



GROWING UP HUNGRY IN NEW YORK CITY: AN ANALYSIS OF HUNGER AMONG CHILDREN

Prepared by
Food Bank For New York City
Division of Government Relations, Policy & Research

© Copyright 2006 by the Food Bank For New York City

ABOUT THE FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY

The mission of the Food Bank For New York City is to end hunger by organizing food, information and support for community survival and dignity. The Food Bank collects, warehouses and distributes food to more than 1,200 nonprofit community food programs throughout the five boroughs. The organization offers ongoing support to its network of food programs through nutrition and food safety workshops, networking sessions and education tools that help build capacity and improve efficiency. The Food Bank also analyzes policy, conducts innovative research and serves as a resource center for member agencies, legislators, the media and the public.

A member of America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank Network, the Food Bank provides 67 million pounds of food annually to our network of community food programs citywide, including soup kitchens, food pantries and shelters. The food provided helps programs to serve more than 250,000 meals each day to individuals and families seeking emergency food assistance.

Main Office:

90 John Street, Suite 702
New York, NY 10038-3239
Phone: 212-566-7855
Fax: 212-566-1463
www.foodbanknyc.org

Warehouse and Distribution Center:

Hunts Point Co-op Market
355 Food Center Drive
Bronx, NY 10474-7000
Phone: 718-991-4300
Fax: 718-893-3442

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHAIR, Carla A. Harris, Morgan Stanley & Company, Inc.

EXECUTIVE VICE CHAIR, Ralph L. Rogers, Jr.

VICE CHAIR, Jewel Jones, Love Kitchen, Inc.

TREASURER, Robert Weinmann, ACOSTA Sales & Marketing

SECRETARY, John F. Fritts, Esq., Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP

Mario Batali

Reverend Henry Belin, Bethel AME Church

Peter L. Bloom, General Atlantic LLC

Anthony Bowe, Credit Suisse

Eileen Scott, *Former CEO Pathmark Stores, Inc.*

Nancy Seliger, Fleishman-Hillard

Stanley Tucci

PRESIDENT & CEO

Lucy Cabrera, Ph.D.

DIVISION OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS, POLICY & RESEARCH

Áine Duggan, Vice President of Government Relations, Policy & Research

Veronica Olázabal, Director of Policy & Research

Ashley Joy Baughman, Policy & Research Coordinator

Loresa Wright, Administrative Assistant

Christopher Fasano, Policy & Research Intern

Jessica Spraos, Research Intern

Emily Doerr, Government Relations Liaison Intern

Sophie Aziakou, Research Intern

Members of America's Second Harvest, The Nation's Food Bank Network



INTRODUCTION

There is a growing amount of information showing that children and families with children are among the most vulnerable populations susceptible to poverty, food insecurity and hunger. Between 2000 and 2005, the number of children living in poverty in the United States increased by 1.5 million — from 12.2 million in 2000 to 13.4 million in 2005.¹ Over the same time period, approximately 17,000 children fell into poverty in New York City alone.² As poverty shifted throughout the nation, food insecurity also increased. Between 2000 and 2004, the number of children living in food insecure households in the U.S. increased by approximately one million.³ A recent study published by the Food Bank For New York City in collaboration with City Harvest, *Hunger in America 2006: The New York State and City Report*, provides a more local perspective on the problem of hunger among children in the city, showing that nearly one out of every five children in New York City live in households that rely on emergency food programs (EFPs), such as soup kitchens and food pantries.⁴ In addition to showing that children comprise one-third (29 percent) of all EFP participant household members receiving emergency food assistance, *Hunger in America 2006* also shows that despite need, many children are not participating in government assistance programs such as the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs, which provide children nutritious food during the school year.⁵

In order to ensure the availability, accessibility and affordability of a safe and nutritious food supply for this vulnerable population as they grow into adulthood, immediate attention must be paid to hunger and poverty among families with children. The lack of access to healthy foods can already be seen in the dramatic increases in health and nutrition related diseases among children. Recent studies show the high (40 percent) rate of overweight and obesity among low-income children as early as two years of age enrolled in New York City Head Start programs⁶ with similar results found among a representative sample of elementary school city children.⁷ The increase in obesity rates is also thought to be linked to the startling growth in Type 2 diabetes among children.⁸ The prevalence of these health-related and nutritional illnesses have increased to such proportions that a recent New York City Council hearing was held this past June by the Committee on Health to specifically address the obesity epidemic.⁹

Hunger also impacts education as children who are hungry are less able to concentrate during the school day which has been shown to have detrimental affects upon achievement.¹⁰ In New York City, school breakfast became universally offered to all children in 2003 subsequent to the publication of scientific research showing that kids who began their day eating breakfast were less likely to be tardy or absent from school, had higher math grades and showed reductions in problems such as depression, anxiety and hyperactivity.¹¹ Further academic research shows that the cost upon achievement extends far beyond the school day resulting in poorer returns on children's educations and decreased workforce productivity as adults.¹²

Opportunities for meaningful change currently exist within New York City and State's government agencies. City Council and State Assembly members are working to solve weaknesses in child nutrition programs, address the lack of nutritious food in low-income communities and put hunger among children on the political agenda. To support the movement towards improving policies that relieve hunger and poverty among children, this paper explores the trends in poverty and hunger among children and seeks to answer the following questions: what populations are growing up hungry; why do these groups need to rely on emergency food; what support systems are available to help them meet their nutritional needs; and what is needed to ensure that the recent health trends among the youngest New Yorkers are reversed?

