

A State of Hunger

Improving
Washington's
Food Stamp Program



Northwest
Federation of
Community
Organizations



Washington Citizen Action
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By John Galfione

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Table of Contents

Introduction	page 4
Background	page 5
Low-income families in Washington do not have access to nutritious, adequate food	page 6
Policy options to improve the Food Stamp Program and eliminate hunger	page 8
Inexpensive policy options	page 9
Conclusion	page 16
Update	page 17
Endnotes	page 18

Introduction

Low-income families in Washington are facing a serious health problem: hunger. As a result of stagnant wages and a high cost of living, many families cannot afford adequate, nutritious food. Children are going to school hungry, unable to pay attention to anything except their empty stomachs. Parents are going to work malnourished, finding it difficult to be productive and hold a job. At the end of the day, both come home to a table of empty plates and a pantry of empty shelves. For these nearly 100,000 families,¹ alleviating hunger is a top priority.

While the pain of hunger can be unbearable, it is often the tip of the iceberg. Hunger and insufficient nutrition lead to immediate and long-term health problems, especially among children.² Hungry children suffer two to four times as many health problems as non-hungry children, including headaches, unwanted weight loss, fatigue, and irritability. They also have increased behavioral problems and do not achieve as highly in school.³ Moreover, a lack of proper nutrition weakens immune systems and increases the risk of chronic diseases.⁴

In the summer of 2001, Washington Citizen Action (WCA) and the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (NWFCO) surveyed over 100 low-income families about their experiences with hunger.⁵ The surveys found that many families experienced hunger as well as barriers to obtaining food assistance:

- 77 percent of adults and 44 percent of children reported having skipped a meal or eaten less than they wanted to because of a lack of food.
- 51 percent of adults and 22 percent of children reported having not eaten for an entire day because they did not have any food.
- A household's utility costs rose as much as 68 percent over the last year.
- 76 percent of adults reported not having enough money to buy sufficient food.
- Repeat trips to the office, inaccessible office hours, complicated paperwork, and transportation problems were all barriers to obtaining food stamps.

This report shows that, for a number of reasons beyond their control, many low-income families in Washington do not have access to nutritious, adequate food. The report relies on data collected from the surveyed individuals as well as government sources.

In addition, the report will focus on how Washington can reduce hunger and food insecurity by strengthening the Food Stamp Program. It will analyze barriers that survey participants faced when applying for food stamps and supply tested solutions to these barriers. It will also examine ways the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services can expand food stamp coverage to otherwise ineligible, hungry families.

Background

In 2001, the United States was hit with an economic recession. As the economy declined, businesses were forced to lay off more and more workers. Unemployment rose dramatically and finding a job became increasingly difficult.

Washington state was hit especially hard. Over the last year, Washington recorded a 2.5 percent decrease in employment, the highest rate among all states.⁶ Large companies like Boeing reduced their payrolls by the thousands, leaving employees with bills to pay and no income to pay them with. For the first time in five years the demand for public assistance increased,⁷ as many families had nowhere else to turn for help.

Regardless of economic conditions, most families experience financial difficulties at one time or another. During these times, families must stretch their incomes to meet their basic needs, such as food, housing, clothing, and health. Fortunately, when families cannot afford these needs, a safety net exists for them to fall back on.

The safety net in the U.S. assumes many forms. However, only one program is designed to help individuals meet their nutritional needs regardless of age, ability, and familial status: the Food Stamp Program.

The Food Stamp Program, based on a depression-era thrifty food plan program, was created in 1977. Federally funded and state run, the program was designed to help low-income households meet their nutritional needs. Every month, the Food Stamp Program allows 17.3 million⁸ people to eat healthier and more sufficiently than they otherwise could.



Rose Lucksinger, Tukwila, WA

In December 2001, after five years in the airline industry, I was laid off from Boeing. I am receiving unemployment right now (\$123/week after taxes), but after paying my rent, utilities, phone, and health insurance, my entire unemployment pension is gone.

I applied for food stamps and was able to receive \$94 per month in food assistance. Without food stamps, I don't know if I could survive. They help me get food for several weeks out of every month.

I want to find employment and I've been looking for a job for five months now through Work Source. I am on the call-up list at Boeing too, but have little faith that will ever happen.

To be eligible for food stamps, households must meet income and resource requirements that determine their need for food assistance. Although the federal government sets the requirements, states can expand eligibility beyond these limits. To be eligible in Washington, a three-person household must have less than \$2,000 in countable resources and a monthly income under \$1,533.⁹

Fortunately, the state does not spend a dime on food stamp benefits no matter how many people are enrolled in the program. The only fee that Washington pays is 50 percent of administrative costs. The federal government takes care of the rest. This provides states with a high financial incentive to enroll all eligible households in the program.

