

# Middle-income families rationing food, poll finds



Local foodbanks reported 155,000 visits in the first three months of 2023 compared to 71,000 in the first three months of 2021, according to Foodlink's CEO. MEEGAN M. REID/USA TODAY NETWORK

## Housing, health care also a struggle for many in Monroe

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Even the "middle class" is in trouble. Six in 10 Monroe County families with income under \$100,000 sometimes have to ration their food until the next paycheck, according to poll results

released Wednesday by The Children's Agenda, one among several alarming statistics showing the prevalence and effects of poverty in the Rochester area.

Among the other findings:

- Four out of five families with income under \$50,000 can't afford fruits and vegetables weekly, and half report that the adults sometimes skip meals

so that children can eat.

- Nearly half of all parents report that finding affordable housing is a challenge, including three-quarters of city residents.

- Four of 10 parents struggle to afford health care coverage that includes

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**Rochester parent and mental health counselor Danielle Jones speaks at a press conference about poverty hosted by The Children's Agenda on Wednesday.** JUSTIN MURPHY/ROCHESTER DEMOCRAT AND CHRONICLE

## Poll

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mental health.

- Three quarters of parents earning less than \$50,000 said their child “shows concern about my stress over money.”

### How do you provide for your kids in New York, with rising costs?

Danielle Jones, a Rochester resident and mother of two, grew up in poverty and promised herself that her kids would have a more stress-free childhood than she did. She went to college and got a job as a mental health counselor with a focus on mothers.

She thought that would be enough for some level of comfortable. Instead, she relies on food stamps and stays up at night worrying about how to stretch her income to provide for her children.

“Just when I thought I made it, the needle moved again,” she said. “It’s expensive to feed our babies healthy meals. ... I don’t want to have to think about making this box of Goldfish last a few more days.”

Foodlink CEO Julia Tedesco said that local food-banks reported 155,000 visits in the first three months of 2023 compared to 71,000 in the first three months of 2021.

### What can we do about higher cost of living for middle class and below?

The Children’s Agenda and the advocates at Wednesday’s press conference named several concrete proposals they said would alleviate the effects of poverty on families:

- Enacting the state Working Families Tax Credit, allowing parents to keep more of their income.

- Reinstating free school meals to all students in the state.
- Creating a housing access voucher to help people find affordable housing sooner.
- Creating a permanent child care fund to allow for higher wages for child care workers, and finding a way to increase the availability of child care nights and weekends.
- Enhancing Medicaid coverage for children and expanding the availability of school-based health programs, including mental health.

### ‘Poverty is due to a lack of cash, not character’

“Poverty is due to a lack of cash, not character,” Children’s Agenda CEO Larry Marx said. “We know what works to lift children out of poverty and to help working families catch a break. All that has been missing is the political will to enact common-sense solutions.”

The state Senate on Tuesday held a public hearing on the causes and effects of concentrated poverty in small and medium-sized cities in New York.

“We know there are things the state can do,” Sen. Samra Brouk said. “When we look at our healthiest and safest communities where people are thriving, you don’t see concentrated levels of poverty. In fact you see greater investment; you see resources coming through development programs.”

The phone and text message poll of 600 Monroe County parents was conducted in early November in English and Spanish and has an overall margin of error of 4.9 percentage points.

*Justin Murphy is a veteran reporter at the Democrat and Chronicle and author of “Your Children Are Very Greatly in Danger: School Segregation in Rochester, New York.” Follow him on Twitter at twitter.com/CitizenMurphy or contact him at jmurphy7@gannett.com.*