



NEWS The United States Conference of Mayors

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U.S. CITIES SEE SHARP INCREASES IN THE NEED FOR FOOD ASSISTANCE; DECREASES IN INDIVIDUAL HOMELESSNESS

Mayors Issue Annual Report on Hunger, Homelessness in Cities

Washington, D.C. – In the last year, U.S. cities have seen the sharpest increase in the demand for hunger assistance since 1991, an increase in family homelessness and a decrease or leveling in individual homelessness, according to a U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) report on the status of Hunger and Homelessness in 27 cities in America (listed below) that was released today at a press conference at the USCM headquarters in Washington, D.C..

For more than 23 years, The Conference of Mayors has documented the magnitude of the issues of hunger and homelessness in our nation's cities, as well as efforts cities are making to address these challenges.

"At this time of historic economic crisis, the issues of hunger and homelessness in America are more prevalent than ever. Cities are the front lines where these effects are felt first, which is why mayors have been proactive in implementing local initiatives in their communities to take care of our most vulnerable residents," said Sacramento (CA) Mayor Kevin Johnson who serves on the USCM Hunger and Homelessness Task Force and participated in the press conference.

The mayors' report shows that on average, the need for emergency food assistance increased by 26 percent from last year. Cities also reported an increase in food requests from middle class households that used to donate to food pantries, as well as an increase in the frequency of repeat requests from those needing help. When asked to report on the three main causes of hunger, respondents cited unemployment, housing costs and low wages respectively.

To combat hunger, many cities have instituted programs to address the challenge over the long term. Examples of successful initiatives include gleaning food that would otherwise go to waste to supply food banks; programs that serve children during the summer and on weekends when they are not receiving subsidized meals at school; food banks offering greater diversity of foods to serve a diverse cultural-client base; and food pantries that help recipients to determine their eligibility for food stamps. When looking to 2010, cities anticipate having a difficult time meeting the high demand for food assistance in the future because of high unemployment and high costs of living, in addition to the impact of state and local budget cuts.

Gastonia (NC) Mayor Jennifer Stultz, who Co-Chairs the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness and who presented the hunger data said, "Although 87% of our nation's wealth is generated in our nation's cities, hunger and homelessness persist in most of our country's cities urban centers. Even working families are increasingly at risk for hunger and homelessness as a result of the crippled economy and rising unemployment and foreclosures. As mayors, it is our responsibility to ensure that those most in need in America are the people we put first."

In the area of homelessness, nineteen cities (76 percent), reported an increase in family homelessness, while homelessness among individuals decreased or stayed the same for 16 of the 25 cities (64 percent). Most of the cities that experienced drops in individual homelessness attribute the decline to a policy strategy by federal, state and local governments of instituting 10-year plans to end chronic homelessness among single adults. Not surprisingly, the recession and a lack of affordable housing were cited as the top causes of family homelessness in the surveyed cities.

"This report highlights the complex, interrelated factors that contribute to homelessness," said Mayor Johnson, who has launched Sacramento Steps Forward, a major program to combat homelessness in his city. "We must deal with these

issues collectively to make sustainable impact because communities cannot handle these challenges alone. We need all levels of government, as well as the private sector, to partner with us and empower our most vulnerable citizens.”

This year’s survey takes into account several programs which provide additional funding to fight hunger and homelessness through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). Those programs include: The Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), the Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP) and The Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), and the Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP).

According to the survey, cities are using funding from the HPRP to develop central intake systems for homeless services, coordinate services more closely with surrounding areas, or offer homeless prevention assistance for the first time. Of note, eighteen cities reported that the HPRP will ‘fundamentally change the way [their] community provides services to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.’ The stimulus package was also a key factor in the increase in the amount of food distributed over the past year. Three quarters (76 percent) of surveyed cities received additional funding for the EFSP through the Recovery Act, and 55 percent of the cities received TEFAP funding through their states enabling the purchase of additional commodities to serve people in need of food assistance.

U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, who also attended the press conference, spoke about the report findings, “Our nation’s mayors are on the front lines in the battle against hunger and homelessness. President Obama and I join the U.S. Conference of Mayors in recognizing that we must change the conventional way we address homelessness in this country. The Recovery Act’s \$1.5 billion *Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program* will help communities move away from simply reacting to homelessness toward a strategy of preventing it from occurring in the first place. It is extremely encouraging to see the significant assistance the Recovery Act is playing in feeding and housing those in need and in improving services.” Donovan also serves as Chair of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Prepared by Abt Associates, the report contains individual profiles for each city in the survey including the median household income, the unemployment rate, the foreclosure rate, the percentage of people in the city who fall below in the poverty line and contact information for service providers. The report is based on data collected from The U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Information Questionnaire, completed by cities that reported on persons receiving food and shelter services over a one-year period from October 2008 to September 2009. A copy of the report and survey questionnaire can be downloaded at The Conference of Mayors website at www.usmayors.org.

The 27 participating cities in this survey are members of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness and include the following:

Boston, MA
Charleston, SC
Charlotte, NC
Chicago, IL
Cleveland, OH
Dallas, TX
Denver, CO
Des Moines, IA
Detroit, MI
Gastonia, NC

Kansas City, MO
Los Angeles, CA
Louisville, KY
Miami, FL
Minneapolis, MN
Nashville, TN
Norfolk, VA
Philadelphia, PA
Phoenix, AZ
Portland, OR

Providence, RI
Sacramento, CA
Salt Lake City, UT
San Francisco, CA
Seattle, WA
St. Paul, MN
Trenton, NJ

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 represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the Mayor.