Despite the strong and simple foundation of the Food Stamp Program, food stamps are only as effective as policy makers allow them to be. Legislators and other public officials determine who is eligible for food stamps, how accessible benefits are, and how high the benefit level is; all of which affect hunger levels in the United States. With a few minor changes, thousands of families in Washington could lead healthier and happier lives.

In 1996, Congress declared legal immigrants ineligible for food stamp benefits. To change this law, WCA and NWFCO successfully lead the National Food Security Campaign. After more than a year of work, the campaign realized its main goal of restoring food stamp eligibility to legal immigrants. Although this is a major improvement, more work needs to be done at the state level.

Low-income families in Washington do not have access to nutritious, adequate food

Food insecurity is defined by a lack of consistent and reliable access to nutritious food. In 1999, the United States government reported that 11.9¹⁰ percent of Washington residents are food insecure, 4.6¹¹ percent being food insecure with hunger.¹² Attempting to address this problem, the U.S. Conference of Mayors surveyed 27 American cities about their experiences with hunger.¹³ The 2001 survey found that in Seattle, hunger was not only widespread, but increasing. Demands for emergency food assistance had risen since 2000 and emergency food assistance providers were unable to keep up with these demands. The survey cited several causes of hunger in the Seattle area: low-wages, high unemployment, and rising housing and energy costs.

Washington's economy does not provide living wage jobs

A living wage is a wage that provides all basic necessities without the use of public assistance. A living wage job is the most important element of escaping hunger. Unfortunately, finding a job, especially a living wage job, is difficult in Washington.

At 7.1 percent,¹⁴ Washington has the second highest unemployment rate in the nation. This number, while high, does not tell the full story. Many of the jobs that Washington offers are not living wage jobs. In 2000, the University of Washington School of Public Policy and NWFCO undertook a countywide survey to determine labor market conditions in Washington.¹⁵ The survey found that:

- A living wage for a single adult was \$10.65 per hour and \$17.52 per hour for a family of three.
- Only 28 percent of available jobs in Washington pay a living wage for a family of three.
- For every job that pays a living wage for an adult with two children, there are seven job seekers.

Unless more jobs in Washington begin paying living wages, there will always be a gap between what families can afford and what they need.

The cost of living is rising too fast for low-income families to keep up

For many people, housing is simply unaffordable. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, 44 percent of renters in Washington live in unaffordable housing.¹⁶ Just to afford a two-bedroom apartment, a renter must earn 14 dollars per hour.¹⁷ This number is 11 percent higher than it was one year ago, pushing housing further out of reach for many families.

In addition, total energy prices rose 6 percent between 1998 and 1999 in Washington.¹⁸ Among the surveyed individuals, the average utility price increase from 2000 to 2001 was 20 percent. These high costs not only make food unaffordable, but also make it difficult for families to heat and light their houses, refrigerate their food, and even cook.

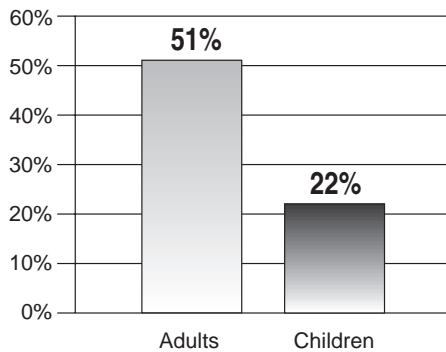
Many families forgo food for other necessities

Households that cannot afford their basic needs frequently must choose between which necessities to satisfy and which to forgo. Food, a relatively flexible necessity (unlike a rent check), is usually the first to be affected. The surveys found that households will often divert money from food to pay other bills, leaving them hungry and malnourished.

Emergency food providers are unable to keep up with demand for food assistance

Seattle has more than 80 food assistance providers (food banks, meal programs, etc.), most of which recorded an increase in demand for food assistance over the last year.¹⁹ These programs, many of which are designed for emergency use only, are no longer used for short-term assistance. Clients frequently rely on food assistance providers regularly to meet their nutritional needs. Unfortunately, these providers are unable to meet the rising demand for food assistance. Many can supply families with only a day or two of food per week due to their lack of supply.²⁰

Percent of individuals who haven't eaten for an entire day in the past 12 months

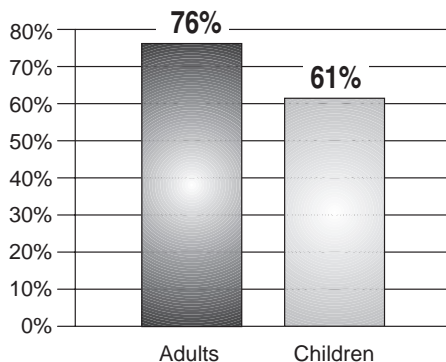


The food that is supplied is not always sufficient for individuals with medical conditions. People under these circumstances must adhere to strict diets that include fresh fruits and vegetables. Unless food banks provide these items, these individuals will go hungry.

