



# Hunger Action Network OF NEW YORK STATE

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## Hunger Alert – March 2008

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1. Statewide Phone-in to Senate Majority Leader to Agree to Raise Welfare Grant

**Monday, March 17 – Friday, March 21**

Welfare benefit levels have not been raised in NYS since 1990. Benefits have declined in value to less than 50% of the federal poverty level.

Soon the Senate and Assembly will hold Budget Conference Committee meetings. The GREAT news is that the Assembly has included a welfare grant increase in its budget – increasing the grant by 10% each year over 3 years (totaling a 30% increase). We also are optimistic that the new Governor David Patterson will be supportive. We are asking that you please help us to get Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno's support on this! (And of course contact your own state senator.)

***Call to Make YOUR Voice Heard and Spread the Word!***



Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno (518) 455-3191

**Our Message:**

*Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno:*

*It is has been 18 years since lawmakers last approved a raise for families in need. It is time for a change!*

*The value of welfare benefits has fallen to only half of the federal poverty level.*

*Please agree to the Assembly's proposal to increase the public assistance grant 10% over 3 years.*

## 2. Fresh Vegetables available to all in the West Harlem and Long Island City Communities of New York City!!!!

The Hunger Action Network is pleased to announce that the West Harlem Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is going into its second season. Hunger Action is also assisting in the launch of a similar model CSA in Long Island City Queens.

Community Supported Agriculture is a way for people to buy vegetables directly from a local farm. You become a CSA member by purchasing a "share" of the farmer's harvest. Then every week from June to November, you pick up a share at a convenient neighborhood location. A share usually consists of 6-8 different kinds of locally grown organic vegetables. Both CSA's are open to people of all income levels. Scholarships are available and Food Stamps accepted! Call our NYC office 212 741-8192 to participate.

Danielle Seidita is the new Just Food/ Hunger Action AmeriCorp volunteer working in partnership with the NYC Coalition Against Hunger to launch a CSA project in Long Island City, Queens. The neighborhood, home to Queensbridge Houses - the largest public housing development in the nation, is serviced by one grocery store. The LI (and West Harlem) CSA tackle food affordability issues by targeting low-income families as members to offer them a variety of flexible payment options that are viable, as well as fair and appropriate for our farmer. By means of cooking demonstrations, recipes, and nutrition education we will empower the community with knowledge of how to prepare fresh produce and, in turn, promote healthier eating practices which will combat nutrition related illnesses. CSAs contribute to a sustainable food system by supporting a local farmer who uses eco-friendly growing practices which are safer for farm workers, the environment, and people eating the food.

## 3. Help End Child Hunger This Summer! – Promote the Summer Food Service Program

While food pantries and soup kitchens notice an increased caseload around the middle of the winter, they also see a sharp increase during the summer months. Over 70 percent of eligible school age children participate in the school lunch program during the school year, yet less than 20 percent participate in the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP). SFSP provides children under the age of 18 with a free meal. There are no forms to fill out or eligibility requirements such as household income or citizenship status.

Unfortunately, many people in need do not know about the programs existence, or do not have nearby access to a feeding site. Hunger Action is working in Poughkeepsie this summer to help promote the SFSP and create additional sites. Last summer, Hunger Action worked to promote the program in Queens, New York, and the participation doubled in our target area! We hope to achieve similar results this summer in Poughkeepsie.

If you are interested in starting a site, or would like to get involved in the project, please contact Veda Myers at 212-741-8192 ex. 2#.

## 4. Telephone Recertification for Food Stamps

As part of the New York State Working Families Initiative, many food stamp recipients will soon be able to recertify for food stamps over the phone. The first phase of this project is already underway; some counties have been training Social Service caseworkers in telephone recertifications since fall of 2006. By Spring of 2009, all of New York State will have adopted the telephone recertification.

This simplified recertification process is part of a larger program to make the food stamp program more accessible to working people. While New York State has seen a steady increase in participation in the food stamp program over the last 6 years, the percentage of working people participating in the program has remained stagnant.

