



**Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force**

## **Shorter Term Recommendations**

**Submitted to Governor Ted Strickland on September 10, 2008**

# Table of Contents

Letter to the Governor

The Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force – Background

Shorter Term Recommendations

Addendum A: Ideas for Upcoming Budget Conversations

Dear Governor Strickland:

Thank you for your continued leadership on the issue of poverty and financial insecurity in Ohio.

We specifically want to recognize the investments being made to create new, good-paying jobs through the bipartisan economic stimulus package, expand health care coverage, increase access to and quality of early childhood development programs, prevent additional foreclosures through the Save the Dream initiative, make college more affordable, and improve access to work supports through the Ohio Benefit Bank.

These investments will go a long way in reducing poverty in our state, however, as you said on May 28, more must be done. We believe that the pragmatic and common-sense solutions submitted here will help improve the outcomes for those currently struggling to make ends meet.

The work of the Task Force comes at a very critical time. The national economy is slumping, adversely affecting the economic situation in Ohio. The cost of food and fuel has skyrocketed while real wages have remained stagnant or declined for too many Ohioans. The mortgage crisis continues to threaten homeowners as well as renters.

In a tough economic climate like this one, those living in poverty are oftentimes the hardest hit. Paying for their basic needs with such inflation becomes increasingly difficult with little to no savings to supplement monthly income. We keep this in mind as we submit our shorter term recommendations today, and we will do so as we begin work on the longer term recommendations to be delivered to you in April of next year.

We stand ready to assist you in any way we can as you consider these shorter term recommendations.

Sincerely,

The Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force

## **The Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force Background**

On May 28, 2008, Governor Ted Strickland signed an executive order (2008-11S) creating the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force (Task Force). The Task Force will provide practical short-term and long-term strategic recommendations that the Administration should consider in its ongoing effort to reduce poverty in Ohio.

Thirty members were appointed to the Task Force, including state agency representatives, faith-based and community nonprofit leaders, Ohioans living in poverty, business and labor leaders, and key anti-poverty stakeholders from around the state.

Additionally, more than 300 Ohioans participate in the five work groups of the Task Force – 1) Interagency Coordination, 2) Benchmarks and Measures, 3) Self-sufficiency Pathways, 4) Public-Private Collaboration and 5) Community Engagement. These work groups developed most of the recommendations included in this report.

Having delivered their shorter term recommendations to the Governor on this day, September 10, 2008, the Task Force along with the five work groups will begin work on the longer term recommendations to be delivered to the Governor on or before April 30, 2009.

## Shorter Term Recommendations

- 1) Work through the appropriate state agencies to exercise the following options to reduce barriers to work supports and other benefits (with a particular emphasis on federally funded programs and children's healthcare):
  - Expand categorical eligibility for food stamps
  - Pursue electronic submission as well as telephone interview options to applicants for all work supports and other benefits
  - To the greatest extent possible, align recertification periods for all work supports to 12 months and allow telephone or electronic recertification for all work supports (also submitted through the Interagency Coordination work group)
  - Explore all other options to reduce barriers and increase access within the confines of current federal guidelines (eligibility requirements, verification processes, renewal procedures, and program application)
- 2) Work through the heads of the major work support programs to expand outreach by using program enrollment information (food stamps, SCHIP, LI-HEAP, etc.) to identify through 'data matching' populations currently underserved (eligible but not claiming) (may need to consider a common consent form to be used across programs); and to develop strategies to expand access to their programs and establish more integrated intake procedures such as a universal application and a bridging application connecting various state databases
- 3) Work through the respective agencies to establish a single, simplified, and efficient process for low-income disabled Ohioans to access Medicaid and Social Security (SSI/SSDI) benefits. The process should eliminate duplicative steps, forms, and the number of entities involved in the current processes. The new process should reduce complexity (and associated costs) and result in improved service to clients
- 4) Study the impact and feasibility of an Ohio earned income tax credit and review the learning produced by the Ohio Commission on the Earned Income Tax Credit
- 5) Work through the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio to request that Ohio's utilities companies coordinate with the state on strategies to increase

awareness of and participation in current energy assistance programs for low-income households

