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**PROJECT BREAD'S 2012 STATUS REPORT ON HUNGER REVEALS A BROADER
FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL SOLUTIONS TO HUNGER IN THE FACE OF A 43%
INCREASE IN FOOD INSECURITY IN MASSACHUSETTS SINCE 2008**

BOSTON, MA November 19, 2012 – The *2012 Project Bread Status Report on Hunger*, released today as the state's annual report card on hunger, reveals a significant increase in food insecurity — with the rate over 43 percent greater than it was before the recession of 2008. (This number represents the difference between the three-year average of 8.3 percent for 2006–2008 and the three-year average of 11.9 percent for 2009–2011.) More people are working harder and longer hours at minimum wage and find it difficult to meet monthly household expenses.

The federal government, through its annual household survey, measures the problem but is less revealing about solutions. That's why, during the past year, Project Bread conducted an extensive statewide survey to better understand hunger in Massachusetts and to shed light on what was working at the very local level.

“We wanted to get behind the numbers and find out how real people were coping,” said Ellen Parker, executive director of Project Bread and co-author of the study. “The data at the national level consistently tells us that emergency food distribution is very important, but is only used by a fraction of the food-insecure population — about 35 percent. While the absolute numbers go up as the population increases, the proportion that uses emergency food pantries and soup kitchens (35 percent) has been constant for years.”

Continued Parker: “We felt that learning how everyone else copes, what strategies they rely on, is the first step toward building twenty-first century solutions. This is not a one-size-fits-all problem, and every solution has its limits.”

During its year-long investigation, Project Bread cast the net wide — investigators interviewed hundreds of community leaders, parents, teenagers, seniors, free-clinic patients, young single mothers, union members, economists, public health experts, and government workers. Investigators found that while the perspectives were different, that common themes emerged. The most striking new theme was this: low-income people throughout the Commonwealth want a fair chance to solve their problems and have good ideas about community-based solutions that will work.

Project Bread learned that food-insecure people wanted hunger relief that provided food but also strengthened their local community and they wanted to take an active role in solving their problems. For example, in addition to securing emergency food and SNAP (food stamps), they asked for investment in food co-ops, food hubs, “bounty bucks” for

SNAP (food stamp) users, which provide an incentive to buying fresh produce, urban agriculture, micro-businesses for immigrant farmers, community gardens, community meals for learning how to cook on a limited budget, and, of course, increased investment in quality school food, including pre-school, after-school, and summer meals.

“During our year-long project, we learned many important lessons,” Parker added. “We learned that food insecurity and hunger are a part of, not separate from, the complex interconnected system that we all rely on to eat every day. The investments we make, and the strategies we use, to address food insecurity have an impact on our environment, our schools, our public health, and our state’s emerging agricultural economy.”

Specific policy recommendations which emerged from the report include:

- Broaden the focus of philanthropic support for antihunger work to include systemic solutions, such as universal access to healthy school food, and high-impact local solutions like community gardens, food co-ops, urban agriculture, and food hubs.
- Develop a systems perspective on the investments the Commonwealth makes to end hunger, grounded in the strength, creativity, and resiliency of individuals and communities. Continue to build the case for investments that help individuals, that build community, and that create value for the local economy.
- Involve residents and local leaders in prioritizing the allocation of resources within food-insecure communities.
- Advocate vigorously to retain SNAP (food stamps) as an entitlement program, recognizing it as an irreplaceable source of assistance to food-insecure people and an important source of revenue for grocery stores across Massachusetts.
- Provide leadership, technical assistance, and resources to support the capacity of schools across the state to serve healthy meals that children like to eat. Promote the purchase of locally grown products as a direct investment in our regional economy.
- Support and expand food rescue — reclaiming healthy food as a sustainable and environmentally positive way to provide no- and low-cost nutritious community meals.

“Compassion and charity will always be needed and appreciated,” said Parker “yet the majority of people want a *hand up* not a hand out: they aren’t willing to accept permanent recipient status, nor should they.

The complete report and downloadable charts are available online at www.projectbread.org/statusreport. The report presents the data to support these finding and solutions as well as offers downloadable graphs and graphics.

About Project Bread

As the state's leading antihunger organization, Project Bread is dedicated to alleviating, preventing, and ultimately ending hunger in Massachusetts. Through The Walk for Hunger, the oldest continual pledge walk in the country, and other sources, Project Bread provides millions of dollars each year in privately donated funds to support over 430 community food programs throughout Massachusetts. They include emergency food programs, schools, summer food programs, non-profit farms, subsidized Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) programs, Chefs in Schools, food banks, food rescue programs, community gardens, farmer's markets, and other programs that protect the individual and strengthen community food security. For more information, visit www.projectbread.org.

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