



The United States Conference of Mayors

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JOBLESSNESS LEADS TO MORE HUNGRY & HOMELESS FAMILIES IN U.S. CITIES

Mayors Issue Annual Report Including 29 Major Cities; Highlight Local Responses

Washington, D.C. – In the midst of a struggling economy and continuing high levels of unemployment, U.S. cities are feeling the pressure from increased numbers of hungry and homeless families according to a U.S. Conference of Mayors (USCM) report on the status of Hunger and Homelessness in 29 cities in America (below) that was released today by the U.S. Conference of Mayors on a news conference call.

For nearly three decades, The Conference of Mayors has documented the magnitude of the issues of hunger and homelessness in the nation's cities, examining key indicators of the problems and describing efforts cities are making to address these challenges.

"Mayors have always grappled with social issues and their economic consequences, but now these issues are more pronounced than ever because of the weak national economy. As mayors, we are responsible for caring for our residents who are struggling to make ends meet and will continue to do so, even as resources for local programs are slashed in Congress," said Asheville, NC Mayor Terry Bellamy who co-chairs the USCM Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness.

According to report findings, all but four of the survey cities noted that requests for emergency food assistance increased over the past year by an average of 15 percent. And among those requesting food assistance, cities noted that even those with jobs are going hungry -- 51 percent of those requesting assistance were families, 26 percent were employed, 19 percent were elderly and 11 percent were homeless.

With joblessness in many cities reaching double-digits, unemployment was cited by the survey cities as the main cause of hunger, followed by poverty, low wages and high housing costs.

Increasing demand and decreasing resources were most frequently found as the biggest challenge to addressing hunger. In an attempt to meet the need, emergency kitchens had to reduce the quantity of food people could receive or the amount of food offered per meal in 86 percent of the survey cities; and food pantries had to limit the number of times people could visit each month in 68 percent of the survey cities. Even with such efforts, 82 percent of the cities reported having to turn people away because of lack of resources.

When asked for suggestions to reduce hunger in America's cities, respondents said that providing more affordable housing, increasing food stamp benefits and expanding employment-training programs would be viable solutions.

Cities also highlighted several programs currently in place to feed those in need. Some best practices include an urban gardening project in *Kansas City*, which serves as a source for fruits and vegetables for children and focuses on the 10 most requested items such as: non-sweet cereal, vegetables, canned tuna, and fruit; a program in *Asheville* that specifically serves hungry and homeless veterans through a community ministry; a partnership between the *Los Angeles* County Department of Public Social Services and the local food bank's CalFresh program that shares information to identify potential clients and helps them through the application process; and a partnership between the SHARE Food Program and the Horticultural Society in *Philadelphia* to match food cupboards with local gardeners to help them provide locally-grown fresh produce at significantly reduced rates. The report contains a full listing of best practices.

In the area of homelessness, 42 percent of the cities reported an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness by an average of seven percent. Among families, the number experiencing homelessness increased by an average of 15 percent with 58 percent of the survey cities reporting an increase.

Once again, unemployment led the list of causes of homeless families. This was followed by lack of affordable housing and by poverty. Unemployment also led the list of causes of homelessness among individuals, followed by lack of affordable housing, mental illness and lack of needed services, and substance abuse and lack of needed services.

When asked for suggestions to combat homelessness, respondents called for providing more mainstream assisted housing, rather than shelters. They also called for more permanent housing for people with disabilities and more or better-paying employment opportunities.

As with hunger, the lack of resources is a critical problem. Because no beds were available, emergency shelters in two-thirds of the survey cities reported turning away homeless families with children; shelters in 70 percent of the cities reported turning away unaccompanied individuals. In considering the outlook for next year, officials were not optimistic: those in 64 percent of the surveyed cities expect the number of homeless families to increase, and those in 55 percent of the cities expect the number of homeless individuals to increase. And while officials expect number of homeless people to grow, no survey city expects the resources to provide emergency shelter to increase over the next year.

Kansas City, MO Mayor Sly James, who also co-chairs the USCM Hunger and Homelessness Task Force and participated in the press conference call said, "This long, deep recession has profoundly affected our citizens that have the very least. In this season of giving, our report once again shows how very great the need is in cities across the nation. Families, who once lived in middle class homes, now find themselves without a roof over their heads. Young and old, black and white, educated, and not all are finding themselves in cold lines at missions, many for the first time in their lives. At the municipal level, as they are nationally, our needs are increasing while our resources continue to decrease. In our community, we have instituted a Homelessness Task Force that works across state and county lines in both Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri to find collaborative and broad-based solutions to this complex problem. We are focused on a "housing first" solution, because all of our social services stem from finding a place to live. I hope this report can serve as a call to once again remember our duty to serve those who have nothing, feed the hungry, and shelter the poor."

USCM CEO and Executive Director Tom Cochran explained why the organization conducts the survey annually: "This report brings national attention to the issues of hunger and homelessness in this country and helps to direct resources where they are needed. As local governments are struggling with lower tax bases and dwindling budgets, the Conference of Mayors will continue to document the need for emergency services in cities across America as a service to our membership and the families in their communities."

Speaking of the diminishing resources, Anthony Love, Deputy Director for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness added, "Despite limited resources and a stubborn unemployment rate, cities are finding more innovative and collaborative ways to deal with the homelessness problem."

Prepared by City Policy Associates, the report contains individual profiles for each city in the survey including the median household income, the metro unemployment rate, the monthly foreclosure rate, the percentage of people in the city who fall below in the poverty line and contact information for specific service providers. The report is based on data collected from The U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homelessness Information Questionnaire, completed by the cities generally for the one-year period from September 1, 2010 to August 31, 2011. A copy of the report, which contains the survey questionnaire can be downloaded at The Conference of Mayors website at www.usmayors.org. An audio file of the press conference call will be available at www.usmayors.org on Friday, December 16.

The 29 cities in this survey, whose mayors are members of The U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness are:

Asheville, NC
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
Minneapolis, MN
Nashville, TN
Norfolk, VA
Philadelphia, PA
Phoenix, AZ
Portland, OR

Providence, RI
St. Paul, MN
Sacramento, CA
Salt Lake City, UT
San Antonio, TX
San Francisco, CA
Seattle, WA
Trenton, NJ
Washington, D.C.

