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Pachter: Hunger's new normal

by Commentary

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By Paule Pachter

Food banks were established in the late '70s to help struggling families during a short-term economic crisis. More and more, however, the people we help have come to rely upon food banks as a place to go on an ongoing basis.

A new study released by [Feeding America](#), the nation's largest domestic hunger-relief charity, shows that at a time when unemployment hovers around 9 percent and underemployment remains over 17 percent, this is to be expected. Long Island has not been spared from this reality. In the past seven months, visits to local food pantries supported by [Long Island Cares](#) have increased by 10.3 percent to 897,627 people.

According to the study, emergency food from pantries is no longer being used to meet temporary food needs. Fifty-four percent of Feeding America's clients have used a food pantry for at least six months or more during the past year. Additionally, over one-third of all clients are "recurrent" clients, having used a food pantry monthly for at least every month within the past year.

We are also seeing that those who receive benefits from the [Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (formerly known as food stamps) are struggling to get through each month, running out of food within three weeks of receipt of their EBT cards, especially if there are children living in the household. The data illustrates that people are using food banks and pantries as a way to supplement their grocery needs. And we are approaching a time when as the result of decreases in government funding and limited corporate support, people will be turned away.

We are in the midst of a perfect storm. Food prices are going up and food manufacturers are seeking greater efficiencies, which mean fewer donations to food banks and charitable contributions are harder to come by. This has led to unprecedented demand upon emergency food providers.

All of this is extremely troubling now as Congress looks to cut many of the most critical programs aimed at helping the hungry, including The Emergency Food Assistance Program, which supplies about 25 percent of the food moving through the national food bank network. Any reductions in aid will make things worse for Long Islanders in need.

Pachter is executive director of Long Island Cares Inc. – The Harry Chapin Food Bank.



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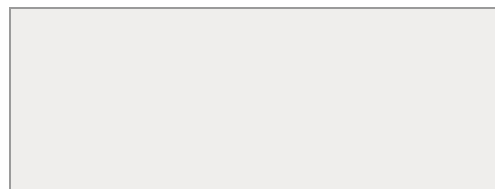
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