Policy options to improve the Food Stamp Program and eliminate hunger

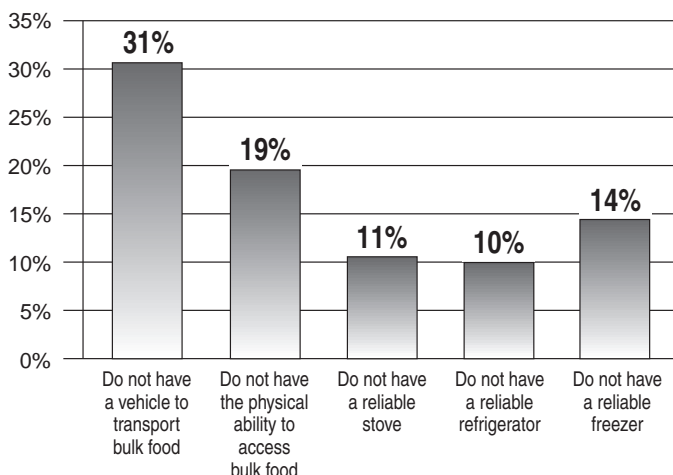
The Food Stamp Program is an invaluable tool for decreasing hunger; however, it only helps households who use it. In Washington, only 64 percent of eligible households receive food stamps.²¹ In other words, 170,000 residents do not receive the food assistance for which they are eligible and possibly need.²²

Percent of individuals who can't afford sufficient food



Washington can reduce statewide hunger by providing food stamps to these individuals. Increasing enrollment by 170,000 people would positively affect the state in several ways. First, it would not strain Washington's budget since states pay a mere half of administrative costs. Second, it will stimulate an already lethargic economy by pouring money into food retailers and farmers.

Individuals who experience the following problems obtaining and cooking cheap food



However, for these things to happen, the state will need to streamline enrollment and adopt new policies.

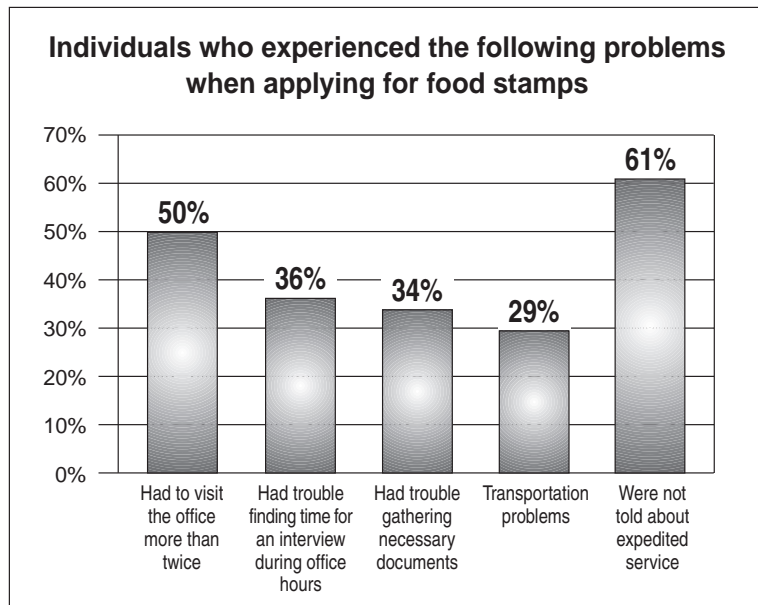
Local food stamp offices and the Washington Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) can take several measures to increase food stamp enrollment. The first measure is to remove administrative barriers to obtaining food stamps,

making them more accessible to everyone. The second is to expand eligibility to other food insecure families.

Inexpensive policy options

Simplify the application

For many applicants, the sheer amount of paperwork required is a barrier to obtaining food stamps. Of the surveyed individuals, 34 percent reported difficulties obtaining and completing the required documents, including the food stamp application itself.



Suzanne Stauffer, Seattle, WA

In 1990, I was permanently injured at work. The injury was building over 30 years of phone work, holding a phone receiver between my neck and shoulder. Finally, one day when I was reaching for something, my neck made a loud snapping sound and my head fell limp like a rag doll's. It turns out that the muscles in my neck had degraded from repetitive stress.

I began receiving food stamps in 1997 to help make ends meet. In return, the state got to evaluate my life every three months when I reapplied. The worst was my last review. The letter from DSHS apparently got lost in the mail because I didn't get it until the Friday before my review was scheduled. They told me I had to submit all my paperwork before Sunday at midnight. I ended up spending \$28 in faxing charges to get everything there in time because I was not able to make it to the office. That was when I finally realized that all the paperwork I had been killing myself over was only for \$10 in food stamps. When I realized that, I just told them to keep their food stamps. I don't need the frustration.

