



# Unnoticed, Unaddressed & Unacceptable

Revealing & Attacking Washington's  
Persistent Hunger Problem

*Report Produced and Released by Washington Citizen Action*

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# Executive summary

In 2002, 33.6 million people went hungry in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Washington is one of the top five states for the highest hunger rate, and has been for the past eight years. Hunger is widespread and pervasive among working families, but little action is being taken to curb high hunger rates. There are four factors that exacerbate hunger in Washington: unemployment, high healthcare costs, unaffordable rent, and lack of living wage jobs. After paying rent, car insurance, and utilities, many working people have few resources left to buy food. Or when an

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*Washington is one of the top five states for the highest hunger rate, and has been for the past eight years.*

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unexpected illness, such as cancer, occurs, families suddenly find themselves worrying about paying for both medical bills and groceries. Food pantries and soup kitchens are doing their best, especially during the holiday season, but they

are simply not enough. They can provide a few meals, but leave families wondering where the next meal will come from. The best solution is to increase food stamp participation and school meal programs. The federal government pays for 100% of the food stamp benefits and 50% of the state's administration costs. Unlike food banks and feeding programs, food stamps stimulate the economy, edging us closer to long-term solutions, and allow families to access

food with dignity.<sup>2</sup> School meal programs are the most effective way to reach children. With all meals paid by the federal government, schools only need to provide the facility.

There are six changes Washington state can easily make to significantly reduce barriers in the Food Stamp Program and to expand school meal programs to reach thousands of hungry children.<sup>3</sup>

- Implement an automatic five-month receipt of food stamp benefits, (otherwise known as Basic Food) to transition families from cash assistance to work.
- Streamline reporting requirements for eligible families to cut down administration work and reduce error rates.
- Institute Congressional options to increase the value of allowable vehicles and resources for families under 130% the federal poverty level.
- Restore Basic Food eligibility to people who have served drug felony sentences.
- Mandate participation in the federally-funded School Breakfast and Lunch programs in all elementary schools to guarantee every child the right to eat.
- Require schools who have a summer time program and that have 50% or more children eligible for free or reduced-price meals to offer breakfast and/or lunch as an "open site" under the USDA Summer Food Service Program or Seamless Summer Feeding Waiver.

Economic stability, living wages, increased subsidized housing, and universal healthcare are long-term solutions, but in the meantime, these short-term solutions will vastly reduce hunger at a minimal cost. Washington has already let families go hungry for too long.

## Explaining the hunger rate

In Washington, more than 100,000 families go hungry each year.<sup>4</sup> A recent study by *ECONorthwest* found that high unemployment, mobility, and housing costs lead to Washington's severe hunger rate, in spite of a per capita income close to the national average.<sup>5</sup> These factors have forced people to reduce their food budgets or buy poor quality food. Persistent food insecurity causes learning barriers for children, lower productivity among adults, higher healthcare costs, and rampant malnutrition. This situation has worsened because of the economic downturns both within the state and across the nation.<sup>6</sup>

Another reason for hunger in Washington is the low participation in federally funded programs. Only 55-67% of eligible persons in Washington participate in Basic Food, and 241 schools do not offer the School Breakfast Program. If

these programs are not accessible, then their impact is severely diminished. Many people drop out of the Food Stamp Program or do not even apply because of the frequent and tedious amount of paperwork and required office visits during their working hours. There is a clear link between nutrition and academic performance; schools make sure children eat on test days, but with federal funding they can eat everyday. With federal funding, schools can provide meals everyday.

In 2001, 23.3 million people in the U.S. turned to a food bank or charitable food program, and about 40% of those were working families.<sup>7</sup> Food banks, pantries, and feeding programs help alleviate emergency situations, but cannot meet the needs of the entire state of Washington. Conversely, food stamps provide families with healthier foods and bring federal dollars into the local economy, and school meal programs ensure children eat and learn.

