# The Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force Report

## Strategic Recommendations for Expanding Opportunity and Reducing Poverty

This report was supported by a grant awarded to the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices.

# Table of Contents

About the Task Force ..... 2

Letter from the Task Force ..... 3

Executive Summary..... 4

Strategic Recommendations ..... 9

Appendix ..... 30

- Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force Members and Work Group Co-Chairs
- Poverty Trends in Ohio
- Guiding Principles and Criteria for the Longer Term Recommendations
- Shorter Term Recommendations
- Budget Ideas Submitted
- Conversations on Reducing Poverty in Ohio
- Newspaper Articles
- Photos

# ABOUT THE TASK FORCE

On May 28, 2008, Governor Ted Strickland signed an executive order (2008-11S), which created the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force (Task Force) to develop practical shorter term and longer term strategic recommendations for the Administration to consider in its ongoing effort to reduce poverty in Ohio.

**Task Force Work Groups**

1) Working Poor (Households with Children, Households without Children, Kinship Care)
2) Children and Young Adults
3) Multiple Barriers to Employment (Formerly Incarcerated, Chronically Unemployed, Mental Health, Substance Abuse, Disability, Homeless, and Immigrant Communities)
4) Seniors
5) Benchmarks, Measures and Implementation

The Task Force was chaired by Greg Landsman, Director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Thirty members were appointed to the Task Force including state agency representatives, faith-based and community non-profit leaders, Ohioans living in poverty, business and labor leaders, and key anti-poverty stakeholders from around the state. Additionally, over three hundred Ohioans participated in the five work groups of the Task Force.

Thanks to the leadership of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) and the Ohio Community Action Agency network, over 1800 Ohioans, many of whom are low-income, participated in one of twenty-one Regional Conversations on Reducing Poverty. Their input informed and strengthened the Task Force's longer term recommendations.

The work of the Task Force was completed in two distinct phases. The first phase produced twenty-three shorter term recommendations that were submitted to the Governor on September 10, 2008. The second phase resulted in the series of longer term recommendations contained within this document and submitted to the Governor on April 28, 2009.

The National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices awarded a $12,000 grant to the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to write the final report of the Task Force.

The Task Force would like to thank all those who helped inform and draft the recommendations included in this report.

# LETTER FROM THE TASK FORCE

April 28, 2009

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 and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, to expand healthcare coverage to hundreds of thousands of Ohioans, to increase access to and quality of early childhood development programs, to prevent additional foreclosures through the Save the Dream initiative, to make college more affordable, and to improve access to work supports through The Ohio Benefit Bank.

The Task Force was acutely aware of the important work described above, as well as the efforts already transpiring as part of the Education Reform Initiative, State (Healthcare) Coverage Initiative, Interagency Council on Homelessness and Affordable Housing, and Ohio's 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force. As such, the Task Force was compelled to focus its attention on affirming action currently being discussed and considered as well as new ideas that have proven effective in other parts of the country.

While we understand that, to a great extent, poverty rates correlate to unemployment rates and that your efforts to rebuild Ohio's economy in the aftermath of the current recession will go a long way toward lifting Ohioans out of poverty and expanding opportunities for all Ohioans, we believe the strategic recommendations contained in this report provide the most appropriate roadmap for state action to address poverty over the course of the next few years.

It is our hope that the longer term strategic recommendations provide your Administration and Ohio lawmakers with a clear sense of where Ohio must invest its energies and resources, if we are to dramatically reduce poverty in our great state.

In a tough economic climate, those living in poverty are often times the hardest hit. Paying for their basic needs becomes increasingly difficult with little to no savings to supplement monthly income. Additionally, the impact of the national recession has increased the number of Ohioans at risk of falling into poverty. We keep this in mind as we submit our longer term recommendations.

Sincerely,

The Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Task Force recognized that important work is already underway with respect to healthcare access, affordable housing, college access, education reform, early childhood development strategies, and transportation, and therefore focused its recommendations on new ideas that have proven effective in other parts of the country. At the same time, the Task Force affirms the action currently being considered by the Administration and the Ohio General Assembly.

These strategic recommendations focus first on aggressive and sustained efforts to create job opportunities for low-income Ohioans. The Task Force supports a more intentional commitment to ensure that public works initiatives provide jobs for low-income Ohioans, to expand transitional job programs in Ohio, to support social enterprises that put "hard-to-employ" populations to work, and to maximize the benefit of federal workforce development funds to provide training for low-income populations.

These strategies to create job opportunities for low-income Ohioans must be pursued with an emphasis on living wage jobs. A living wage must provide sufficient earnings to cover the costs of housing, food, and the other necessities of life. The Task Force recommends that wage goals be based, in part, on the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which measures how much income an individual or family of a certain composition, in a given place, needs to adequately meet basic needs—without public or private assistance.

In order for Ohioans to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities that can lead to sustainable financial progress, a foundational stability must be in place. Therefore, these longer term recommendations call for an ongoing commitment to ensure a reliable safety net for families and individuals facing financial hardship. Ohio is called upon to strengthen its efforts to ensure that families and children have access to the supports and benefits already in place and to pursue proven strategies to strengthen work incentives and rewards for low-income individuals as they attempt to move ahead through employment.

In an attempt to shift the paradigm of current anti-poverty work, these recommendations also encourage new attempts to draw on "informal" supports, such as family and youth mentoring, while expanding efforts to invest in children and young adults in a way that will help eliminate the painful reality of generational poverty.

Finally, these recommendations call on Ohio to be more accountable for the progress of its anti-poverty efforts, to measure investments in a uniform way, and to establish ongoing, interagency leadership.

Together, these recommendations establish a comprehensive and holistic four-pronged, multi-year approach for expanding opportunity and reducing poverty in Ohio:

**I. Create Opportunities for Economic Advancement** - Encourage, enable, and support sustainable movement up the economic ladder for Ohioans living in poverty, as well as those who are at risk of falling into poverty, through training and employment opportunities.

**Strategy A:** Ensure Public Works Initiatives Provide Jobs for Low-Income Ohioans

Recommendations:

1. Utilize public works resources to build skills and experience of entry level and low-income workers.

2. Encourage public works projects to hire low-income and entry-level workers.

**Strategy B:** Expand Transitional Jobs Programs

Recommendations:

1. Expand Transitional Jobs programs through partnerships with state contractors.

2. Establish a Transitional Workers Initiative to encourage and increase utilization of the Transitional Jobs model.

**Strategy C:** Expand Social Entrepreneurship

Recommendation:

1. Establish a Social Entrepreneurship Initiative to serve as a clearinghouse for funding and central point of contact for technical support and training curriculum for the "hard-to-employ."

**Strategy D:** Maximize the Benefit of Federal Workforce Development Funds to Provide Training for Low-Income Populations

Recommendations:

1. Establish an interagency strategy for drawing down Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) funds.

2. Implement policies and strategies to assure that the workforce development system is targeting resources to the needs of low-income Ohioans.

3. Assist local workforce boards to address administrative barriers to effective use of WIA funds and implement innovations and best practices.

**Strategy E:** Foster and Expand Community Development Financial Institutions and Lending in Low-to-Moderate Income Communities

Recommendation:

1. Explore the possibilities of how Community Development Bank and Community Development Credit Union models could be adopted and implemented in various communities and conduct research on successful models in order to guide interested parties on how to adopt and implement a CDB/CDCU model.

**Strategy F:** Expand the Accessibility and Use of Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) and Promote Financial Literacy Programs

Recommendation:

1. Strengthen the savings ability of the working poor through collaboration with financial institutions.

**II. Establish Foundational Stability** - Provide for the basic needs of Ohioans living in poverty, as well as those who are at risk of falling into poverty, in order to prevent additional hardships, stabilize their current economic situation, and prepare them to take advantage of opportunities that lead to economic advancement.

**Strategy A:** Strengthen the "Safety Net" and Maximize Support Packages for Ohioans

Recommendations:

1. Strengthen state investments in housing, healthcare, mental health and addiction services, and food assistance.

2. Strengthen federal advocacy for housing, food assistance, and work related tax credits.

3. Streamline and simplify the process for accessing work supports and other benefits.

4. Coordinate outreach across relevant state agencies and establish data sharing policies to increase access to work supports and public benefits.

5. Establish a statewide 2-1-1 information and referral system.

6. Improve access to needed supports for seniors and disabled Ohioans.

7. Utilize the Ohio Family Resource Simulator.

8. Endorse and expand Ohio's 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force's recommendations to improve transportation coordination.