I have applied for several public assistance programs, and I have never run across so much intrusive paperwork as for the food stamp program. I have roommates in my house, and the DSHS actually asked for the roommates' salaries, and even their social security numbers! They're not getting the food stamps — how can the state force me to pry into their private lives?

It sure looks like they're trying to scare needy people away with all the questions and all the paperwork. I thought the idea was to help people in need, not to make them frustrated and drop out of the program. I qualify for SSDI, and they ask for financial information. I qualify for Medicaid, and I have to submit information for them. Why can't the state use that same information for food stamp claims? Why do food stamps require so much more?

Because the Food Stamp Program is run by states, applications vary in length. States have the power to choose which questions will be on the application and which documents the applicant must provide. The longer and more detailed the application, the harder it will be for applicants to complete. In Washington, individuals must fill out a six-page application that includes cumbersome questions, such as:²³

- Does the applicant own burial plots?
- Does the applicant own life insurance?
- What are the applicant's previous bingo/lottery earnings?

The 2002 Farm Bill allows states to use federal funds to simplify their applications and make them more accessible. Washington can use this funding to simplify their application and make it look like Oregon's, which is only two pages long. This will make the application process easier to complete and less intimidating for applicants.

Combine food stamp applications/benefits with other assistance programs

In 2001, Washington considerably improved its food stamp program by creating WASHCAP (the Washington State Combined Application Program).²⁴ WASHCAP automatically provides food stamps to individuals receiving SSI without additional forms or interviews. It reduces many of the barriers applicants face, such as complicated paperwork and repeat office visits, and streamlines the enrollment process.

Households that qualify for public assistance often face an increased risk of food insecurity. Therefore, providing food stamps to more of these households will reduce this risk. DSHS can achieve this goal by expanding WASHCAP to more assistance programs, such as medical or housing assistance. This will bring more stability to families that qualify for public assistance and increase their likelihood of achieving adequate nutrition.

Extend office hours

For 36 percent of the surveyed individuals, finding time to interview or visit a food stamp office was another barrier to obtaining food stamps. Office hours are generally 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Individuals that work during the day frequently have trouble visiting an office during these times and completing the application process.

Local offices can reduce this barrier by expanding hours of operation. Opening food stamp offices on Saturdays and evenings will give applicants more time to interview and complete necessary documents. This will make it easier for working families to enroll in the Food Stamp Program and not force them to take time off of work.

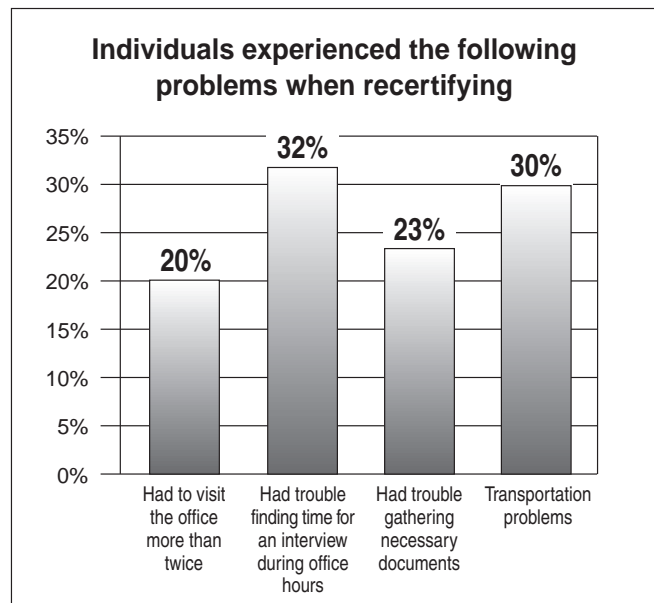
Yolanda Brown, Seattle, WA

I am a single mother still providing for the youngest of my four children. A while ago I lost my job due to management changes and my legally blind 17-year-old son and I needed temporary help. I applied for food stamps to help us through this time. I was able to receive \$120 in food stamp benefits. After two months I got hired at a drugstore. It's a part-time job that pays \$8.50 an hour without benefits. Immediately after I found this job, I was declared ineligible for food stamps because I made too much money.

At the moment I have no health coverage at all. My son gets his through Medicaid. Our rent is \$930/month and utilities are about \$150 a month. Because of these high costs, I am having a tough time paying bills. If I could receive food stamps, my son and I would stay better nourished. My goal is to find a full-time job so that I can get insurance for myself and provide for my son. In the mean time, we desperately need assistance until that actually happens.

Extend the certification period

When a household enrolls in the Food Stamp Program, it is assigned a certification period to determine how long it will receive benefits. At the end of the certification period, a household can continue to receive benefits by reapplying for the program; i.e., completing another interview, and providing additional documents to prove eligibility. In Washington, unless a household has special circumstances, the certification period is three months. This means that every three months, many recipients must reapply for benefits and face the same barriers to enrollment that were faced in the initial application process.



