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**Annual Hunger Report Finds Increase in Federal Government Food Aid  
Dwarfed Increase in Charitable Food Distribution**

**NYC Food Pantries, Soup Kitchens Fed 65% More People This Year;  
Nearly 33% of NYC Emergency Food Programs Lack Resources to Meet  
Soaring Demand; Amount of SNAP Benefits Received from March to  
August 2020 Jump 37% to More than \$298 Million**

**Statewide In New York: 85% of Pantries and Soup Kitchens Fed More  
People This Year as Nearly 22% Lacked Resources to Meet the Need and  
SNAP Jumped by 38% to \$488 Million in August**

**Advocates Call on City, State Officials to Continue Providing Support to  
New Yorkers In Need, Call on Federal Government to Boost SNAP  
Funding and Make It Easier to Apply for Benefits**

**“Only Thing Preventing Mass Starvation is Federal Aid”**

Hunger Free America’s annual survey of hunger in New York City and State found that, in 2020, a historic surge in federal funding for SNAP (formerly called Food Stamp) benefits dwarfed the sharp hike in food distributed by charitable food pantries and soup kitchens.

The city’s food pantries and soup kitchens fed more than 65 percent more people in 2020 than in 2019, This is a huge jump compared to previous annual increases of ten percent in 2019, five percent in 2018, six percent in 2017, nine percent in 2016, and five percent in 2015.

“While charitable food pantries and soup kitchens citywide and statewide struggled heroically to meet the increased demand during the pandemic, they were only able to scratch the surface of the need, and the only thing that truly prevented mass starvation here was a historic surge in federal funding for SNAP benefits,” said **Joel Berg, Hunger Free America’s CEO**, at a virtual press conference Wednesday afternoon to announce the findings of the report. “The City and State agencies that administer SNAP – and their rank-and-file employees – are our greatest hunger heroes in this crisis.”

At the same time, New York City’s SNAP (formerly called Food Stamps) caseload rose from 1,483,230 in March 2020 to 1,705,337 in September 2020 – an increase of 15 percent. The increase in caseload from March 2020 to April 2020 – an increase of 68,714 people – was the largest one-month increase in NYC’s history since 1980. Due to both the increased caseload as well as the state providing SNAP households with the maximum benefit allotment, the SNAP benefits received by City residents rose from nearly \$218 million in March to \$298.7 million in August – a 37 percent jump. If the current SNAP caseload and spending remains flat from September 2020, the SNAP program will provide \$3.6 billion in federally-funded food dollars to low-income New York City residents over the next 12 months.

“We have taken aggressive action and pioneered strategic initiatives to ensure vulnerable New Yorkers have access to vital resources, including food assistance, which is more important than ever before in these unprecedented times,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**, who joined Hunger Free America at Wednesday’s virtual press event. “Since the outset of this pandemic, DSS-HRA has aggressively built on this foundation by implementing reforms at a scale and speed never before seen, using every tool at our disposal, to ensure we continue effectively providing this critical lifeline to the New Yorkers who rely on us to make ends meet. Hunger Free America’s report affirms the success of our extraordinary response and overall efforts in combatting the hunger crisis. We are proud of our exceptional DSS-HRA staff and provider partners for their dedication during these challenging times, honoring our commitment to serving all New Yorkers in need no matter what.”

Statewide, more than 85 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens said they fed more people in 2020 than 2019, with more than 21 percent reporting they have had to turn people away, reduce the amount of food distributed per person, or limit their hours of operation because they lacked enough resources in 2020. In New York State outside of New York City, more than 70 percent of respondents who reported an increase in people served since the start of Covid-19 attributed the increase to adults having lost their jobs and/or incomes, more than 40 percent of organizations attributed the increase to the loss of school meals, while more than 22 percent of pantries and kitchens cited the closing of senior centers.

In March 2020, 2,561,187 state residents (including those in NYC) received SNAP, obtaining \$355,020,610 in federally-funded benefits. By August 2020, the caseload had increased to 2,756,187 people, and the total amount of benefits received that month had increased to \$488,159,706. Thus, the caseload increased by eight percent, and the benefits amount increased by 38 percent over just those five months, the most rapid increase in the history of the modern SNAP/Food Stamp Program in New York State since it was created in 1977. This increase also dwarfed the increase in all the charities combined. If the current caseload and spending remains flat from August 2020, the SNAP Program will provide \$5.9 billion in federally-funded food dollars to low-income New York State residents in the next 12 months.

Continued Berg: “The pandemic and the national economic collapse during the last eight months have resulted in an estimated 2 million New York City residents struggling with food insecurity. Statewide, food insecurity has doubled in the pandemic, and now hunger is an even worse problem in rural, suburban, and urban communities throughout the state. Many of these residents were already struggling with poverty and hunger before the pandemic, and Covid-19 made their circumstances even worse. While food pantries and soup kitchens play an essential role in filling in the gaps of the food safety net, it’s clear that the increase in participation in the SNAP Program dwarf the increase in all food charities combined.”