9. Protect families in crisis and ensure they have access to basic utilities including gas, electric, water, and telephone service.

**Strategy B:** Strengthen Ohio Work Incentives and Rewards

Recommendations:

1. Establish steps to eliminate the "Cliff Effect."

2. Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

3. Establish a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit in Ohio.

4. Increase Support for Volunteer Tax Preparation Programs.

5. Reform tax refund anticipation loans (RALs) in Ohio.

**Strategy C:** Expand the Use of Informal Supports

Recommendations:

1. Expand the Circles™ Campaign in Ohio.

2. Expand youth mentoring in Ohio.

**III. Invest in Children and Young Adults -** Further invest in children and young adults in an effort to reverse the tide of generational poverty.

**Strategies:**

A. Pursue strategies to keep children in school.

B. Expand efforts to reduce teen pregnancy.

C. Strengthen after school and summer programs for children.

D. Increase participation in child nutrition programs.

E. Increase access to high quality early childhood development programs and family supports for children 0-6.

F. Establish tax incentives to attract and retain high-quality teachers and

other school staff.

**IV. Ensure Transparency, Accountability, and Leadership** - Ensure progress is accountable, investments are uniformly measured, information is made public, and ongoing interagency leadership is effective.

**Strategies:**

A. Establish Ongoing Interagency Leadership in Implementation

B. Track Progress Using Key Indicators

C. Establish a Universal System for Measuring State Investments

D. Launch Tracking Web Site and Require Annual Report on Progress

It is not the expectation of this Task Force that the recommendations submitted to the Governor be implemented immediately. Rather, these strategic recommendations are intended to be multi-year in scope and require a sustained commitment over several budget cycles in order to implement them in their entirety and realize optimal results and return on investment.

# I. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

*These strategies focus on aggressive and sustained efforts to create job opportunities for low-income Ohioans through ensuring that public works initiatives provide jobs for low-income Ohioans, expanding transitional job programs in Ohio, supporting social enterprises that put "hard-to-employ" populations to work, and maximizing the benefit of federal workforce development funds to provide training for low-income populations.*

*These strategies to create job opportunities for low-income Ohioans must be pursued with an emphasis on living wage jobs. A living wage must provide sufficient earnings to cover the costs of housing, food, and the other necessities of life. The Task Force recommends that wage goals be based, in part, on the Self-Sufficiency Standard, which measures how much income a family of a certain composition, in a given place, needs to adequately meet basic needs—without public or private assistance.*

Information regarding the Self-Sufficiency Standard can be found in the *Self-Sufficiency Standard for Ohio 2008* report, commissioned by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) and written by Diana Pearce and in *The Real Bottom Line, The State of Poverty in Ohio 2008: New Obstacles and Opportunities for Low Income Ohioans,* a report prepared for OACAA by Community Research Partners (CRP).

# Strategy A: Ensure Public Works Initiatives Provide Jobs for Low-Income Ohioans

Providing opportunities for work to low-income Ohioans is critical to reducing their immediate hardships and could lead to long-term self-sufficiency. Jobs need to provide family-sustaining wages and benefits, on-the-job training, and opportunities for career advancement in in-demand occupations and industries. To ensure low-income Ohioans have access to public works jobs that pay a living wage, the Task Force recommends the following strategies.

**Recommendation 1**: **Utilize public works resources to build skills and experience of entry-level and low-income workers:**

- Give preference to public works projects that use a portion of public works resources to support on-the-job training of workers.
- Target the use of workforce development resources to prepare low-income and unemployed adults to move into public works jobs that pay family-sustaining wages and lead to career advancement.
- Provide participants-in-training with adequate work stipends and supportive services, such as child care.
- Expand pre-apprenticeship skills enhancement programs for populations historically underrepresented in the building trades.

**Recommendation 2: Encourage public works projects to hire low-income and entry-level workers:**

- Give preference to projects that establish community benefit agreements ensuring that low-income individuals are hired and complete a defined number of work hours on the project.
- Give preference to projects that make use of apprentices.
- Expand public works apprentice programs.
- Support the use of transitional jobs for certain public works programs to provide short-term, subsidized work for low-income Ohioans facing multiple barriers to employment.

# Strategy B: Expand Transitional Jobs Programs

There is a growing Ohio population that remains disconnected from the world of work and faces multiple barriers to employment. This population, often referred to as "hard-to-employ," includes a variety of individuals, such as:

- Individuals lacking a high school diploma or GED
- Formerly incarcerated individuals
- Ohio Works First (OWF) families who have exhausted their 36-month eligibility
- Individuals with disabilities
- Individuals aging out of the foster care system
- Homeless Ohioans
- Veterans
- Rural dislocated workers
- Individuals with mental health challenges
- Individuals with substance abuse challenges

To expand transitional job opportunities to formerly incarcerated youth and adults, the Task Force recommends that efforts be made to eliminate "collateral sanctions," or those Ohio laws that prevent formerly incarcerated Ohioans from obtaining unsubsidized, stable employment.

Transitional Jobs (TJ) is a workforce strategy that helps participants overcome multiple barriers to employment through the use of time-limited, wage-paying jobs that combine real work, skill development, and supportive services. The transitional jobs strategy pragmatically addresses the complex reasons for a person's unemployment and starts with the desired outcome--employment.

While the person is working and earning an income, case-managed social services are brought to bear on the individualized nature of the factors that blocked the person's success in employment in the past. Job development services facilitate placement in unsubsidized work, and job retention services help consolidate a successful transition to long-term employment.

As Ohio pursues transitional job strategies, it must do so with a focus on establishing paths to permanent job opportunities for low-income Ohioans.

**Recommendation 1: Expand Transitional Jobs programs through partnerships with state contractors:**

- Establish incentives for state contractors to provide Transitional Jobs as an employment and training option within all public contracts.

- Include Transitional Jobs as a strategy in new and existing employment and training efforts by providing bonus points for contractors/programs that include Transitional Jobs.

- Encourage and give preference to contractors that utilize the Federal Bonding Program, which encourages the utilization of existing tools for the employment of formerly incarcerated Ohioans. The U.S. Department of Labor established the Federal Bonding Program to enable the delivery of bonding services as a unique job placement tool to assist ex-offenders, and other at-risk/hard-to-place job applicants. In Ohio, the program is administered by the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction and is available at no cost to the job seeker or employer.

**Recommendation 2: Establish a Transitional Workers Initiative to encourage and increase utilization of the Transitional Jobs model.** This initiative would:

- Lead an interagency effort to better coordinate and align Transitional Jobs with all public workforce, training, and education efforts.

- Partner with the National Transitional Jobs Network to provide technical assistance and capacity building to regions in the implementation of various Transitional Jobs strategies.

- Develop and promote appropriate hiring incentives for local employers to participate in the Transitional Jobs program.

- Research and evaluate the effectiveness of Transitional Jobs program.

- Lead an effort to eliminate "collateral sanctions," or Ohio laws that prevent formerly incarcerated Ohioans from obtaining unsubsidized, stable employment.

- Ensure that community voicemail initiatives are readily available across the state so that homeless persons can communicate with potential employers.

- Better promote the Work Opportunities Tax Credit (WOTC), which provides Ohio employers with a tax credit against their federal tax liability for hiring individuals from target groups of disadvantaged job seekers. To do so, the Task Force recommends Ohio work closely with the Ohio Chamber of Commerce, local chambers of commerce, the National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB), the Ohio Manufacturers' Association (OMA), the Ohio Business Roundtable, Inc., and others.

## Strategy C: Expand Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship is often a "low-profit" venture developed in response to a social problem and pursued using entrepreneurial principles that can involve producing market value, earning revenue, and employing the chronically underemployed.

The Task Force recommends implementing new strategies aimed at encouraging and assisting non-profit organizations and other socially-minded ventures to establish sustainable and effective

social enterprises, especially those agencies that work with the chronically unemployed, formerly incarcerated, and individuals with mental illness and disabilities.