The more frequently households recertify, the less likely they will be to receive benefits. To reduce this barrier, the Department of Social and Health Services should increase the minimum certification period. All households should have a minimum certification period of six months by mail and 12 months in person, except for those federally required to recertify every three months.²⁵ Doing so will reduce the number of times that households face barriers to enrollment. It will also ease the burden on eligibility technicians and allow them to spend more time with new applicants. Food stamp enrollment will be higher and more assistance will go to those in need.

Drop ABAWD work requirements

Federal law mandates that Able-Bodied Adults without Dependents (ABAWDs) must work to receive food stamps. Unless they are employed at least half-time, ABAWDs can receive food stamps for only three months in a 36-month period. However, with unemployment over 7 percent, Washington does not offer an abundance of jobs. As a result, many ABAWDs cannot find employment and are unable to receive food assistance.

Federal law, in addition to requiring ABAWDs to work, allows counties to escape the work requirement. Any county that lacks a sufficient amount of jobs can submit a waiver to the state that drops the ABAWD work requirement. This is an extremely powerful tool because it allows states and counties to keep food stamp enrollment high when jobs are hard to find. Without the waiver, many ABAWDs would lose their food security safety net and be forced to rely on emergency assistance providers.

To keep this from happening, Washington should encourage all eligible counties to use the waiver, as is done in Oregon. In 2001, eight Washington counties did not accept the waiver to remove the ABAWD work requirement.²⁶ In these counties, food stamp enrollment was lower than it could have been and hunger was higher than it should have been. Maximum use of the waiver, including the implementation of a statewide waiver, will avoid penalizing ABAWDs for poor economic conditions and keep emergency supplies of food higher for those that need them.

Improve the outreach program

Before families can benefit from food stamps, people must know basic information about the program. Learning how to apply, what documents to bring, and who is eligible for food stamps are all necessary steps that precede enrollment. Without this information, eligible households will not be able to receive any assistance.



Gladys Phillips, Seattle, WA

I am a retired person trying to live off of what little I get through SSI, but struggle to make ends meet. I live by myself in a little apartment I'm renting. Rent takes up 70 percent of my income. After paying my bills, I only have \$65 left.

Fortunately I was able to apply for food stamps and receive \$110 per month. I don't have a car so it's hard for me to get to larger grocery stores where the food is cheaper. There's a little convenience store in my neighborhood that I have to shop at most of the time. I can get very little with my money there. I turned to a local food bank for help as well, but I can only get food there once a week because they run out. Most of the time I can't eat what I get at the food bank because my doctor wants me to follow a very strict diet. I have very high blood pressure and I'm also battling cancer, so I am supposed to eat a lot of vegetables and fruit. Those are very expensive and I am able to buy them very rarely.

Washington can remove this barrier with help from the 2002 Farm Bill. The bill grants federal money to states in order to develop a food stamp outreach program. An effective outreach program will incorporate mediums designed to reach a wide variety of people, such as TV and radio. It will advertise food stamps in various languages, help applicants obtain necessary documents, advise individuals on how and where to apply for benefits, and pre-screen households for food stamp eligibility.

These simple measures will improve the program in several ways. First, they will increase enrollment by helping individuals complete the application process. Second, they will reduce administrative burdens by preparing applicants before they enter food stamp offices.

Adopt the federal option to remove the vehicle test

Cars, although once considered a luxury, are often necessary for day-to-day activities — especially in rural areas. Many families use cars to get to school, work, and community service offices. Owning a car makes grocery stores and bulk food accessible, provides more time to cook inexpensive meals, and increases the chances of finding a well paying job — one that allows families to achieve self-sufficiency. Despite all of these uses, cars can count against families applying for food stamps.



Rosie I Torres, Seattle, WA

I am a single mother raising three children. Last year I lost my job and found myself in a very hard situation. I was living off of my savings while searching for employment.

After three months, I went to the DSHS office hoping I'd get help there. I found out my family is not eligible for any of the services. I was offered health insurance for my children, but no cash or food assistance. I insisted that our situation was critical and that we desperately need help. Eventually, after filling out the application form and getting the necessary documents to my caseworker, we were granted food stamps. It took two months to do and finally, in February, we received \$238 for food. In March

we didn't receive food stamps at all. I called my case worker, who informed me that he'd sent out a letter (which I never received) explaining that our assistance was cancelled because the value of my car exceeded the limit by \$43. If I wanted to keep receiving benefits, I would have to sell it.

I was outraged and explained to my case worker that I need my car not only for taking my kids to school (two of them don't get picked up by the school bus), but also to be eligible for many jobs. If I broke my loan on the car it would affect my credit. I'm trying very hard to keep my credit records straight so that some day I can buy a house.

