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NEW REPORT SHOWS TEXAS IS MISSING OUT ON MILLIONS IN UNCLAIMED SNAP BENEFITS

Austin, Texas—The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP), Houston Food Bank, and San Antonio Food Bank today highlighted the findings of a new report revealing millions in unclaimed federal benefits available for hungry Texans, as well as newly-calculated data showing the significant effect of anti-hunger stimulus spending on the Texas economy.

The report by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), entitled “SNAP Access in Urban America,” examines SNAP (formerly called Food Stamps) and hunger in 24 of America’s largest urban areas in 2007, including Houston and San Antonio. The report looks particularly at local SNAP participation rates, the number of unserved people, and the consequences for individuals and local economies.

“SNAP Access in Urban America” Findings

Harris County had among the top-five worst participation rates (the “Local Access Indicator”), with SNAP benefits reaching only 46 percent of eligible individuals in May 2007. Failing to reach so many eligible persons cost Harris County more than \$203 million in unclaimed benefits in 2007. Bexar County performed closer to the average, with a 66 percent participation rate, compared to 67 percent for all survey cities combined. Bexar County lost out on \$47.1 million in unclaimed benefits in 2007.

"SNAP is the backbone of hunger relief in Texas," said Brian Greene, President of Houston Food Bank. "Food banks are just the last line of defense against hunger. SNAP should be the first line that provides families in poverty the ability to access sufficient nutritious food."

2007	Local Access Indicator	Estimated unclaimed benefits (\$million)	Estimated Eligible Individuals	Estimated Eligible Non-participants	Child Poverty Rate
Harris County	46%	\$203.7	691,194	376,358	33.0%
Bexar County	66%	\$47.1	276,132	92,577	26.5%

(continued)

Impact of SNAP Benefits on the Economy

SNAP benefits prevent child hunger by helping low-income families bridge the gap between their earnings and expenses. SNAP also benefits our state and local economies, particularly during a recession when unemployment rises and consumer spending falls. Economists across the political spectrum agree that boosting SNAP benefits is one of the best ways to stimulate the economy. The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that every \$1 in SNAP benefits produces \$1.84 in overall economic activity.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), commonly known as the economic recovery package, included a 13.6 percent increase in SNAP benefits, or \$80 more per month for a household of four. The ARRA increase took effect on April 1, bolstering the stimulative effect of SNAP spending on local economies. Texas issued \$343.3 million in SNAP benefits to more than 2.8 million people in April, bringing the estimated total economic impact of SNAP benefits to more than \$632.6 million. **From April to August 2009, Texas issued \$1.7 billion in cumulative SNAP benefits, for a total economic impact of \$3.2 billion.**

For SNAP enrollment and economic impact by county, see <http://www.cppp.org/research.php?aid=911>.

Improving SNAP Participation in Texas

FRAC's report highlights the importance of getting SNAP benefits to more eligible families.

“To increase SNAP participation, Texas needs to fix the problems facing our eligibility system, which are causing widespread delays in getting benefits to eligible families, and increase funding for community organizations to do outreach and application assistance,” CPPP Senior Policy Analyst Celia Hagert said.

The Center for Public Policy Priorities is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy institute committed to improving public policies to better the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans.

The Houston Food Bank is filling pantries and filling lives. Each week, more than 80,000 people can eat thanks to the network of 400 charities that receive fresh produce, meat and non-perishables from the Food Bank. More than 36 million pounds of food travels from the Houston Food Bank to reach hungry people in 18 southeast Texas counties.

The San Antonio Food Bank's mission is to fight hunger in Southwest Texas through food distribution, programs, education, and advocacy.

The Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) is the leading national organization working for more effective public and private policies to eradicate domestic hunger and undernutrition.

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