



# Hunger Action Network of New York State

## 2018 Advocacy, Education and Policy Agenda

*Advocacy and Education is the most effective way to eliminate hunger and poverty. We aware and advocate for public policy that will increase economic stability, strengthen our food system and increase access to the food assistance safety net on the local, state and federal levels.*

The Hunger Action Network of New York approach is a combination of grassroots organizing and public policy research, education and advocacy. To accomplish we bring together voices from all regions of the state and from all backgrounds to advocate for increased support for programs that provide immediate food needed while also building a unified statewide platform for long-term solutions to hunger. Hunger Action Network members represent emergency food providers and other concerned individuals and organizations sharing the common goal of ending hunger and its root causes, including poverty. While we know education and policy response to hunger includes numerous federal and state assistance program, many of which are facing historic challenges, these program are not enough as too many New Yorkers still struggle with hunger –1 in 7 people in New York and of children it is 1 in 4. Hunger Action Network of New York will not accept this as a reality.

For over four decades, The Hunger Action Network of New York has developed and advanced innovative policy solutions that get to the root causes of hunger and will continue to do so in 2017 through the the following federal and state priorities identified:

## FEDERAL POLICY & ADVOCACY

### Affordable Care Act:

President Donald Trump and Republican Congressional leaders have tried their hardest to repeal and replace the 2010 health care law called the Affordable Care Act (or Obamacare) and replace it with an alternative that basically dismantles the program. There was a hard fought battle, but the pushback was tremendous and they were unable to achieve the dismantling of ACA. While it is still the law, the changes that will take effect in 2018 are as follows:

- The enrollment period for 2018 was shorter than in previous years
- The affordability standard of job-based health plans has decreased from 9.69% to 9.56% because of the increase in the poverty level in most states. This means an affordable plan would require no more than 9.56% of an employee's monthly household income.
- Some preventive care items will be included in the plan in 2018, such as aspirin for adults over 50 who have cardiovascular risk or preventive care for women, such as breast cancer screening

What the Republican Congress did accomplish was the repeal of the individual mandate. The Individual Mandate was the requirement under the ACA that individuals must sign up for health insurance or face a tax penalty. The Mandate was repealed in 2017 by Republicans as part of their tax reform bill, and it takes full effect in 2019.

The Affordable care Act also provided various subsidies to make the insurance more affordable, particularly for low and middle-income households. Cost Share Reduction (CSR) was a discount that lowers the amount an enrollee pays for deductibles, copays, and coinsurance. CSR was eliminated by presidential executive order in October 2017.

The 2010 Affordable Care Act (ACA) included many provisions affecting the Medicare program and the 57 million seniors and people with disabilities rely on Medicare for their health insurance coverage. The battle is yet to be finished.

### **Child Nutrition Programs:**

Reauthorize Child Nutrition programs (**The Summer Food Services Program** – Provides meals to children during the summer. **National School Lunch Program** – Provides lunch to qualified children at school. **The School Breakfast Program** – Provides breakfast to qualified children at school. **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women Infants and Children (WIC)** – Provides nutrition education and food for infants, young children and pregnant women.

**Child and Adult Care Food Program** – Provides meals and snacks to children and adults in child and adult care centers, as well as children participating in an afterschool programs with timely and comprehensive legislation that ensures access to meal programs for all eligible children. )

The authorization of federally-funded child nutrition programs expired in September 2015 and is currently being maintained through a Continuing Resolution.

### **The Farm Bill**

**The Food, Farm & Jobs Bill (aka The Farm Bill)** which provides funding for SNAP (the food stamp program) is up for reauthorization in 2018. We will be focusing on opportunities to continue to protect SNAP and TEFAP (emergency food) and to expand the programs created in the last Farm Bill that help SNAP shoppers buy more fruits and vegetables and access employment training. Our main focus is to fight against proposals to make drastic and harmful changes to SNAP as part of the budget reconciliation process. Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House and other Congressional leaders have been talking about proposals to cut and make harmful changes to the federal programs that help families of limited means afford food, housing, health care, and other basic needs- first under the banner of “welfare reform” and now with the misleading language of “workforce development”. The President has recommended a concept called Harvest Boxes, a proposed food delivery program that would replace about half of food stamp benefits for households who qualify for the boxes. The plan would put the U.S. government directly in charge of what goes on the dinner plates of more than 16 million low-income households. This program would be inefficient and costly, and would end up reducing benefits for low-income families and communities.

## **STATE POLICY ADVOCACY**

### **Home Stability Support**

Homelessness in New York is a crisis and requires bold solutions. In New York City alone, a record 63,000 men, women and children sleep in a shelter on an average night.

There are over 150,000 homeless children in New York State and another 80,000 families on the brink of homelessness. Every year, 19,000 more people become homeless than escape homelessness, according to New York State's report to HUD.

