



*Getting to the  
Root of the  
Problem*

# Hunger Action Network OF NEW YORK STATE

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## Hunger Alert – November 2008

1. We have postcards to send to state leaders on HPNAP, welfare grant
2. Tuesday Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> is the annual People's State of the State rally
3. Children's Art Poster Project for Hunger Awareness Day, Thursday March 19<sup>th</sup>
4. Urge President Obama and Senator Kennedy to support single payer universal health care for all
5. Last call to sign on to letter to Governor Paterson to raise the welfare grant.
6. Demand for emergency food is on the rise.
7. Make a special holiday contribution to Hunger Action Network
8. Prayer Vigil Wed. Dec. 10 Noon Capitol outside of the Governor's Office
9. NYC Public Advocate Finds Problems with HRA Job Centers
10. Hunger Action Testifies at Assembly Hearing on Welfare to Work – Need Transitional Jobs

### 1. We have postcards to send to state leaders on HPNAP, welfare grant

We have printed up postcards to send to the Governor, Assembly Speaker, Senate Majority Leader Skelos, and Senate Minority Leader Smith urging them to raise the state welfare benefits and funding for emergency food programs (i.e., the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program). The four cards come together on a detachable 8.5 by 11 sheet. With the Governor expected to release his state budget early this year on Dec. 16<sup>th</sup>, we need to get them in as soon as possible.

Please let us know if you would like some to hand out at your program – 50, 100, 500. Contributions to pay to ship them to you appreciated but not necessary. Contact [dcatozzi@hungeractionnys.org](mailto:dcatozzi@hungeractionnys.org) or 518 434-7371.

### 2. Tuesday Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> is the annual People's State of the State rally

Every year the day before the Governor's official State of the State address, Hunger Action organizes the People's version at the state capitol. This year the rally will be on Tuesday Jan. 6<sup>th</sup> at noon. Issues will include raising the welfare grant

### 3. Children's Art Poster Project for Hunger Awareness Day, Thursday March 19<sup>th</sup>

Hunger Action observes Hunger Awareness Day on the third Thursday of each March – March 19, 2009. A big part of the project is getting youth to make drawings / posters about their feelings about hunger and homelessness. Please let us know if you know of a youth program or art class that would like to participate. We display posters at the Capitol in the last two weeks of March – a visual reminder about the problem of hunger just before lawmakers adopt the state budget.

### 4. Urge President Obama and Senator Kennedy to support single payer universal health care for all

This is critical time for single-payer health reform. On the one hand, the need for fundamental health reform has never been greater as our economy falters, and with the election of Obama the opportunity has never been greater since the election of Johnson in 1964. On the other hand, the forces within the Democratic Party appear to aligning on a half-way reform—whether the Obama pre-election plan, the Baucus plan, or some other version of a Massachusetts-style combination of private and public plans—that will keep the private insurance companies in power and health care costs high. Even the major insurance companies are swinging into line, with the news that Kennedy is talking with them in preparing his own plan and the announcement that their leaders will agree to more regulation, namely the elimination of cherry-picking (or at least limits on it), in return for mandatory insurance for everyone (so that the healthy have to pay premiums). In response, we need to work quickly and hard with our single-payer allies to convince our elected representatives to be bold and adopt the most just, effective, and efficient means of providing truly universal access health care.

A single payer system plan based on H.R. 676 would cover everyone for life, allows them to choose their own doctor, eliminates greed and profit by ridding the system of the private health insurance companies. To find out more, see [www.singlepayernewyork.org](http://www.singlepayernewyork.org) or [www.pnhp.org](http://www.pnhp.org).

a. Write Obama. You can send his staff an e-mail message at <http://change.gov/page/s/yourvision> (it will put you on his outfit's e-mail list, but you can unsubscribe).

b. Write Kennedy. You can send him an e-mail at the following address:  
<http://kennedy.senate.gov/senator/contact.cfm>

We also need you to contact your individual Congress people to urge them to support HR 676 – and to lobby Kennedy and Obama.

The long delayed NYS study on universal health care is due out in December. We are concerned that the Urban Institute, which conducted the study, has been biased against single payer throughout the process. However, every other state that has studied the issue has found that single payer is the only universal health care proposal that actually covers everyone while lowering costs. We will be organizing forums on the studies once they come out. If the federal government fails to enact single payer, we will push the state to do so.

#### 5. Last call to sign on to letter to Governor Paterson to raise the welfare grant.

We hope to have more than 100 groups sign on to our letter urging the Governor to increase the welfare grant in the 2008 budget. Deadline is this Friday Nov. 28. Send your name and organizational affiliation to [dunleamark@aol.com](mailto:dunleamark@aol.com) if you would like to sign on.

#### 6. Demand for emergency food is on the rise.

In the New York City Coalition Against Hunger's (NYCCAH) Annual Hunger Survey, emergency food providers reported serving 28% more people in 2008 than they had in the previous year. In the 2007 Annual Hunger Survey, agencies reported serving 20% more people than they had in 2006. As a result of the influx of people needing emergency food, 68.8% of emergency food agencies in 2008 – up from 59% in 2007 – reported that they did not have enough food to fulfill demand. The Coalition's full survey report, entitled: No Bailout for the Hungry: Funding Slashed to Emergency Food Providers as Hunger in NYC Continues to Soar, is available at [www.nyccah.org](http://www.nyccah.org).

Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen in NYC, the largest in the city, once again broke their record, serving 1254 meals each weekday, up from average of 1163 last year.

Last week USDA reported that 691,000 children went hungry in America sometime in 2007 – an increase of 50% - while close to one in eight Americans struggled to feed themselves adequately even before this year's sharp economic downturn. USDA said that the number of children who suffered a substantial disruption in the amount of food they typically eat was more than 50 percent above the 430,000 in 2006 and the largest figure since 716,000 in 1998. The families with the highest rates of food insecurity were headed by single mothers (30.2 percent), black households (22.2 percent), Latino households (20.1 percent), and households with incomes below the official poverty line (37.7 percent). A November 11th story in the NY Times reported in the four months since June, demand for food aid has risen 20 percent in areas of the country with the healthiest economies and more than 40 percent in areas with the weakest.

The demand for emergency food is up significantly in the Capital District. The FOCUS breakfast program at the Westminster Presbyterian Church saw an increase during their first week from 65 people fed daily in 2007 to 140 in 2008. In October, the number of households using their food pantry program increased from 250 to 280. A Nov. 17 story in the Albany Times Union reported that in September, 60 percent more residents sought food at the Saratoga EOC Food Pantry than last September. Over that period, pantry visits were up 50 percent in Bethlehem and Rensselaer, 39 percent in Cohoes and 32 percent in the Albany hill towns of Knox and Berne. In Mechanicville, the community center served a record 1,436 children, adults and seniors by Nov. 1. The pantry served 787 visitors all of last year.

#### 7. Make a special holiday contribution to Hunger Action Network

Though our agenda is ambitious, the reality is much more needs to be done to eliminate hunger in New York State. Several of our foundation funders, dependent upon stock investments for their liquidity, have already warned us that next year will be challenging for grants. We are hoping that our faithful supporters will help us make up the difference. We hope you will consider a contribution to Holiday Hunger Appeal to help us on the way. Perhaps you would like to make your contribution in the form of an alternative holiday gift. We can send an acknowledgement card to the recipient of your "Gift of Giving"

Please send donations to Hunger Action Network, 275 State St. Albany NY 12210.

#### 8. Prayer Vigil Wed. Dec. 10 Noon Capitol outside of the Governor's Office on welfare grant

On Wednesday Dec. 10 the Faith and Hunger Network will hold a prayer vigil outside of Governor Paterson's office on the need to raise the welfare grant. Feel free to bring your own prayer or scripture passage to read. The event will be at noon. The Governor's office is on the second floor of the State Capitol. We would be interested in having groups organize a similar event in NYC.

#### 9. NYC Public Advocate Finds Problems with HRA Job Centers

A new survey released by Public Advocate Gotbaum today finds that New Yorkers visiting the Human Resources Administration (HRA) Job Centers are facing unnecessary barriers to accessing public benefits, including excessively long wait times, multiple visits, workflow problems such as misplaced documents and non-working computers, and lack of clear explanation of rules and requirements. On average, clients at Model Job Centers waited longer and spent more hours per visit than clients at non-model centers.

- Eighty-two percent of respondents said long waits were a problem when dealing with public benefit offices. On average, clients spent 20.3 hours per year in Job Centers.
- The majority of respondents (73 percent) returned to a Job Center two or more times in the past year because of problems with their benefits case.
- More than half of clients (52 percent) experienced workflow problems, including no record of a prior visit, HRA misplacing their documents, or computers not working at HRA Job Centers, and 24 percent reported

that their eligibility or job opportunity specialist did not clearly explain the rules and requirements for receiving public benefits.

- Despite HRA's efforts to improve wait times through the Model Office Initiative, clients at Model Centers, on average, spent 7.8 more hours per year in these centers than clients at non-Model Centers.

Public Advocate Gotbaum also urged the New York City Council to enact the Ready Access to Assistance Act (REAACT). This bill, introduced in 2006 by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and co-sponsored by Councilmembers Bill de Blasio and Eric Gioia, would allow non-profit advocates to set up help desks in New York City public benefits offices. See <http://www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov/index.html>

#### 10. Hunger Action Testifies at Assembly Hearing on Welfare to Work – Need Transitional Jobs

Hunger Action Network testified at the Nov. 20th Assembly hearing in NYC on the state's welfare to work program. The federal government has consistently ranked NY as having one of the worst programs in the country in terms of helping people leave welfare for a job. Hunger Action called for increased investment in creating transitional jobs and increasing access to education and training.

The repeal of the Aid to Dependent Children's Program in 1996 was based on a false premise, namely that by merely imposing a time limit of five years on how long poor mothers and their children could receive federal welfare benefits that this would magically produce a full-employment economy. The new federal TANF program ignored the need for job creation, especially of living wage jobs, to be a centerpiece of any effort to transform welfare into a more jobs oriented program. The lack of jobs was, and remains, a problem in many low-income inner city neighborhoods where welfare participants are concentrated.

New York's jobs first approach to welfare reform has made it more difficult for needy families to obtain assistance, driving down the caseload, but it has not made a significant impact in reducing poverty. A copy of our testimony can be found on our home page at [www.hungeractionnys.org](http://www.hungeractionnys.org)