

Status Report on Hunger in RI 2009: Summary

Poverty and hunger are facts of life for too many Rhode Islanders. Without the ability to afford enough food, families choose cheap, unhealthy food, cut back on meals, and go hungry. Thousands of people – many for the first time – are turning to emergency food programs for their daily meals and weekly groceries. But emergency food programs only provide temporary hunger relief and do not make up for ongoing food shortages in more than 50,000 households that are food insecure.



Emergency food is necessary but not sufficient to meet the growing need. With little evidence that the recession will end quickly, an effective response is required now from all levels of government.

President Obama and Congress wisely increased food assistance in the federal stimulus package of 2009. In the coming months, Congress will consider reauthorizing and expanding child nutrition and WIC programs. This is an opportunity to increase federal reimbursement for school meals, make it possible for afterschool programs in low-income communities to provide suppers to hungry children, and expand funding for WIC to cover all at-risk families. Rhode Island has already taken steps to raise nutrition standards for school meals and WIC. Now we can bring better nutrition to thousands of vulnerable children, improve their health outcomes and rein in future healthcare costs by maximizing participation in these programs.

As more Rhode Island families become eligible for government-sponsored nutrition programs, it is up to the state – that oversees the application process – to help these families enroll and receive benefits. Unfortunately, there are not enough eligibility workers to manage the current caseload, resulting in long delays and unfair denials. Since these nutrition programs are a major source of federal revenue for Rhode Island, enrolling every eligible household should be a key part of our strategy for economic renewal.