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*In a recent bipartisan survey by the Alliance to End Hunger, 92.7% of Americans reported that "fighting the hunger problem" was an important issue for the United States.*

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# Food Stamp Program and School Meal programs are the solution

Created in 1977 by Senators Bob Dole and George McGovern, the Food Stamp Program is the single most important federal program in the fight against hunger, because of its ability to respond to changing needs: when needs increase or decrease, funds are disbursed accordingly. Unlike food banks and soup kitchens, the Food Stamp Program improves people's access to food and brings federal dollars into the local economy. Millions of federal dollars flow into the state economy if participation rates match the need. Every five additional food stamp dollars creates nearly ten dollars worth of total economic activity.<sup>8</sup>

It is logical and economical to reform existing programs with options offered by the 2002 Farm Bill.<sup>9</sup> Food stamps are targeted to those most in need. In fact, more than 90% of benefits go to households with a child, senior, or disabled individual. More than half of the recipients of food stamps are children. The Food Stamp Program experienced a major change with

the introduction of Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Recipients no longer use coupons that can be traded or sold, but can only purchase food products with their EBT cards. Food stamps don't replace family budget cuts, but can support family budgets in time of need. Half of food stamp participants receive benefits for nine months or less. The average participation is less than two years.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, food stamps are good for farmers and business, too. The economic stimulus caused by food stamp participation improves the overall economy by supporting local grocery stores and increasing family monthly spending power by up to 45%.<sup>11</sup> The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities showed that "without food stamps, some grocery stores in low-income neighborhoods and rural communities would likely go out of business during recessions, causing a further loss of jobs and making food shopping more difficult for all families in the area."<sup>12</sup> Food stamp benefits significantly reduce the depth and severity of poverty.<sup>13</sup>

When President Bush signed into law the 2002 Farm Bill, it added \$6.4 billion in new funds to improve the Food Stamp

I'm a small business owner of bakery and butcher shops. During the winter months, businesses like mine survive because people who work in the agricultural industry are able to purchase food with their EBT cards. When the crops are harvested, families are able to work and provide for their families. In September, when there is the apple harvest, about one out of 10 families use EBT cards. Now in the winter, seven out 10 use the EBT cards to buy food. People are able to survive with this help from the USDA, and they have a dramatic effect on the businesses in this area.

Yakima Valley has a strong agricultural economy based on apples, grapes, pears, cherries, and hops. Many farmers are struggling because the larger farms are heavily subsidized by the government, and are the only ones who can survive the poor economy. Farms aren't able to employ workers during the off season, so thousands of workers lose their jobs during the winter. There are few jobs available in other industries like packing. People try to save their money during the harvest season, but the savings cannot last throughout the winter season since they have to pay for rent, bills, and medical care. It is not until the trees have to be pruned and the asparagus crops are ready in March that farm workers start getting their jobs back. We survive because our customers are able to buy foods with EBT cards.

Program and other nutrition programs through enhancements and simplifications. Individual states can adopt new provisions that improve access and benefits. The Food Stamp Program statutes and regulations allow individual states to meet the nutritional needs of low-income people and improve their programs through several options. Washington has yet to implement any significant Farm Bill state options. Now is the time to act for hungry families.

There are six changes that would decrease hunger in Washington. Four of these directly increase participation of the Food Stamp Program: simplified reporting, transitional benefits, categorical eligibility, and opting out of the federal exclusion of people with former drug felony convictions. The other two would mandate School Breakfast and Lunch programs in every elementary school and open Summer Food Program sites to all children in the area.

## Basic Food changes

### Simplified Reporting

**Simplified Reporting** will decrease hunger by eliminating frequent reporting requirements that deter people from Basic Food. Working people are unable to keep up with the reporting demands and face barriers due to lack of transportation, work hour conflicts, or overwhelming paperwork. Workers often cite frequent interviews as a reason for leaving the Food Stamp Program even though they are still eligible, because it is difficult to take time off of work.<sup>14</sup> A study commissioned by USDA estimated that each reapplication

takes an average of two trips to the office and five hours.<sup>15</sup> With Simplified Reporting people can report minor income changes every six months, rather than more frequently. The increased participation costs are offset by the streamlined re-certification process that eases administration and paperwork costs and reduces errors.

#### **The benefits of Simplified Reporting:**

- Increases federal dollars by freezing a family's benefit for six months and responds only to changes that increase benefits.
- Reduces administrative burdens and costs. Families do not have to fill out excessive amount of reports and, as a result, workers do not process an overwhelming amount of paperwork.
- Decreases errors for both families and DSHS. Since the federal government applies penalties to states with higher error rates, it is in the best interest of Washington to reduce reporting mistakes caused from frequent re-certifications.

