



For immediate release: September 17, 2013
Contact: Dawn Dunlap, 916-284-3418

Nearly One in Six Californians Live in Poverty; Millions Struggle to Afford Food Congressional Proposal to Slash Food Assistance Would Dramatically Increase Hardship

SACRAMENTO—In the wake of the deepest recession in decades, 6 million Californians, including more than 2 million children, remain in poverty, according to a US Census Bureau report released today. The number of state residents living in poverty is equal to the combined population of the cities of Los Angeles, San Diego, and San Francisco.

The new report shows that one in six Californians (15.9 percent) had incomes below the federal poverty line in 2012. In addition, nearly one-quarter of the state's children (22.5 percent) lived in poverty. The federal poverty line varies by family size. A parent with two children, for example, is considered poor if their annual income was less than about \$18,500 in 2012.

High levels of poverty mean that millions of Californians struggle to adequately feed their families. A US Department of Agriculture report published earlier this month found that nearly 10 million California households (15.6 percent) have trouble affording enough food. These so-called "food insecure" households include nearly 2.5 million children. Nationwide, 14.5 percent of households are food insecure—the highest percentage on record.

"We continue to see more folks coming to us for food," said Eileen Thomas, Executive Director of River City Food Bank. "Sadly, the most vulnerable people in our society are most at risk of hunger. In the last two years, we've seen a 52 percent spike in the number of seniors needing assistance and a 35 percent increase in the number of families with children."

With millions of Californians in danger of going hungry, the Sacramento Hunger Coalition is calling on Congress to reject proposals to cut the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, CalFresh in California).

SNAP, formerly called food stamps, is the nation's first line of defense against hunger. It provides modest food assistance—typically less than \$1.50 per person per meal—to very low-income individuals and families. The average SNAP recipient lives on just \$744 per month.

"For many people, SNAP makes the difference between eating and going hungry," said Dawn Dunlap, chair of the Sacramento Hunger Coalition's education committee. "The deep cuts that Congress is considering would dramatically increase hardship in communities across our state. Millions of low-wage workers, seniors, veterans, and children would go hungry without SNAP."

The House of Representatives is expected to vote on a measure this week that would slash SNAP by \$40 billion over 10 years, causing as many as 6 million Americans to lose access to nutrition assistance. This cut would be in addition to sizeable SNAP benefit reductions that will take effect on November 1.

Later today the Sacramento Hunger Coalition and the California Hunger Action Coalition will launch a social media campaign called **SNAP Helps Us All** that will enable Californians to tell their stories about how they've benefited from SNAP and send a message to Congress to reject any cuts to the program. Follow the campaign on tumblr at <http://sachungerco.tumblr.com/> and on twitter at [@SacHungerCo](https://twitter.com/SacHungerCo).

Contrary to popular perception, food banks couldn't come close to providing all the meals families would lose if federal policymakers cut SNAP. "If SNAP benefits are cut, we know that all emergency food providers will be inundated with more people needing our services," said Eileen Thomas, Executive Director of River City Food Bank. "Our problem is that we are already working at capacity or beyond. We are able to give three to five days worth of healthy food, but only once a month. What do families do for the rest of the month?"

Hunger is one of many devastating consequences of poverty. It not only prevents children and families from leading healthy, productive lives, it threatens the future prosperity of our state and nation. When children aren't well nourished they're less likely to succeed in school and to grow up to be productive workers and members of society.

By reducing hunger, SNAP helps ensure that we will have a productive workforce and a more prosperous future.

###

The Sacramento Hunger Coalition (SHC) was founded in 1989. The mission of the SHC is to reduce hunger and malnutrition by increasing food security and access to healthy and nutritious food in Sacramento County through public education, advocacy, community organizing and grassroots advocacy research. For more information, visit <http://www.sachousingalliance.org/programs/sacramento-hunger-coalition/>.

