

Capital Area Food Bank report documents widespread food insecurity across the D.C. metro area

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In the shadow of Congress and the White House, food insecurity in the Washington D.C. region has become a chronic crisis for the working class. The government shutdown left thousands of federal workers furloughed or unpaid and lining up at food banks, while the Trump administration's refusal to release full SNAP benefits for November has deepened the hardship.

On September 26, shortly before the shutdown began, the Capital Area Food Bank released its annual Hunger Report, which makes clear that food insecurity across the region has become an entrenched and persistent crisis. In the past year, 36 percent of households experienced at least one food-related hardship. This level has remained virtually unchanged from 2024, when 37 percent reported food insecurity and is up from 32 percent in 2023.

The number of people suffering "very low food security" has grown sharply, rising from 16 percent of households in 2022 to 22 percent today. This amounts to at least 820,000 residents who regularly face "multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake." The report notes that many in this category are federal workers and contractors whose employment has been hit by recent cuts.

Underlying the increase in food insecurity is a decline in real wages and growing unemployment. Over the last five years, real wages in the region have fallen by 12.1 percent, compared to 2.8 percent nationally. During the same period, consumer prices have risen roughly 21 percent nationwide since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal workers have been particularly hard hit. As of May 2025, 41 percent of households with direct or indirect federal government employment that had

experienced a job loss were food insecure, compared with 17 percent of similar households who did not experience job loss. Among those who lost work, more than two-thirds now face "very low food security."

Food insecure households are being pushed to the edge of financial collapse. Eighty-three percent reported exhausting their savings to meet basic needs. Seventy percent are paying only minimums on credit cards, 62 percent have reduced retirement contributions and nearly one-third have already been forced into early retirement withdrawals.

Credit card debt in the region is soaring with the average household now carrying nearly \$11,000 in balances as delinquencies rise. Among low-income households, defined as those earning up to \$89,000 a year, more than half reported being forced to choose between feeding their families and meeting basic costs like transportation, utilities, housing or medical care.

This deepening crisis stems from the policies of both major parties and the capitalist system they defend, which subordinates every social need to profit.

After taking office, Trump, backed by his largest campaign contributor Elon Musk and the Republican Party, rapidly eliminated hundreds of thousands of federal jobs and gutted key social programs. Central to this assault was the grotesque "Big Beautiful Bill Act," which cemented enormous tax cuts for the financial elite and imposed a \$186 billion cut to SNAP funding over the next 10 years.

In the D.C. region, 50,000 families are set to lose an average of \$187 a month in benefits once the provisions take full effect. The bill's Medicaid cuts, projected to remove health coverage from more than 8 million people across the country by 2034, will deprive tens of

thousands of residents in the region of medical care.

Democratic officials in the region, no less committed to the ruling class than their Republican counterparts, have carried out sweeping austerity measures against workers. Over the summer, Washington D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser unveiled the “Grow DC” budget and imposed cuts to address a billion-dollar shortfall. The plan tightens Medicaid eligibility for the poorest residents and reduces Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. It also abolishes cost-of-living increases through 2030, increases penalties for unmet work requirements and reinstates harsh sanctions for anyone reaching the 60-month TANF limit.

Even as social programs are cut, the city has committed nearly a billion dollars to a new football stadium, \$515 million to Capital One Arena renovations and \$343 million in police salaries for fiscal year 2026, a 13 percent raise for the police force.

Under the Biden administration, child food insecurity nationwide soared by 46 percent, rising from 13 percent to 19 percent. In the Washington region, food insecurity reached a record 37 percent during Biden’s final year in office. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, homelessness on a single night in 2024 was higher than at any point in recorded history.

The crisis deepened further during the record-long government shutdown. Almost 42 million people saw their food stamp benefits reduced, with nearly 5 million losing benefits entirely and another 5.4 million receiving only about \$12 for November.

With few alternatives, unpaid federal workers, laid-off employees and low-income families are increasingly turning to food pantries. Many organizations report unprecedented demand; in one case, a D.C. food bank saw its clientele double in just a few weeks in late October 2025. So What Else Inc., a local food bank, is attempting to raise its weekly distributions from 450,000 pounds to as much as 600,000 pounds to meet the surge. This trend mirrors national patterns, especially in cities with large federal workforces.

While misery deepens for millions, staggering wealth continues to pile up at the top. Oxfam’s recent annual report on inequality found that the 10 richest Americans increased their collective fortunes by nearly

\$700 billion in the last year. The richest 1 percent now holds 49 percent of stocks, valued at \$19.7 trillion, while the bottom half holds only 1 percent.

Oxfam projects that, if current trends continue, at least five trillionaires could emerge within the next decade. During the Biden administration, the wealth of the 10 richest Americans grew by hundreds of billions, with the inflation-adjusted wealth of the top billionaires increasing by more than 500 percent since 2020.

This extreme concentration of wealth shapes the response of the ruling class to the deepening social crisis. Such levels of inequality cannot be maintained through traditional democratic methods. The Trump administration’s cuts to essential social programs such as food stamps, Medicaid and public health agencies are designed to finance tax cuts for the super-rich and sustain a \$1 trillion annual military budget. This naked class war program is fully supported by the Democratic Party, which, like the Republicans, is funded by the American oligarchy and is a pro-war party.

Ending hunger in a society on the verge of producing trillionaires requires the independent intervention of the working class. This means building rank-and-file committees in every workplace and community to organize mass action, oppose both capitalist parties and fight for a socialist program that places the needs of billions above the wealth of a few.



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