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THE EMERGENCY FOOD SYSTEM

Hunger in America 2006: The New York City and State Report showed that children under 18 comprise 29 percent (348,000) of the 1.2 million New York City residents participating in emergency food programs (EFPs) such as soup kitchens and food pantries.¹³ Among the approximately 1.9 million children living in New York City, one in five (18 percent) live in households that turn to EFPs for assistance.¹⁴

Socioeconomic analysis conducted by the Food Bank For New York City show that many EFP participants with children are residents who are frequently working but have low-incomes. For example, analysis shows that 100 percent of EFP participants with children have annual incomes of \$25,000 or less with as many as 83 percent with annual incomes less than \$15,000.¹⁵ Despite low incomes, more than one-fifth (22 percent) of households with children accessing EFPs have an employed adult member, with 37 percent of this population working full-time.¹⁶

Findings indicate that low education is often a barrier to employment and self-sufficiency for many EFP participants with children. Among participants with children, 46 percent have less than a high school degree while 36 percent have a high school degree or equivalent.¹⁷ Only 10 percent have completed some college while 4 percent have a two-year degree, 3 percent have a Bachelors degree and 1 percent completed graduate school.

Research also suggests that barriers exist to enrollment and participation in nutrition assistance programs. For example, only 46 percent of households accessing EFPs are enrolled in the federal Food Stamp Program and only 44 percent of EFP participant households with children age three and under receive Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) benefits.¹⁸

Similarly, child nutrition programs are also underutilized. Less than two-thirds (64 percent) of EFP participant households with school age children are enrolled in the National School Lunch Program and approximately one-half (49 percent) participate in the School Breakfast program (which is free to all children in New York City). Even lower, just more than one-third (36 percent) of EFP participant households with children participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). At the same time, close to one-half (47 percent) of soup kitchens in New York City see an increase in the number of children they serve during the summer, suggesting that families are turning to EFPs for assistance rather than the SFSP during the summer months.¹⁹

HUNGER AND POVERTY AMONG CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The high number of children living in households accessing EFPs is not surprising given that more than one out of every four children in New York City (28 percent) under the age of 18 live below the federal poverty line (\$16,600 for a family of three).²⁰ This figure is 43 percent higher than the percentage of children living below poverty in New York State and 50 percent higher than the national average.²¹ Further analysis shows that child poverty is on the rise. Since 2000, child poverty has increased by 5 percent in New York City, by 4 percent in New York State and 9 percent in the U.S.²²

Similar to poverty among children, poverty among families with children is also considerably higher in New York City in comparison to New York State and the U.S. In New York City, 23 percent of families with children under age 18 live below the federal poverty line, 43 percent higher than in New York State and 49 percent higher than the national average.²³

Paralleling and likely linked to the high rate of child poverty, households with children in New York City are also finding it progressively more difficult to afford food. In 2003, nearly one-third (32 percent) of households with children experienced difficulty affording food.²⁴ By 2005, households with children who experienced difficulty affording food increased by 25 percent.²⁵ As a result, more than two times as many households with children reported that they did not purchase needed food at some time during 2005 (34 percent) than in 2003 (11 percent).²⁶ In addition, in 2005, one out of every four households with children (25 percent) would not be able to afford food after a loss of income, up from one out of every five (20 percent) in 2003.²⁷

Findings on food insecurity in New York State and the U.S. show similar trends.²⁸ In 2004, 6.7 million households with children in the U.S. (17 percent) were food insecure.²⁹ This is an increase of 5 percent since 2003 when 16 percent of households with children were food insecure and an increase of 19 percent since a low of 14 percent in 1999.³⁰ Throughout New York State, the percentage of total households experiencing food insecurity increased from 10 percent in 1999-2001 to 11 percent in 2002-2004.³¹ Analysis indicates that approximately 1.2 million New York City residents were food insecure in 2005.³²

SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES

A variety of social and economic challenges contribute to poverty and hunger among children and their families. Factors including low wages, the increasing gap between the rich and poor, and the earnings disparity between women and men, as well as barriers to affordable child care and health insurance make it difficult for families to afford food and other basic necessities. Other factors not specifically discussed in this paper but that can also contribute to child poverty and hunger are unemployment as well as access to affordable housing; however, for the purposes of this paper, the discussion has been limited to low wages, gender disparities and affordable childcare and health insurance.

INCOME

In New York State, three-quarters (74 percent) of children in low-income families (below 200 percent of the federal poverty line³³) have at least one parent who is employed and among them, 68 percent have a parent that works full-time.³⁴ Throughout the U.S., these figures are similar, 73 percent and 74 percent respectively. Although many parents are working, stagnant wages make it difficult to support a family. Research shows that the buying power of the federal minimum wage—which has remained at \$5.15 per hour since 1997—is currently at its lowest point since 1955.³⁵ Since 2000, the purchasing power of the minimum wage has decreased by 14 percent.³⁶ While thousands of workers in New York State benefited from legislation increasing the minimum wage above the federal level to \$6.00 in January 2005 and to \$6.75 in January 2006, many still experience poverty and struggle to make ends meet.³⁷

A parent with two children earning New York State's minimum wage and working 40 hours per week for a full-year would only earn \$14,040 before taxes, well below the poverty line for a family of three (\$16,600).