Right now I am working part-time with no benefits. I only make about \$800 per month. I live in a low-income housing and am struggling to pay rent, bills, and feed my children. I've paid taxes all my life to help other people through the system. Now that I need help for my family there is none available. A vehicle is not a luxury — it's a necessity in this town. Selling it would make it impossible for me to work.

If a family owns a car with equity²⁷ value above \$1,500, then the Fair Market Value of the car exceeding \$4,650 is counted in the resource test.²⁸ In Washington, the resource test is \$2,000. Therefore, a family that owns a car with Fair Market Value above \$6,650 will most likely be disqualified from food stamps regardless of need.

When people lose their jobs or otherwise need assistance, they should not be punished for owning a car. Fortunately, states can choose how to measure vehicles when calculating food stamp eligibility. Federal law allows states to exclude one vehicle per household from the food stamp resource limit by aligning the vehicle test with that of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funded programs. Already, 16 states use this provision to increase food stamp enrollment.²⁹ Washington should follow these states and exclude one vehicle per household from the food stamp resource test. This will expand food stamp eligibility to hungry families that the program does not otherwise serve.

Advertise expedited service

Households that are in immediate need of food assistance are often eligible for “expedited service.” This allows applicants to receive food stamps within just five days instead of the normal 30, which is crucial to households with no food and no money. To make sure that advertising this service is a top priority, caseworkers are required to discuss eligibility with all applicants.



Celestino Rocha, Seattle, WA

I'm raising three daughters between the ages of seven and 11 years old. Being a single father is very hard, but I've managed to provide for my family by working jobs ranging from a truck driver to a forklift operator. February of this year I severely hurt my back. Suddenly I found myself not being able to work at all and worried about my family's situation. I applied for emergency assistance at my local community service office. I collected all the necessary paperwork, submitted it, and waited for their decision, which my caseworker promised would be mailed to me within 15 days.

I never got anything in the mail so I went into the CSO again and I was told my application was turned down. At that point I turned to a friend and advocate who helped a member of my family before. She complained to my caseworker's supervisor and my application was reviewed again. This time I was eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and several hundred dollars in food stamps.

In addition, El Centro De La Rasa Community Center helps us pay rent. If it were not for this help, my daughters and I would be homeless right now. We pay \$800 for rent, \$130 for electricity, and \$34 for the phone line. I want to start working again because we simply have no money and soon we may have to move out since we can't afford the rent where we live right now. I worry about what is going to happen to my girls and me once the help we get runs out.

While this is an excellent policy, it is not always practiced. Sixty-one percent of the surveyed individuals were not told about expedited service. Additionally, expedited service is not visibly advertised in all food stamp offices.³⁰ For families with an immediate food crisis, not knowing about expedited service can result in a month of unnecessary hunger and health problems. Therefore, local food stamp offices should make every effort to ensure that caseworkers discuss this service with applicants and that it is unmistakably advertised.

Grant transitional benefits to families leaving TANF

After leaving TANF, many families struggle to make ends meet.³¹ They are often unable to find living wage jobs necessary for self-sufficiency and therefore need a little extra assistance. To help these families, the 2002 Farm Bill authorizes states to implement a five-month food stamp transitional period. During these five months, families that leave TANF for exceeding the income requirements can automatically receive food stamps regardless of eligibility.

Washington can invest in the future of its families by helping them leave TANF. Exercising these transitional benefits will make it easier for families to adjust to their new circumstances by ensuring that their nutritional needs are met. They will help parents work productively and children perform well in school. More families will escape poverty and the success rate of the TANF program will increase.



Asha Abdi, Seattle, WA

I am originally from Somalia, where my family and I lived until 1991, but had to leave because of war. When I came to the U.S. in January 2000 I applied for political asylum. I was pregnant at the time with my son—Zekria Ahmed Ali. He was lucky to be born in the United States on May 10th, 2000. At first we stayed in Memphis, Tennessee, but eventually we decided to settle in Washington. I was placed in a work program and got a job at Seattle Central Community College. I worked there for almost two years. Once that ran out I tried looking for a different job. I hoped to find childcare or any other kind of a job that doesn't require

being fluent in English. I found it hard though, as the economy is very slow right now.

My son and I receive \$203 a month in food stamps. We shop at the local grocery store, but prices there are very high. We don't have a car to get us to different stores where our food stamp money would buy more food. We also receive \$440 in TANF. Both have been very helpful but still every month we have trouble making ends meet. We live in a low-income housing apartment and our rent is \$610. We get help paying for it from Muslim Housing.

Our electricity bills are very high (\$140/month) and they are piling up. I am trying to spread the payments and hope to be back on track in two months time.

