

For Immediate Release

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## **USC Annenberg and Center for Investigative Reporting Produce Multimedia Series “Hunger in the Golden State”**

### ***Investigative series reveals escalating hunger crisis in California***

Los Angeles, CA – The [USC Annenberg School for Journalism & Communication](#) has teamed up with the Center for Investigative Reporting’s [California Watch](#) to launch an investigative, multimedia series titled [“Hunger in the Golden State.”](#) The series debuts on March 19 and will run in newspapers, on radio stations and online news outlets statewide over the next three weeks.

Over six months, Annenberg journalism graduate students interviewed dozens of state and local-level food bank officials as well as the Californians who struggle with food shortages every day. The reporting unearthed new numbers that show hunger is rising at an unprecedented rate in California and nationwide and affects millions – including those in affluent areas – but is invisible to many.

The stories explore food waste, nutrition in schools and ways to help Californians fighting to ward off hunger. The project reveals that nearly one in eight people in California has asked for food assistance in the last year. Food banks and social services are overwhelmed, reporters found.

[The Los Angeles Times](#) teamed a staff reporter with a student to produce a story explaining how California leaves millions of federal dollars on the table because of problems in the way the state runs its end of the Food Stamp program. “The combined effort sheds light on a significant public policy issue facing the state. At the same time, the team reporting approach has allowed us to help in training one of the next generation of California journalists,” said Times editor Russ Stanton. “That’s a double victory.”

“Hunger in the Golden State” kicks off March 19, with the first story of a three-part series airing on KQED Public Media’s statewide broadcast, [The California Report](#). In Los Angeles, the programs will air on three consecutive Fridays, beginning on the 19th, on KPCC, 89.3 FM.

“When we saw the quality of work that the students had generated, it was clear that it was a high-value, important and well researched look at an important public issue in California. And that’s what we’re about,” said Raul Ramirez, executive producer of The California Report. “It was just solid work that the students did.”

Annenberg journalism professor Sandy Tolan transformed his class into a newsroom to produce the series, alongside former California Watch launch manager Marcia Parker (now West Coast editorial director of AOL’s Patch.com) and the Center for Investigative Reporting. Parker and Tolan served as co-teachers and editors of the project, with additional editing by the California Watch team.

“We set out to get beyond just chronicling rising hunger in the face of the recession in California and the nation to delve more deeply into the roots of the current hunger crisis, the effectiveness of the safety

net programs put in place decades ago, and the barriers that keep tons of edible food from getting to hungry Californians,” Tolan said.

Each student spent hundreds of hours reporting, writing and producing the project, Tolan said. They used on-the-ground reporting to explore the struggle of hungry Californians as well as the challenges governments and charities have in helping them. The result is a comprehensive, in-depth series with more than 20 multimedia pieces.

School of Journalism director Geneva Overholser said the partnership reflects a growing trend, led by USC Annenberg, of top journalism schools partnering with legacy media to create remarkable projects.

“This rich and valuable journalism shows beautifully the kind of contribution that journalism schools can make in this time of unsettlement among news organizations,” Overholser said. “Capable and talented journalism students working with these terrific partners and dedicated editors are meeting substantial public information needs.”

California Watch editorial director Mark Katches said the project was well worth the time and energy the collaborators put into it.

“Students benefit by getting great experience and ability to work with top-flight journalists,” Katches said. “California Watch benefits because we get more eyes and ears on the ground to do important reporting that needs to be done. Readers benefit by seeing stories that need to be told.”

The project was a challenge, but the experience was invaluable, students said. Jacqueline Howard liked having the help of the pros when it came to polishing her broadcast package.

“It was a great experience to hear not only what the editors from the Center and California Watch expected out of the collaboration, but also what they expected from our work,” she said.

With the weight of CIR professionals behind them, the walls between academic work and real-world journalism broke down, said online journalism graduate student Emilie Mutert, who contributed an investigative piece about the “sagging safety net” of food stamps in California.

