



For Immediate Release: November 23, 2009

Contact: Kerry Birnbach
(212) 825-0028, ext. 212 (office)
(503) 706-3649 (mobile)
kbirnbach@nyccah.org

New Report Shows that, Although Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen Usage Soared, Federal Funding Surge Prevented Problem from Becoming Catastrophic

Schumer, Quinn, Gotbaum Join Hunger Advocates at Local Pantry to Release Data; Report Directly Proves Effectiveness of Federal Recovery Bill in Fighting Hunger

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 during the same period, fewer agencies ran out of food than the year before, according to the annual survey of the New York City Coalition Against Hunger.

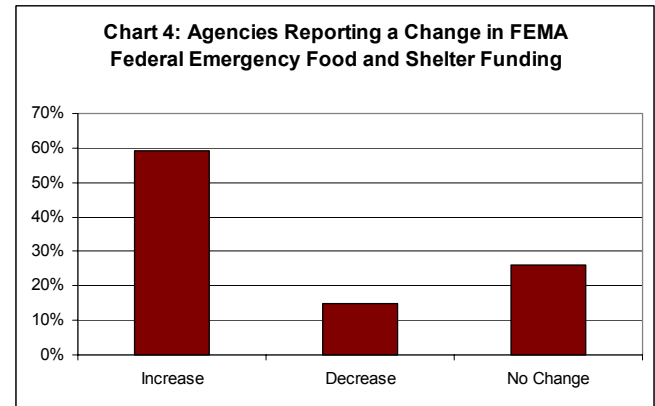
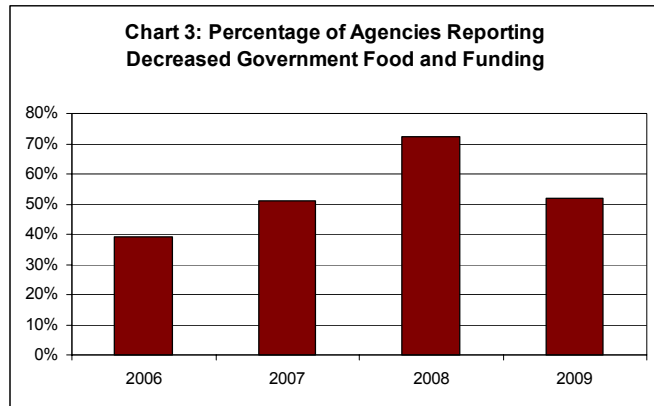
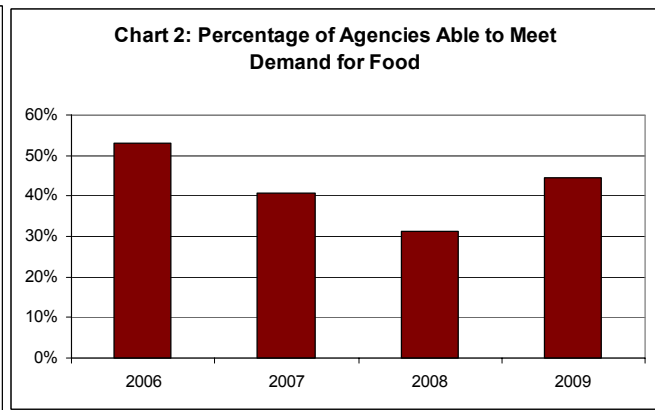
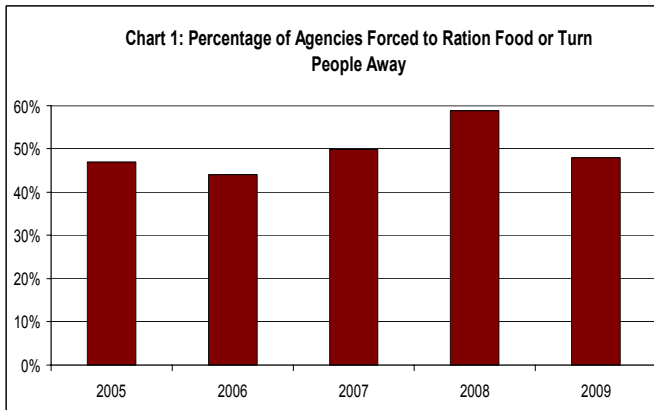
This Coalition's report not only graphically demonstrates the negative impact of the recession, it is also one of the first concrete indicators anywhere in the country as to the success of the federal economic recovery bill in battling hunger. Although the report showed that 55 percent of emergency food programs lacked enough food to meet the growing demand, that was a significant improvement over 2008, when fully 69 percent of the pantries and kitchens lacked sufficient food.

