



P.O. Box 652
Enola, PA 17025
Telephone: (717) 525-9807
Email: info@pahunger.org
Web: www.pahunger.org

For Immediate Release

Contact: Laura Tobin Goddard
717.525.9807

New Data Show 12.5 Percent of Pennsylvania Households Struggling with Hunger
PA Hunger Action Urges Congress to Protect Federal Nutrition Programs during Deficit Negotiations

Harrisburg, PA – September 9, 2011. 1 in 8 households in Pennsylvania struggled with hunger on average in the years 2008-2010, according to new data released Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in its annual report on food insecurity. Nationally, more than 48.8 million people lived in households that were food insecure in 2010 – slightly down from 50 million in 2009 but still up from 36.2 million in 2007.

The Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center noted that the Pennsylvania number released yesterday covers the three years during the heart of the recession. The rate is well above the 10 percent for the years 2005-2007, demonstrating the downturn's depth and impact on the Commonwealth.

This latest report also found that the percentage of Pennsylvania households with "very low food security" nearly doubled to 5 percent during the 2008-2010 period. People that fall into this USDA category had more severe problems, experiencing deeper hunger and cutting back or skipping meals on a more frequent basis for both adults and children.

“These numbers only affirm what we've been hearing from too many people in our Commonwealth who are struggling to put food on their table. Congress must support job creation while protecting the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), child and senior nutrition programs, and other parts of our nation's safety net against deficit cutting measures,” said Laura Tobin Goddard, the Interim Executive Director for Hunger Action. “Weakening these programs would cause irreparable harm to low-income people in Pennsylvania and across the nation.”

The number of individuals calling Hunger Action's SNAP/Food Stamp Line (1-800-634-2033) has nearly doubled in the last year. Seniors who were once skeptical of enrolling in this federal nutrition program are now applying—even if they appear to be eligible for only the minimum benefit of \$16 a month. "Every bit helps" is a common refrain on the SNAP Line these days. And it's being said across the state by a variety of households: those on fixed incomes, those wishing their wages could stretch just a little further, and those eager to find work, to be able to provide for their family again.

“It is time to strengthen, not weaken the nation's safety net,” said Tobin Goddard. “There's a reason that every bipartisan deficit reduction plan proposed over the past year – including those from Simpson-Bowles Commission and the Gang of Six – has made sure to keep these programs intact and protected from cuts.”

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About the USDA Report

Since 1995, the United States Department of Agriculture, using data from surveys conducted annually by the Census Bureau, has released estimates of the number of people in households that are food insecure. Food insecure households are those that are not able to afford an adequate diet at all times in the past 12 months. The report also includes food insecurity rates for each state, but for states it uses three-year averages to give a better estimate of the number of households experiencing food insecurity. Experts agree that the Census/USDA measure of food insecurity is a conservative one, with the result that only households experiencing substantial food insecurity are so classified.

About the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center

As the statewide leader in anti-hunger advocacy for more than thirty-three years, the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center works every day for the day when all Pennsylvanians will have access to enough nutritious food for an active and healthy life. Beyond federal and state advocacy around food and nutrition programs, Hunger Action provides Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly the Food Stamp Program) outreach, as well as School Breakfast and Summer Food outreach. For more information, please visit our website at www.pahunger.org.