

Mayors Report More Hunger, Homelessness

Dec. 20—The U.S. Conference of Mayors released its annual “Survey on Hunger and Homelessness in America’s Cities” today in a press teleconference call. The 2012 survey of 25 cities of varying sizes documents the need for “more, not less spending in the year ahead to support growing numbers of hungry and homeless.” It was issued just days before the threatened sequestration of Federal funding.

The task force that produced the report was chaired by Mayor Terry Bellamy of Asheville, N.C.

Among the startling statistics:

Hunger: All but 4 of the 25 cities surveyed in 2012 reported that requests for emergency food assistance increased over the past year, and 3 of these 4 said requests remained at the same level as 2011. Emergency kitchens and food pantries in nearly all of the cities had to reduce the quantity of food a client could receive. In fact, lack of resources meant people in need had to be turned away in nearly 90% of the cities. The rate of increase ranged from 63% in Asheville and 56% in Denver, to 41% in Philadelphia. Ninety-five percent of the cities reported an increase in the number of persons requesting food assistance for the first time, while 57% of the cities reported that their total budgets for emergency food purchases increased over the past year. Cities documented cutbacks in nutritious food in favor of cheaper food.

Some of the surveyed cities made the following estimates of unmet food needs: 20% in Denver, Colo.; Phoenix, Ariz.; Trenton, N.J., and Des Moines, Iowa; 30% in Nashville, Tenn. and San Francisco, Calif.; 33% in Philadelphia, Pa.; 40% in San Antonio, Tex.; and 25% in Washington, D.C..

Looking to 2013, “City officials of the 25 cities surveyed are pessimistic about the future: 3 out of 4 expect requests for emergency food assistance to increase over the next year, and nearly half expect that resources to provide emergency assistance will decrease; some (22%) say substantially.”

Homelessness: The study reports that “60% of the cities said they saw an increase in the number of

people experiencing homelessness; across the cities, the increase averaged 7%. Over 70% of the cities reported an increase in homelessness among families; 35% reported an increase among individuals. Because no beds were available for them, homeless families with children were turned away by emergency shelters in 64% of the survey cities; and shelters in 60% of the cities had to turn away unaccompanied individuals.”

Unmet needs for shelter estimates include 70% in Portland, Ore.; 33% in Philadelphia; 27% in Louisville, Ky.; 25% in Charlotte, N.C., and San Antonio, Tex.; and 23% in Nashville.

As to the future, “Officials in 60% of the cities expect the number of homeless families to increase over the next year; those in 56% of the cities expect the number of homeless unaccompanied individuals to increase; and those in more than 58% expect that the resources needed to provide emergency shelter will decrease.”

Task force leader Mayor Bellamy placed the hunger/homelessness figures in the larger context of economic collapse:

- In 2011, real median income was down 1.5% from 2010 for all racial groups—the second consecutive year it declined nationally. “In 2011, real median household income was 8.1% lower than in 2007, the year before the most recent recession,” he said.

- In 2011, the Census Bureau reported that the family poverty rate was 11.8%, with 9.5 million families in poverty.

EIR: What About Glass-Steagall?

EIR correspondent Anita Gallagher asked the second and final question after the presentation: President Franklin D. Roosevelt enacted the Glass-Steagall Law in his first month, and he then issued credit, and built great projects, like the Tennessee Valley Authority. Today H.R. 1489 is before the House of Representatives, a resolution to restore that bill, which was repealed in 1999. Without a program like this, Gallagher said, the United States is following the suicidal path of Greece.

Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter, the Conference Chair, responded that mayors were on the front line dealing with these problems, and that they would be talking to their Congressmen.

The annual National Conference of Mayors meeting is scheduled in Washington for Jan. 17-19, 2013.