Low wages coupled with the rising costs of basic necessities such as food, housing, fuel/utilities and medical care (which have increased by 7 percent, 9 percent, 21 percent and 6 percent, respectively in the New York Metro Area between 2003 and 2005)³⁸ are forcing families to spend a high percentage of their income for basic necessities, sometimes going without. For example, the median share of income spent on rent among low-income New York City residents who do not receive subsidized housing increased from 44 percent in 2002 to 50 percent in 2005.³⁹ The result of such

high costs can be seen among the 34 percent of EFP participant households who were forced to choose between paying for food and paying for rent or mortgage in 2005.⁴⁰

As wages remain stagnant and costs rise, low-income populations are becoming poorer. Over the past few decades, income inequality has increased considerably in New York State, straining low-income families' budgets. In 1970, the wealthiest one-fifth of New York families earned 8 times the yearly income of the poorest one-fifth of New Yorkers.⁴¹ By the late 1990s the gap had increased 64 percent with the wealthiest one-fifth earning 13 times the poorest one-fifth. This increase is the largest of any state in the U.S. and had the effect of increasing incomes for wealthy families while further decreasing incomes of poor families. As the average yearly income for the wealthiest one-fifth of families increased 54 percent (from \$105,050 to \$161,860) the poorest one-fifth experienced a 6 percent decrease (from \$13,430 to \$12,640).⁴² Similarly, current analysis shows that in New York City, the annual income among the lowest one-fourth of wage-earners has decreased by 4 percent between 2000 and 2005.⁴³

There are a number of government assistance programs in which low-income families may participate to supplement their incomes including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Earned Income Tax Credit. However, research shows that these programs are greatly underutilized and that many families face considerable barriers to participation. In total, nearly one-quarter (24 percent) of low-income children in New York City and approximately one-third (30 percent) in New York State live in households that do not receive benefits from any government assistance programs, including TANF, the Food Stamp Program, public health insurance or housing assistance programs.⁴⁴

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

In 2005, the average number of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) per month totaled approximately 140,200 in New York State and 1.9 million throughout the U.S.⁴⁵ These families represent an average of approximately 88,000 adults and 232,000 children receiving TANF per month in New York State and 1.1 million adults and 3.4 million children in the U.S.⁴⁶ At the same time that child and family poverty has increased since 2000, the average number of adults and children receiving TANF has decreased by 60 percent and 51 percent, respectively, in New York State between 2000 and 2005.⁴⁷ In the U.S. the average number of adults and children receiving TANF has decreased by 30 percent and 20 percent, respectively, over this period.⁴⁸

Decreases in the number of families participating in public assistance can be attributed to the Personal Responsibility Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 (also known as welfare reform), which replaced Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). With this reform, families now receive assistance for a maximum of five years on the condition that they find and sustain employment. The assumption behind this major policy change was that welfare recipients would be capable of securing employment and transitioning from welfare to work, thus, by linking benefits to work, the government would provide an incentive for welfare recipients to provide for themselves.⁴⁹ In reality, research shows that many families face barriers to employment which leads to difficulty in finding employment.⁵⁰

Research conducted prior to PRWORA highlights the failure of this policy change by showing that welfare recipients lacked prior work experience, had low levels of education and were frequently in poor health, which, upon the enactment of TANF, further impeded recipients' access to jobs.⁵¹ Although studies conducted after welfare reform showed that 70 percent of recipients found employment, working did not necessarily translate into material improvements and economic well-being.⁵² Academic reports demonstrate that many of those who transitioned from welfare to work

experienced food hardships, could not find adequate child care, had difficulty paying for rent and utilities and experienced a loss of health insurance.⁵³

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

In New York City, an estimated 16 percent of households eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) in 2000 did not participate in the program.⁵⁴ Throughout New York State, this figure is approximately 18 percent.⁵⁵ With full participation, New York State residents would receive an additional \$312 million each year, including \$159 million for New York City residents alone.⁵⁶ Estimates show that in 1996 between 2.3 million and 3.4 million individuals in the U.S. were eligible for EITC but did not file to receive the credit. As a result, an estimated \$2.1 billion to \$3.5 billion went undistributed to low-income families.⁵⁷

When appropriately funded, the EITC has been effective in reducing poverty by reducing the number of persons living below the federal poverty line and substantially increasing employment.⁵⁸ Estimates from 2005 show that throughout the U.S., EITC helps lift over five million individuals out of poverty each year including 2.6 million children.⁵⁹ This reduction in poverty is accomplished by providing a tax credit to low-income working households.⁶⁰ Further, unlike the minimum wage, the EITC is adjusted for inflation each year so that increases in living costs do not decrease the tax credit's purchasing power. Both New York State and New York City have local level EITC programs that add an additional 30 percent and 5 percent, respectively, to the federal credits that low-income families receive.

LIVING COSTS

While a number of government programs are available to help low-income parents supplement their annual incomes and provide for their families, living costs often prove to be higher than wages and benefits combined. Costs associated with child care and health care are especially problematic for families with children.

Child Care

Studies repeatedly show the positive outcomes of quality child care, particularly among low-income children, which include better academic performance, higher graduation rates and fewer behavioral problems.⁶¹ Nevertheless, with the average annual cost of child care for a four-year-old in New York State at approximately \$8,000, many families cannot find adequate and affordable care.⁶² For a parent working full-time and earning minimum wage (currently \$6.75) in New York City, the cost of child care would comprise over one-half (57 percent) of his or her annual earnings. Although child care programs exist to assist low-income families access quality child care, only one in seven children eligible for child care assistance throughout the U.S. receive it.⁶³

Low participation in government child care programs is likely due to the limited funds available through the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), which at the federal level is the primary source of child care support for low-income families. Sufficient funding does not exist to serve all families eligible for a child care subsidy and, as a result, many families are placed on waiting lists or turned away.⁶⁴ Moreover, despite an increase in the number of mothers in the labor force since 2002, the program has been flat-funded at \$4.8 billion.⁶⁵

