



# The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006  
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352  
E-mail: [info@usmayors.org](mailto:info@usmayors.org) URL: [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)

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Contact:

Rhonda Spears Bell (USCM)

202-861-6766 ([rspears@usmayors.org](mailto:rspears@usmayors.org))

Elena Temple (USCM)

202-861-6719 ([etemple@usmayors.org](mailto:etemple@usmayors.org))

Jaya Bohlmann (Sodexo, Inc.)

301-987-4550 ([jaya.bohlmann@sodexoUSA.com](mailto:jaya.bohlmann@sodexoUSA.com))

***Hunger and Homelessness Remains a Critical Issue for Families;  
Leading Causes Cited are Unemployment, Mental Illness, and Lack of Affordable Housing***

## **The U.S. Conference of Mayors – Sodexo, Inc. Release 2006 Hunger and Homelessness Survey**

**Washington, D.C.** – As emerging priorities unfold under new Congressional leadership, The U.S. Conference of Mayors and Sodexo, Inc. released today the 2006 Hunger and Homelessness Survey at a press conference at the Conference of Mayors Headquarters in Washington, D.C. Participants in the press conference included Conference of Mayors president, Trenton (NJ) Mayor Douglas H. Palmer, Des Moines (IA) Mayor T.M. Franklin Cownie, Co-Chair of the USCM Hunger and Homeless Taskforce, Charleston (SC) Mayor Joseph P. Riley, USCM Past President, Congressman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), Co-Chair of the Congressional Hunger Caucus, Rod Bond, President of Sodexo, Inc. School Services Division, and Tom Cochran, Conference of Mayors Executive Director.

For more than 20 years, The U.S. Conference of Mayors has reported on the shortage of emergency services – food, shelter, medical care, income assistance and energy assistance – in the nation’s cities. For the fourth year, Sodexo, Inc. joins The U.S. Conference of Mayors in bringing national attention to the factors that impact hunger and homelessness in metropolitan areas in the United States.

“This survey represents real people with real needs in cities all across our nation,” said U.S. Conference of Mayors President Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer. “As mayors of cities in the richest and most powerful nation in the world, we cannot simply stand by as our residents -- families with children -- continue to suffer. We have a responsibility to work together with our federal partners, as well as the private sector to turn the tide of those most in need in America.”

Highlights of the survey show that overall requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of seven percent over the last year, with 74 percent of the survey cities registering an increase. Additionally, 100 percent of the survey cities reported that families and individuals relied on emergency food assistance facilities both in emergencies and as a steady source of food over long periods of time.

Also, requests for emergency shelter assistance increased by an average of nine percent over the last year, with 68 percent of the survey cities showing an increase. This year mental illness and the lack of needed social services are considered the leading causes of homelessness by city officials.

“The results of this report shed light on a very real challenge facing this nation,” said Des Moines Mayor T.M. Franklin Cownie, Co-Chair of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. “All of us, as Americans, should ask ourselves, are we willing to confront the difficult issues of hunger and homelessness and identify the causes? To attack this problem in a coordinated manner, we cannot ignore the fact that additional funding is needed. If we are to truly change the condition of those who are chronically hungry and homeless, we must act now.”

Amid a growing debate on the federal level on the use of the term ‘hunger’, Congressman Jim McGovern (D-Mass.), Co-Chair of the Congressional Hunger Caucus has argued that to call ‘hunger’ by any other name will make it more difficult to get the political backing and action that is needed to deal with this issue.

“Hunger and homelessness are not simply part of the ‘natural order of things’. They represent inexcusable failures of political will and human imagination,” Rep. McGovern said. “All of us -- at all levels of government and throughout society -- must rededicate ourselves to addressing the needs of ALL Americans.”

For the last four years, Sodexo, Inc. has been a partner with The U.S. Conference of Mayors in bringing attention to the serious dilemma of hunger in this country. “All year, Sodexo focuses on the plight of our nation’s hungry. We are a company that shows our commitment through more than our checkbook. We are an activist company with more than 110,000 U.S. employees, and we make it our business to understand the effects of hunger and to practice hunger-reducing activities in our communities,” said Rod Bond, President of Sodexo, Inc. School Services Division.

### **The findings of the 23-city survey include:**

#### **Hunger:**

Officials in the survey cities estimate that during the past year requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of seven percent, with 74 percent of the cities registering an increase. Requests for food assistance by families with children also increased by an average of five percent. Requests for emergency food assistance by elderly persons increased by an average of 18 percent during the last year, with 74 percent of the cities reporting an increase.