**Recommendation 1**: **Establish a Social Entrepreneurship Initiative to serve as a clearinghouse for funding and central point of contact for technical support and training curriculum for the "hard-to-employ."** This initiative would:

- Provide seed funds to support social entrepreneurship initiatives in the start-up phase of their development.
- Develop new loan products, micro-lending and revolving loan efforts, tax credits, grant programs, and other incentives for socially-minded small businesses.
- Offer training courses on starting and sustaining socially-minded small business ventures and free comprehensive startup toolkits for new efforts.
- Coordinate investment strategies at relevant state agencies around innovative and proven social entrepreneurship initiatives.
- Provide funding for social impact studies on the benefit of social enterprise in Ohio.
- Expand the state's small business hotline to include information for socially-minded small business ventures.
- Create an annual recognition for developing the most innovative, sustainable, and effective solution to addressing need.
- Identify necessary and appropriate changes to the tax status of non-profit and for-profit entities pursuing socially minded ventures.
- Highlight existing social entrepreneurship initiatives and disseminate best practice information.
- Investigate the feasibility of a statewide collaborative of financial institutions willing to pool Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) funds and resources to invest in socially minded small business ventures throughout Ohio.

The Task Force recommends housing this effort in the Ohio Department of Development, Division of Small Business and Entrepreneurship.

# Strategy D: Maximize the Benefit of Federal Workforce Development Funds to Provide Training for Low-Income Populations

Federal workforce development and training funds that are disbursed to the State of Ohio from various federal agencies, including, but not limited to the U.S. Department of Labor, U.S. Department of Agriculture, and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, could be further aligned to allow Ohio to leverage all available funds and to assure that they are used to increase the training and skills of low-income Ohioans for in-demand occupations.

**Recommendation 1: Establish an interagency strategy for drawing down Food Stamp Employment and Training (FSET) funds.**

Assure that Ohio is accessing all available FSET funds for job training services for food stamp recipients. Implement an Ohio initiative, similar to the State of Washington model, which enables third-party workforce development providers to leverage their own resources to meet non-Federal match requirements to draw down FSET 50-50 Match dollars.

**Recommendation 2: Implement policies and strategies to assure that the workforce development system is targeting resources to the needs of low-income Ohioans.**

Implement reforms to the workforce development system to shift from the traditional focus on job search activities to job training activities needed to retrain workers in the rapidly changing economy and to increase the focus on services for low-income, low-skilled populations. The Task Force recommends that Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds be primarily used to fund training, defined to include: a) occupational training at an adult career center, community college, branch campus, or other WIA-eligible training providers; b) basic literacy, adult education, and ESL classes; and c) supportive services or needs-related payments for individuals participating in a WIA eligible training program to assist with meeting living expenses.

**Recommendation 3: Assist local workforce boards to address administrative barriers to effective use of WIA funds and implement innovations and best practices.**

Provide training, technical assistance, and administrative resources to local areas to support them in overcoming administrative barriers to implementing policies to serve low-income participants. This includes guidance and assistance with adequate staffing levels, administrative time tracking, maximizing expenditure rates, contracting, and performance measurement. Also, provide training for local workforce boards, county agencies, and their collaborators in models, innovations, and best practices in WIA policies and programs from across the state and nation.

## Strategy E: Foster and Expand Community Development Financial Institutions and Lending in Low-to-Moderate Income Communities

Low-to-moderate income communities need the ability to access credit and build assets in a secure financial environment. Below are financial challenges they may face:

- Payment systems for check cashing, credit cards, and debit cards
- Affordable credit for mortgages, installment debt, and education expenses
- Commercial bank services for loans and payroll
- Secure deposits for savings and transaction balances
- Asset management advice for households.

**Recommendation 1: Explore the possibilities of how Community Development Bank and Community Development Credit Union models could be adopted and implemented in various communities and conduct research on successful models in order to guide interested parties on how to adopt and implement a CDB/CDCU model.**

Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) in low-to-moderate income communities need to be explored at a statewide level.

## Strategy F: Expand the Accessibility and Use of Individual Development Accounts and Promote Financial Literacy Programs

Working individuals and families have limited resources to use for savings. Ohio must strive to move families and individuals forward in the economy through the creation of financial assets.

**Recommendation 1: Strengthen the savings ability of the working poor through collaboration with financial institutions:**

- Work with city mayors and county commissioners on an effort to connect unbanked households to financial institutions.
- Request that financial institutions open savings accounts regardless of CheckSystems violations.

- Develop a pay check card product that would enable tax refunds and pay checks to be directly deposited.

- Request that financial intuitions develop, market, or expand IDA programs for consumers.

- Advocate for changes to federal IDA law to allow for limited withdrawals from IDA funds for emergencies, such as an eviction notices or car repairs.

- Include financial literacy in all K-12 curricula in every school in Ohio.

- Connect tax preparation services to the new SaveNOW program recently established by Ohio Treasurer Kevin L. Boyce. SaveNOW provides Ohioans with a 3.25% interest bonus in their savings account.

# II. ESTABLISH FOUNDATIONAL STABILITY

*In order for Ohioans to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities that can lead to sustainable financial progress, a foundational stability must be in place. These strategies call for an ongoing commitment to ensure a reliable safety net for families and individuals facing financial hardship. They call upon Ohio to strengthen its efforts to ensure that families and children have access to the supports and benefits already in place. In addition, the recommendations call for the pursuit of proven strategies to strengthen work incentives and rewards for low-income families and individuals as they attempt to move ahead through employment.*

## Strategy A: Strengthen the "Safety Net" and Maximize Support Packages for Ohioans

Ohio must continue to invest in basic needs such as food assistance, mental health services, housing support, and child care. However, more must be done to advocate for additional federal investments, particularly in the area of affordable housing.

The state must strive to be the nation's leader in effectively leveraging a broad array of supports and benefits available from the federal government by maximizing work supports and tax credits that boost family incomes and local economies. For example, The Ohio Benefit Bank, a public-private partnership between the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks, and more than 800 community and faith-based organizations, connects low-to-moderate income Ohioans to work supports and tax credits. The OBB has become a national model and has helped nearly 70,000 Ohioans access more than $100 million in potential supports and tax credits. Ohio must expand efforts to maximize federal and state work supports and tax credits.

The Task Force has outlined recommendations to strengthen the "safety net" and maximize federal and state work supports and tax credits.

**Recommendation 1: Strengthen state investments in housing, healthcare, mental health and addiction services, and food assistance.**

- Lift the cap on the Housing Trust Fund, which is currently unable to meet demands.
- Implement the healthcare reform recommendations outlined in the State's Coverage Initiative so that every Ohioan has access to quality and affordable healthcare.
- Strengthen investments in mental health and addictive services.
- Expand the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Program to $17 million per year from the current $8.5 million to provide wholesome, Ohio grown, fruits, vegetables, protein, and dairy items to Ohioans with incomes at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- Allow those eligible to utilize the full sixty months of Ohio Works First benefits by expanding uninterrupted services from three years to five years in accordance with federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) regulations.

**Recommendation 2: Strengthen federal advocacy for housing, food assistance, and work related tax credits.** Advocate for:

- Additional investments in federal housing programs, as they have not kept up with the cost of housing.
- A permanent increase in the monthly food assistance allotment.
- A permanent increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit.
- Significantly increase the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and make that tax credit refundable for employers who hire "hard-to-employ" individuals.

**Recommendation 3: Streamline and simplify the process for accessing work supports and other benefits.**

Ohio has made progress streamlining and simplifying the various application processes with the expansion of categorical eligibility for food stamps and the electronic submission of applications for cash assistance, food assistance, and Medicaid programs through The Ohio Benefit Bank.

Through a grant from the Living Cities Foundation, the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is exploring all other options to reduce barriers and increase access to work supports and benefits by examining eligibility requirements, verification processes, renewal




procedures, and program applications.

As it relates to this project, the Task Force recommends that Ohio:

- Pursue a "technology-based" approach utilizing web/electronic submission and telephone interview options for work supports and benefits to homebound seniors, rural, and low-income Ohioans with transportation and child care constraints.

- Implement CRIS-E universal profile and other workforce modernization plans that would allow caseloads to be shared across work teams and potentially statewide.

- Align recertification periods for all work supports to 12 months and allow telephone or electronic recertification. Moving recertification for food assistance to a twelve-month cycle can significantly decrease administrative costs and reduce the amount of "churning" on and off the program.

- Create a single, simplified, and efficient process for low-income disabled Ohioans to access Medicaid and Social Security (SSI/SSDI) benefits. Eliminate duplicative steps, forms, and the number of entities currently involved in the process.