Other sources of child care include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, Social Services Block Grants (SSBG) and the New York State Child Care Block Grant. In 2003, approximately 2.5 million children received child care assistance through these programs; however, the number of children receiving the assistance is expected to decline by 500,000 in 2010. This

anticipated drop-off is largely due to the overall decline in funding available through these subsidies, which—after experiencing steady increases since 1997—has decreased for the first time in 2006, from \$801 million in 2004-2005 to \$744 million in 2005-2006.⁶⁶

At the city level, child care subsidies are provided through the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) to approximately 100,000 children.⁶⁷ For the 2006 budget cycle the size of these combined programs was set for \$712 million.⁶⁸ This figure is expected to diminish due to the overall decrease in federal funds that provide necessary monies to city programs (as mentioned above) as well as the anticipated demand for child care assistance among TANF recipients due to increased work requirements enacted by welfare reform legislation.⁶⁹ This means that there will not be adequate funds to pay for the new child care costs, likely forcing more low-income parents to choose to pay for child care costs over medical or food needs, which may increase the number of families that are in need of emergency food assistance.

Health and Health Insurance

Families most at risk of hunger are more likely to lack access to healthcare and medical treatment. Approximately one in six U.S. residents (16 percent) were uninsured in 2004, an increase of 14 percent since 2000.⁷⁰ In New York State as many as 2.8 million residents (15 percent) live without any form of health insurance, one-half million of whom are children.⁷¹ Among EFP participant households in New York City, only 14 percent have private health insurance while 28 percent have at least one member in poor health.⁷² Research published by the Food Bank For New York City shows that this situation forces many EFP participant households to make impossible choices as more than one-fifth (22 percent) were forced to choose between paying for medicine and medical care and purchasing food in 2005.⁷³

One of the reasons for the high number of uninsured families in New York City is that the vast majority (87 percent) of full-time workers living at or below 100 percent of the federal poverty line do not receive health benefits from their place of employment.⁷⁴ While government programs such as Medicaid and Medicare cover 23 percent and 4 percent of this population, respectively, 51 percent of full-time workers living in poverty are uninsured.⁷⁵ It is not surprising that many low-income families who are not covered through their employment cannot afford private insurance given that the high cost of premiums would account for 82 percent of a minimum wage worker's salary in New York State.⁷⁶

Public health insurance programs, available to low-income households, not only help to keep families healthy and allow their income to be spent on other basic needs, but also allow families to work and add money to local economies.⁷⁷ The positive effects of these programs, however, are diminished by low participation rates. Among the programs available to low-income families in New York State are Child Health Plus (also known as Children's Medicaid), CHPlus B, Medicaid, Family Health Plus (FHPlus) and the Prenatal Care Assistance Program (PCAP). Less than one-fifth (18 percent) of the 880,900 eligible children in New York State receive child care assistance.⁷⁸ Recent research shows that many families are uninsured because of complicated eligibility procedures that make it difficult for families to access and maintain their health coverage.⁷⁹

Health issues associated with barriers to insurance coverage are compounded by the lack of access to affordable nutritious food. Research shows a strong link between healthy diets and the availability of supermarkets—which generally offer more nutritious and lower cost food.⁸⁰ In areas throughout the U.S., low-income neighborhoods have two to four times fewer supermarkets than middle- and high-income communities.⁸¹ Research conducted in New York City found that 58 percent of food stores on Manhattan's Upper East Side stocked low-fat and high-fiber food while only 18 percent of food stores just north in more impoverished East Harlem did the same.⁸² Access to nutritious food is

particularly important as health issues such as obesity among children continue to rise. Over the past two decades, obesity among children age six to eight more than doubled.⁸³ Among elementary school children in New York City, 24 percent are obese and 19 percent are overweight.⁸⁴

Obesity among children and adults has also been linked to food insecurity.⁸⁵ Research shows that cyclical lack of access to food can lead people to overeat at the beginning of the month to make up for shortages of food at the end of each month, which in turn contributes to obesity.⁸⁶ Such eating patterns can easily develop when families are forced to make tough choices between paying for food or paying for rent or when food stamps run out at the end of the month—as experienced by the one-half of EFP participant households enrolled in the Food Stamp Program whose benefits only last two weeks or less.⁸⁷

GENDER

Gender often plays a role in poverty and hunger among families as women are frequently denied equal wages and positions in the workplace. As is the case throughout the U.S., women in New York City occupy a weaker socioeconomic position than men and as a consequence, fall into poverty more often. Of the more than one million (1,075,826) New York City residents over the age of 16 living in poverty, more than 60 percent (647,248) are women.⁸⁸ Median annual earnings for men living in New York City (\$33,823) are 17 percent higher than average annual earnings among women (\$28,980).⁸⁹ Within the boroughs of Manhattan and Staten Island, median annual earnings among men are as much as 26 percent and 42 percent higher respectively.⁹⁰ In addition to lower salaries, New York City women wield relatively less power than men within the marketplace. For every five top male executives in the Bronx, there are only three top female executives.⁹¹ Among office workers, nearly 20 times the number of women occupy lower-paying secretarial or administrative assistant positions than men.⁹²

Just as economic downturns tend to pull more women into poverty than men, economic growth disproportionately benefits men over women. Even though the percentage of the city's employed population increased from 61 percent to 64 percent from 2003 to 2005, women enjoyed proportionally fewer of the new jobs.⁹³ Whereas the percentage of men employed in New York City increased by 5 percent (from 68 percent to 71 percent), the percentage of women employed increased by only 2 percent (from 56 percent to just 57 percent).⁹⁴

Linked to higher wages and disproportionate benefits from economic growth, the median annual income for single men with children in New York City (\$34,509) is 63 percent higher than the median annual income among single women with children (\$21,233).⁹⁵ In some areas, this disparity is even greater. For example, the median annual income for single men with children is 79 percent higher than that of single women with children in Staten Island and more than double in Manhattan.⁹⁶

GOVERNMENT FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

Government nutrition assistance programs are a vital part of the safety-net, helping to ensure that low-income families and children do not go hungry despite the myriad of social and economic challenges faced by families with children today. These programs include the federal Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the School Meals programs and the Summer Food Service Program for Children. While these programs assist millions of individuals and children each year, low participation and funding levels must be addressed to effectively combat poverty and hunger among children.

