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Food Insecurity Rates Increase Significantly Due To COVID-19 Pandemic

42 percent increase in southwestern Pennsylvania

PITTSBURGH, PA (October 27, 2020) – A new report from Feeding America projects a 42 percent increase in food insecurity rates during the year 2020 in Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank’s service area.

“Since the onset of the pandemic we’ve seen a dramatic increase in demand for food,” said Food Bank President and CEO Lisa Scales. “We’ve anticipated and are preparing for this high level of need to be around for many months to come.”

Using a model developed to Map the Meal Gap, which provides insight into the relationships between poverty, unemployment and food insecurity, Feeding America projected changes to annual unemployment and poverty rates to arrive at new estimates.

In 2018 (the most recent data reported by Feeding America), food insecurity in the Food Bank’s 11-county service area was 10.8 percent (260,390 individuals). The new 2020 projection estimates a 15.4 percent food insecurity rate (369,450), a 42 percent increase from 2018.

“Prior to the pandemic we were providing food to an average of 15 families each day at our headquarters in Duquesne,” said Scales. “Since March, we’ve served an average of 30 families a day, including more than 100 families daily during peak times in April and May. We have more than 500 partners across our network in 11 counties, along with our drive-up distributions, home delivery service and grab and go meals for kids. The increased outreach for food through those channels has been just as substantial.”

Pertaining to childhood hunger, the 2020 projection indicates a 57 percent increase from 2018 when the childhood food insecurity rate was 15.5 percent (71,620 individuals). The 2020 rate is 24.4 percent (112,630 individuals).

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The Feeding America model does include other indicators, such as median income, home ownership and disability. While these variables do change over time, in the near-term Feeding America assumes the most significant changes due to COVID-19 will be in unemployment and poverty as jobs are lost, income declines and new expenses increase.

For questions regarding this report and food insecurity rates in our region, please contact me or Melissa Murray (mmurray@pittsburghfoodbank.org | 717-519-7911).

About Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank is a nonprofit organization that distributes nearly 40 million meals annually across 11 counties in southwestern Pennsylvania through a network of agencies, partners and programs. The Food Bank was founded in 1980 and is a member of Feeding America, the leading domestic hunger-relief charity in the U.S. For more information on hunger in our region or how to get involved, visit www.pittsburghfoodbank.org.

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