Currently the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) of Washington is working toward an integrated Simplified Reporting that combines the set requirements for cash, medical, and food benefits into one application. Families would fulfill the eligibility requirements for only the program with the strictest requirements. The effects of Simplified Reporting are less paperwork, significant administrative savings, and low error rates.<sup>16</sup> DSHS currently plans to implement Simplified Reporting in October 2004. It is critical that this date not be further postponed as it has



been numerous times since Congress made simplified reporting a state option in 2002. Washington state must support this move through a state mandate to ensure that hungry families access food today.

### **Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA)**

**Transitional Benefits Alternative (TBA)** grants Basic Food benefits for five months to families leaving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Food stamps serve as a work support when people transition from TANF to work, and enable them to focus on their jobs. Eric M. Bost, President Bush's Undersecretary of Agriculture for Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services, argues for TBA: "The reasons are easy to understand — if you are worried about your family's next meal, it is hard to focus on your future." Families are often unaware of their food stamp eligibility, which lead to erroneous reductions or terminations of food stamp benefits. Consequently, Washington should take steps to provide this crucial work support.

Six states have adopted Transitional Benefits and four more are extending their certification periods.<sup>17</sup> On average only 35.6% of families leaving TANF continue to receive Basic Food; food stamps keep families off of cash welfare.<sup>18</sup>

#### **There are several benefits for implementing TBA:**

- Newly employed workers will not have to take the time to go through the re-determination of Basic Food while starting a new job.
- Families are able to stabilize before a new level of assistance is set.
- TBA reduces TANF caseloads.

### **Expanded Categorical Eligibility (ECE)**

**Expanded Categorical Eligibility (ECE)** simplifies eligibility requirements by eliminating asset valuation and resource tests. Households that receive a TANF or Maintenance of Effort funded benefit are automatically eligible for food stamps. Instead of waiting for families to become completely destitute, ECE helps alleviate hunger so families can continue to work and go to school.

Having a reliable source of transportation is a major barrier for families seeking Basic Food. Having access to a car enables people to be food secure even more so than proximity to a supermarket.<sup>19</sup> Vehicle exemption is only one of the benefits of ECE.

#### **Other benefits to families from ECE include:**

- Owning a car which helps them seek and maintain jobs, and to access grocery stores;
- Building their assets to work toward economic stability and independence;
- Stabilizing before they lose all financial resources and reaching a more severe level of poverty; and
- Keeping homes and having the ability to pay for other basic needs, such as healthcare.

DSHS has announced plans to allow families to own a car over the current limit of \$4,650. The implementation of ECE, however, has been continually postponed. Making this change in eligibility will have a significant impact on food stamp participation rates and help bring in more federal dollars into the state. From March





*Rita Anderson, Ph D, former University of Washington professor and executive director and board president of North Helpline Food Bank, works with manager Gayle Munns. Seattle, WA*

Rita:

**W**e are part of the community and have to take responsibility for other members. Our community can provide food. Those who have more have more responsibility. At the food bank we provide emergency access to food for people in crisis and transition, but it is not enough. People need to get more involved with the community and know that until there are systemic changes in health care and employment, hunger will continue to persist. When people aren't making enough, people have to make tough choices, and food is often the first to go.

People want to be able to feed themselves and provide for their families; they don't want to come if they don't have to. It's the same story: they had jobs; they got laid off. There is a shortage of jobs. We had a client who was brilliant and had been working at a dot com making a high salary. And when he got laid off, he came to the food bank because he didn't have enough money to eat. He's one of the lucky ones, now he has a job, but there was a time when he was going hungry because of the current economy.

Gayle:

**U**nexpected things happen and people find themselves struggling with health-care or housing costs. We help people save on their food bills and prevent them from being evicted or doing without other necessities. The clients are

diverse, young, old, disabled, working — most of them are educated. There's a fear that people are always coming back to the food bank, but it is not something we found to be a problem. Families are working hard, yet after paying for housing, utilities, and medical bills, they don't have enough to adequately feed their families. When there are job losses or sudden car repairs, your budgets get considerably reduced in other areas, and food is usually what goes to the bottom of the list. Everything is related, it's a domino effect. Food shouldn't be a choice

through July 2002, about 93 cases were closed each month, and 343 cases were denied based on the resource limit. Since ECE applies only to people receiving Basic Food, there would be minimal state costs. Washington can only benefit with improved eligibility requirements.

