percent of residents in each of those districts lacking money for food in 2008-2009, according to just-released data collected by the Gallup Organization on behalf of the Washington, DC-based Food Research and Action Center (FRAC).

The 16th Congressional District in the South Bronx, where more than one in three residents could not afford enough food, had the highest rate in the nation, and the 10th Congressional District in Central Brooklyn, where 30.8 percent faced food hardship, had sixth highest rate out of all the country's 436 congressional districts. Moreover, every district in the city faced significant food hardships.

"It is a horrible sign of time times that in the South Bronx, one in three people ran out of money for food and that in more than half the other neighborhoods, more than one in five did. Considering that the city still has 56 billionaires, this is an appalling turn of events, which provides the latest wake-up call that all levels of government need to take immediate action to reverse the city's growing hunger poverty, and inequality of wealth," said Joel Berg, executive director of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

"The fact that more than half of New York City's districts face severe food hardships is shocking and unacceptable," Senator Charles Schumer said. "While so many children, seniors, and low income families are struggling to make ends meet during these tough economic times, something must be done to find immediate and permanent solutions to the skyrocketing hunger rates in New York City and across the country. This new report is a real wake-up call and I will do everything I can to combat this problem."

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand said, "The hunger crisis that exists throughout our communities and neighborhoods is nothing short of alarming. Millions of New Yorkers do not have enough money to buy food and lines for people waiting at emergency food pantries continue to grow longer. This is unacceptable. No parent should have to worry about when or how they will feed their children. We need to help New Yorkers hit hardest by this economy and develop long-term solutions to stem the city's soaring hunger rate. As the first New York senator to sit on the Agriculture Committee in over 40 years, I support legislation that would double federal funding to \$500 million to provide for emergency food programs and services to New Yorkers in need."

"The data shows that our worst fears about this recession in the Bronx have come true—people are going hungry," said Congressman José E. Serrano, who represents the 16th District. "This is a crisis that I intend to confront head on. We cannot accept food insecurity in the wealthiest city in the wealthiest nation in the world. I will be speaking with Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack, and asking his immediate assistance in meeting the food needs of the people of the Bronx."

Said Congressman Ed Towns, “With more than 200,000 hungry people in my congressional district, hunger in New York City is not a distant, isolated problem. That’s why I am committed to new and existing initiatives that provide sustenance to those who need it – like H.RES.210, which I co-sponsored to provide breakfast in schools as part of the National School Breakfast Program. With the hard work of organizations like the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, we can alleviate hunger in New York City and across the United States.”

Said Congressman Charles Rangel "These numbers are a sobering reminder of how many families are struggling to meet their basic needs in these rough economic times. But they also illustrate that government can make a real difference. Even as unemployment climbed sharply, the food hardship rate in the survey dropped between 2008 and 2009. As the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, I am proud our Committee played a major role in producing legislation that reduced hardship by increasing payments to low-income families through increases in food stamps, tax benefits, unemployment insurance and other programs. In total, last year's American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) targets over \$160 billion of assistance specifically to low and moderate-income Americans. We need to continue to help those struggling the most, while also working more broadly to promote job growth."

Said City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, "As today's report demonstrates, hunger remains a pervasive problem in neighborhoods across New York City. The Council has worked to get more New Yorkers enrolled in food stamps, and provide every community with access to healthy foods, but far too many of our neighbors still have trouble feeding their families. We must now redouble our efforts, working with the Coalition Against Hunger and our colleagues in government to help New Yorkers in need."

“This data provides just the latest evidence that hunger and food insecurity are soaring throughout New York City , and in big cities nationwide. We need to remove bureaucratic barriers that continue to hamper access to the City’s Food Stamp Program, like digital fingerprinting, and accelerate efforts to provide more public school children with federally-funded free breakfasts,” said Public Advocate Bill de Blasio.

In the New York metropolitan region, including suburban Connecticut and New Jersey, 21.6 percent of households with children faced food hardship. Continued Berg, “The problem is so widespread that, even when you factor in some truly wealthy areas in Manhattan, Westchester, Long Island, and suburban Connecticut and New Jersey, more than one in five people in the metropolitan area couldn’t afford enough food. Statewide in New York, 17.4 percent of all state residents faced food hardship.”