- Establish presumptive eligibility, self-declaration, and administrative verification of income for Medicaid for children. This change would likely result in an additional 2,000 - 4,000 children accessing health coverage in Ohio.

**Recommendation 4: Coordinate outreach across relevant state agencies and establish data sharing policies to increase access to work supports and public benefits.**

Individuals currently enrolled in one program area are likely eligible for other supports. Better utilizing collected data to pursue targeted outreach strategies can help to identify currently underserved populations.

- Enable the appropriate and legal exchange of client-specific and/or aggregate electronic data between state agencies to allow for the collaborative sharing of mutual client data for a more efficient and effective delivery of services to increase access to work supports and public benefits.

- Establish a more integrated intake procedure such as a universal application and a bridging application connecting various state databases.

**Recommendation 5: Establish a statewide 2-1-1 information and referral system.**

Establish a 2-1-1 statewide database and expand 2-1-1 to all Ohio counties. Currently, there are nineteen independently operating 2-1-1 systems in Ohio – and 25% of Ohioans do not have 2-1-1 access. Establishing a 2-1-1 statewide database and expanding 2-1-1 to all Ohio counties will make it possible for all Ohioans to access the programs and services they need. Continue to

invest in a 2-1-1 statewide database – and require relevant state agencies to leverage the data as part of their ongoing work.

**Recommendation 6: Improve access to needed supports for seniors and disabled Ohioans**

In addition to establishing a single, simplified, and efficient process for low-income disabled Ohioans to access Medicaid and Social Security (SSI/SSDI) benefits, the Task Force also recommends the following as it relates to seniors and disabled Ohioans:

- Create a consistent message on Estate Recovery and pre-planning long-term care needs to help both those accessing Medicaid and those who are not yet in need of services to understand their options and make informed decisions. There is potential to work through the Ohio Department of Aging and organizations serving persons with disabilities to reach out through the aging and disability networks, service providers, and caregivers with this message.

- Train Senior Community Service and Employment Program workers as Ohio Benefit Bank counselors so they can better assist seniors and others in completing and submitting applications for the supportive programs for which they are eligible.

- Launch a broader awareness campaign for the Medicaid Buy-In for Workers with Disabilities. The program is less than a year old in Ohio with close to 2,000 people already participating. A larger, more intentional strategy will be required.

**Recommendation 7: Utilize the Ohio Family Resource Simulator.**

The Family Resource Simulator was recently developed for Ohio by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP). Using Ohio specific law and policy, this simulator illustrates the impact of work supports, such as earned income tax credits, child care assistance, food assistance, and Medicaid on the budget of a hypothetical low-income working family.

The simulator will inform policymakers of possible ways to avoid the "cliff effect" that many working families face, when an increase in earned income-even by a few dollars a week-leads to a loss of coverage and support. For example, a small hourly wage increase of $1.00 could mean the loss of work supports, such as child care and medical coverage, that keep the parent employed.

The Task Force recommends that the Governor's Office host a briefing with lawmakers, administration officials, and other key stakeholders around the Ohio Family Resource Simulator. NCCP is prepared to present on the relevant learning associated with their work.

**Recommendation 8: Endorse and expand Ohio's 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force's recommendations to improve transportation coordination.**

Ohio could better coordinate transportation services for all Ohioans, including those who are transit dependent, senior citizens, people with disabilities, veterans, and individuals with special health and human service needs, as well as citizens with limited incomes. Better coordination of efforts would improve the productivity of public transportation and reduce costs for Ohio taxpayers and the agencies involved.

The Task Force supports the following recommendations developed by Ohio's 21st Century Transportation Priorities Task Force to:

- Establish a Health and Human Service Transportation Plan to ensure that health and human services options are coordinated and addressed.

- Streamline state rules and regulations regarding the provision of service delivery and lobby for federal changes where barriers are identified so that funds can flow quickly to providers.

- Consider establishing an Executive Office for Mobility Management (similar to Executive Medicaid Management Administration), for the coordination of transportation across systems, which would report to the Governor.

- Create a comprehensive inventory of service providers and a comprehensive online service directory.

- Invest in Intelligent Transportation Systems to create a single point of access to transportation services.

In addition to these recommendations, the Task Force also recommends:

- Utilizing federal Corporation for National and Community Services programs (e.g., VISTA, AmeriCorps, and Senior Corps) to increase the number of volunteers supporting human services transportation.

- Replicating Ohio's New Freedom initiative programs that have proven successful in developing a base of community volunteers (e.g., church groups) who could assist with transportation when needed.

- Creating reimbursement systems, including Medicaid, that encourage group trips and ride sharing (instead of one-at-a-time, taxi style service) whenever feasible. The goal would be a measurable increase in the number of passenger trips per vehicle mile, as well as increased access to services for consumers regardless of payer.

**Recommendation 9: Protect families in crisis and ensure they have access to basic utilities including gas, electric, water, and telephone service.**

To protect the health and safety of individuals and families, encourage utility companies to establish flexibility in terms of negotiating individual payments to avoid disconnection of service by extending payment plans and terms as long as necessary to allow customers to bring payments current. In addition, utility companies should ensure steps are taken to avoid shut-offs, especially in the hottest and coldest seasons. These steps will also protect citizens who have chronic health issues or who rely on utilities to maintain operation of life support equipment from disconnection of utility service.

## Strategy B: Strengthen Ohio Work Incentives and Rewards

Pursue proven strategies to further strengthen work incentives and rewards for low-income populations as a way of strengthening families and reducing poverty.

**Recommendation 1: Establish steps to eliminate the "Cliff Effect."**

Utilize the Ohio Family Resource Simulator to better understand the way in which Ohio's eligibility policies affect working families as they experience incremental increases in earned income. Pursue strategies to minimize the "cliff effect," putting in its place a more gradual "step down" approach to work supports and benefits. This "cliff effect" arises when a family's income rises with higher earnings, but drops off sharply when even a small increase leads to a loss of benefits, such as children's health insurance coverage, home energy assistance, or eligibility for a low-income tax credit.

**Recommendation 2: Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit.**

Create a refundable state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) based on 5% of the federal EITC. Enacting a state EITC would help working families with children. State EITCs bring additional money into the community and have increased the number of people filing for and receiving the federal EITC.

Based on 2005 data, nearly 800,000 low-to-moderate income families stand to gain needed income support through a refundable state ETIC. Providing a state EITC would be a targeted way of providing vital additional resources to low-income working families, primarily those with children.

**Recommendation 3: Establish a refundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit in Ohio.**

Modify its current Child and Dependent Care tax credit, which is nonrefundable, to make it refundable to low- to-moderate income families. Covered services include any child-care setting used while a parent is at work or looking for work. By making the current Child and Dependent Care tax credit refundable, Ohio would make the credit available to those lowest-wage workers with no income tax liability.

**Recommendation 4: Increase Support for Volunteer Tax Preparation Programs**

Increase support and awareness of free volunteer tax preparation services, such as those provided by The Ohio Benefit Bank and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. This support will help low-to-moderate income families and individuals get free tax preparation assistance.

Only a small percentage of eligible low-income families use free tax preparation services (less than 2% of EITC recipients). More assistance in the form of advertising, staff, and training would greatly benefit the free filing effort.

**Recommendation 5: Reform tax refund anticipation loans (RALs) in Ohio**

Address the issue of tax refund anticipation loans (RALs), which are high-interest loans sold to taxpayers based on their expected tax return. A majority of RALs are sold to Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) recipients, diluting the expected return aimed at helping the working poor care for their children and afford basic needs. There were roughly 800,000 EITC returns in Ohio in filing year 2006, and more than 386,000 RALs (including refund loan checks) sold. The Task Force recommends that Ohio:

- Require all businesses engaging in tax preparation and selling tax refund loans to register with the state and require a database to keep track of loans made and terms of loans, including fees.

- Mandate that only businesses where tax preparation is the primary business can sell RALs. This curtails businesses such as auto car dealerships and other businesses who often sell RALs with other products that can confuse customers.

- Limit the interest rate associated with RALs similar to recently passed "Payday Lending" legislation.

- Connect tax preparation services to strategies that incentivize savings, such as the new SaveNOW program recently established by Ohio Treasurer Kevin L. Boyce. SaveNOW provides Ohioans with a 3.25% interest bonus in their savings account.

# Strategy C: Expand the Use of Informal Supports

Place a greater emphasis on the role community plays in helping to establish foundational stability for low-income Ohioans.

