

# *Hunger Growing In New York City:*

## *Barriers To Help Persist*



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January 2, 2006

## Executive Summary

Hunger is a growing problem in New York City. However, the City's Food Stamp program resources--the country's most successful federal program to address hunger--are woefully underused.

Data released by New York City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) reveals that the number of meals served in New York City's pantries and soup kitchens grew by 24% between July and October 2005. And while more than a million people received Food Stamp assistance, an additional 600,000 New Yorkers – eligible to receive benefits from the federally-financed program – remain unenrolled. HRA's failure to enroll those eligible costs the City an estimated \$739 million last year in federal funding.

Why were these federal funds left on the table? Because the City has constructed bureaucratic barriers that contribute to its failure to enroll all eligible participants. This year, more than 600,000 New Yorkers were left behind. For example, the City often refuses to allow applicants who work during the day to conduct enrollment interviews over the phone – rather than in person. Moreover, approximately 8% of New York City applications for Food Stamp benefits are not processed by the Human Resources Administration within 30 days of submission, as required by federal law.

I plan to introduce legislation in Washington to require state and local governments to break down the barriers that prevent hundreds thousands of New Yorkers from receiving the benefits to which they are entitled.

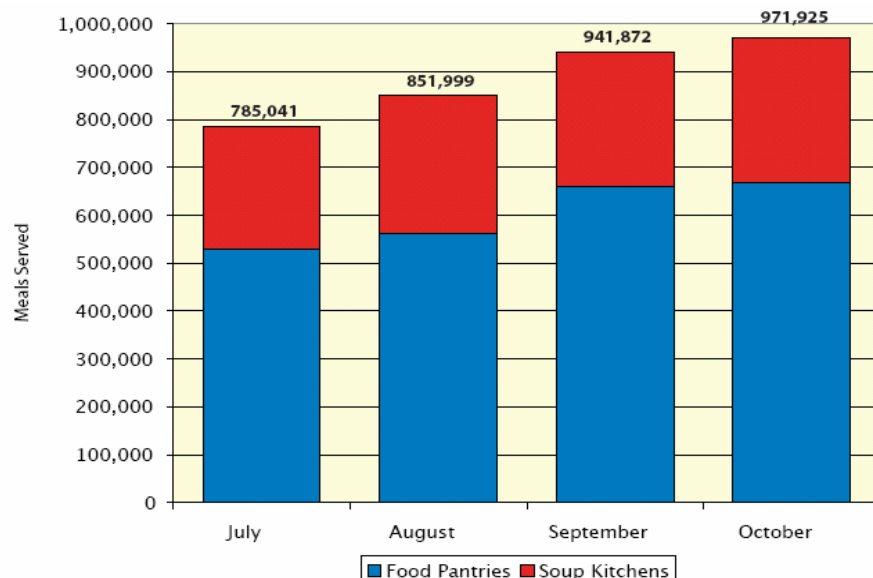
## Findings

### ***Finding #1: The Number of Meals Served at Food Pantries and Kitchens Spiked at the End of 2005***

The number of meals served in city food pantries and soup kitchens is on the rise. The 3,550,837 meals served between July and October of this year represents an 8% increase over the same 4-month period as last year--almost 264,000 more meals served.