"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 horrible 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 bill and not protected the Food Stamp Program as an entitlement that expands when times are rough."

The annual 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.

Joined by U.S. Senator Charles Schumer, New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, and other prominent New Yorkers, the Coalition released the report at the West Side Campaign Against Hunger's food pantry in Manhattan.

Said Senator Schumer, "Thanks to the emergency food aid from the federal government, we were able to take a small bite out of New York's hunger crisis and get by this holiday season. But with so many more New Yorkers relying on soup kitchens and pantries, we still have a long way to go. The federal government needs to keep it up and support the food banks and pantries that for far too many New Yorkers mean the difference between eating or going hungry. I will continue to work to provide emergency food providers with the resources they need to feed the hungry. And over this Thanksgiving holiday, I encourage New Yorkers to consider all they are thankful for, and to give back to those New Yorkers less fortunate than you."



Fully 91 percent of responding agencies citywide reported feeding more people in the last year. More than 58.4 percent said this number increased “greatly.” However, as Chart 1 demonstrates, the percentage of agencies forced to ration food and turn people away dropped from 59 to 48 percent. As Chart 2 demonstrates, the percentage of agencies able to meet the growing demand increased from 31 to 45 percent. As Chart 3 shows, the percentage of agencies reporting decreased overall government funding dropped from 72 percent last year to 52 percent this year.

Funding for New York City in the Federal FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), distributed through the United Way of New York City, rose from \$4,581,417 last year to \$7,492,125 this year, of which \$2,340,980 was from the recovery bill, which equaled a 64 percent increase in that one year. Survey respondents also noted this increase in EFSP funding, as shown in Chart 4, where fully 60 percent reported an increase. Fifty-one percent of survey respondents reported an increase in federal The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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

“Today’s report shows that New Yorkers are feeling the sting of the recession, and that more and more of them are having difficulty feeding their families,” said Speaker Quinn. “As a result, it’s not surprising that 21 percent of our emergency food providers have reported an increase in demand. But there is good news - despite the increased demand, our pantries and soup kitchens were actually better able to meet demand this year. I’m extremely proud that the City Council has done our part, restoring over \$2 million to food pantries and soup kitchens that were facing budget cuts. And we’re incredibly grateful that the federal government has increased their funding as well.”

Not only did the government assist agencies through stimulus funding for emergency food, increases in the federal Food Stamp Program (recently renamed the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP) 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 SNAP/food stamps benefits, thereby encouraging more people to apply. The results were positive: between September 2008 and September 2009, participation in the SNAP/food stamp program 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 \$2.1 billion it was already slated to spend.

Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum said, “At a time when food insecurity is at its highest level in 14 years and New Yorkers continue to lose jobs, this survey bears a glimmer of hope: it shows that we have a partner in Washington, committed to providing greater assistance in difficult times. Now, the city must follow the Obama administration’s lead and do more.”

Said Doreen Wohl, Executive Director of the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, which hosted the event, “As the economy has continued to worsen we’ve been seeing more people in need of food. Increased government funding has allowed us to meet the needs of our clients. Faced with possible cuts in city and state funding we may not be able to meet our growing demand.”

Some key findings from the Coalition’s annual survey:

- Of the populations that increased “greatly” at responding agencies, the fastest growth was seen among families with children.
- 81.1% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of families with children over the last 12 months (versus 6.5% reporting a decrease, and 8.0% reporting no change).
- 68.3% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of seniors over the last 12 months (versus 6.3% reporting a decrease, and 21.0% reporting no change).
- 56.9% of responding agencies reported feeding an increased number of working people over the last 12 months (versus 7.1% reporting a decrease, and 14.1% reporting no change).
- 83.8% of responding agencies believe that their need will continue to increase in the next six months. 44.7% of responding agencies believe it will increase “greatly.”
- 52.0% of responding agencies reported receiving less government food and money in the last 12 months (vs. 16.2% reporting no change, and 27.8% reporting an increase).
- 54.5% of respondents reported using their own personal money “often,” “always,” or “sometimes” to support their feeding programs.
- While it is by definition impossible to fully count the number of times people were not served because they were turned away, the Coalition’s rough estimate, based on survey responses, indicates that 13.9 % fewer people were turned-away in 2008 than in 2009.

###