**Recommendation 1: Expand the Circles™ Campaign in Ohio.**

The Circles™ Campaign is a new initiative already working in forty communities in eighteen states that will engage communities to join with 1,000 low-income families to find paths out of poverty and address the systems and policies that keep poverty in place. Move the Mountain Leadership Center (MTM) is the national non-profit organization helping expand and develop

Circles™ initiatives in several Ohio communities. MTM is committed to helping Circles™ families achieve an earned income sufficient to meet their basic household needs regularly without cash assistance, food assistance, or housing subsidy.

Each Circle consists of a family working to move out of poverty and from two-to-four middle-class Allies, who befriend the family and support its members throughout the transition into self-sufficiency. With the help of these Allies, each family sets goals that are unique to its own needs and circumstances and that will lead to developing the emotional, financial, intellectual, and spiritual resources necessary for self-sufficiency and family stability.

Ohio can be a national leader by investing in the expansion of initiatives that leverage informal supports such, as Circles™. However, Ohio should begin with several pilot programs to ensure the efficacy of these efforts in all regions and communities of the state.

**Recommendation 2: Expand youth mentoring in Ohio.**

For many young people living in poverty, developing a "future story" becomes paramount to advancing beyond the confines of their current circumstance. Through effective mentoring programs, at-risk youth are matched with an adult mentor in a way designed to help them envision that "future story," which often leads to improved academic performance, strengthened social relationships, and personal development.

Mentoring uses relationships to impart changes in attitudes and behaviors. Ohio could become the "Mentoring State" with a more intentional and committed approach both at the state and local school district level.

# III. INVEST IN CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

*The Task Force affirms the current investments being made in the area of early childhood development and supports the ongoing commitment to the Governor's Early Childhood Cabinet and its many initiatives. The Task Force is also encouraged by the Governor's Education Reform plan, particularly the commitment to community engagement strategies, longer school years, full-day kindergarten, and establishing 21st century learning environments for Ohio's children. However, the Task Force recommends that additional steps be considered to further invest in children and young adults in an effort to reverse the tide of generational poverty.*

## Strategy A: Pursue Strategies to Keep Children in School

Many Ohio children face multiple barriers that prevent them from remaining in school, including unstable family situations, school policies, and inadequate services for mental health and behavior issues. Because children in low-income families often do not have resources to access quality alternative education facilities, these children are at risk of not finishing school,

becoming the perpetrators and victims of crime, becoming teen parents, and other factors that perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

Children who are members of some special populations, including homeless and foster youth, are particularly at risk of falling victim to this cycle, because they lack family support and stability.

Ohio can address the issue of keeping children in school from a holistic perspective and with a focus on the dignity of each child. Increasing the number of Ohio children who finish school is one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty over the long-term.

The Task Force recommends that Ohio:

- Pursue legislation requiring schools to embrace positive behavior intervention strategies. Ohio law currently requires school districts to "adopt a policy of zero tolerance for violent, disruptive, or inappropriate behavior…" (O.R.C. § 3313.534). The Task Force recommends amending this law to include a requirement that school districts promulgate policies to implement positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) in schools, so that students whose behavior is a barrier to their success in school are identified early and can be treated and/or properly taught how to control their behavior.

- Work with the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR) to offer training and support to school districts in implementing PBIS in schools and to include in this effort pre-service training at the colleges and universities that train teachers. ODE is in a unique position to offer support and training for school districts on how to more effectively address students' problem behavior.

- Work with local school districts in the appropriate use of police in schools. There is currently a discrepancy in what triggers police contact for students. It is crucial that Ohio schools act in a consistent, careful, and restrained way in choosing to call the police to enter a school building to address student behavior.

- Create a statewide pilot project modeled after the *Kids in School Rule!* program in Cincinnati to ensure seamless support among systems so that all children in Ohio successfully complete school. The Hamilton County Juvenile Court, the Hamilton County Department of Job and Family Services, ProKids, Cincinnati Public Schools, and Legal Aid Society of Cincinnati cooperate to provide seamless support that helps foster children remain in and successfully complete school. *The Kids in School Rule!* program addresses inconsistency by providing a system for entities involved in the child's life to communicate with each other to ensure that the child receives help and support.

- Provide grants and incentives to schools to implement peace programs, community-based responses to violence, and other methods of addressing behavior and misconduct concerns in schools without involving the criminal justice system.

## Strategy B: Expand Efforts to Reduce Teen Pregnancy

The birth rate for Ohio teenagers fifteen-to-nineteen years of age increased 3% in 2006, interrupting the fourteen-year period of continuous decline from 1991 through 2005.

The Task Force recommends that, to help reduce teen pregnancy in the state:

- Enact legislation to direct the Ohio Department of Education to establish state standards for a health education curriculum that includes abstinence-inclusive, medically accurate, comprehensive reproductive health education.

- Support enactment of key provisions of the Ohio Prevention First Act, particularly those provisions that would: (1) limit state funding to only those reproductive health education programs that provide comprehensive, medically accurate, evidence-based information, and (2) launch a Teen Pregnancy Prevention grant program through the Ohio Department of Health to award grants to public and private entities to establish or expand programs geared towards at-risk youth.

- Continue ongoing research by the Ohio Department of Health that would annually analyze state-level teen birth rate data.

## Strategy C: Strengthen After School and Summer Programs for Children

Children who participate in after school programs are more likely to be engaged in the education process, have better grades and attendance, show more positive social skills, and have higher aspirations for college. The Task Force recommends that Ohio:

- Increase funding for after school and summer programs to allow greater access for working families.

- Coordinate current after school and summer program licensure requirements with school requirements so that more schools are eligible to host after school programs. A work group comprised of members of the Ohio Department of Education and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has already been established as part of a Mott Family Foundation grant.

- Increase flexibility in the use of childcare vouchers for out-of-school time programs to pay a standard weekly rate instead of the current hourly rate. Currently, the vouchers for school aged children only pay for the hours the child is in attendance at the program, while early childhood vouchers pay a part-time or full-time rate.

- Increase co-op opportunities for high school-aged youth so they can learn about business and industry needs and be prepared to enter college, job training, or the workforce. When high school-aged youth see the end result of education (working in the "real world") they will be more invested in their studies and make the school-workplace connection.

## Strategy D: Increase Participation in Child Nutrition Programs

Increase participation and place greater emphasis on taking full advantage of the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) program designed to meet the needs of hungry children. One in six Ohio children could benefit from this federal food program.

The Task Force recommends that Ohio:

- Lobby Congress and work with USDA to extend the Supper Pilot of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) nationally and to increase reimbursement rates for all USDA Programs. Higher food prices do not just affect families; they also affect those programs offering meals.

- Provide incentives to any school districts offering summer programs to provide access to a USDA Child Nutrition Program. Current legislation directs schools in which 20% of the students are low-income to participate in USDA Child Nutrition Programs.

- Review current policy at the Ohio Department of Education around child-care providers' participation in the USDA Child Nutrition Programs.

- Advocate for changes in guidelines concerning where and at what time a child can eat food during the summer feeding program. Eating all meals in the building may not be practical in every case. The mandatory waiting period between breakfast and lunch and the prohibition of taking home leftovers should be questioned. Each sponsor should be able to adopt a schedule that fits their particular situation without being penalized for doing so.

## Strategy E: Increase Access to High Quality Early Childhood Development Programs and Family Supports for Children 0-6

Continue to build on the Governor's investments in early childhood development strategies to provide high quality early childhood services to our most vulnerable children and their families. The Task Force recommends the following strategies:

- Maximize receipt of flexible funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act eligible for early childhood programs, including:

- use of Title I education funds for Pre-K
- use of U.S. Department of Education state incentive and local innovation grants
- use of U.S. Department of Education funds for Improving Teacher Quality grants
- use of U.S. Department of Education funds for Education Data Systems, including early childhood
- use of State Fiscal Stabilization Fund for applicable early childhood programs and renovation and repair of facilities
- competitive grants through Early Head Start
- quality funds of the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG)
- funds for state Early Learning Councils

- Provide state incentives and guidelines for local communities to collaborate on coordinated use of ARRA, Title I, Head Start, Early Head Start and CCDBG funds at the local level.