On average, 23 percent of the requests for emergency food assistance are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. For families alone, 18 percent of the requests for assistance are estimated to have gone unmet. In 26 percent of the cities, emergency food assistance facilities may have to turn away people in need due to lack of resources.

Forty-eight percent of the people requesting emergency food assistance were members of families – children and their parents. Thirty-seven percent of the adults requesting food assistance were employed.

The overall level of resources available to emergency food assistance facilities increased by 13 percent during the last year in the cities registering an increase. Fifty-three percent of the survey cities reported that emergency food assistance facilities are able to provide an adequate quantity of food. However, 63 percent of the cities’ emergency food assistance facilities have had to decrease the number of bags of food provided and/or the number of times people can receive food. Of these cities, 52 percent have had to increase the limit of food provided.

Lastly, city officials cited unemployment and other employment-related problems as the leading causes of hunger. Others causes of hunger cited, in order of frequency, include high housing costs, poverty or lack of income, medical or health costs, substance abuse, utility costs, transportation costs, and the lack of education.

### **Homelessness:**

During the past year, requests for emergency shelter increased in the survey cities by an average of nine percent, with 68 percent of the cities registering an increase. Requests for shelter by homeless families alone, increased by five percent, with 59 percent of the cities reporting an increase.

An average of 23 percent of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people overall and 29 percent of the requests by homeless families alone are estimated to have gone unmet during the last year. In 86 percent of the cities, emergency shelters may have to turn away homeless families due to lack of resources; in 77 percent they may also have to turn away other homeless people.

Survey cities reported that over the last year, people remained homeless an average of eight months. Thirty-two percent of the cities said that the length of time people were homeless increased during the last year.

In 55 percent of the cities, families may have to break up in order to be sheltered. In 54 percent of the cities families may have to spend their daytime hours outside of the shelter they use at night.

City officials cited mental illness and the lack of needed services as the leading causes of homelessness. Other causes cited, in order of frequency, include lack of affordable housing, substance abuse and the lack of needed services, low-paying jobs, domestic violence, prisoner re-entry, unemployment, and poverty.

The average percentage of homeless families headed by single parents in the survey cities is 71 percent; and, on average, children represent 24 percent of the entire population in emergency shelters in the cities. Eighty-seven percent of the survey cities say that there was an increase in homeless children in the emergency shelter system.

Additionally, 95 percent of the cities have developed plans to end chronic homelessness. Twenty-five percent of those cities say that their plans have led to a reduction in the number of people living on the streets. Seventy-five percent of cities say it is too early to say what impact their plans will have on ending chronic homelessness especially with regard to cost savings spent on a chronically homeless person.

Requests for assisted housing by low-income families and individuals increased in 86 percent of the cities during the last year.

### **Outlook:**

Officials in 72 percent of the responding cities expect requests for overall emergency food assistance to increase during 2007. Ninety-five percent expect that requests for emergency food assistance by families with children will increase during 2007. Officials in 68 percent of the cities expect that requests for emergency shelter will increase next year. Seventy-five percent expect that requests by homeless families will increase in the same year.

**The 23 mayors participating in this survey are members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. They include:**

**Boston Mayor Thomas M. Menino  
 Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley, Jr.  
 Charlotte Mayor Patrick McCrory  
 Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley  
 Cleveland Mayor Frank G. Jackson  
 Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper  
 Des Moines Mayor T. M. Franklin Cownie`  
 Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick  
 Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes  
 Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa  
 Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson  
 Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz**

**Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell  
 Norfolk Mayor Paul D. Fraim  
 Philadelphia Mayor John F. Street  
 Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon  
 Portland Mayor Tom Potter  
 Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson  
 San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom  
 Santa Monica Mayor Robert Holbrook  
 Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels  
 St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman  
 Trenton Mayor Douglas H. Palmer**

**The complete survey can be downloaded at The U.S. Conference of Mayors website at  
[www.usmayors.org](http://www.usmayors.org).**

*The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. The primary roles of the Conference of Mayors are to promote the development of effective national urban/suburban policy; strengthen federal-city relationships; ensure that federal policy meets urban needs; provide mayors with leadership and management tools; and create a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. More information about the Conference is available at [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org).*



*Sodexo, Inc. ( [www.SodexoUSA.com](http://www.SodexoUSA.com)) is the leading provider of integrated food and facilities management in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, with \$6.7 billion in annual revenue and 125,000+ employees. Sodexo offers innovative outsourcing solutions in food service, housekeeping, groundskeeping, plant operations and maintenance, asset management, and laundry services to more than 6,000 corporations, health care, long term care and retirement centers, schools, college campuses, government and remote sites throughout North America. Headquartered in Gaithersburg, Md., Sodexo proudly serves as the official food service provider for the U.S. Marine Corps.*

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