



The Poverty Institute

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RI Community Food Bank & The Poverty Institute Release Reports that Document Struggles of Low-Income Rhode Islanders

“Status Report on Hunger” and “RI Standard of Need” show many Rhode Islanders struggling to make ends meet; government support programs provide relief

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Two new reports have been released that document the difficulty low-income Rhode Islanders have in meeting their basic needs and how government support programs, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) help narrow the gap between income and expenses. During a joint press conference, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank released the *Status Report on Hunger in Rhode Island 2010* while The Poverty Institute released its *Rhode Island Standard of Need* report.

According to figures recently released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), 13.7 percent of households in Rhode Island were unable to meet their basic food needs last year. The number of Rhode Island families lacking adequate food and at risk for hunger is at its highest level in a decade.

The Poverty Institute’s *Rhode Island Standard of Need*, which calculates a basic needs budget for families and individuals, documents that it costs close to \$54,000 for a two-parent family and near \$49,000 for a single parent to raise two children in Rhode Island and \$20,000 for a single adult to meet basic needs.

Currently, the Rhode Island Community Food Bank provides food assistance to more than 55,000 people each month through a statewide network of emergency food programs. In response to the extraordinary need, the Food Bank surpassed previous levels by distributing 9.8 million pounds of food in the year ending August 2010. Emergency food programs also benefitted from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, commonly known as the federal stimulus package) that provided additional USDA food for emergency distribution.

“With the end of the federal stimulus, extra USDA food will not be available to our network of emergency food programs in 2011. We are asking these programs to do more with less,” said Andrew Schiff, Chief Executive Officer of the Rhode Island Community Food Bank.

The economic crisis has stretched the charitable response to hunger to its limit as lines at food pantries reach unprecedented lengths. This is just one of the major findings of the Food Bank’s *Status Report on Hunger*. According to the report, growing unemployment and poverty in Rhode Island, the highest rates in New England, are driving up the demand for food assistance.

While emergency food programs are at capacity, government sponsored nutrition programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly the Food Stamp Program) can scale up to serve more people in a time of increased need. Currently, more than 150,000 Rhode Islanders, one in seven, receive SNAP benefits.

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The *Rhode Island Standard of Need* shows how SNAP benefits and other government assistance including Rite Care and the Earned Income Tax Credit are an integral part of family budgets, helping close the gap between income and expenses for many. When income is too low, however, these supports only help narrow the gap, leaving family budgets in the red, and many needing to rely on food pantries to meet basic needs.

“Government response to the recession has helped many Rhode Islanders weather these hard economic times,” said Kate Brewster, Executive Director of The Poverty Institute. “The increase in both SNAP eligibility and the amount of benefits, as well as the reduction in Rite Care health insurance premiums, shift many family budgets from the red to the black. The fact is that these programs will continue to be necessary for the hundreds of families and individuals that do not earn enough to make ends meet.”

“During a year of great hardship for many Rhode Island families, SNAP benefits helped cushion the blow of the recession,” agreed Schiff. “By taking full advantage of reliable federal nutrition programs, and the resilient network of the Food Bank and its member agencies, we can end hunger in Rhode Island.”

The Rhode Island Community Food Bank is a non-profit organization located in Providence, RI. The Food Bank solicits, stores and distributes food products donated by supermarkets, wholesalers, food processors, local farmers and community food drives. The food is then distributed to the Food Bank’s network of more than 250 member agency programs. In the past fiscal year, the Food Bank distributed 9.7 million pounds of food. For more information about the Food Bank, please visit www.rifoodbank.org.

About The Poverty Institute

The Poverty Institute is a social policy think tank that develops and promotes policies to improve the economic security of low and modest-income Rhode Islanders, and works to ensure that tax and budget policies are equitable and adequate to fund vital public services. For more information, visit www.povertyinstitute.org.

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