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New Survey Finds that Food Hardship has Dropped in Pennsylvania's First Congressional District Though Much Work to Reduce Hunger and Poverty Remains

Philadelphia – February 28 – In 2011, 26.5 percent of respondents in Pennsylvania's First Congressional District reported not having enough money to buy food that they or their family needed during the prior twelve months, according to a new report released by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC). This represents a reduction in food hardship by nearly 10 percentage points since 2009.

This unique report provides data on food hardship – the inability to afford enough food – for every region, every state, every Congressional District and 100 of the country's largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). The data was gathered as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index project, which has been interviewing almost 1,000 households daily since January 2008. FRAC has analyzed responses to the question: "Have there been times in the past twelve months when you did not have enough money to buy food that you or your family needed?"

For Philadelphia, the report found that:

- For the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington MSA, the food hardship rate was 16.1 percent in 2010-2011.
- In 2011, two out of Philadelphia's five Congressional districts had 21 percent or more of their residents reporting food hardship.
- 10 out of the 19 Congressional Districts in Pennsylvania had 15 percent or more of their residents reporting food hardship in 2010-2011.

Though hunger persists as major issue for thousands of Philadelphians, it is notable that Philadelphia's food hardship rates have improved over the past 2 years. In 2009, PA's First Congressional District, represented by Congressman Bob Brady, had the second highest rate of food hardship in the nation, reporting 36.1 percent of all households in the district struggled to afford food. In 2011, Brady's district is reporting food hardship rates at 26.5 percent, now ranking 27th nationally for this issue.

Since FRAC's 2009 Food Hardship Report sounded alarms in Philadelphia, Representative Brady, Mayor Nutter, as well as public and private organizations across the region have re-committed themselves to addressing Philadelphia's hunger crisis. The Center for Hunger-Free Communities applauds these commitments and is cautiously optimistic about the improved food hardship rates.

Though these rates represent a significant improvement, Philadelphia still has a very long way to go. Our First Congressional District remains in the top thirty districts in the nation for food hardship. Furthermore, 15 percent of all Pennsylvania households cannot afford enough food for their families and 1 in 6 households nationwide reported food insecurity.

"Rising food prices, continuing high unemployment and underemployment, and flat food stamp benefit allotments all contributed to the high food hardship rate in 2011," said FRAC President Jim Weill. "Particularly challenging was the increase in food inflation, especially for the foods the government uses to construct the Thrifty Food Plan, its cheapest diet. Food stamp beneficiaries lost more than six percent of their food purchasing power because of this increase."

This week, the Center for Hunger-Free Communities was in Washington, D.C. for the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference sponsored by FRAC and Feeding America. With more than 700 attendees, the conference culminated on Tuesday (February 28, 2012) with a day on Capitol Hill, and attendees shared state and congressional district data with their lawmakers. The Center joined in urging Members of Congress to strengthen the federal nutrition programs to ensure that benefits are more adequate and reach more needy households.

The full report is available at www.frac.org

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About This Report

This report is the latest in the Food Research and Action Center's (FRAC) series of analyses of survey data on food hardship collected by Gallup as part of the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index. It provides the most up-to-date examination of the struggle that very large numbers of American households are having affording enough food.