



May 2010 Legislative News: The latest in legislative news concerning hunger and nutrition issues

Senate Budget Committee Passes Budget Resolution

The Senate Budget Committee approved the FY 2011 Senate Budget Resolution last month. The Budget Resolution sets the aggregate funding level which is then divided up to individual committees where they appropriate funding for the federal programs that fall under their jurisdiction. The Senate Budget Resolution provides \$1.124 trillion to fund discretionary programs-\$4 billion less than the President's proposal. The Budget also proposes to freeze funding for all "non-security" discretionary programs overall for the next three years-this includes funding for WIC, TEFAP, child nutrition programs, and other human needs programs such as housing and education. While individual program funding may fluctuate, the total spending will remain the same overall.

Next steps: the entire Senate must approve the Budget Resolution and the House of Representatives will have to create their Budget Resolution to move the process forward before the new fiscal year begins on October 1, 2010.

New Child Hunger Bill Introduced

A new federal bill introduced in the House and Senate aims to add funding for programs that feed children on the weekends and during school holidays to help alleviate the loss of access to school meals. The "Weekends Without Hunger Bill" (H.R. 5012/S. 3293) proposes \$10 million in new funding to provide government commodities to eligible institutions (schools, emergency food providers) to provide nutritious foods to at-risk children on weekends and during extended school breaks during the school year. Intended as a five-year pilot program, the funding will not be taken from current TEFAP funding but will be allocated as a new source. Advocates in support of this bill should contact their federal Congressman and Senators and ask them to cosponsor this legislation to build congressional support. For more information on the bill, visit www.thomas.gov.

Obama Announces New Tool to Measure Poverty

Recently the Obama Administration announced the development of a new way to measure poverty to gain a more accurate understanding of both the expenses and income sources of the poor. Expected to be released in Fall 2011 in conjunction with the current poverty measurement, this new tool is designed to be an experimental research tool and is

not intended to replace the current method or to determine eligibility for any means-tested programs.

The poverty measure currently in use was created in the 1960s based on the Economy Food Plan (today's Thrifty Food Plan) which is a measure of a minimally adequate food budget. It was created based on the fact that food expenditures represented about one third of the after-tax income of the typical family at that time, so the food plan amount was multiplied by three to establish the poverty threshold. Poverty thresholds have mainly only been adjusted for inflation ever since. This is an issue because the cost of food only represents approximately one-seventh of total household expenditures according to the Consumer Price Index currently. Other requisite household expenses such as housing, child care, and medical costs have concurrently risen dramatically. The current measure also does not vary geographically to account for different regional expenses. Finally, the current measure counts particular sources but not all types of income. For example, noncash benefits such as food stamps, other nutrition assistance benefits, heating assistance, housing subsidies and refundable tax credits are not counted. This is important because not including food stamp benefits or refundable tax credits make it impossible to show whether recent increases in these benefits and policies have had any effect on alleviating poverty.

The new Supplemental Poverty Measure is derived from recommendations made by the National Academy of Sciences fifteen years ago. It will establish a poverty threshold by calculating the modern day costs of food, shelter, clothing and utilities. Costs will take into account regional variation and will show housing cost differences for those who rent, own their homes, and those who own with a mortgage. Expenditures will be averaged for over 5 years and multiplied by 1.2 (to account for other expenses beyond basic necessities) and then adjusted for household size. The threshold will be set at the 33rd percentile-demonstrating that two-thirds of Americans spend more than the estimated figure on these necessities. Those who spend less will be considered poor.

This new tool will measure additional income sources such as food stamp benefits, refundable tax credits, child support and work expenses (transportation and child care). This new tool will be beneficial to collect a more accurate picture of people in poverty while also creating a measurement to examine the effectiveness of anti-poverty initiatives.

For more information, visit the Census Bureau's Background Paper at:
http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/povmeas/SPM_TWGObservations.pdf

New Unemployment Numbers

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the official unemployment rate increased slightly to 9.9 percent in April 2010. However when factoring people working part-time for economic reasons or too discouraged to look for work are included, the rate of unemployment and underemployment increases to 17.1 percent. To view the report visit:
<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm>

Another Record Month for SNAP/Food Stamps Participation

A record 39,693,919 people received SNAP/Food Stamps in February 2010, an increase of 7.1 million people compared with February 2009. It is also an increase of 262,929 individuals from January 2010. Currently one in eight people are receiving food stamp benefits. With New York State having 2,712,437 people receiving benefits, 13.9% of our population are enrolled in the program. USDA estimates that by September 2010, food stamps benefits will go to an average of 40.5 million people and an average of 43.3 million by September 2011. For more information, visit:
http://www.frac.org/html/news/fsp/2010.02_FSP.htm.

New Resource on Farmers Markets

A new website by the Farmers Market Federation of New York aims to educate low-income families on improved access to fresh fruits and vegetables by using their food stamp benefits at local farmers markets. www.snaptomarket.com outlines the token program used by participating markets where terminals are available to allow participants to exchange their food stamp benefits for wooden tokens that can be used throughout the farmers market. The site also features recipes, seasonality charts, produce storage and cleaning tips, and a virtual market to allow food stamp recipients to find the market closest to them. The New York Farmers Market Federation counts 135 markets that accept food stamp benefits-a 53% increase over the number of participating markets in 2008. For more information, visit the new website at www.snaptomarket.com.

If you have any questions or would like to submit a story for next month, please email bslater@foodbankcny.org

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