The shelter allowance was initially created to pay the full amount of a family's rent, but it has failed to keep up with the rising cost of housing.

Two-thirds of public assistance households living in private housing have rents that exceed the amount of their shelter allowance. Studies show that housing instability has a negative effect on employment outcomes for adults and school achievement for children, among other things.

Despite legal mandates, households eligible for public assistance are among the most vulnerable in our State. The state Constitution mandates that the care of needy is an obligation of the State and of the Legislature, and the Social Services Law requires that public assistance housing allowances be adequate to enable families to meet their basic needs *in the home*. Finally, the landmark case of *Jiggetts v. Grinker* ruled that if these allowances are so low as to force many families into homelessness, then the allowance levels violate the law.

There is a drastic disconnect between the cost of decent housing and the allowances provided to public assistance recipients to pay for housing. We know all too well that housing is simply unaffordable in too many parts of our state, and the housing portion, or "shelter allowance" in the public assistance grant has not remotely kept pace with relentless rent increases. Governor Cuomo has noted taxpayers expend over \$1 billion for the statewide shelter system. Keeping families in their homes through the Home Stability Support proposal could save taxpayers millions of dollars while bringing about better outcomes in health, employment, and education.

Why is HSS good for New York State?

- HSS will keep families and individuals on public assistance in their homes and out of homeless shelters by providing sufficient rental and, in some cases, heating assistance.

- HSS will significantly reduce costs to the state and taxpayers by preventing evictions, reducing emergency shelter utilization and reducing the costs of other homeless services.

- HSS will provide mandate relief to financially strapped counties that already have shelter supplement programs, and will benefit all communities across the state by using state and federal funds to stabilize families and neighborhoods.

Home Stability Support (HSS) will be a new statewide rent supplement for families and individuals who are eligible for public assistance benefits and who are facing eviction, homelessness, or loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous living conditions. HSS will be 100% state-funded, and will replace all existing optional rent supplements.

The rent supplement will be a bridge between the current shelter allowance and 85% of the fair market rent determined by HUD. Local districts will have the option to further raise the supplement up to 100% of the fair market rent at local expense.

To address the fact that the heating allowance has not been increased in 30 years, and assistance currently available doesn't go far enough to help pay for heat, HSS will have a heating differential for homes that do not include heat in the rent.

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### **New York Health Care Act**

Through the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, Congress required every American (with some exemptions for hardship, religion, etc.) to purchase insurance – in New York, through the New York State of Health which provides sliding scale subsidies for those with incomes under 400% of the Federal Poverty Level (\$92,000 per year for a family of four) if they don't get it from an employer or the government – or pay a tax penalty. However, insurance companies drive up the cost of healthcare to pay for their overhead, profits and marketing costs while restricting individuals' access to health services in order to protect the companies' profits. While it has maintained insurance company dominance over the healthcare system, the Affordable Care Act has helped expand access to health insurance and bring down the number of uninsured in New York to 6% of the population down from 16% in 2010.

The Republican dominated Congress is intent on repealing the ACA. They have yet to succeed but they are doing all they can to undermine the program. If a repeal were to be enacted, an estimated 2.7 million New Yorkers would lose coverage and New York State would experience a direct state budget impact of \$3.7 billion and a loss of nearly \$600 million of federal funding that goes directly to counties. At a time of national uncertainty, it is critical that New York legislators support a statewide system that guarantees healthcare as a human right, especially at a time when federal healthcare funds are in jeopardy.

Hunger Action Network supports a universal health care system to provide quality, comprehensive health care service to all New Yorkers. The most common sense solution is a single payer financing system, similar to Medicare for All. This system, used by almost all of the other industrial countries, eliminates the huge waste and paperwork of the private health insurance system. It should include long-term care. The New York Health Act, A 4738 (Gottfried) / S. 4840 (Rivera) which would create a universal, publicly funded and administered health care plan for all New Yorkers.

### **New York State Food Recovery and Recycling Act**

In New York State there are 2.5 million food insecure people, meaning they do not know where their next meal will be coming from. Over 442 million meals missing and 28% of the 2.5 million in NYS in need of charitable assistance are not eligible for federal assistance programs.

However, an enormous amount of food is wasted each year. More than 400,000 tons of organic material - edible food and food scraps - are generated annually by New York's large generators and landfilled. With 2.5 million New Yorkers suffering from hunger, keeping food out of our landfills NOW is not only feasible but necessary. Pope Francis has attacked the "culture of waste" and stressed that "discarding food is like stealing from the poor". The Food Recovery & Recycling Act (FRRA) is a funded mandate that will provide surplus food to hungry people, convert organic waste into valuable compost, and drive

economic development in NYS. It will create jobs, enhance efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by diverting organic material from our landfills.