“What we did was technically student work but it could be professional work because it’s so well reported,” she said.

Second-year graduate student journalists in the class also included Francesca Ayala, Kim Daniels, Katie Evarts, Irma Widjojo, Tina Mather, Shannon Pence, Ashley Ragovin, Anant Goenka, Traci Hanamura, Dianne de Guzman and Alaena Hostetter. Other contributors to the project include Annenberg journalism professors Robert Hernandez and Nonny de la Peña, communication professor Peter Clarke and Sachi Cunningham, video journalist for the Los Angeles Times.

Tolan said the key to the project’s success was creating a class atmosphere where he was as much an editor and colleague as a professor. “When you get students working together on a common project about an important issue, the work that they do individually adds up to something greater than the sum

of the parts,” Tolan said. “Students end up understanding an issue in depth and that gives them the opportunity to cover the issues later in their careers.”

### **About the Center For Investigative Reporting**

Founded in 1977, the [Center for Investigative Reporting](#) is the nation's longest-running nonprofit investigative news organization. Its mission is to produce and distribute multimedia reporting that reveals injustice and abuse of power, has an impact, and is relevant to people's lives. CIR reports reach the public through television, print, radio and the web, appearing in outlets such as 60 Minutes, PBS Frontline, NPR, The Los Angeles Times, Washington Post, Politico and U.S. News & World Report. CIR stories have received numerous journalism awards including the Alfred I. du Pont-Columbia University Silver Baton, George Polk Award, Emmy Award, Investigative Reporters and Editors Award, and National Magazine Award for Reporting Excellence. More importantly, its reports have sparked congressional hearings and legislation, United Nations resolutions, public interest lawsuits and change in corporate policies. CIR founded California Watch to help create a new model for regional investigative reporting.

### **About California Watch**

[California Watch](#) began operation in the fall of 2009 and has built the largest investigative team operating in the state. The new investigative team has already partnered with more than 45 news organizations in California to produce watchdog stories for newspapers, online outlets, television stations and radio. Our major funders are the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. California Watch is a project of the Center for Investigative Reporting.

### **About the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism**

Located in Los Angeles at the [University of Southern California](#), the [Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism](#) ([Annenberg.usc.edu](http://Annenberg.usc.edu)) is a national leader in education and scholarship in the fields of communication, journalism, public diplomacy and public relations. With an enrollment of more than 2,200 students, USC Annenberg offers doctoral, graduate and undergraduate degree programs, as well as continuing development programs for working professionals, across a broad scope of academic inquiry. The school's comprehensive curriculum emphasizes the core skills of leadership, innovation, service and entrepreneurship and draws upon the resources of a networked university located in the media capital of the world.

### **About KQED Public Radio**

KQED Public Radio ([www.kqed.org](http://www.kqed.org)) is a service of Northern California Public Broadcasting, Inc. (NCPB). KQED Public Radio, home of *Forum* with Michael Krasny and *The California Report*, is one of the most-listened-to public radio stations in the nation with an award-winning news and public affairs program service. Listen on 88.5 FM or Comcast channel 960 in San Francisco, 89.3 FM in Sacramento, 88.3 FM in Santa Rosa and 88.1 FM in Martinez. KQED Public Radio 88.5 FM and 89.3 FM also broadcast in analog

and HD Radio technology. Stream programs live and download archives and audio podcasts at [www.kqed.org](http://www.kqed.org), featuring unique content on one of the most-visited station sites in public broadcasting.

**For more information, contact:**

Gretchen Parker, USC Annenberg

Email: [gretchen.parker@usc.edu](mailto:gretchen.parker@usc.edu)

Office: (213) 740-6302 Cell: (410) 215-1931

Lisa Cohen, California Watch

[lisa@lisacohen.org](mailto:lisa@lisacohen.org)

(310) 395-2544

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