



*Getting to the
Root of the
Problem*

Hunger Action Network OF NEW YORK STATE

Media Advisory

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For More Information:
Mark Dunlea, 518-434-7371, x. 1#
Bich Ha Pham, 212-741-8192, x. 1#

Hunger Remains a Significant Problem in NY This Thanksgiving Groups Urge Governor to Create Food Policy Council, Increase Funding for Emergency Food

Hunger Action Network of NYS urged today that Governor-elect Eliot Spitzer establish a New York State Food Policy Council to help coordinate efforts to end hunger in the state, which remains at epidemic levels.

The Food Policy Council would help strengthen the state's agriculture system, while seeking to ensure that all New York residents would have access to fresh, nutritious food.

The group also called for the state to make a multi-year commitment to increase funding for the state's emergency food programs.

"Thanksgiving is the one time during the year when the entire community comes together to make sure no one goes hungry. But hunger is a 365 day a year problem and it continues to grow. We have children, seniors and families throughout the state struggling to feed themselves. Obesity and diet-related health problems are on the rise and small family farms are in decline. We need strong state leadership and support to create a sustainable food system and the establishment of a Food Policy Council is a critical part of the solution," stated Mark Dunlea, Associate Director of the Hunger Action Network.

Legislation to create a New York State Food Policy Council (A 10461 / S 7618) was introduced last year by Assemblymember Felix Ortiz (then head of the Assembly Task Force on Food, Farm and Nutrition Policy) and Senate Agriculture Chair Cathy Young. The Council, modeled after existing programs in other states, would work to end hunger, promote a vibrant local food and farm economy, and enhance coordination between government agencies and citizens.

The Council, bringing together the state agencies most involved with food and nutrition, would develop comprehensive state food policies with the goal of providing a plentiful, affordable, and nutritious food supply, comprised of locally produced foods as much as possible. The goal is to ensure that all citizens of the State are able to eat a healthy diet and avoid hunger, while supporting a vibrant local farm and food economy.

A Council existed during the Cuomo administration. Re-establishing it has received bipartisan support as well as the endorsement of the NYS Farm Bureau, dietetic groups, anti-hunger organizations and sustainable agriculture groups.

275 State St., 4th Floor
Albany, NY 12210
(518) 434-7371 • Fax (518) 434-7390
dunleamark@aol.com

260 W. 36th Street, Room 504
New York, NY 10018
(212) 741-8192 • Fax (212) 741-7236
spasquantonio@hungeractionnys.org

The Council would consist of the Commissioners of the State Health Department, Agriculture & Markets, Temporary & Disability Assistance, Economic Development, Labor, and Environmental Conservation, among others. An Advisory Board to the Council of at least 15 members representing the issue areas of agriculture, anti-hunger, nutrition, food businesses, and labor would be established.

“Demand for emergency food continues to increase and over 2 million people use soup kitchens and food pantries throughout the year,” noted Bich Ha Pham, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network. “State and federal funding for emergency food programs have actually declined in recent years while the demand has continued to increase. We are asking for \$32 million this year in state funding to restore the cuts and adjust for inflation and increased demand.”

Last year the state provided \$22.8 million in the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, a 7% cut in the funds for food banks and emergency food programs since 2002.

The group also wants the new Governor to improve state oversight of the local Department of Social Services in providing food stamps and other benefits to eligible households. It hopes the new administration will go back to the requirement during the Cuomo administration of providing expedited food stamps in emergencies by the day after application; it was increased to five days during the Pataki administration.

The recent census data documents that poverty is a significant problem in New York. The official poverty rate statewide increased to 14.7%. New York City's poverty rate was 19.1% in 2005. But upstate cities fare even worse: Syracuse rate was 31.3%, Rochester 30.0%, Buffalo 26.9% and Albany 26.5%. Yet we are told that we are in the midst of the fourth year of an economic recovery. Over half the residents of Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo had incomes below 200% of the poverty threshold. And more than 10% of the residents of these cities and Albany are classified as extremely poor – with incomes less than half the poverty threshold.

Hunger Action Network of NYS is available for interviews during the Holiday season.

Hunger Action Network of NYS is a statewide membership organization of emergency food programs, low-income people, advocates, faith groups, and other individuals whose mission is to end hunger and its root causes, including poverty, in New York State.

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