



Illinois Hunger Coalition

Working to End Hunger in Illinois since 1988



Representative Jan Schakowsky, and Diane Doherty, Executive Director of Illinois Hunger Coalition, and volunteers



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Cook County participation in food stamps means nearly one in four struggling individuals miss out on benefits and over \$108 million in federal dollars are foregone as the economy unravels, failure to get benefits to eligible families deepens the pain.

The Illinois Hunger Coalition released a report today detailing the food stamp access rates for the Cook County area. The report, "Food Stamp Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot" was published by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) and highlights the gaps in participation in the most populous areas of the country. Nationwide, the report shows that the 24 large urban areas surveyed lost out on nearly \$1.5 billion in federal benefits as a result of under-participation.

Food stamps are a critically important but under-utilized resource in urban America, according to Diane M. Doherty, the Illinois Hunger Coalition Executive Director. The Food Stamp Program is the first line of defense against malnutrition and hunger. The good news is that although nationwide urban participation rates are only about 67.8%, the Cook County has substantially higher participation with 76%. Between 2003 and 2008 the participation rate increased by close to 29%. Even at this rate, with 24% of individuals not participating, Cook County lost \$108,054,006 to food stamp benefits in 2006 because eligible people were not participating, making it the urban area with 4th most lost dollars. Worse yet, Chicago has lower participation rates than most of the surveyed metropolitan areas in neighboring Midwestern states. Right now with Illinoisans facing

unemployment, shortened hours of work or reduced wages, increased food and gas prices failure to get food stamps to needy families is deepening the harm to them, hurting urban economies, and worsening the recession. In addition to the aid these funds would have provided to low-income families in direct benefits, food stamp benefits were rated high among many proposals for providing an economic stimulus. In a testimony before the House Committee on Small business, Mark Andi of Moody's Economy.com indicated that for every dollar of food stamp benefit, \$1.73 of demand is created in the economy. According to Doherty, "We need to try to get every eligible person enrolled in food stamps. These funds could have assisted many families who are struggling in these difficult times and provide a much need boost for the economy as well."

The "food stamp program" name is also due to be retired this year, as the Farm Bill renamed the federal program the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program as of October 2008. Illinois has not yet announced whether they will adopt the new federal name for the program or will select a different name of its choice, both of which are options under the new legislation. The principal purpose of the new name is to provide families and individuals with the resources they need to receive adequate nutrition.

For those who are interested in applying for food stamps or would like more information: the Illinois Hunger Coalition provides a statewide Hunger Hotline, Monday-Friday, 9:00-5:00 at 1-800-359-2163.