



The United States Conference of Mayors

1620 Eye Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone (202) 293-7330 • Fax (202) 293-2352
E-mail: info@usmayors.org URL: usmayors.org

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Contact: Rhonda Spears Bell (USCM)
202-861-6766 (rspears@usmayors.org)

Tara Baten (Sodexho USA)
301-987-4324 (tara.baten@sodexhoUSA.com)

U.S. Conference of Mayors – Sodexho USA Hunger and Homelessness Survey 2004

Hunger, Homelessness Still On the Rise in Major U.S. Cities *27-City Survey Finds Requests by Families for Food and Shelter Increasing*

Washington, DC – Hunger and homelessness continued to rise in major American cities over the last year, according to the new *U.S. Conference of Mayors-Sodexho USA Hunger and Homelessness Survey*, released today at the Conference of Mayors Headquarters in Washington. In particular, families with children requesting food assistance and emergency shelter also increased substantially over the last year.

Even with an improving economy, overall requests for emergency food assistance increased by an average of 14 percent over the past year with 96% of the cities registering an increase. Also during the past year, requests for emergency shelter assistance increased by an average of 6 percent, with 70% of the 27 cities surveyed showing an increase.

“These are not simply statistics,” said Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell, who co-chairs the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. “These are real people, many are families with children, who are hungry and homeless in our cities. Unfortunately, the results of this year’s survey tell us that we are still far short in meeting the challenges of our neediest citizens.”

“These alarming results show that America's working families are increasingly at risk for hunger and in need of shelter,” said Rod Bond, president of the School Services division at Sodexho USA. “Now is the time for all of us to focus on ways to address these issues and to bring attention to this survey which so clearly demonstrates the need for immediate action.”

The findings of the 27-city survey include:

Hunger:

During the past year, requests for emergency food assistance by families - children and their parents - increased by an average of 13 percent. On average, 20 percent of the requests for emergency food assistance have gone unmet over the last year. For families alone, 17 percent of requests for food assistance have gone unmet.

Forty-eight percent of the cities surveyed reported that emergency food assistance facilities may have to turn away people in need due to lack of resources. The survey finds that 56 percent of those requesting emergency food assistance were families, and 34 percent of the adults requesting food assistance were employed.

In 100 percent of the cities surveyed, families and individuals relied on emergency food assistance facilities both in emergencies and as a steady source of food over long periods of time.

Additionally, the survey shows that unemployment and other employment-related problems lead the list of causes of hunger. Other causes contributing to hunger, in order of frequency, include low-paying jobs, high housing costs, poverty or lack of income, medical or health costs, substance abuse, high utility costs, mental health problems, homelessness, reduced public benefits and high childcare costs.

Homelessness:

During the past year, 78 percent of the cities surveyed reported that requests for emergency shelter by homeless families increased by 7 percent. Fifty-six percent of participating cities reported that families may have to break up in order to be sheltered.

Eighty-one percent of the cities reported that emergency shelters may have to turn away homeless families and other homeless people due to lack of resources. An average of 23 percent of the requests for emergency shelter by homeless people overall have gone unmet over the last year. Additionally, for homeless families, 32 percent of the requests for assistance were not met.

“These survey results indicate, as they have in the past 19 years that we have done this survey, that there is still a great deal to be done to address the serious issue of homelessness in America,” said Cedar Rapids Mayor Paul Pate and co-chair of the Conference's Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. “Again this year, the Hunger and Homeless survey shows that the demand for homeless shelters in our communities continues to increase. It is important that we all take seriously the challenge of eliminating chronic homelessness over the next 10 years.”

According to the survey, the lack of affordable housing was the leading cause of homelessness. Participating cities reported that other causes most likely attributing to homelessness, in order of frequency, include mental illness and the lack of needed services, substance abuse and the lack of needed services, low-paying jobs, unemployment, domestic violence, poverty, and prisoner re-entry.

The survey also shows that people remained homeless for an average of eight months in the survey cities. Forty-six percent of the cities reported that the length of time people are homeless increased during the last year.

Single men comprised 41 percent of the homeless population, families with children 40 percent, single women 14 percent, and unaccompanied youth five percent.

Outlook:

Eighty-eight percent of the cities surveyed expect that requests for emergency food assistance will increase during 2005. Eighty-four percent expect that requests for emergency food assistance by families with children will increase next year. Furthermore, 88 percent of participating cities expect that requests for emergency shelter will increase next year, and 78 percent expect requests for shelter by homeless families will increase in 2005.

City officials believe that even with an improving economy, economic conditions will continue to have a negative impact on the problem of hunger and homelessness.

The 27 mayors participating in this survey are members of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Task Force on Hunger and Homelessness. They include:

**Boston Mayor Thomas Menino
Burlington Mayor Peter Clavelle
Cedar Rapids Mayor Paul Pate
Charleston Mayor Joseph Riley
Charlotte Mayor Patrick McCrory
Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley
Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell
Denver Mayor John Hickenlooper
Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick
Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes
Los Angeles Mayor James Hahn
Louisville Metro Mayor Jerry Abramson
Miami Mayor Manuel Diaz
Nashville Mayor Bill Purcell**

**New Orleans Mayor C. Ray Nagin
Norfolk Mayor Paul Fraim
Philadelphia Mayor John Street
Phoenix Mayor Skip Rimsza
Portland Mayor Vera Katz
Providence Mayor David Cicilline
St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly
Salt Lake City Mayor Rocky Anderson
San Antonio Mayor Ed Garza
San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsome
Santa Monica Mayor Richard Bloom
Seattle Mayor Greg Nickels
Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer**

The complete survey can be downloaded at usmayors.org.

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The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. The primary roles of the Conference of Mayors are to promote the development of effective national urban/suburban policy; strengthen federal-city relationships; ensure that federal policy meets urban needs; provide mayors with leadership and management tools; and create a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. More information about the Conference is available at usmayors.org.



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