**Senator Kirsten Gillibrand**, who also joined Berg at the virtual press event, said, “Food banks and groups like Hunger Free America have been going above and beyond to help and advocate for New York families, but they can’t – and shouldn’t – be asked to meet this rising demand alone. Congress must pass a relief package that meets this crisis head on in order to help families in New York and across the country afford groceries and stay fed and healthy. Feeding people isn’t a partisan issue and, it’s time Republicans come to the table and pass a COVID relief deal that will help families overcome hunger.”

Hunger Free America’s survey also found that in 2020, nearly 33 percent of New York City food pantries and soup kitchens were forced to turn people away, reduce their portion sizes, and/or limit their hours of operation due to a lack of resources. In contrast, the proportion of feeding agencies that reported they were forced to reduce food distribution due to lack of resources when thinking back on 2019 was 13.8 percent. <sup>1</sup>

**Congressman Joseph Morelle** said at the virtual press conference, “The COVID-19 pandemic has severely exacerbated our nation’s hunger crisis and shined a stark light on just how fragile food accessibility is, particularly for low-income families. Especially now, it’s critical that we take action to address the growing food insecurity in our communities and eliminate the barriers that hold people back from receiving the resources and benefits they need and deserve. I’m proud to be working alongside Senator Gillibrand, Hunger Free America, and our many partners to identify solutions and enact policies like the HOPE Act to ensure no one is left behind.”

Berg continued, “Throughout the crisis, the City and State governments have worked rapidly to meet the growing need for food. The City ramped up its Grab and Go meals program for kids and expanded it to all New Yorkers in need, among other programs, while New York State instated the Pandemic-EBT program without an application process for children to receive funds to cover meals while schools were closed. But more needs to be done to help those who are struggling with poverty and hunger. Specifically, the U.S. Senate should immediately pass the HEROES Act, which was passed by the House in May and which would increase funding for the SNAP Program by 15 percent.”

**Kate MacKenzie, Director of the NYC Mayor’s Office of Food Policy**, said at today’s event, “Eight months into the pandemic in New York City, it’s become a cliché to say that this is a crisis like no other, and yet this report still contains shocking new data. Working with Hunger Free America and other partners in the non-profit space, the City of New York has done whatever we can to get food to people

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<sup>1</sup>In our 2019 survey, 34 of respondents said they had to turn people away that year compared to 31 percent in 2018. It is likely that COVID-19 affected the respondents’ perception of this question in this year’s survey and/or their recollection of the previous year.

in need – 170 million meals to hungry New Yorkers and 2.2 million pounds of produce to pantries – but the need remains high. We need federal action and we need it now.”

**NYS Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon** said at the press event, “After months of a pandemic and recession that has skyrocketed unemployment and food insecurity, this is exactly the time to enact policies to end hunger and income inequality in the long-term. I’m so grateful to New York’s food programs that have stepped up to help their neighbors -- and New York has taken good measures to get people food and SNAP during the pandemic. However, it is unconscionable that so many children and adults live in poverty in Brooklyn and across the country, having to choose between food and other basic needs. New York must ensure that people have access to good-paying jobs, affordable health care and housing, and quality food. Thanks to Hunger Free America for their work to end food insecurity and identify initiatives that get at the root cause of hunger and poverty.”

**Wes More, CEO of Robin Hood**, an anti-poverty nonprofit organization and one of Hunger Free America’s grant funders said, “It is far too easy to fall into poverty in this country, and far too insurmountable to escape. The reality is that policy choices have played a consequential role in keeping around 40 million Americans in poverty, with communities of color being hit the hardest. We cannot curb food insecurity, prevent homelessness, and tackle poverty without further intervention at the federal level. At a minimum, Congress needs to expand SNAP benefits, provide emergency rental assistance, and renew increased unemployment benefits so that families don’t have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table.”

Many respondents to Hunger Free America’s survey detailed the skyrocketing demand their organizations have experienced since the pandemic began, with some charities noting that their food distribution had gone up by 350 percent since the spread of Covid-19 began.

Mike Haynes, Chief Government Affairs Officer with Long Island Cares, responded in the survey, “With increases in demand, with such high increases, the nation’s charitable sector cannot do it alone. We need increased support from federal and state governments to enable nonprofits to meet the increased needs in our communities.”

Hunger Free America’s study, “NYC Pandemic Hunger Crisis: Safety Net Soars While Charities Struggle,” is available on Hunger Free America’s website: [hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research\](https://hungerfreeamerica.org/media-research/research/)

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