- Support increased access to high-quality early care and education for all low-income Ohio families, including:

    - Maintaining current eligibility levels at 200% of the federal poverty level for child care, the Early Learning Initiative, and Early Childhood Education (Public Preschool)
    - Aligning, coordinating, and improving early childhood policies through the creation of a single administrative structure

- Support behavioral health programs for young children. Ohio's Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative addresses the social and emotional needs of children and their caregivers.

    - Increase its support of the Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Program
    - Enact legislation in permanent language to guarantee that young children have access to the Early Childhood Behavioral Health Treatment Program

- Maximize state funds for the *Help Me Grow* program by utilizing Medicaid reimbursements for appropriate statewide services. The Task Force recommends that *Help Me Grow's* home visitation program be based on research and evidence and target Ohio's most vulnerable families.

- Allow full-day kindergarten programs to be delivered in community-based child care settings.

## Strategy F: Establish Tax Incentives to Attract and Retain High-Quality Teachers and Other School Staff

Create a state Educator Expense tax credit that mirrors the federal deduction. Identify and recommend specific tax benefits for teachers and other school staff in high poverty districts, including consideration of tuition reimbursement, loan forgiveness, and income tax relief.

# IV. ENSURE TRANSPARENCY, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND LEADERSHIP

*The following strategies are recommended to ensure that Ohio is more accountable for the progress of its anti-poverty efforts, that it is measuring investments in a uniform way, and that it is establishing ongoing interagency leadership.*

## Strategy A: Establish Ongoing Interagency Leadership in Implementation

Establish an interagency team, led by an appointee of the Governor, made up of representatives of key state agencies and other stakeholders, responsible for carrying out the recommendations included in this report.

The Governor's appointee and assembled team will: 1) establish key indicators, targets, and measurements; 2) establish a reporting and accountability system; 3) review progress, accountability, and investment reports; 4) identify resources for implementation; 5) help remove barriers and obstacles to implementation; and 6) issue annual progress reports to the Governor, the Cabinet, and the public.

## Strategy B: Track Progress Using Key Indicators

The Task Force recommends the creation of a state implementation plan based, in part, on this report and encourages counties to create similar plans, as well. These plans would establish targets for improvement from current baselines for key indicators related to poverty alleviation. The plan should include *no more than two-to-four targets* in each of the following categories:

- Quality of life indicators that support people moving out of poverty.
- Poverty measures.
- Public benefits and services access and coverage.

To achieve this recommendation:

- Select research-based indicators in each category.
- In collaboration with local agencies, determine current baselines and two-to-three year targets for the state and counties.
- Identify programs and activities that contribute to achieving targets.
- Develop a data collection, tracking, and reporting process for the programs, activities, and indicators at the state and county levels.
- Make information publicly accessible through the accountability Web site (Strategy D).
- Establish a process for ongoing dialogue to assess targets and modify them, if needed, based on changing conditions.

## Strategy C: Establish a Universal System for Measuring State Investments

Establish a system for measuring all state anti-poverty investments, including: 1) the type of investment; 2) amount invested; 3) other funds leveraged; 4) how the investment was used; and 5) how it contributed to poverty alleviation. Investments might include payments to individuals, grants to local government and organizations, staff time, and materials and equipment.

The following steps are recommended:

- Identify resources to be tracked and establish a uniform cross agency/program tracking system.
- Identify state agency reporting roles and responsibilities.
- Initiate tracking and reporting.
- Make information publicly accessible through the accountability Web site described in Strategy D.

## Strategy D: Launch Tracking Web Site and Require Annual Report on Progress

Establish data collection and reporting systems, including a public Web site and state agency reports, to measure progress in achieving the Anti-Poverty Task Force recommendations and make this information easily accessible to key decision makers, program staff, and the general public.

The following steps are recommended:

- Establish measurable benchmarks for each Task Force recommendation.

- Research best practices and models in accountability systems.
- Design accountability systems and identify resources for implementation.
- Identify state agency reporting roles and responsibilities.
- Initiate Web site and reporting.

# APPENDIX

Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force Members and Work Group Co-Chairs

Poverty Trends in Ohio

Guiding Principles and Criteria for the Longer Term Recommendations

Shorter Term Recommendations

Budget Ideas Submitted

Conversations on Reducing Poverty

Newspaper Articles

Photos

# Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force Members and Work Group Co-Chairs

(Including their titles during the time they served with the Task Force)

| Task Force Members | |
|---|---|
| Mark Barbash | Chief Economic Development Director, Ohio Department of Development |
| **Ohio Treasurer of State Kevin L. Boyce | Office of the Treasurer |
| Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner | Office of the Secretary of Sate |
| Pastor Gregory Chandler | Whole Again International |
| Phil Cole | Executive Director, Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) |
| *Margot Copeland | Executive Vice President/Director of Corporate Diversity & Philanthropy, Key Foundation |
| *Ohio Treasurer of State Richard Cordray | Office of the Treasurer |
| Director Angela Cornelius Dawson | Ohio Department of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services (ODADAS) |
| Allison DeHart | Executive Director, Partners in Hope |
| Pauline Edwards | Board of Trustees, Columbus-Franklin County Community Agency Action |
| **Marcia Egbert | Senior Program Officer, Gund Foundation |
| David Ellis | Assistant Director, Office of Budget and Management (OBM) |
| *Jennifer Farmer | Communications Director, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) |
| Chancellor Eric Fingerhut | Ohio Board of Regents |
| Joseph Gauntner | Director of Employment, Family Services Cuyahoga County |
| *Director Ralph Guildehaus | The Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB) |
| Matthew Habash | Executive Director, Mid-Ohio FoodBank |
| Director Alvin Jackson | Ohio Department of Health (ODH) |
| *Director Helen Jones-Kelley | Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) |
| Bill Kitson | President & CEO, United Way of Greater Toledo |
| **Christine Kozobarich | Community Relations Specialist, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) |
| **Director Douglas Lumpkin | Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) |
| Director Greg Landsman | Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (GOFBCI) |
| Tax Commissioner Richard Levin | Ohio Department of Taxation |
| Cassandra Lovejoy | Social Services Provider, Retired |
| Linda Martens | Government Relations and Public Policy, Pfizer, Inc. |
| Roger McCauley | Executive Director, Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development (COAD) |
| Marc Molea | Chief of Human Service Program, Ohio Department of Aging |
| Joyce Probst MacAlpine | Manager Housing and Homelessness Solutions, Montgomery County Office of Family and |
| Rodney Reasonover | President, Ohio Urban Resource System |
| Pastor Michael Reeves | Corinthian Missionary Baptist Church |
| Betty Simmons Talley | Executive Board Member, OAPSE/AFSCME Local 4 |
| Louis Staffilino | Associate Superintendent, Ohio Department of Education (ODE) |
| Director Sandy Stephenson | Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) |
| **Director Shannon Teague | The Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB) |

*Served during the development of the Shorter Term Recommendations

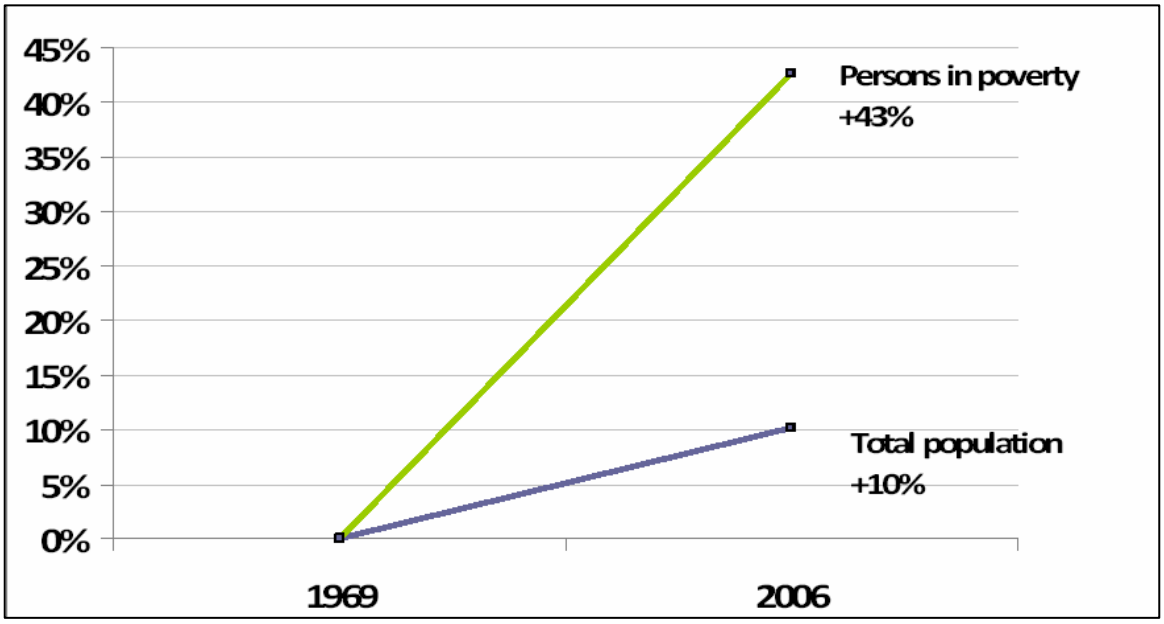
**Served during development of the Longer Term Recommendations

