

9.5 Percent of Maryland Households Living on the Edge of Hunger

Washington, D.C. – November 14, 2007 – Maryland households continue to face a constant struggle against hunger, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) annual report on food insecurity. The latest data in that report (using three-year averages for states) show that from 2004-06, 9.5 percent of Marylanders lived in households that were considered to be food insecure.

Nationally, more than 35.5 million people lived in households considered to be food insecure. "As costs for food, energy, and housing continue to rise and wages stagnate, households are increasingly strapped. Millions have difficulty affording a healthy and adequate diet, and find themselves in a constant struggle against hunger," said Jim Weill, president of the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). "We need to do more to make sure that households have access to healthy food by improving and expanding programs that help."

There is a wide range of available federally-funded nutrition programs – food stamps, school breakfast and lunch, child care food, WIC, and summer and afterschool food – that could have a significant impact on the hunger problem in Maryland. Unfortunately, Maryland participation rates are too low – often lagging the national average. For example:

- Only 43 low-income children in Maryland receive free or reduced-price school breakfast for every 100 eating school lunch. In Baltimore City schools, just 39 percent of eligible low-income students eat breakfast; and
- Maryland's food stamp participation rate is 55 percent, lagging behind the national average of 65 percent.

"We need more Marylanders to be connected to these programs," said Weill. "That's why FRAC is launching a concentrated effort to work on behalf of low-income Marylanders, improve the availability of nutrition programs, and make sure needy, eligible Maryland residents are aware of programs that can help them and their children access three healthy meals a day."

Maryland Hunger Solutions, a new initiative of the Food Research and Action Center, will work to get tens of thousands more Marylanders, especially children, enrolled in available federal food programs. The program will be modeled after FRAC's successful District of Columbia initiative – D.C. Hunger Solutions.

"The latest food insecurity numbers highlight the need for much greater efforts to make sure that Maryland reduces access barriers, pulls down the tens of millions in available nutrition dollars it is forgoing, and thereby acts to reduce hunger in our state," said Kimberley Chin, who will serve as the director of the new Maryland initiative. "A hunger-free Maryland is an attainable goal."

Among the 9.5 percent of Maryland households considered to be food insecure, 3.9 percent were living in households that were considered to have "very low food security." People that fall into this USDA category had more severe problems experiencing hunger and cutting back or skipping meals on a more frequent basis for both adults and children.

Each year, the Census Bureau measures food insecurity through a series of household survey questions about the ability to obtain enough food for an active, healthy life for all members. USDA produces the analysis of the Census data. To report food insecurity in each state, USDA uses three-year averages to compensate for limited sample sizes and give a better estimate of the number of households experiencing hunger. In 2001-2003, 7.7 percent of people in households in Maryland were considered to be food insecure.