FEDERAL FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP)

The federal Food Stamp Program (FSP) provides low-income families with funds to independently shop for and purchase nutritious food.⁹⁷ FSP has been shown to reduce incidence and degree of child poverty as well as increase household spending on nutritious foods, yet many eligible households are not receiving benefits.⁹⁸ In 2004, 61 percent of eligible U.S. residents participated in FSP—up from 56 percent in 2000—and 76 percent of eligible households with children participated—up from 68 percent in 2000.⁹⁹ Throughout New York City and State in 2005, this figure was 67 percent and 66 percent, respectively.¹⁰⁰

Although poverty, food insecurity and FSP participation rates are rising, the program is currently facing significant funding cuts within the Administration's proposed fiscal year 2007 budget, which seeks to decrease FSP funding by approximately \$2.8 billion.¹⁰¹ Even without a cut, many states and participating households are struggling with low funding levels and benefit amounts. In addition, households applying for FSP are often forced to go through a long and complex application process, which can conflict with employment or child care responsibilities, only to receive relatively small benefit amounts. The average monthly benefit amounts in New York City and State are \$113 and \$107, respectively, while the minimum benefit is only \$10.¹⁰² As previously mentioned, research published by the Food Bank For New York City and City Harvest shows that food stamps last two weeks or less for one-half of EFP participant households in New York City who receive FSP benefits.¹⁰³

Strategies including raising minimum FSP benefit amounts, expanding the number of application sites and hours as well as increasing the number of farmers' markets and community supported agriculture projects (CSAs) that accept food stamps are important for increasing participation and ensuring that families and children are receiving the assistance they need.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)

The Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplies low-income¹⁰⁴ pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women as well as children age five and under with vouchers for approved nutritious food¹⁰⁵ for the purpose of improving health at critical stages of development and later in life. WIC has been shown to increase recipient's consumption of protein, fruit and a number of vitamins and minerals while reducing the intake of fat and sugar.¹⁰⁶ The program is also linked to increased consumption of low-sugar cereals and 100 percent fruit juice among children.¹⁰⁷ The average monthly benefit amount is approximately \$35 per family.

As a result of a lack of funding and low participation rates, many eligible children and families are not benefiting from this critical program. WIC is not an entitlement, therefore, the federal government does not fund the program at a level that allows all eligible families to participate. Waiting lists are established when agencies do not have enough funding to serve all applicants. Whether lack of participation is due to limited funding or barriers to awareness and access, calculations conducted in 2002 estimate that throughout the U.S., more than one-third (34 percent) of eligible pregnant and postpartum women, 27 percent of eligible infants and 62 percent of eligible children ages one through four do not participate in WIC.¹⁰⁸

Even as many eligible families are not participating and poverty and food insecurity are increasing, the Administration's fiscal year 2007 budget proposes to decrease funding for WIC from \$5.5 billion in fiscal year 2006¹⁰⁹ to \$5.2 billion in fiscal year 2007.¹¹⁰ An additional proposal by the U.S. Department of Agriculture seeks to decrease the amount of milk, eggs, cheese and juice WIC will pay for in order to expand the list of food covered to include more fruit, vegetables and whole grains. While increasing the variety of nutritious food participants can purchase is a positive step, efforts should be made to ensure that all eligible families can access the program without a reduction in services or benefits.

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH AND BREAKFAST

The National School Lunch and Breakfast programs provide free or reduced-priced school meals to children living in low-income households—below 130 percent of the poverty line for free meals and between 130 percent and 185 percent for reduced-price meals—yet a number of obstacles prevent many eligible families from participating.

In 2005, 70 percent of low-income students participated in the free or reduced-price School Lunch Program in New York State. This figure drops to 68 percent in New York City.¹¹¹ Participation in the School Breakfast Program is considerably lower. Figures show that in 2005, less than one-quarter (24 percent) of low-income students in New York State participated in School Breakfast.¹¹² Although New York City offers a universal program that allows all students to receive free breakfast (regardless of household income), only one-fifth (20 percent) of low-income students in the city participated in 2005.¹¹³

Underutilization of the School Breakfast Program indicates that accessibility and the time of day when meals are offered affects participation. When meals are incorporated into the school day, as is the case with school lunch, students are more inclined to participate in the program. In contrast, breakfast is generally offered before the school day begins, creating barriers for families with tight schedules and no means by which to bring their children to school early. In addition, children are sensitive to the stigma associated with needing free or reduced-price meals. Receiving breakfast before school increases the visibility of low-income students that do participate and consequently lowers participation rates.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM (SFSP)

The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) provides free meals (including breakfast, lunch and dinner at selected locations) to children age 18 and younger regardless of household income at schools and other sites such as non-profit camps or recreational programs.¹¹⁴ However, lengthy application procedures, complicated accounting requirements and low reimbursement rates deter many schools and programs from participating, reducing children's access to free meals.¹¹⁵

During the summer of 2005, only one-fifth (20 percent) of low-income students in New York State and less than one-quarter (24 percent) of low-income students in New York City participated in SFSP.¹¹⁶ Despite such low utilization, New York State ranks number two in participation rates.¹¹⁷ The national average for participation in SFSP was 10 percent in 2005, a decrease of 2 percent from 2004.¹¹⁸

