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Childhood Hunger Frequent in Connecticut

Only 1-in-3 Students Reached with School Breakfast;

Only 1-in-4 Helped by Summer Nutrition

A report released today by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) in Washington, D.C. confirms that many of Connecticut's school kids don't get the basic food assistance that they are eligible to receive from federal child nutrition programs.

Connecticut ranks a dismal 44th among all states for participation in the School Breakfast Program. Only a third of the state's children who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch also receive a school breakfast. This is largely because although nearly 1,100 schools in the state participate in the National School Lunch Program, fewer than 50% of them also offer school breakfast. By comparison, nationwide, 78% of the schools offering lunch also offered breakfast. Studies show that, in addition to ensuring that students do not start the day hungry, school breakfast also promotes healthier eating to fight obesity; improves students' achievement, behavior and test scores; and reduces absenteeism, tardiness and visits to the school nurse.

"The research is so clear on the benefits of school breakfast that we must take active steps to increase participation," said Gloria McAdam, President of Foodshare, the regional food bank of Greater Hartford. "This is why we support End Hunger Connecticut!'s current push for legislation to ensure that all schools with a large number of low-income kids participate in the federally funded School Breakfast Program."

According to FRAC, the risk of hunger increases when school is out for the summer. It is a perilous time for children of low-income families who lose access to regular daily school lunch and breakfast. The Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) is intended to fill this vacuum. Yet in Connecticut, only 26% of students who received School Lunch are also reached by SFSP. There are only 149 SFSP sites in the state, concentrated mostly in the state's urban areas.

“During July and August local food pantries in the suburbs and rural areas are often swamped with requests for help from families with children. But many of these towns could have an open summer food site,” said Nancy Carrington, Executive Director of Connecticut Food Bank. An open site is where at least half the children in the geographic area are eligible for free or reduced price school meals. The site is open to all the children in the neighborhood, whether or not they are enrolled in a program that may run concurrently at a site.

The FRAC report also examined other federal nutrition programs and their impact on Connecticut’s poorest citizens. The average monthly benefit per person receiving food stamps in the state is a mere \$76, barely \$2 a day. Only three out of five persons eligible for food stamps receive them. Average state participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition for Women, Infants and Children Program dropped 21% here in the last 10 years, yet the national average rose by 30% during the same period.

In 1999 and 2000 the USDA recommended a number of practices to states for improving access to benefits for working families, including targeted outreach, extended office hours, on-site child care, and longer certification periods. One USDA study concluded that low-income working families are less likely to receive food stamps if they work traditional daytime hours.

“Connecticut is moving in the right direction and working together with the food banks, we have taken on the task to get more food stamps for those who need them through an intensive outreach on the program. There is a need to improve accessibility to the program, like all the nutrition programs. We have our work cut out for us,” said Lucy Nolan, Executive Director of End Hunger Connecticut!. In addition with the School Breakfast legislation EHC! is promoting a “Recreation Connection” to attract kids to Summer Food sites this summer.

“The economy simply is not providing enough year-round, full-time jobs with wages high enough to support a family. Wages and benefits for workers in the bottom parts of the job market are lower than a generation ago,” said Foodshare’s McAdam. “We’ve got to do more to ensure that our hungry neighbors have enough to eat.”

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General Information:

Foodshare is the regional food bank of Greater Hartford and distributes 12 tons of food per day to more than 300 local programs that feed hungry people. These programs serve 100,000 people each year, 40,000 of whom are children. Foodshare’s mailing address is P.O. Box 809, Windsor, CT 06095; Phone: 860/688-6500; Fax: 860/688-2776; Website: www.foodshare.org.

Connecticut Food Bank serves emergency feeding programs in six of Connecticut's eight counties: Fairfield, Litchfield, Middlesex, New Haven, New London and Windham. It distributed 12.4 million pounds of food to over 500 charitable food programs in 2003. Connecticut Food Bank’s mailing address is P.O. Box 868, New Haven, CT 06531; Phone: 203/469-5000; Fax: 203/469-4871; Website: www.ctfoodbank.org.

End Hunger Connecticut! seeks to eliminate hunger in the state through legislative and administrative advocacy, public education, and outreach on federal nutrition programs. EHC!’s mailing address is 102 Hungerford Street, Hartford, CT 06106-4626; Phone: 860/560-2100; Fax: 860/560-2108; Website: www.endhungerct.org.

The **Food Research and Action Center (FRAC)** is a leading national organization working to improve public policies to eradicate hunger and under-nutrition in the United States. Founded in 1970 as a public interest law firm, FRAC is a nonprofit and nonpartisan research and public policy center that serves as the hub of an anti-hunger network of thousands of individuals and agencies across the country. Website: www.frac.org.

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