## **Food Stamp Fairness**

**Food Stamp Fairness** enables people who have completed their sentence on a drug felony conviction to end the cycle of poverty and drugs. They already face difficulty obtaining employment, financial aid for higher education, and social assistance. Hunger is just one more obstacle for peo-

ple with former drug felony convictions. These barriers are particularly pronounced for people of color, because of racial disparities in drug arrests and convictions.<sup>20</sup> Opting out of the lifetime federal ban on people with former drug felony convictions from food assistance is an initial step toward establishing more effective ways of reducing poverty and drug abuse.

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 gave states the option to lift the lifetime ban from food stamps on people convicted of a drug-related felony after August 22, 1996. Currently, 11 states and the District of Columbia have rejected the lifetime ban.



*Tanner Houghton lives in Auburn and understands the economic impact of Food stamps on business.*

I have been in the grocery business for 15 years. For the past six and a half years, I have been working at Safeway. I have seen a lot of families who use EBT cards to get their minimal nutritional needs with help from the Food Stamp Program. From the grocer's perspective, food stamps drive business and help families support themselves. In the beginning of the month, we see many families who use food stamps because they've often gone hungry at the end of the month when they run out of their rations. They can't buy produce because it is extremely perishable, and it is difficult for families to get to the grocery store. Since families are disqualified for owning a car worth more than \$4,650, they have to rely on public transportation. Most of them have to take a taxi because they have too many groceries to carry on a bus. If they have a reliable source of transportation, then they get disqualified from food stamps. It is unfortunate, because they could be using that taxi money for a car to also help them get to jobs or get more nutritional food.

There is a direct link to the amount of business we get and employment. In low-income areas both families and businesses survive with the money generated from food stamps. At the beginning of the month, when families with food stamps generally come to buy food, \$35,000 is generated at my store alone in one week from the EBT cards alone. This economic stimulus is important because the shifts given to the employees are in direct proportion to the amount of business we get. Since many families on the Food Stamp Program come at the beginning of the month, the employees are allotted a higher number of working hours. As families run out of money on their EBT cards, we are given less work. Workers can go from 28 to 18 hours a week. We have families and kids too. It's cyclical and competing with other businesses makes it even more crucial for federally funded dollars to come into our grocery store. Food stamps and other welfare services drive businesses in areas like Auburn.

**People with former drug felony convictions can only be eligible for Basic Food if they:**

- were convicted only of possession or use of any illegal drug;
- were not convicted of a drug-related felony within three years of the most recent conviction;
- were assessed as chemically dependent by a program certified by the division of alcohol and substance abuse (DASA); and
- are taking part in or have completed a rehabilitation plan consisting of chemical dependency treatment and job services.<sup>21</sup>

These requirements exclude a large segment of people with former drug felony

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*The Center on Hunger and Poverty states that, "Black and Hispanic households had food insecurity and hunger rates that were nearly three times those of white (non-Hispanic) households."*

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convictions. For example, job commitments, lack of transportation, or their inability to eat, and therefore, function can limit their ability to participate in treatment. There are insufficient resources for DASA certified programs to allow people to enroll, and, as a consequence, few are able to become eligible for food stamps.

**Todd:**

I'm 33 and I have a mental illness. I've been fighting an addiction half of my life. I was convicted of a drug related felony and as a result don't qualify for food stamps. This puts a burden on my mom because she has to buy my food. If she doesn't provide my food, I go hungry. I applied, but don't qualify for WASHCAP (Washington State Combined Assistance Program) because I have a felony.

**(Due to memory problems and mental illness, Todd's mother, Andrea Bozick, speaks for him):**

Ten years ago Todd was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia. His drug use stemmed from his inability to deal with his disease. Todd got his original conviction in 2000. He has to pay fines for being in a jail from his small social security income. He only gets \$450 a month. You can't live on \$450 without someone supplementing you. Back in the mid 1990s he got \$60 to \$70 dollars a month for food, but in 1996 he lost that benefit. His rent is over \$300 and the energy bills can get really high, especially during the winter. In order to be eligible for food stamps, he must take part in a rehabilitation program that consists of both drug dependency and job services. He is only capable of two to three hours of work before he starts having episodes, regresses, and has meltdowns — that is why he is on SSI. I just hope he is able to be self-sufficient before I am no longer here to take care of him.