Nationally, 30 percent of all households participating in the Food Stamp Program have earnings. In New York State, however, the proportion is 21.6 percent. A main cause identified for this low participation is the complexity of the application process. The Working Families Initiative aims to enroll 100,000 new households in the program.

Please help to get the word out to households receiving food stamps that they can now recertify by phone. Contact Veda Myers for more information - 212-741-8192 ex. 2#

### 5. Job Opening in NYC Office

Advocate. Hunger Action Network. NYC-based, statewide. Welfare rights, community food policy, economic security. 2 years policy / organizing experience. Research, legislative advocacy, media, community outreach, CSA. High 30's, benefits. Resume [dunleamark@aol.com](mailto:dunleamark@aol.com).

Responsibilities: Policy research, strategizing, and coalition work on legislative and advocacy campaigns (welfare, economic justice, food policy); Provide supervision and direction on local community food programs, including assistance with our Harlem Community Supported Agriculture program; Organize community events such as forums, speak-outs, conferences and workshops; Outreach to community-based organizations, emergency food programs, faith organizations, public housing projects, shelters, etc; Assist with running effective media campaigns, press conferences, interviews, etc.; Legislative advocacy for the organization's annual issues; Membership organizing and mobilization (e.g., community forums, meetings with legislators, advocacy trainings, phone/fax/email campaigns); Basic grant writing and reporting to funders under supervisory guidance; Supervise two beginning professional staff and policy intern

Qualifications: Bachelor's degree in related field or equivalent experience required. Knowledge of city/state legislative system preferred. Strong commitment to low-income communities; knowledge of poverty issues, including welfare and economic security issues; experience with grassroots organizing, community empowerment and/or community food works; excellent written, communication, and analytical skills; Spanish-speaking a plus; ability to work well with diverse communities; some knowledge of NYC neighborhoods a plus.

### 6. Farm Bill Moves Slowly Forward

Congressional leaders insist that negotiations now underway will result in passage of the long-overdue Farm Bill in the coming weeks, but to complete the job current law must be extended again. The Senate is proposing an extension until April 18. Negotiators have not reached agreement on approximately \$10 billion in offsets to increase Farm Bill spending, with Congress and the Bush Administration reportedly still about \$4 billion apart. The Administration shared a list of proposed budget cuts with House Agriculture Committee chair Collin Peterson (D-MN) in early March, but Peterson found most of the offsets, such as lowering Medicare reimbursements to people on oxygen, unpalatable.

Ask your members of Congress to urge House and Senate leadership and leaders of the House and Senate agriculture committees to ensure that the final farm bill includes permanent funding for nutrition programs at levels no less than those passed by the House. The new investments in the Food Stamp Program included in the Senate farm bill are not secure. All other titles in the bill have a 10-year budget, but the nutrition title is only funded for five years, so its new provisions will "sunset." Congress needs to find the money to fully fund the nutrition title for 10 years.

### 7. Welcome New Governor David Paterson

With the sad developments at the State Capitol leading to the resignation of Governor Spitzer, David Paterson was sworn in on March 17<sup>th</sup> as our new Governor. As a state Senator, Paterson was very supportive of Hunger

Action's agenda, including supporting single payer health care. He spoke at several Hunger Action rallies and says he supports raising the welfare grant this year. Of course, as Governor he faces new responsibilities and challenges, so his priorities are not yet clear. But Hunger Action wishes him well.

The dramatic change provides even more uncertainty about the state budget. The Assembly is proposed a small take hike on millionaires to help resolve the state's \$5 billion budget deficit; the Senate remains opposed. The budget is due to be adopted by April 1<sup>st</sup>. Key issues such as health care, welfare benefits and affordable housing are still far from agreement.

#### 8. Feast for Famine on Wed. May 14<sup>th</sup>

Hunger Action's main annual benefit will be at the Egg at the Empire State Plaza in Albany on Wed. May 14<sup>th</sup> from 5:30 to 8 PM. Several dozen restaurants and microbreweries will participate, including our own Hamilton Hill Food Processing, which has just begun to sell our products in stores. Tickets are \$40. Call 518 434-7371 xt 3# for your tickets.