

## STUDY POINTS TO GAP IN FOOD STAMP USE

By James Goodman  
Staff Writer

(March 16, 2004) — Almost 18,000 residents in Monroe County appear to be eligible for food stamps but don't receive them, says a new study by the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund.

The study derived this number by looking at the total of residents who, by the 2000 census, would appear to qualify for food stamps and then comparing that number with the number of recipients as of June.

If all those eligible were enrolled, an estimated \$11.1 million more in federal money would flow to Monroe County for this federally funded program, said Rachel Cooper, program and policy associate for the Children's Defense fund, a nonprofit research group.

The study, "Giving New York's Children a Fair Start in Life: Supports for Working Families," made similar calculations across the state and, according to Cooper, Monroe County was the one that had the highest percentage of low-income residents — 79 percent — receiving food stamps.

"There should be absolutely no reason why the county would not want anyone eligible to participate in food stamps," said Bryan Hetherington, chief counsel for the Public Interest Law Office of Rochester.

But he said that the application process to get food stamps has become more difficult over the past year because of "understaffed and

overwhelmed bureaucracy" resulting from the reorganization of social services.

Joe Martino, acting director of the Department of Human and Health Services, said that as of March, 69,815 individuals in the county received food stamps, and he believes there are eligible people not receiving this benefit.

Yet Martino said that the reorganization of social services has helped get people enrolled in food stamps because they are now told about applying for food stamps whenever they apply for public assistance or Medicaid, rather than having to apply for food stamps separately.

The Children's Defense study also estimated that about 6,200 low-income residents in the county were not taking advantage of the Earned Income Tax Credit at the federal and state levels.

If all the low-income residents eligible for these credits used them, residents would receive about \$8 million more in federal and state refunds, Cooper said.

United Way of Greater Rochester is heading up an initiative — Creating Assets, Savings & Hope — that started last year to encourage use of tax credits. Last year, about 2,500 households got free help from this initiative in filling out their tax forms to take advantage of these credits. They received an estimated \$3.7 million in tax credits, said Becky Cania, spokeswoman for United Way.

This year, about 3,400 households have already taken advantage of the United Way program. For more information, contact United Way at (585) 242-6485 or online at [www.uwRochester.org](http://www.uwRochester.org).

The Defense Fund study also estimated that about 335,000 children and 825,000 adults without insurance in New York should be eligible for Medicaid, Child Health Plus or Family Health Plus but are not enrolled.

The study didn't break down enrollment possibilities by county, but a 2000 survey by the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency found 2 percent of children and 10 percent of adults under 65 in the county were uninsured, said Bonnie DeVinney, executive director of this group.

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