- 6) In response to rising food and fuel costs, request of Congress emergency assistance for Ohio foodbanks, an increase in the monthly food stamp allotment, and increase funding for home energy assistance (LiHEAP)
- 7) Work with the Ohio congressional delegation in support of senior meal programs, subsidized guardianship legislation (increased funding for kinship care programs), reversing recent (2005) child support enforcement funding cuts, and increased funding for Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDF)
- 8) Work through the Ohio Department of Commerce to identify opportunities to better educate Ohioans about tax refund anticipation loans and to investigate the feasibility and advisability of regulating fees associated with tax refund anticipation loans
- 9) Work through the Department of Transportation to identify resources for fuel supplement for public transit in Ohio's rural and urban areas to ensure services are maintained and routes are not reduced due to fuel price increases
- 10) Work through ODJFS to submit the Family Planning Medicaid Waiver that would increase eligibility for family planning services to men and women at or below 200% FPL. If approved, the federal government would provide 90% with only 10% needed in non-federal sources
- 11) Encourage the formation of a statewide emergency hunger relief campaign (much like the local Harvest for Hunger or Operation Feed campaigns in Cleveland and Columbus, respectively) led by community and corporate foundations to raise funds for Ohio's foodbanks – and look for ways to include support for energy relief for struggling Ohioans
- 12) Use local and private resources to expand the Ohio Benefit Bank by adding a foreclosure prevention platform. Incorporate use of the Benefit Bank in the foreclosure prevention and intervention efforts currently managed by the Ohio Department of Commerce, Ohio Department of Development, and Ohio Housing Finance Agency in collaboration with local housing counseling agencies
- 13) Investigate and promote Green Collar Jobs programs throughout Ohio that will train and place unemployed individuals in living wage jobs

- 14) Work through the appropriate agencies to investigate the use of a Self-Sufficiency Index to provide a benchmark for anti-poverty efforts
- 15) Conduct an inventory of major state agency administered programs that target low-income populations to determine their current performance measures and eligibility guidelines as a context for establishing longer term state anti-poverty targets
- 16) Make use of the expertise of the Benchmarks and Measures work group to establish performance measures for various shorter term recommendations
- 17) Consider including in future executive budget proposals an analysis on poverty, including the Governor's definition of poverty, an inventory of state programs designed to combat poverty, and some general performance measure targets around reducing poverty
- 18) Work through the Ohio Board of Regents to engage colleges and universities on establishing a match to the AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps\*VISTA education award
- 19) Continue to support initiatives to raise awareness of the issue of poverty in Ohio and engage the public in identifying and implementing methods for addressing poverty in communities throughout Ohio
- 20) Encourage state and county employees dealing with poverty issues to attend a simulation and Bridges out of Poverty training
- 21) Work with the Corporation for National and Community Service in Ohio to increase the number of support Circles initiatives in the state as part of this effort

## **Addendum A: Ideas for Upcoming Budget Conversations**

This is a list of ideas that were raised during work group sessions that A) did not meet the criteria of a shorter term recommendation as each would require legislative action and B) did not garner consensus approval to be submitted as a recommendation. They are included here, in no particular order, so that they might be included in upcoming conversations regarding the 2010-2011 budget which will be put together prior to the submission of the longer term recommendations on or before April 30, 2009.

- Transfer Early Learning Initiatives to the Ohio Department of Education and fund these services from the ODE budget (GRF). Ensure TANF funds are restored to ODJFS/CDJFS core programs to be used to address poverty and provide work support programs and services
- Expand and fund the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Program to \$17 million per year to provide wholesome, Ohio grown, fruits, vegetables, protein and dairy items to Ohioans with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level (current funding level is \$8.5 million per year)
- Implement presumptive eligibility, self-declaration and administrative verification of income for Medicaid for children
- Increase utility assistance by supplementing the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) with state resources
- Double the amount of food stamp benefits with state funding
- Increase the amount of Ohio Works First (OWF) by \$100 per person per month
- Increase the OWF income eligibility standard to 100% FPL and increase the OWF payment amount to 100% FPL
- Increase the earned income disregard in OWF
- Expand the time limit for receipt of OWF from 3 to 5 years
- Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit
- Adopt federal pass through/disregard in child support
- Increase the Medicaid need standard to at least SSI

- Increase job support income related to daycare, uniforms, transportation
- Funding to sustain programs for youth mentoring
- Increase budget counseling and literacy programs
- Increase funding of mortgage assistance
- Assist grandparents raising grandchildren by linking child care subsidies to OWF child only grants
- Assist grandparents raising grandchildren by expanding the time period of receipt of Kinship Permanency Incentive Program (KPIP) from 3 to 5 years
- Fund, expand and implement free after-school programs to all interested
- Lift the cap on Housing Trust Fund
- Align income eligibility standard to 200% FPL for all programs
- Promote asset development by adding a savings account – family self-sufficiency program to the Department of Development's rental program
- Implement universal free school breakfast, lunch and snack programs for all children
- Expand funding for legal services for low-income Ohioans
- Require the use of budgeting and financial literacy curriculum in all Ohio schools
- Require the state to issue a photo ID card and activation of Medicaid card at time of release from state incarceration
- PUCO and utility companies to establish simple, uniform, and effective arrearage forgiveness program for PIPP participants
- Increase funding for public transit to promote mobility and job access, and reduce transportation barriers
- Expand low-income weatherization and energy efficiency programs and use as a training opportunity providing low-income Ohioans access to 'green' jobs

- Expand the 2-1-1 network to ensure that every Ohio citizen has access to the service.