Conclusion

Despite its abundant food production, hunger levels in Washington remain high. Low wages and unemployment make it difficult to afford basic necessities and families often forgo food to pay other bills. While food banks can provide emergency assistance, most do not supply stable or adequate amounts of food to fill the thousands³² of empty stomachs in Washington state.

Using federal funds, states can dramatically reduce hunger by enrolling all eligible families in the Food Stamp Program. Food stamps help individuals avoid the long- and short-term health effects of hunger by ensuring their nourishment. At the same time, food stamps stimulate the economy by pouring millions of federal dollars back into the state every year.³³

However, for the Food Stamp Program to be effective, it must be accessible to all hungry and food insecure families. This requires eliminating barriers to food stamp enrollment and implementing new policies to expand food stamp eligibility. Washington Citizen Action would like to see the DSHS as well as local food stamp offices make the following improvements to the Food Stamp Program:

- Shorten the application
- Use WASHCAP as a model to combine food stamp benefits with more public assistance programs
- Extend the minimum certification period
- Adopt a more lenient vehicle test
- Increase food stamp office hours
- Improve food stamp outreach
- Drop ABAWD work requirements
- Support families leaving TANF
- Advertise expedited service

Washington has the ability to make these things happen, and until all hungry households receive food stamps, the state should continue to improve the program to the best of its abilities.

Update

On June 4, 2002, Washington Citizen Action met with Roxie Schalliol and Alicia Konè from the Washington Department of Social and Health Services to discuss these and other improvements to the Food Stamp Program. They agreed to make the following changes:

- A new food stamp application, shortened to three pages, will be released on July 1, 2002 to replace the current six-page application
- Food stamp offices will be extending certification periods for those who are not federally required to recertify every three months
- The state is developing a phone bank system, which will allow more applicants to certify by phone rather than visit an office
- The state, in 2003, will be implementing a “simplified reporting” system, which will reduce the amount of paperwork needed to recertify

In addition, the state is currently considering the following options:

- Implementing a five-month transitional period during which families leaving TANF automatically receive food stamps
- Increasing the vehicle allowance
- Expanding outreach
- Improving expedited service
- Implementing a statewide waiver to automatically exclude counties from the ABAWD work requirement.

Washington Citizen Action thanks Roxie Schalliol, Alicia Konè, and the Department of Social and Health Services for meeting with them and looks forward to working together to improve the Food Stamp Program.

Endnotes

- 1 M. Nord et al (September 1999) Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger, by State, 1996-98. Washington, DC: Economic Research Service, USDA, and its Addendum How Many Households? How Many People? (August 2000), available at: <http://www.centeronhunger.org/states/wa.html>.
- 2 "Health Consequences of Hunger," *Hunger in the U.S.*, FRAC, available at: www.frac.org/html/hunger_in_the_us/health.html.
- 3 Alan Meyers and Neetu Chawla, "Nutrition and the Social, Emotional, and Cognitive Development of Infants and Young Children," *The Nutrition of Very Young Children*, Bulletin of Zero to Three: National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families, August/September 2000, Vol. 21, No. 1, p. 5-12.
- 4 Position of the American Diabetic Association: Domestic Food and Nutrient Security," *Journal of the American Diabetic Association*, March 1998, Vol. 98, No.3, p. 337-343.
- 5 In May 2001, NWFCO developed a 15-minute survey aimed at measuring food needs of low-income households (defined as households earning 150 percent of the federal poverty line or less). Over 650 surveys were conducted in six states: Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Texas, and California. The survey measured: food security, ability to provide balanced meals, access to transportation, access to cooking facilities, and amount of time available for cooking. It also asked detailed questions about households' experiences with the Food Stamp Program. The results used in this report were gathered by WCA and NWFCO members and staff, and reflect the results from the Washington surveys only.
- 6 Regional and State Unemployment, April: 2002, The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Found at: <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/news.release/History/laus.05172002.news>.
- 7 Food Stamp Program Average Monthly Participation: 1997-2001, Data as of April 25, 2002, United States Department of Agriculture.
- 8 Food Stamp Program: Average Monthly Participation for 2001, United States Department of Agriculture, April 25, 2002, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfypart.htm>.
- 9 Assuming households without elderly members or special circumstances. Households with elderly members must have countable resources under \$3,000.
- 10 Nord, Jemison, and Bickel; Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger by state, 1996-1998, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, September 1999, available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr2>.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Hunger is defined by the physical discomfort caused by a lack of food. This differs from food insecurity because not all food insecure families are hungry, they simply do not have a reliable source of food, which can lead to hunger.
- 13 *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities, 2001*, The United States Conference of Mayors, December 2001, available at: <http://www.usmayors.org/uscm/hungersurvey/2001/hungersurvey2001.pdf>.
- 14 Regional and State Unemployment, April: 2002, The United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. Found at: <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/news.release/History/laus.05172002.news>.
- 15 *Northwest Job Gap Study: Searching for Work that Pays, 2001*, Washington, Northwest Policy Center and the Northwest Federation of Community Organizations, June 2001, available at: <http://www.nwfc.org/Nwfc/NWJobGapWA.pdf>.
- 16 Out of Reach 2001: America's Growing Wage-Rent Disparity. Washington. The National Low Income Housing Coalition, available at: <http://www.nlihc.org/or2001/index.htm#data>. A housing unit is affordable if no more than 30% of disposable income is used for rent.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Table 293, Energy Price and Expenditure Estimates by Source 1970-1999, Washington, The United States Department of Energy <http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/sep/wa/frame.html>.
- 19 *A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America's Cities, 2001*, The United States Conference of Mayors, December 2001.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Allen Schirm, *Reaching Those In Need: Food Stamp Participation Rates in the States in 1998*, United States Department of Agriculture, January 2001, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/Participation.htm>.
- 22 Allen Schirm, *Reaching Those In Need: Food Stamp Participation Rates in the States in 1998*, United States Department of Agriculture, January 2001, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/oane/MENU/Published/FSP/Participation.htm>, and Food Stamp Program Benefits 2001, United States Department of Agriculture, April 25, 2002, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfybft.htm>.
- 23 Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Application for Benefits, 14-001(X) (REV.06/1997).
- 24 The Washington State Combined Application Program, or WASHCAP, was implemented in November 2001. It is a simplified method of providing food assistance to SSI recipients without having to complete another application, interview, or visit the DSHS office.

