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Cuts may end up creating more hunger

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COMMUNITY VIEW

It is distressing that funding for the much-lauded Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (S. 3307), signed into law by President Barack Obama this month, is taken directly from benefits and services meant for poor, food-insecure Americans. This significant legislation is the largest investment ever made in federal child nutrition programs, allocating \$4.5 billion in additional funding over the next 10 years. By improving access to food after school, on weekends and during school breaks and summer vacations when at-risk children are most vulnerable, it is intended to close the hunger gap for millions of American children.

In a classic case of “robbing Peter to pay Paul,” the legislation relies on cuts to SNAP — the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, formerly known as Food Stamps — for partial funding. This means that families of those same food-insecure children targeted by the bill will lose the “safety net” put into place by Congress to help them during these difficult times.

Reducing access to food for the 42.3 million Americans, nearly half of whom are children, who rely on SNAP benefits will create even more food scarcity at home for struggling families and children.

Ironically, just last month,

the Agriculture Department’s Economic Research Service released its annual report, “Household Food Insecurity in the United States,” providing a sobering snapshot of the pervasiveness of hunger in America. Based on data collected by the government in December 2009, the report reveals that 12.4 percent of New York residents are food insecure, meaning they lack consistent access to a nutritious, well-balanced diet. Child hunger remains critically high, with nearly 1 in 4 children at risk of hunger in 2009.

However, levels of food insecurity, while unacceptably high, were not as great as predicted last year, providing strong evidence that the now-endangered safety net helped

many families at risk of hunger in 2009. In Westchester last year, the Food Bank distributed 6 million pounds of food — 1 million more than the previous year — and experienced a 30 percent increase in household food requests, and this was with the safety net in place. Imagine the levels of hunger and food insecurity if the SNAP cuts are not restored!

While we applaud President Obama for vowing to restore the funds to SNAP before the cuts become effective in 2013, he and our other elected officials need to hear from us that the cuts to SNAP are unacceptable as well as unfair to vulnerable families.

Tough decisions are now being made in Washington and here in Westchester to



File photo by Joe Larese/The Journal News

Michele Berkwits, a professor from Berkeley College in White Plains, packages cereal at the Food Bank for Westchester.

reduce the deficit, lower taxes and balance the budget, but failing to support hunger-relief programs — especially programs for hungry families — is not the answer. Now is the time to contact your elected officials and ask them to restore SNAP funding. Let

them know we will not allow children, seniors and their families to suffer from hunger in America — or in Westchester.

The writer is executive director of the Food Bank for Westchester.