| Work Group Chairs | |
|---|---|
| Marcia Egbert | Senior Program Officer, Gund Foundation |
| Jason Elchert | Community Food and Nutrition Program Coordinator, Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks |
| Paul Fraunholtz | Deputy Director, Office of Family Stability, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services |
| Roberta Garber | Executive Director, Community Research Partners |
| William Graves | Director of Community Development, Ohio Department of Development |
| Matt Habash | Executive Director, Mid-Ohio FoodBank |
| Marvin Hayes | Executive Director to the Governor for Urban Affairs |
| Marc Molea | Chief of Human Service Program, Ohio Department of Aging |
| Ray Roberts | Executive Director, Pike County Community Action Agency |
| Chris Reis | Field Services Manager, Community Development, Ohio Department of Development |
| Dustin Speakman | AmeriCorps VISTA Program Director , Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks |

# Poverty Trends in Ohio - The State of Poverty in Ohio

*The content included in this section of the report comes from the Real Bottom Line, Community Research Partners Presentation, May 28, 2008 and a CRP presentation on April 28, 2009.*

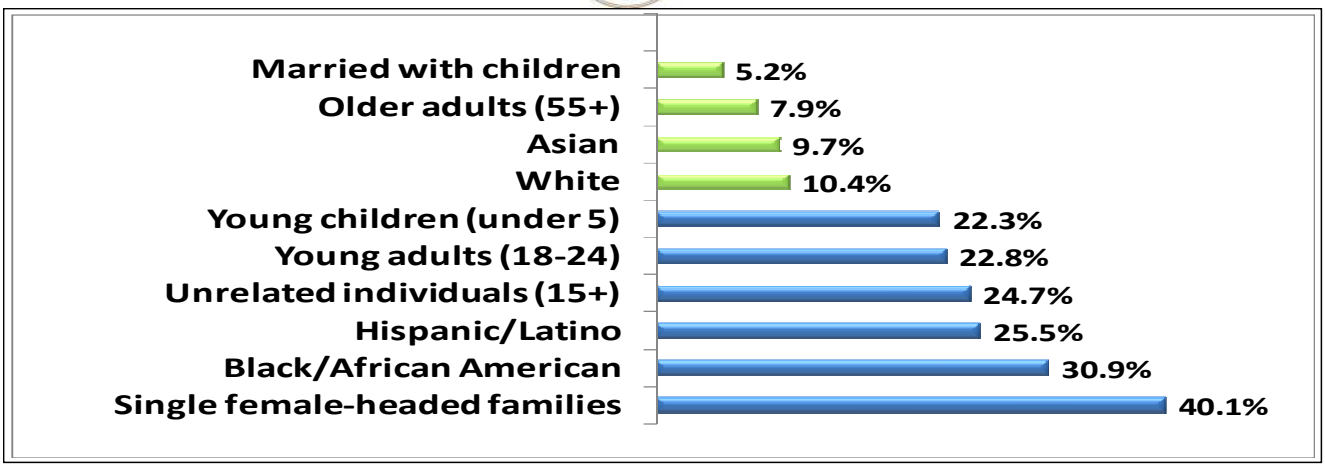
The number of Ohioans living in poverty is growing. From 1969 to 2006 the population of Ohio grew at a rate of 10%, while the number of persons living in poverty in the state grew by 43%.



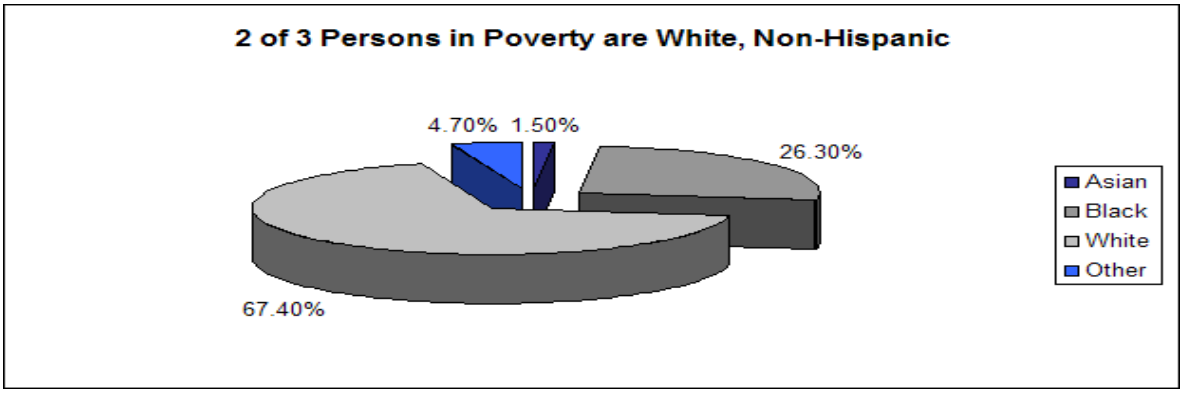

The trend can also be viewed in the shorter term. In 1999 1.2 million Ohioans - 10.6% of the state's total population - lived in poverty. In 2007 the number increased to 1.46 million Ohioans living in poverty, or 13.1% of the state's total population.

According to Roberta Garber, Executive Director of Community Research Partners, the current picture as likely much worse. During her presentation to the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force at their final meeting on April 28, 2009, Ms. Garber cited the March 2009 unemployment rate of 9.7% compared to the 2007 rate of 5.7% and an increase of 20.6% in assistance groups (AGs) receiving Food Stamps from January 2007 to January 2009. An AG is defined as a group of individuals who live together and customarily purchase food and prepare meals together for home consumption or an individual living alone or who, while living with others, customarily purchases food and prepares meals for home consumption separate and apart from the others.

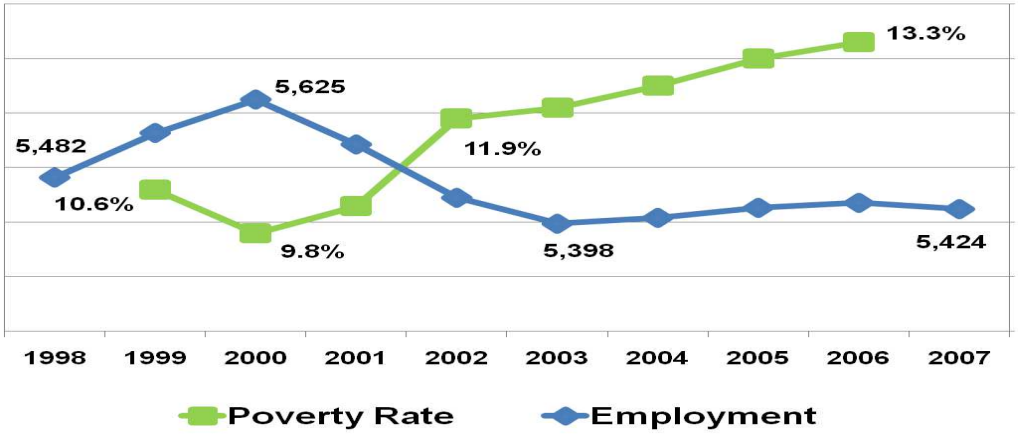
Ms. Garber's report also provided information about specific groups of Ohioans experiencing high percentages of poverty. The groups include children and young adults, the Hispanic/Latino community, the Black/African American community, and families headed by single females.




Two thirds of the Ohioans living in poverty are identified as white, non-Hispanic.