Effective strategies to expand the number of SFSP sites and increase participation rates among children do exist. For example, the Simplified Summer Food Program (also known as the Lugar Pilots) enables SFSP sites to fill out less paperwork and potentially receive higher reimbursements. This simplification is accomplished by removing the traditional accounting procedures that separate administrative and operating costs for calculating reimbursements and instead reimbursing all programs at the maximum rate allocated for meals. Results of the Simplified Summer Food Program have been positive. Since 2000, the original 13 participating states have increased SFSP participation by 8 percent and the number of sites by 15 percent.¹¹⁹ In addition, the number of states participating in the simplified program has increased to a total of 26 (New York State does not currently participate in the Simplified Summer Food Program).¹²⁰

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

To supplement income and benefits provided by nutrition assistance programs and to ensure that all families have access to food, a number of federal, state and local programs provide food and other resources to emergency food programs (EFPs) such as soup kitchens and food pantries. These

programs include The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) managed by the United States Department of Agriculture, the federal Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) managed by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), New York State's Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and New York City's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP). Despite increases in poverty and living costs, these programs have been flat-funded for a number of years, forcing EFPs to provide services to more people with fewer resources. For example, research conducted by the Food Bank For New York City shows that while 82 percent of the city's food pantries have experienced an increase in the number of participants in need of emergency food over the past four years, nearly one-half (45 percent) were forced to turn participants away in 2005. Among food pantries that turned participants away, 84 percent did so due to a lack of food resources.¹²¹

The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) was established in 1981 by the federal government to distribute surplus commodity food purchased from farmers in order to support the agriculture industry. Approximately 80 percent of TEFAP commodities are distributed to programs, including food pantries and soup kitchens, through the America's Second Harvest network of member affiliate food banks and food rescue organizations.¹²² America's Second Harvest estimates that between 10 and 40 percent of all food distributed by its members are supplied by TEFAP.¹²³ Approximately 69 percent of all food pantries and 49 percent of all soup kitchens in the America's Second Harvest Network participated in TEFAP in 2005.¹²⁴ Since fiscal year 2002, funding for TEFAP has increased by 26 percent, from a fiscal year 2002 funding level of \$150 million.¹²⁵ In the past couple of years, however, funding levels have remained unchanged. In fiscal year 2005, funding for TEFAP was \$189.6 million, while in fiscal year 2006, \$189.5 million was appropriated for the program.¹²⁶

The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) was launched in 1983 and now supports more than 200 organizations that operate close to 1,000 shelters, food pantries and soup kitchens throughout New York City's five boroughs. EFSP funding subsidizes meals, groceries, lodging at shelters and other programs. The programs also offers funding for one month's rent or mortgage payment, one month's utility bill, repairs for program facilities and equipment necessary to feed and shelter individuals.¹²⁷ The fiscal year 2001 federal funding level for EFSP was \$140 million.¹²⁸ In the intervening years between fiscal year 2001 and fiscal year 2006, funding increased by \$13 million to a fiscal year 2006 funding level of \$153 million. Congress then passed an across-the-board cut in discretionary funding of 1 percent, reducing EFSP program funding by \$1.5 million, to a fiscal year 2006 funding level of \$151.5 million.¹²⁹

In recent years, New York State and New York City have experienced drastic cuts in EFSP funding. The total New York State award for fiscal year 2006 was \$9,491,104, a decrease of 10 percent from the fiscal year 2005 funding level of \$10,575,458.¹³⁰ Over this same time span, the New York City EFSP funding decreased by 19 percent, dropping from \$5,643,443 in fiscal year 2005 to \$4,581,417 in fiscal year 2006 representing the smallest award since fiscal year 1997.¹³¹

The Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) is a state sponsored grant that provides emergency food programs with lines of credit at regional Food Banks and other organizations, including the Food Bank For New York City and the United Way. HPNAP also offers an Operations Support and Equipment grant, which awards emergency food programs up to \$3,000 for operations and equipment expenditures. This program is administered by the New York State Department of Health. In total, HPNAP was funded at \$22.8 million in fiscal year 2005, which represents a 7 percent decrease from \$24.44 million in fiscal year 2002.

At the city level, the New York City Human Resources Administration's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) funds more than 500 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the city. In addition to funding food distribution, EFAP also provides administrative funding to build capacity at

emergency food programs and also administers technical assistance grants for the automation of food stamp enrollment at soup kitchens, food pantries and other locations. In 2006, the Current Modified Budget for EFAP was \$14,776,000,¹³² while the 2007 Current Modified Budget is \$14,772,606.¹³³ EFAP has been flat-funded in recent years, though the need for the program has increased considerably.

RECOMMENDATIONS¹³⁴

Stemming from the need to offset more than five years of cuts or flat funding for government-funded emergency food and in response to the underutilization of nutrition programs, a collective of city and state anti-hunger organizations, including representatives from emergency food programs, held a series of meetings to review and develop a collaborative anti-hunger policy platform addressing policies and funding amounts at each level of government. The *Anti-hunger Policy Platform for New York City and State 2007 — 2012* will be used to inform the policy work conducted by each supporting organization in addition to broader discussions within the food, hunger and nutrition sectors. The recommended policies cover emergency food funding; government nutrition assistance programs, including the child nutrition programs; and long-term solutions in an effort to improve short-term hunger relief while initiating long-term change.

The following recommendations, are included within the *Anti-hunger Policy Platform for New York City and State 2007—2012* and seek to improve the well-being of New York's most vulnerable residents by ensuring that the funding, access and benefits provided in government nutrition assistance programs—including child nutrition programs — and emergency food programs meet the immediate needs of all New York City children and families. Additional policy recommendations address long-term solutions that work towards eliminating poverty and hunger.