People leaving prison have already served their time.

#### **Opting out of the federal ban:**

- Reduces recidivism. If you are hungry and socially ostracized, placing more barriers in the way of independence does not break the cycle of poverty and drug use.
- Decreases state costs in foster care, criminal justice, and public health.
- Increases food stamp participation and therefore generates \$26 million in yearly economic activity in Washington state, with insignificant state expenditures.
- Helps families stay together and decreases negative impacts on children of former felons.
- Confronts the disproportionate impact on people of color.

The federal exclusion of people with former drug felony convictions disproportio-

tionately affects people of color. Most current illicit drug users in Washington are white, and constitute 72% of all drug users. African Americans make up 15% and Hispanics, 10%. Yet, 36.8% of those arrested for drug violations are African American.<sup>22</sup> African Americans comprise almost 58% of those in Washington state prisons for drug felonies; Hispanics account for 20.7%.<sup>23</sup> These outcomes in conjunction with higher hunger rates among minority groups raise questions about the racially disproportionate outcomes. The Center on Hunger and Poverty states that, "Black and Hispanic households had food insecurity and hunger rates that were nearly three times those of white (non-Hispanic) households."<sup>24</sup> Poverty, discrimination, and unemployment all converge to produce a situation where hunger is worsened by restrictive drug policies. If people are expected to lift themselves out of poverty, then we must work to reduce barriers rather than impose them.

The impact of the federal exclusion is

broad and serious. DSHS denies an average of 269 clients each month due to a conviction for drug-related felony. Lifting this ban will decrease racial disparities, recidivism, and hunger rates.

## Child and adolescent nutrition initiatives

School Breakfast, Lunch, and Summer Food programs provide meals to hungry children and improve academic performance. There are many long-term health benefits for improving children's nutrition. Preschool and school-aged children who experience severe hunger have higher levels of chronic illness, anxiety and depression, and behavior problems than children with no hunger.<sup>25</sup> In addition, children not living in homes where food is readily available are 200% more likely to report having fair or poor health, 66% more at risk for iron deficiency anemia,<sup>26</sup> and 37% more likely to have been hospitalized since birth.<sup>27</sup>

### Breakfast, Lunch, and Summer Food programs benefits::

- Child nutrition programs boost local economies by purchasing locally and employing community residents.
- Thousands of kids eat with federal funds.
- Meals help kids learn. Schools already make sure kids eat on test days, demonstrating the link between food and academic performance.
- Summer meals ensure that kids stay fed and healthy all summer and are ready to learn in the fall.

Studies published by the Food Research and Action Center prove that breakfast and lunch have a significant impact on a child's ability to perform well in school.

### Breakfast and lunch have a significant impact on a child's ability to perform well in school:

- Schools that serve breakfast to all students in the classroom show increases in standardized test scores.<sup>28</sup>
- Children who skip breakfast are less able to distinguish among similar images, show increased errors, and have slower memory recall.<sup>29</sup>
- Hungry children have lower math scores and are more likely to repeat a grade.<sup>30</sup>
- A healthy eating environment teaches children good nutrition and the elements of a proper diet, which can have positive effects on children's eating habits and physical well-being throughout life.<sup>31</sup>
- Properly nourished children actively participate in the education experience, which benefits them, their fellow students, and the entire school community.<sup>32</sup>
- Behavioral, emotional and academic problems are more prevalent among hungry children.<sup>33</sup>
- Hungry children are more likely to be hyperactive, absent, and tardy.<sup>34</sup>

## School Breakfast and Lunch programs

Twenty states have stronger breakfast policies than WA.<sup>35</sup> There is no reason why children should go hungry when federal reimbursement is available. The state



*Vicki Dwight, a health and fitness teacher at Franklin Middle School, has been teaching for 22 years. Yakima, WA*

**A**s a teacher, I see every day how important nutrition is. Breakfast is especially important. Children who don't eat can't pay attention or stay on task. There are so many kids at our school who come in without breakfast and with no money for lunch. I've bought kids lunch several times, as do many other teachers; we know they won't have anything to eat if we don't give them lunch. Sometimes I bring in snacks and offer them without the kids having to ask. There is a real link between getting adequate nutrition and learning. I see the tangible impact of hunger on academic performance.

