

Hunger and social misery soar in Washington D.C. during the pandemic

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As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to cut a path of sickness through the population, numerous studies and investigations have revealed the growth of a far more pervasive and silent killer stalking the United States: hunger.

According to a report published last month by the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC), the number of people in the US experiencing a persistent lack of food sometimes or often climbed above 29 million people in July. This number represents nearly 11 percent of the US population. This is a near quadrupling of the number of such people in 2018, when 8 million adults were in this category.

The report states that in 38 states and the District of Columbia, 1 in 10 adults with child dependants find themselves without enough food to feed themselves and their family on a regular basis.

“Food need is being driven by unemployment, particularly in service industries, e.g., Uber drivers, childcare workers, hospitality industry, including hotels and restaurants, home health care and school services,” a representative of the Falls Church Community Services Council in Northern Virginia told the *World Socialist Web Site* in an email. “Our recent clients now include people who were managing before the pandemic, but now can no longer afford rent, utilities and food.”

Falls Church, located in the near-suburbs of Washington D.C., is an independent jurisdiction inside Fairfax County. In 2011, it was named the wealthiest county in the United States, with a median income of \$113,000 per household, its wealth largely attributable to the number of federal contractors stationed nearby. The city’s largest employer is its school system.

Last month, a report in the local ABC News affiliate WJLA noted that the Capital Area Food Bank, a

supplier to over 450 charity organizations and groups in the area, found a nearly 300 percent surge in demand for its services. When contacted, Amanda Rogers, Communications Director for the Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services office, reported a surge of “residents who have never called or had a case open with CSP [Coordinated Services Planning] before.” This was nearly four times more than the average monthly new caller rate in fiscal year 2019.

While the need is dire, the pandemic has restricted the ability of local charities to respond. According to the WJLA report, out of nearly 150 food banks in the D.C. area that partner with the Capital Area Food Bank, “only 45 are operational.”

The Falls Church Community Services Council reported “a lack of volunteers willing to risk illness while making sure people get food.” This is especially noticeable as “the core of many food pantries’ volunteer bases are in the most vulnerable age group” for COVID-19. In addition to this, “Many stores [in spring] had placed limits on purchases of food as well as paper goods and cleaning supplies which some pantries provide.”

In other words, a complete breakdown has occurred throughout charitable networks, affecting everything from personnel to supplies.

“Location is another factor,” NPR reports, in addition to resource scarcity. A report last month using data from the US Department of Agriculture found, “People who live in food deserts are often more likely to experience food insecurity because food is harder to obtain where they live.” The report notes that 19 million Americans live in regions classified as food deserts, where supermarkets stocking fresh fruits and vegetables, dairy products and other healthy foods are

nonexistent.

This has affected every demographic in the US population. According to the US Department of Agriculture, while African American and Hispanic families are more than twice as likely to be food insecure, the report notes that rural areas of the United States are more likely to become food deserts due to the spread out population as well as the lack of economic opportunity.

The stark growth of social misery is a searing indictment of both the Democratic and Republican parties. Both parties sought to shore up big business and Wall Street interests through the passage of the multitrillion-dollar CARES Act as the pandemic swept across the United States in early spring. The enacted bill was a giveaway to the financial elite, who have seen their wealth and holdings skyrocket during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the minor benefits awarded the working population became memories months ago.

It is significant that the primary recipients of the aid are teachers and home health care workers, i.e., those who are being placed on the front lines by callous officials determined to reopen public schools and businesses in the pursuit of profits. In Northern Virginia, Fairfax County, the region's largest school system, is beginning this week sending groups of schoolchildren to in-person classes. The purposeful impoverishment of teachers and other education workers has been instrumental in forcing them back to work in unsafe conditions.

A team of reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* visited So Others Might Eat (SOME), a non-profit organization in Washington D.C., located a little over a mile from the White House and National Mall. We spoke with Terrellyn, a retiree who had been accessing SOME for nearly two years. "I usually visit this place at the end of the month, or on Wednesdays to get groceries," she said. "That way, the only thing I have to worry about is buying meat."

Terrellyn confirmed that need for food aid during the pandemic was dire. "If you come out here around 7 a.m. in the morning, it looks like a block party" due to the number of people lined up to receive free breakfast. "You can still see construction workers cleaning up the mess from the number of people [who line up to receive free meals]. A lot of people have become homeless during the pandemic because of foreclosures," she said.

According to the Public Broadcasting Service, "Roughly 21 million people were already struggling to scrape rent together before the pandemic hit. Now, with unemployment at record highs, only a temporary government moratorium on evictions keeps many from losing their homes." A study by Princeton University's Eviction Lab found in a study of over 2,600 women with children that those who had been evicted were more likely to develop physical and mental health issues within a year's time. The children also suffered in their schooling.

Terrellyn explained that she had yet to receive any stimulus money during the pandemic because she lacked internet access and could not establish that she was no one's dependent. "It doesn't matter who is elected [in the November 3 presidential election]," she said, "there won't be any stimulus for us."



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