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM (FSP)

To increase access to and participation in the Food Stamp Program (FSP) among families with children at the federal, state and local levels, the following funding and policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Increase administrative funds for technology improvements and adequate staffing as well as fund outreach measures to reverse the decline in food stamp participation among working families, particularly through grants to nonprofit organizations.
- Provide additional funding to increase the usage of food stamps at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects and food-producing community gardens, particularly by simplifying the process by which state farmers' market associations apply for food stamp authorization on behalf of member markets.

Increase Access and Outreach:

- Combine outreach efforts and the application process for FSP, Medicaid, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), child care subsidies, nutrition assistance programs and tax credits to expand access to and participation in FSP for families with children.
- Increase the resource limit and the list of exempt saving categories to allow more families with children to receive benefits.
- Mandate and fund the distribution of FSP outreach materials at emergency food programs in New York City and State. In addition, expand the distribution of FSP outreach materials at hospitals, government offices, community food programs (senior centers, daycare centers,

Kids Cafes, rehabilitation centers, shelters, etc.) and other services and providers that reach low-income populations in New York City and State.

- Include food stamp outreach materials in mailings of checks and other materials to recipients of Unemployment Insurance, EITC and disability benefits.
- Improve hotlines in New York City and State that serve both FSP applicants and food stamp recipients trying to access their benefits, particularly by providing services in multiple languages.

Improve benefits:

- Increase the minimum monthly benefit from \$10 to \$25 to provide both additional funds for struggling families as well as provide a greater incentive to apply for FSP.
- Provide a standard medical deduction similar to the standard utility allowance, for use in calculating food stamp benefits with persons whose medical bills exceed the standard deduction allowed.
- Calculate benefits allotment using a more accurate and up-to-date measurement.

Streamline the application process:

- Create simple systems through which families with children and other groups facing hardships can apply for food stamps in a way that does not conflict with their jobs, training programs or job search and that generally minimizes potential scheduling conflicts. For example, allow households to apply for FSP at any food stamp office throughout the state, implement an online application process, offer evening and weekend hours and open satellite offices and drop-boxes for applications.
- Eliminate the face-to-face interview requirement in favor of alternative methods of gathering and verifying information.
- Eliminate the finger imaging requirement in New York State and eliminate the ability of states to require finger imaging to apply for FSP at the federal level.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (WIC)

To ensure that the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) provides quality services to all families with children in need, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Fund WIC at a level that allows the program to be fully implemented without a reduction of services and change WIC into an entitlement program with an independent source of funding.
- Establish a federal contingency fund in conjunction with the current discretionary funding structure that would maintain participation throughout the year, should the appropriated amount fall short due to unforeseen events, such as an economic downturn or unexpected increases in WIC food prices.

Increase access and outreach:

- Support states, localities and nonprofit groups in their efforts to increase the usage of WIC at farmers' markets, roadside farm stands, community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects and food-producing community gardens. This may be done at the federal level by providing the USDA with more authority and funding.
- Ensure that there is access to a WIC site in every low-income neighborhood in New York State.
- Mandate that the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene work in coordination with the New York State Department of Health to provide oversight over the WIC program.

NATIONAL SCHOOL LUNCH AND SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMS

To increase children's access and participation in the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs at the federal, state and local levels, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Appropriate additional federal funding for meal reimbursements, start-up and expansion grants, administrative costs and outreach to families with children.
- Create new funding sources at the federal and state levels to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables on the menu.

Increase access and outreach:

- Expand the school meals programs in New York City to include universal school lunch in addition to the current Universal School Breakfast Program.
- Encourage schools to schedule lunches as close to midday as possible, and to cease scheduling lunches at 10am and 2:00pm. As an alternative, create incentives for schools to offer nutritious "grab-and-go" breakfasts and lunches at cafeterias and hallway kiosks, and incentives for breakfasts and lunches in the classroom, to ensure that children have access to meals at the appropriate time of day.
- Serve breakfast at the start of the first period of the school day.
- Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.
- Be sensitive to the dietary, cultural and religious preferences and needs of students.
- Encourage New York State and City schools to hold recess before lunch, which allows students to build up an appetite during recess and consequently, eat more of their lunch.

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM FOR WOMEN, INFANTS AND CHILDREN (SFSP)

To increase children's access and participation in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) at the federal, state and local levels, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Appropriate funding for: SFSP meal reimbursements; start-up and expansion grants; administrative costs; transportation of children and, where necessary, meals to SFSP sites; and outreach to families with children. In addition, appropriate funding at the state level for technical assistance during the start-up process, particularly for smaller nonprofit groups.
- Create new federal funding sources to increase the amount of fruit and vegetables on the menu.

Increase Access and Outreach:

- Expand the Simplified Summer Food Program (also known as Lugar Pilots) to all states, which would enable participating sites to use a simplified reimbursement process.
- Expand the criteria for open sites, where all children receive meals at no charge regardless of income, from the current requirement of at least 50 percent of students eligible for free or reduced-price meals to 40 percent.
- Ensure that the New York State Education Department and New York City Department of Education publicize the program in a timely fashion by: identifying open school sites early enough to develop accurate lists for early publication before school recess; reminding parents and students about the availability of summer meals on all school notices; involving principals, teachers and parent coordinators in the promotion of summer meals; and advertising how to access information regarding expanded sites throughout the summer.
- Provide incentives for schools to increase the number of nutritious meals prepared on-site, which tend to be fresher and more appealing to students, and would enable greater flexibility in menu planning while allowing food service staff to respond more effectively to student preferences.
- Ensure that some sites in New York City are open for the entire duration of time that schools are closed for summer recess.
- Ensure better coordination among New York City agencies when organizing and administering SFSP.
- Incorporate adequate time for meals into summer school schedules at the local level, and ensure that all programs offer lunch before their afternoon activities.
- Provide breakfast and lunch to students enrolled in summer school in New York City and State and create incentives for schools to offer nutritious “grab-and-go” summer meals in the classroom.

