

Survey: Most NYers say paying for food's harder

BY LISA L. COLANGELO

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Almost 75% of New Yorkers surveyed are finding it harder to afford groceries now compared with one year ago and 59% said they have experienced stress, anxiety or depression in the past 12 months trying to figure out how to get food on the table for their families, according to a poll released early Monday.

The situation is just as dire on Long Island, the poll shows, with 28% of respondents from Nassau and Suffolk counties saying they have experienced one or more symptoms of food insecurity in the past year and 52% saying they worry about how to pay for food if they are stuck with an unexpected \$500 expense.

The poll was commissioned by No Kid Hungry New York and shines a light on how hunger impacts many New Yorkers, including those on Long Island.

"It's getting worse and it's harder for families to be able to afford groceries," said Rachel Sabella, director of No Kid Hungry New York, a campaign of the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit group Share Our Strength. "This is just devastating because it's impacting families in so many different places."

Sabella said she is especially concerned about the added stress expressed by adults and parents who are struggling to afford enough food for their families.

More than half of the respondents on Long Island said it has impacted their mental health, according to the poll.

"One of the biggest changes we have seen in the last year is the expiration of additional support from the federal government," Sabella said, noting the end of expanded child tax credits, extra money in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that helps low-income people purchase food, and universal free meals in schools.

Other findings in the statewide poll were that 29% of parents worried their household would not have enough food and 40% said they were forced to decide between pay-



Island Harvest, based in Melville, has seen a big spike in need.

WHAT TO KNOW

- **A new statewide poll** by No Kid Hungry New York shows that 73% of respondents said it is harder to afford groceries than it was one year ago.
- **59% of adults said they experienced stress, anxiety and depression** while figuring out how to afford food for their families.
- **Long Island nonprofits that battle food insecurity** said they are seeing a rise in the number of people who need help.

ing for food or other costs like rent, utilities, or gas.

About one-third of respondents classified as middle-income (earning between \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year) said they experienced food insecurity.

The poll, which was conducted online and with text messages by Change Research from April 3 to 10, surveyed 1,189 state residents. The statewide margin of error was plus or minus 3.3 percentage points.

Some 16% of the respondents were from Long Island.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines food insecurity as the "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, or limited or uncertain ability to acquire foods in socially acceptable ways."

Jessica Rosati, vice president for programs at Long Is-

land Cares — The Harry Chapin Food Bank, said the nonprofit has seen a 69% increase in the number of children it served in the first quarter of 2023 compared with the first quarter of 2022.

The group estimates about 230,000 Long Islanders are food insecure and 68,000 of them are children.

Rosati said she worries the numbers cited in the poll will increase even more if programs that made it easier for people to access food continue to dwindle.

"During the pandemic such programs were so relaxed so it was inclusive that no matter who you are, where you were, what your needs were, you had access," she said. "The pandemic has subsided so all those provisions in place to help people are now going away but what hasn't gone away is the rising cost of goods, inflation and underemployment."

Island Harvest, a large hunger relief organization on Long Island, has also seen an increase in need.

"Our lines are getting very long and the calls coming in for help are starting to come in very strong again," said Randi Shubin Dresner, president and CEO of Island Harvest. "In December [2022], the number of people coming to our mobile food market, compared with March [2022] went up 199%."

She said restoring funding from the state and federal government for programs like SNAP is key to helping the food insecurity crisis.

NASSAU NOT

State says performance had slipped; nonprofit takes over

BY SCOTT EIDLER

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ONLY IN NEWSDAY

Nassau County has lost control of a major federal housing program that it administered for decades after the state turned it over to a local nonprofit.

The move came after Nassau's performance slipped in recent years, and after the Community Development Corporation of Long Island, which manages the program for Suffolk County, submitted a lower bid for the state's Housing Choice Voucher program, county and state records show.

Nassau lost the contract in early 2022 after the state selected the nonprofit to distribute the vouchers. The county since has disbanded its Office of Housing and transferred 16 employees to other agencies or departments, officials said.

CDCLI, which took over the program Dec. 1, is moving its headquarters to Melville in May from Centereach and also has an office in Nassau.

The county finished third in a state bidding process after submitting an application at the end of former Democratic County Executive Laura Curran's tenure. The application said County Executive-elect Bruce Blakeman, a Republican, was consulted and supported it.

The State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (HCR) said the primary reason Nassau lost the contract was because it asked for a 33% increase in the administrative fee it receives for each voucher, from \$59 to \$78. The nonprofit proposed a \$61 fee. CGI Federal, a consulting firm that works with public housing authorities, ranked second, state records show.

The Housing Choice Voucher program is available to individuals or families who have low enough incomes to qualify for the subsidy. The dollar amount depends on the applicant's income and what their approved rent or mortgage is.

Nassau, which had run the program since 1986, did not

have to bid for a contract until 2021. That's when the bidding process was implemented to make sure there was "fair competition and best value," according to state officials.

The state said it is required by law to contract with an agency that provides the best value for managing the program.

"HCR determined through a competitive procurement process that CDCLI submitted the most competitive, highest-rated proposal to administer the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher contract in Nassau County," Charni Sochet, a spokeswoman for HCR, said in a statement. "We are confident that they will successfully administer the program in accordance with the duties laid out in the contract."

Blakeman, whose administration appealed the decision last year, said in a statement: "I believe with my team in place, we would have been able to better administer this important program but unfortunately that opportunity is not available. All of the employees of the housing department have been absorbed within county government and we stand ready to assist our residents with housing issues the best we can."

Nonprofits are often chosen to administer Section 8 programs because they can run them in a more cost-effective way, said Robert Silverman, a professor of urban planning at the University at Buffalo.

"It's fairly common around the country," he said.

Performance scores slip

In the past two years, Nassau has scored low on annual audits required by the federal government and administered by the state.

The Section Eight Management Assessment Program reviews focus on performance in 14 areas such as "proper selection of applicants from the housing choice voucher wait-