25 There are three types of households that are federally required to have a three-month certification period. These include homeless households, households with expenses higher than income, and ABAWDs.

26 Wendy Forslin, Lead Program Manager, WorkFirst Employment and Training Section, DEAP. Data was received through personal communication on April 18, 2002. The Washington counties that did not submit the waiver to drop ABAWD work requirements in 2001 were Benton, Ferry, Franklin, Kittitas, Klickitat, Pend Oreille, Spokane, and Stevens.

27 The equity value of a car is defined by the Fair Market Value (FMV) minus what is owed.

28 A household can qualify for special exemptions if it uses its vehicle over 50 percent of the time to earn income (such as a taxi), uses its vehicle as its home, or is use its vehicle to make income each year that is consistent with the vehicle's fair market value. A complete list of exemptions is available at: <http://www-app2.wa.gov/dshs/EAZManual/Sections/RSCSvehicles.htm#388-470-0075>.

29 Ray Horng and Stacy Dean, *State's Vehicle Asset Policies in the Food Stamp Program*, November 7, 2001, The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, available at: <http://www.cbpp.org/7-30-01fa.htm>.

30 NWFCO and WCA noticed inconsistent advertising in Community Service Offices around Washington. On May 28, 2002, in the Pierce North CSO in Tacoma, WCA staff saw poor advertisements for Expedited Service that were barely visible to someone actively searching for them. At the Capitol Hill CSO in Seattle, NWFCO staff saw no signs for expedited service on May 21, 2002, but saw one sign on other visits to the same office. However, WCA staff saw large and visible signs for Expedited Service at the King South CSO in Kent.

31 *Leaving Welfare, Left Behind: Employment Status, Income, and Well-being of Former TANF Recipients*, The National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, October 2, 2001, available at: <http://www.maketanfwork.org/tanf/publications.asp>.

32 Nord, Jemison, and Bickel, *Prevalence of Food Insecurity and Hunger by State, 1996-1998*, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, September 1999, available at: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/publications/fanrr2>.

33 Food Stamp Program Benefits 2001, United States Department of Agriculture, April 25, 2002, available at: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/fsfybft.htm>.

About the organizations releasing this report

Washington Citizen Action (WCA) is a social and economic justice organization with over 50,000 individual members statewide. In addition to its dynamic grassroots membership, WCA also includes permanent coalition partners from other community organizations, labor, senior, religious, and people of color organizations.

WCA has both a legislative and non-legislative issue agenda that focuses on increasing access to health care and living wage jobs.

The Northwest Federation of Community Organizations (NWFCO) is a regional federation of five statewide, community-based social and economic justice organizations located in the states of Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington: Idaho Community Action Network (ICAN), Montana People's Action (MPA), Oregon Action (OA), Washington Citizen Action (WCA), and Coalition of Montanans Concerned with Disabilities (CMCD). Collectively, these organizations engage in community organizing and coalition building in 14 rural and major metropolitan areas, including the Northwest's largest cities (Seattle and Portland) and the largest cities in Montana and Idaho.

For more information, contact:

Washington Citizen Action
419 Occidental Ave S Suite 609
Seattle, WA 98104
(206) 389-0050

The Northwest Federation of Community Organizations
1905 S Jackson St
Seattle, WA 98144
(206) 568-5400

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