Our school has begun the breakfast program and I've seen it help. When I come into the cafeteria there is healthy food and I don't see food wasted. There are several children whose only meals during the day are what they get at school. Summer food programs are also necessary because kids don't just need to eat during the school year—and their families don't stop having trouble providing for them just because it's summer. This is an issue for all schools in Yakima, and across the state — every school has students who are going hungry.

How can the state expect students to learn, let alone pass the WASL, if we haven't even met their basic needs? I can't believe there are schools or districts out there that don't have the School Breakfast or Summer Food programs. It's a federal program; it's simply a matter of paperwork.

Breakfast and lunch programs are not an add-on. For most kids it's all they get to eat. Breakfast, Lunch, and Summer Food programs are fundamental feeding programs; it's a matter of survival.

provides \$5 million for school districts to help provide breakfast to low-income children, and \$500,000 for start up funds to establish the meal programs. The superintendent of public instruction may grant additional funds for breakfast start-up and expansion grants.<sup>36</sup> For every school without lunch or breakfast, there is a school of similar size and demographics that has managed to start and maintain meal programs.

## **Summer Food programs**

Washington state added funds to the Summer Food Program in 1997 after federal funding was cut, but some schools

have not taken advantage of this resource. Summertime is when kids are most at risk for hunger. Providing meals ensure that kids stay healthy all summer and are ready to learn in the fall. Thousands more children would be fed in the summer if the state required all school districts operating summer meal programs to open their meals sites to all children in the area. Child nutrition programs purchase locally and employ community residents, which helps the local economy. The evidence is clear that hunger produces detrimental effects upon children. Having good health at a young age prevents future health problems and enables children to reach their fullest potential.

# Conclusion

Basic Food and School Breakfast, Lunch, and Summer Food programs are the most logical and effective tools in ending high hunger rates. Washington has several compelling incentives for increasing participation in these programs: lower hunger rates, economic stimulus, and minimal state costs. Washington has been slow in adopting any of the 2002 Farm Bill options; 44 states and territories have taken one or more options.<sup>37</sup> The key goal behind the Food Stamp Reauthorization Act was to simplify the process, retain, and

increase participation. The USDA specifically targets the options recommended in this report as the most effective options for reducing hunger. The School Breakfast, Lunch, and Summer Food programs are the best way to reach children, and Washington must work to increase participation in order to truly recognize that every child deserves an equal chance. These recommendations are the best tools we have for fighting hunger and without their full utilization Washington will continue to have one of the top hunger rates in the nation.

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## Endnotes

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2 A recent study published by the Joint Center for Poverty Research showed that people receiving a significant amount of food stamps had a far greater chance of obtaining healthy, affordable than they would from food banks. More importantly, Basic Food allows families to access food with dignity. Unlike food pantries, the Food Stamp Program's primary goal is to alleviate basic hunger and malnutrition through socially acceptable ways, rather than as a full feeding service. The Food Stamp Act of 1997, Section 2, states that the Food Stamp Program's purpose is "to permit low-income households to obtain a more nutritious diet through normal channels of trade increasing food purchasing power for all eligible households who apply for participation."

3 In Washington, school breakfast is required only in schools where over 40 percent of the lunches are served free or at a reduced price. As a result, 241 schools do not offer the School Breakfast Program. With a breakfast and lunch mandate, 22,268 children would be affected.

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9 Washington can easily make these changes through the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (Pub. L. 107-171), which includes in Title IV, the Food Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2002, and the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PROWRA).

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  - 17 States that have adopted TBA: Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania. The states who are extending certification: Arizona, Colorado, Massachusetts, and New York.
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**Washington Citizen Action** is a statewide, grassroots organization. With over 50,000 members, we are the largest consumer advocacy group in the state. We work on a range of issues with the broad aim of bringing about greater economic justice in our state and the country. Our board represents a coalition of groups, including labor, senior, faith, and community organizations. Our field and telephone canvasses do education, activation, and fundraising with our members. Our strength as an organization depends on our members' involvement.

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