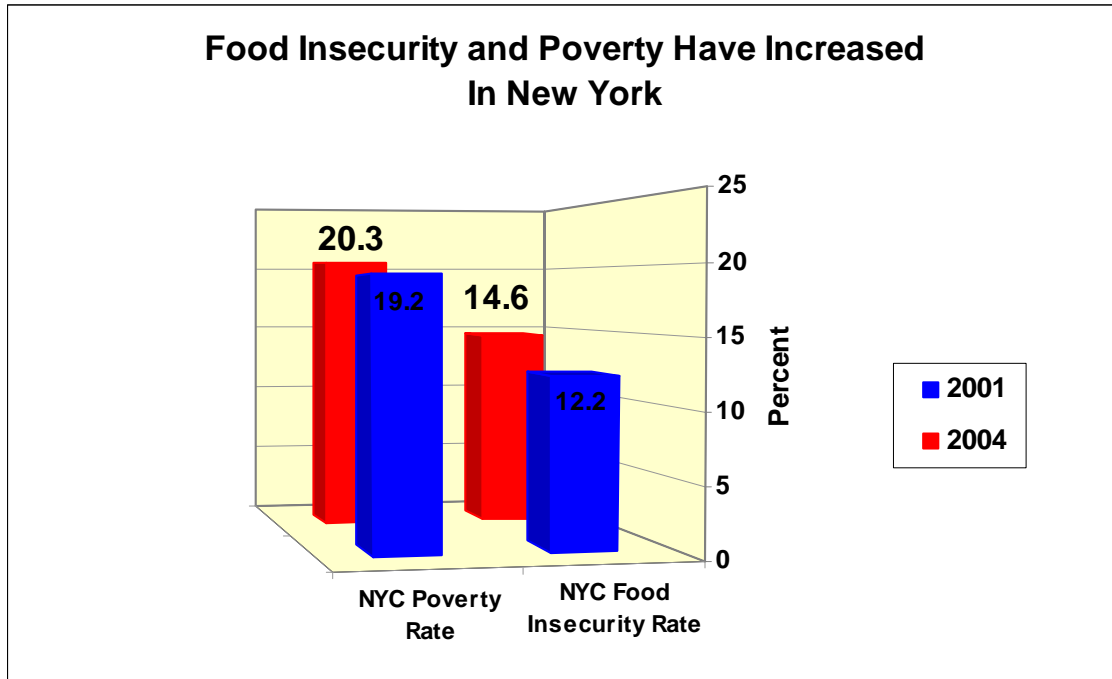
Data recently released by the city's Human Resources Administration revealed that activity at local soup kitchens reached a six month high of 303,903 meals served in October 2005, with 26% of the increase occurring over the last four months. The 668,022 meals served by local food pantries in October 2005 represented the highest levels since November 2004, a 16.3% increase since the end of last year.

**Meals Served by New York City Soup Kitchens and Food Pantries, July-October 2005**

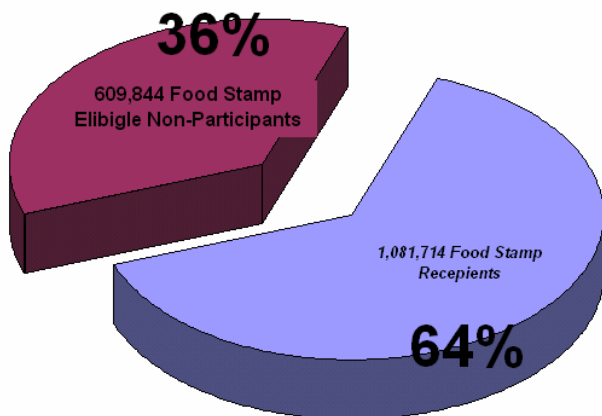


**Finding #2: Hunger and poverty are growing in New York City.**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and U.S. Census Bureau report that rates of food insecurity and poverty have both increased significantly since 2001.



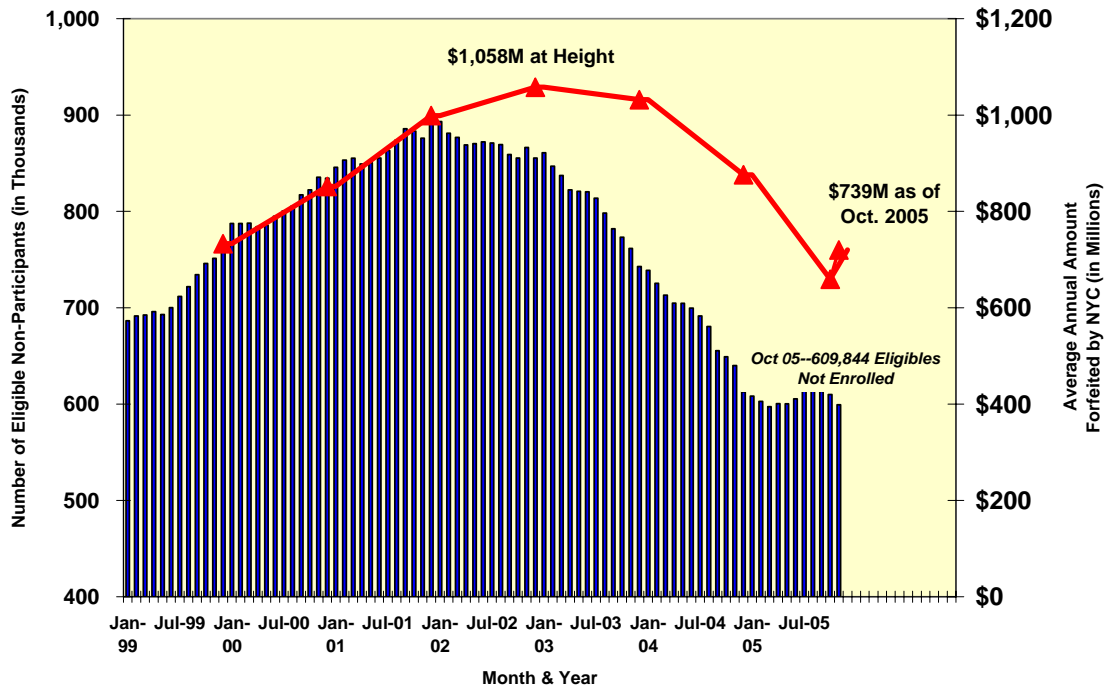
The US Department of Agriculture defines "Food Insecure" as "[not] having access, at all times, to enough food for an active health life" and "uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food to meet [their] needs because they had insufficient money or other resources."