“Hunger has been increasing dramatically in our state over the last two years," noted Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of the Hunger Action Network of New York State. "The loss of jobs and the housing crisis has helped increased the demand for emergency food by more than 50 percent statewide in the last two years.”

NY CD District #	U.S. Rep.	Location	% of residents with food hardship	# food hardship rank in the city	# food hardship rank in the nation (out of 436)
16 th	Serrano	South Bronx	36.9%	1	1
10 th	Towns	Central Brooklyn	30.8%	2	6
15 th	Rangel	Northern Manhattan	24.1%	3	49
12 th	Velázquez	Brooklyn/Queens	24.0%	4	50

7 th	Crowley	Queens/Bronx	22.5%	5	75
6 th	Meeks	Queens	21.0%	6	114 (tied)
17 th	Engel	Bronx/Westchester	21.0%	7	114 (tied)
13 th	McMahon	Staten Island/Brooklyn	19.8%	8	140
11 th	Clarke	Central Brooklyn	19.5%	9	157
5 th	Ackerman	Western Queens	14.2%	10	324
8 th	Nadler	Manhattan/Brooklyn	10.2%	11	406
4 th	Maloney	Manhattan	7.9%	12	428
9 th	Weiner	Brooklyn/Queens	7.8%	13	430

Continued Berg, “While key parts of the city face a particularly severe problem, I believe the most notable news from this data is just how widespread food hardship is in all corners of the city and nation. Even in the relatively least hungry congressional district in the city – Congressman Weiner’s district that has been traditionally thought of as a bedrock middle class of neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Queens – more than one in 12 residents couldn’t afford enough food, a level likely higher than in the majority of industrialized Western nation’s of the world. Because America’s wages are now so low and our safety net so gutted, even the parts of New York City suffering the least are still in worse shape than most people in our competitor nations.”

This report is the first time that data on food hardship is available for every state, every Congressional District and for 100 of the country’s largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs), including in the New York-North New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA MSA, where 13.6 percent of all people had trouble affording food.

The report analyzes survey data that were collected by Gallup and provided to FRAC. The ability to provide such localized data and such up-to-date data comes from Gallup’s partnership with Healthways, interviewing 1,000 households per day almost every day since January 2, 2008 as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project. Through December 2009, more than 650,000 people have been asked a series of questions on a range of topics including emotional health, physical health, healthy behavior, work environment and access to basic services. Specific to this report, more than 530,000 people were asked whether there were times over the preceding year that they did not have enough money to buy food they or their family needed.

The Gallup survey question on food hardship is very similar to one posed by the Census Bureau and analyzed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in its official measure of food insecurity, but because of sample size the Gallup survey provides a closer, more localized and more recent look at food hardship. Official government data on food insecurity have a nearly one-year time lag and do not go below the state level.

“The data in this report show that food hardship – running out of money to buy the food that families need – is truly a national problem. It is a national problem in the sense that the rate for the nation is so high,” said Jim Weill, president of FRAC. “And it is a national problem in the sense that rates are high in virtually every state, Metropolitan Statistical Area, and Congressional District.”

These new numbers are especially relevant as Congress looks at jobs legislation and other strategies to mitigate the damage of the recession, and reauthorizes child nutrition legislation this year. The New York City Coalition Against Hunger has joined FRAC in calling for improvements in a range of federal

nutrition programs, including SNAP/ Food Stamps and child nutrition programs, and for more efforts to boost the economy, create more well-paying jobs and reduce unemployment.

“President Obama has set a goal of ending childhood hunger by 2015,” said Berg. “As we can see with this new data, the struggle with hunger is a serious problem here in New York for children and adults. Not a minute can be wasted between now and 2015 if we’re to reach that goal. All corners of government, the private sector, and the nonprofit sector must work together in order to implement long-term strategies that will battle our nation’s hunger crisis.”

The full report is available at www.frac.org

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