THE EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (TEFAP)

To increase children’s access to nutritious food through emergency food programs such as food pantries throughout the United States, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Increase funding by 46 percent over the next five years, to a fiscal year 2012 funding level of \$276.60 million.¹³⁵

Improve the quality of food:

- Improve the quality of food by offering more minimally processed and fresh foods.

EMERGENCY FOOD AND SHELTER PROGRAM (EFSP)

To increase children's access to nutritious food through emergency food programs such as food pantries and shelters throughout the United States, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Increase federal funding by 42 percent over the next five years, to a fiscal year 2012 funding level of \$214.59 million.¹³⁶
- Increase the percent of funding allocated for actual administrative costs.
- Allocate funding for EFSP before the program begins on October 1st.

HUNGER PREVENTION AND NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (HPNAP)

To increase children's access to nutritious food through emergency food programs such as food pantries throughout New York State, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Increase funding by 147 percent over the next five years, to a FY 2012 funding level of \$56.3 million.¹³⁷
- Increase funding for actual administrative and operational support.

EMERGENCY FOOD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EFAP)

To increase children's access to nutritious food through emergency food programs such as food pantries throughout New York City, the following policy changes are recommended:

Ensure adequate funding:

- Increase funding by 38 percent over the next five years, to a FY 2012 funding level of \$20.34 million.¹³⁸
- Appropriate funding for emergency food programs in the event that the city experiences any decrease in outside funding.
- Ensure that all EFAP funding designated for administrative costs is provided in one lump sum to programs at the beginning of the fiscal year.
- Create an advisory council consisting of representatives of emergency food providers from all five boroughs, including nutritionists that will meet with HRA on a quarterly basis so as to advise HRA on all EFAP food purchases.

Improve the quality of food:

- Improve the quality of food by offering more minimally processed and fresh food, and by giving programs choice over food selection.

LONG TERM SOLUTIONS

To ensure that the causes of poverty and hunger are addressed and to provide children and families with permanent access to nutritious food, the following policy changes are recommended:

- Create a New York City Office of Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy and a New York State Council on Food, Hunger and Nutrition Policy which would develop comprehensive, coordinated city and state food policies with the goal of ensuring an available, accessible, affordable, safe and nutritious food supply, comprised of locally produced food as much as possible, so that all state residents are able to eat a healthy diet, avoid hunger and obesity, and have the opportunity to support a vibrant local farm and food economy.
- Create a city-state agreement to fund new initiatives that would increase the supply of and access to fresh food in low-income neighborhoods by: subsidizing improvements in storage capacity at local food stores for nutritious food, specifically targeting food stores in low-income neighborhoods; subsidizing food cooperatives in every low-income neighborhood in the city; enhancing access to nutrition education in all communities through additional funding and greater utilization of existing resources, such as public schools, colleges, senior programs and community centers; and by enabling emergency and community food providers to purchase locally grown produce.
- Increase farmers' markets and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) projects in low-income communities.
- Offer classes and training programs throughout New York City on how to access the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC); banking services; wages and supplemental income; lender programs; mortgage lending; predatory credit policies; long-term and retirement financial planning; and other areas of personal finance.
- To embrace a holistic approach to solving the multifaceted socioeconomic problems of poverty and hunger, the anti-hunger community lends its support to those seeking: a living wage with benefits; affordable and comprehensive universal health care; career advancement opportunities for the unemployed and underemployed; open and equal access to education and training; the creation and maintenance of new affordable housing; affordable, accessible transportation; high quality, affordable child care; a more progressive tax code; and all other forms of socioeconomic uplift.

CONCLUSION

As poverty and food insecurity increase, thousands of children throughout New York City live in households that rely on emergency food to help make ends meet. One out of five New York City children live in households that turn to emergency food programs (EFPs) for assistance while 40 percent of families with children throughout the city experienced difficulty affording food in 2005 and more than one-third (34 percent) did not purchase food at some time during the year.

Multiple factors, including low wages, lack of healthcare and rising costs of basic necessities, exacerbate the effects of poverty by making it difficult for families to afford food. Moreover, access to affordable, nutritious food such as fruit and vegetables is not readily available in low-income neighborhoods. Poor health including high rates of obesity and diabetes among low-income children are amid the results. Working families with children also have the added challenge of finding affordable child care. Since women are often denied equal wages, an even greater economic strain is placed on already struggling households. Government programs such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) can help alleviate financial strain yet they are underutilized because many families face barriers to participation.

While government nutrition assistance programs such as the Food Stamp Program, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), the National School Lunch and Breakfast Programs and the Summer Food Service Program have the potential to relieve hunger among families with children, diminishing funding levels and barriers to access have debilitated these programs for years. Emergency food programs (EFPs) are available to serve families' immediate needs, yet programs such as The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) have been flat funded for years forcing food pantries and soup kitchens to serve an increasing number of people with fewer resources.

To solve poverty and hunger and to ensure that children and families have permanent and reliable access to nutritious food, long-term policy changes are needed. Solutions include increasing access to farmers' markets and community supported agriculture projects and addressing issues such as the minimum wage, affordable health care and education. These changes are essential to reducing the need for the safety net of government and emergency food assistance programs and eradicating hunger among children and families in New York City.