**Finding #3: New York City forfeits hundreds of millions of dollars in federal Food Stamp assistance annually because bureaucratic and administrative barriers make it difficult for residents of New York City to enroll in the Food Stamp Program.**

New York City forfeits an estimated \$739 million in federal Food Stamp assistance annually because the City has not enrolled an estimated 609,844 persons eligible for the Food Stamp Program as of October 2005.

Millions in Federal Food Stamp Funds Forfeited



## Solutions

Congressman Weiner will introduce legislation to ensure that state and local governments enroll all eligible Food Stamp recipients in the program. Specifically, his legislation will:

1. **Create a “Right” to a Phone Interview.** Currently, HRA uses its discretion to deny applicants the opportunity to conduct the federally-required interview over the phone – as opposed to in-person at an HRA office. The burden of establishing that an applicant has sufficient “hardship” to warrant a phone interview is placed on the applicant. The Weiner bill will shift that burden onto HRA, requiring them to establish why an applicant should *not* be eligible for a phone interview.
2. **Expand Enrollment Hours.** Currently, HRA offices are open from 8:30am to 5pm during the week, though four of the 20 offices are open until 6:00 and on Saturdays. The Weiner bill will require HRA to stay open from 7am to 9pm to better accommodate working applicants.
3. **Provide an Easy-to-Read Checklist of Required Forms.** Often, applicants arrive at HRA offices without the proper paperwork, requiring them to return again and again with more documentation. The Weiner bill will require HRA to provide a comprehensive list so that applicants do not arrive empty-handed.
4. **Establish a Grant Program for Non-Profit and Faith-Based Groups for Community Outreach and Enrollment.** Local groups are currently prevented from enrolling applicants in the Food Stamps program. The Weiner bill will establish a public-private grant program to train employees of local hunger advocacy and religious groups to do community outreach and enrollment.
5. **Require HRA to Track the Convenience of the Application Process.** The Weiner bill will require HRA to monitor the application process, and report back on whether applicants are easily able to enroll. Furthermore, will empower the U.S. Department of Agriculture to sanction offices that fail to be applicant-friendly.

## **Conclusion**

Hunger is a serious problem in New York City. Bureaucratic barriers are preventing hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers from enrolling in the Food Stamp program, costing New York City hundreds of millions of available federal dollars.

### **Methodology**

#### *Finding #1:*

- Information detailing activities of local food pantries and soup kitchens supplemented in part by New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) compiled by New York City Coalition Against Hunger from HRA data

#### *Finding #2:*

- New York State food insecurity and hunger data provided by the US Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service
- New York City poverty data provided by the US Census Bureau 2004 American Community Survey
- New York City food insecurity data provided by the New York City Coalition Against Hunger

#### *Finding #3:*

- Information regarding estimated number of Food Stamp eligible non-participants in New York City provided by FoodChange
- Calculations of estimated federal Food Stamp Program funding forfeited by New York City due to under-enrollment completed by Office of Congressman Anthony Weiner based on data compiled by FoodChange and the Human Resources Administration. Should be interpreted as: based on the number of Food Stamp eligible non-participants for any given month and the average Food Stamp allotment for that month, the City of New York would forfeit “x” amount in federal Food Stamp funding due to under-enrollment of eligible non-participants over the next 12 months.