Generators ( restaurants, supermarkets, etc.) of two tons or more of food waste per week who are within 40 miles of a processing facility will be required to separate edible food for donation and the remaining organic material for composting and anaerobic digestion. Approximately 1,200 retailers, institutions, hospitality and restaurants will be affected. More than \$8 million dollars will be committed over the next three years to generators, food rescue organizations, and municipalities to help them prepare.

Food Scraps Diversion: Empire State Development (ESD) will provide \$4 million to large generators for equipment and other infrastructure support. Municipal Recycling: NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) will provide \$1.2 million to villages, towns, cities and counties.

- New York should implement the current minimum work hours allowed under federal regulations, where parents with children less than 6 years old receiving welfare and doing 20 hours of activities fully meet participation rates.
- Expand access to SNAP benefits for college students: NYS can accept class time as counting for work activity for SNAP; and NYS can expand work-study funds so more college students can do work-study and receive SNAP.
  - NYS legislature needs to pass Senator Montgomery's Senate Bill S3740 which prohibits colleges from asking about an applicant's prior arrests or convictions during the pre-admissions process because research demonstrates that having access to higher education dramatically reduces the likelihood of people returning to prison.

## **Preventing Wage Theft (SWEAT)**

Wage theft is rampant in New York but exploitative employers too often hide or transfer their assets to avoid paying wages they have stolen from their employees. Even when workers win a court-awarded judgement, they are unlikely to collect money owed.

As reported in *Empty Judgements*, basic labor law protections are often unenforceable because unscrupulous employers transfer and hide assets in order to evade paying judgments rendered by the Courts and the Department of Labor. In fact, there is more than \$1 Billion of wage theft annually in New York State according to a recent U.S. Department of Labor. Much of this theft is never remedied due to loopholes that weaken our labor laws and judicial process.

Honest businesses that comply with the labor laws are currently forced to compete with businesses that can undercut their competition by paying unlawfully low wages. That's simply unfair.

The victims of wage theft are often low-wage workers who struggle to support themselves and their families on meager wages despite long workweeks. These workers should not be forced to rely on government benefits when their employers should be paying a lawful wage. It's not fair to workers or taxpayers. Hunger Action Network believes everyone should be paid fairly for their labor and wage theft is not only morally wrong, but illegal.

The Securing Wages Earned against Theft (SWEAT) bill (A628/S579) will close loopholes that hinder enforcement of state and federal wage theft protections. ES2 believes this is a bill whose core values increases tax revenues generated when wages are paid, and saves taxpayer money by are reducing bipartisan, reliance rewarding on public work, benefits.

- The SWEAT bill will create efficiencies in the way that wage theft cases are resolved by the courts. Current law often requires that employees engage in multiple successive lawsuits to establish liability and to ensure that there are assets to satisfy at least some of a judgment. The SWEAT bill will allow courts to resolve these related issues in one proceeding and reduce the cost of litigation and the burden on the courts resulting from existing inefficiencies.
- The SWEAT Bill will not add to the cost of doing business. It doesn't place any ongoing requirements on businesses, and should not affect any business that complies with the wage theft laws (except that, as noted above, it will benefit businesses that play by the rules). And the employee lien will not interfere with operation of an ongoing business. The SWEAT bill will help to reduce the incidence of wage theft, and thereby protect scrupulous business owners from unfair competition.

## EDUCATION INITIATIVES

In addition to the numerous campaigns Hunger Action Network continues to work on with our partners, the 2017 fiscal year Hunger Action Network of New York will focus on the following initiatives:

### **Food as a Human Right**

Working in collaboration with The Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Partnership and Senator Gillibrand to bring awareness to both the public and our elected officials to the depth of the hunger problem facing our fellow New Yorkers. More than 2.6 million New Yorkers go hungry everyday, almost a million of whom are children. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares everyone has the right to a standard of living that includes the right to food.

The United States is only one of three countries that signed the United Nations Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights but has yet to ratify. The other two are Cambodia and Liberia. Signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1977, it has yet to be ratified by our US Senate. Meanwhile, in the forty years since the United States government declared a " War on Poverty", the gap between the rich and poor in this country has grown exponentially. We will be working to grow a coalition to get the US Senate to ratify and start to truly address the homelessness and hunger pervasive in our country.

## **Education & Training**

Poverty rates in NYS are high at 15.4% of NYS population living in poverty. Inequality stretches beyond poverty limits to families just above the poverty line and other low-income families and individuals who are often thwarted from gaining the skills and credentials they need to reach economic security. NYS ranks 50th in US for income inequality.

American Community Survey 5-Year Profiles of the US Census shows that educational attainment is linked dramatically to economic security. Incomes were 86.0 % percent higher for people with college /certificate degrees than high school graduates. The state legislature and governor are trying many appeals to have business choose NYS for opening, expanding and modernizing their products, markets and industries. Broadening the base of skilled, educated and innovative entrepreneurs is key to attracting and expanding NY's future.

Poverty in NYS and the U.S. overwhelmingly impacts women and children. Over 75% of people living in poverty are women and their children. In the late 1990s, federal, state, and local changes in welfare policy made it nearly impossible for women supported by public assistance to access education and training programs. Since 1996, over 21,000 students in the City University of New York (CUNY) alone have been forced to drop out of school because of new "workfare" laws. The implications of these statistics are staggering especially since 88% of women on public assistance who graduate from college with a bachelor's degree move permanently off welfare within a year of graduation.

New York State law permits college work-study, externships, and internships to count as work activity and allows 2 year and 4 year college and other education for work participation. However the laws are not being implemented efficiently. When state regulations are implemented in NYS districts, low-income families and individuals in New York will have the opportunity to enter and remain in degree/certificate granting programs that will help them achieve economic security. All New Yorkers will benefit.

The governor has proposed a tuition scholarship approach that does not account for the real lives and what we know works for people. Students graduate with 12 credits, time for study, homework and skill building through practice and internships. Any NYS tuition assistance, scholarship or grant must be available for part time and full time basis. We ask that NYS and the governor use the formula that allows part time Tap and Pell at 6 credits each and full time starts at 12 credits or higher.

Hunger Action Network believes New York should provide free public college tuition to all New Yorkers. All New Yorkers should have ongoing access to a wide range of education and training programs so that they are prepared to compete in the job market. New York must pursue education and welfare policies

that do not place caps on the level or degree of education that individuals and families can attain as such policies would be deemed contrary to the goal of economic security for all of us. Our education access needs to include Dreamers, supports New York Immigration Coalition advocates who ask the state to increase resources for English language learners (ELLs), improve teacher training and instruction, and eliminate barriers that prevent immigrant parents and their children from gaining skills and credentials.

Among those who would benefit from expanding access to education are high school students either aging out of foster care or in poor families who are being told they cannot go to four-year college because they receive welfare. Welfare does not pay for college. Students receiving welfare are able to attend college through financial aid. Pell, the federal grant that sets the standard for funding higher education, and ES2 urges NYS to commit to making PELL standards the mark for counting families and individuals receiving public assistance as meeting federal welfare requirements.

- CUNY's budget must be stable, secure and adequate to serve the students who study there every day, who stay in New York after graduation and are vital to the future of our state. Its budget should be **INCREASED**, not CUT! CUNY deserves our support and continued and strengthened investment. CUNY's governance and structure should not be changed, and certainly not during the budget process.
- Implement statewide NYS law, which allows for educational and training including baccalaureate and advanced degree programs to count towards the work participation rate, by instructing districts that the new provisions allowing 4 year college and homework to count for work activity as well as previously enacted statutes of the Work Study and Internship Law can be made accessible to all participants at call-in.
- New York State should increase funding for education and training programs; increase funding for CUNY, SUNY and full-time and part-time Tuition Assistance Program (TAP). New York should halt any plans to further increase or deregulate CUNY and SUNY tuition.
- NYS needs to bridge the gap between Pell grants and rising tuition through TAP so poor, low-income and middle class students are not saddled with student loans and debt. This includes raising the grant itself and the eligibility criteria to at least \$125,000 for a family of four.
- New York can count 30% (out of 50%) of the welfare caseload meeting work requirements, when they are engaged in education and training activities. New York would be prudent to commit to meeting the full 30 percent of people engage in education and training that the federal law allows.
- The NYS Work-Study, Internship and Externship Law should be fully implemented in districts around the state. This law counts the hours students spend in work-study, internship and externship programs towards the welfare work requirements and can have a positive impact on New York's economic bottom line. State policy directives on education and training options should be displayed at local social services offices so people receiving welfare can know the regulations.
- New York State should conduct statewide and regional job vacancy surveys to more accurately project job growth and labor market trends in New York. A job vacancy survey will help better identify where jobs are available and what skills are needed to perform those jobs.

- Enact law that would ensure comprehensive assessments and development of career plans for participants and that sets forth a definition of sustainable living wage.

### **Empowerment through Advocacy**

Since the election there has been a remarkable surge of energy in response via grassroots advocacy. As many as 5.2 million people participated in hastily organized Women's Marches across the country, senators' phones have reportedly been jammed with calls protesting cabinet nominees and other early moves. Hunger Action Network will be utilizing this energy with the hope of having powerful local New Yorkers help push our policy agenda. We will increase our relationships with local advocacy groups that have sprung since November and create advocacy toolkits for each of our advocacy items to provide these groups. Additionally, we will create a section of our website that educates and outlines a simple, step-by-step instructions and process on what people can try to do to actually affect change such as grassroots organizing and advocacy targeting federal and state representatives from coordinated calls to sit-ins and photo op disruption.