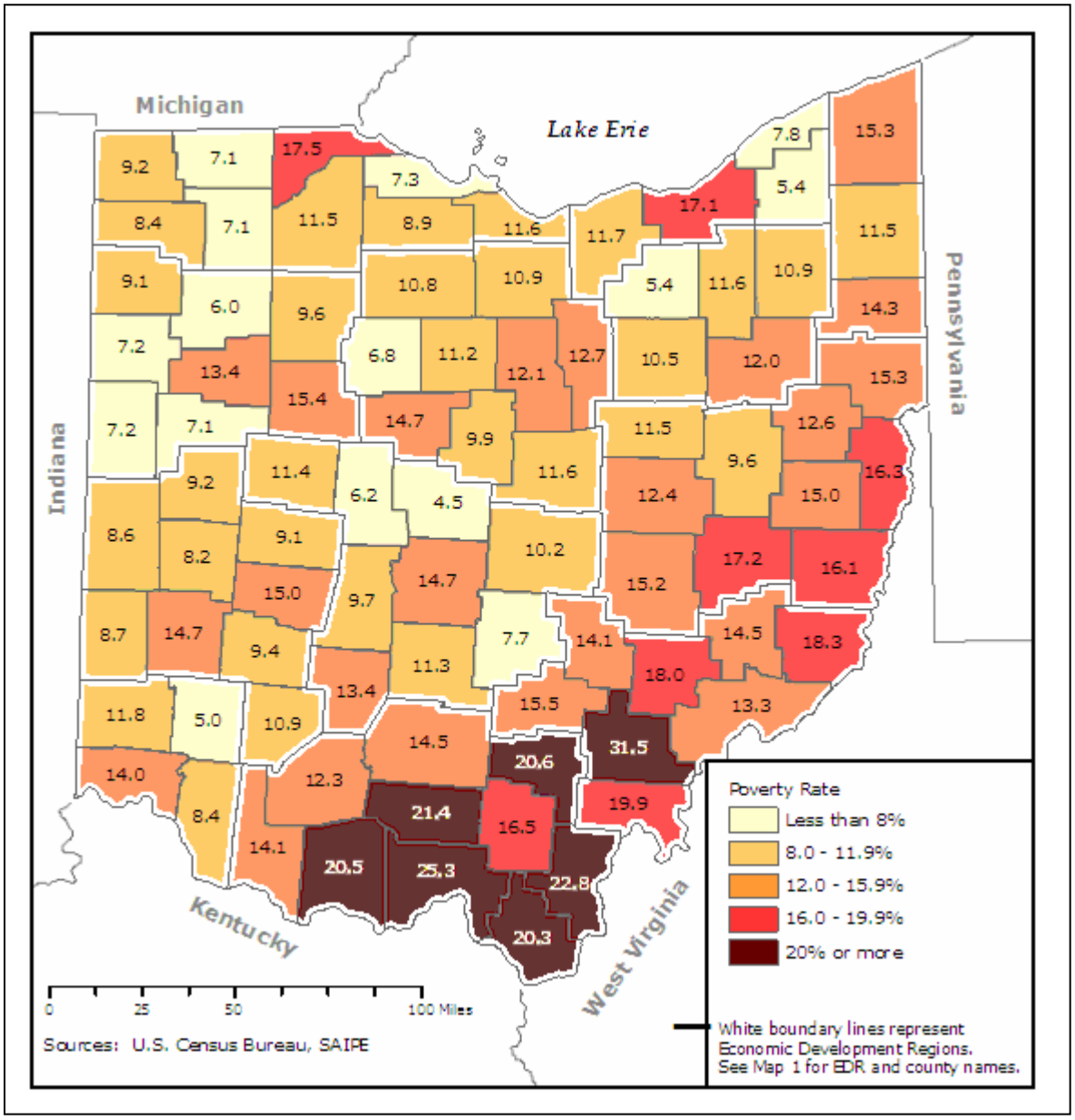



Another discouraging trend in Ohio, as well as in other states, is the diverging employment rate and poverty rate. The next figure shows the increase in the percentage of poverty and the decrease in employment in Ohio beginning in 2001.




U.

S. Census data shows several large concentrations of high rates of poverty in Ohio. These areas include urban areas in northeastern and northwestern Ohio and the regions with the highest rates of poverty in rural southern and southeastern counties. The map indicates that poverty is found in suburban areas of the state. A September 3, 2008 article in *The Columbus Dispatch* cites examples of the same trend in counties adjacent to Franklin County.



# Guiding Principles and Criteria for the Longer Term Recommendations

**Guiding Principles for Recommendations**

1) Basic needs must be met
2) Prevention works and we must invest in the future
3) People must be empowered and involved
4) We must maximize the quality of opportunity
5) Reducing the disparity of wealth by reducing poverty and strengthening the middle class will benefit all Ohioans
6) We must build an economy that works for everyone
7) We must think and act boldly with a commitment to new ideas and solutions

**Criteria for Recommendations**

1) Must move people out of poverty or prevent them from falling into poverty – *The recommendation must be substantive and effective with the intended purpose of reducing or preventing poverty.*
2) Must be Measurable – *The recommendation must be proposed in a way makes clear to those implementing the recommendation how results will be tracked and how the overall effectiveness of the effort be measured.*
3) Must be Accessible – *The proposed initiative must be easily accessible to those it seeks to serve and consideration must be given to whether an implementation plan will be done in a way that maximizes participation.*
4) Must be done in consideration of the possible return on investment – *The recommendation must consider the effectiveness of the investment in terms of future savings or increased revenue to the state.*
5) Must be within our circle of influence – *The recommendation must be mindful of the Governor's ability to influence its implementation.*
6) Must be specific with a timeline and a determination of who will be responsible – *Clearly articulated timelines and the specific steps necessary to implement the initiative, including an indication as to who will be responsible for implementation, must accompany each recommendation.*

# Short 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

     *Put in place on October 1, 2008. Determining countable resources can be complicated and in some cases the resource test discouraged clients from saving and building assets to enable them to move toward self-sufficiency and out of poverty. As a result, a new policy was put in place to eliminate the resource limit for all food stamp assistance groups.*

   - Pursue electronic submission as well as telephone interview options to applicants for all work supports and other benefits

     *Electronic submission of applications for cash assistance, food assistance, and Medicaid programs through the Ohio Benefit Bank was implemented in December 2008. Prior to this, the application was faxed, mailed or dropped off to the county agency. Electronic submission eases the application process for the clients and provides more complete applications for caseworkers to process.*

   - 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)

     *The Governor's Office has convened a small "benefits and supports" work group to address recommendations 1, 2, and 16. Through a privately-funded grant awarded to the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives from Living Cities, a national foundation, a temporary staff person will be brought on for 6-9 months beginning in March 2009 to lead this effort and to produce an implementation plan around the most practical and effective options to reduce barriers associated with work supports and benefits. Recommendations around aligning recertification of work supports to 12 months while simplifying recertification will be part of the agenda.*

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

*The Governor's Office has convened a small "benefits and supports" work group to address recommendations 1, 2, and 16. Through a privately-funded grant awarded to the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives from Living Cities, a national foundation, a temporary staff person will be brought on for 6-9 months beginning in March 2009 to lead this effort and to produce an implementation plan around the most practical and effective options to reduce barriers associated with work supports and benefits. Expanding outreach efforts as described above will be part of the agenda.*

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

*The state Medicaid director and the executive director of Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) have established a work group to address this recommendation. They have been focused on collecting data that will be necessary to obtain CMS approval for a consolidated process. They have also initiated a joint policy and process committee that includes representatives from counties, ODJFS, RSC, and others to work through the details.*

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

*The Governor's Office has asked OBM to analyze and report on the feasibility of implementing an Ohio EITC.*

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

*The Governor's staff has worked with PUCO and with the Office of the Ohio Consumers' Counsel (OCC) to assess what is being done and what more can be done to inform and educate the public.*

*Currently, utility companies currently educate both eligible and potentially eligible customers about low-income programs through a variety of sources:*

- *Companies (gas and electric) send out bill stuffers in the fall for gas and spring for electric explaining the medical certificate program, which will assist a customer with a medical issue to maintain service for 30 days in an emergency situation.*

- *Companies also provide information on all disconnection notices which explain the payment plans (both PIPP and non-income based plans) and sources of federal, state and local government aid for payment of utility bills and home weatherization.*

- *When customers contact utility call centers, utility representatives are to explain the various payment plans available, send out HEAP applications and make referrals to local social service agencies for financial assistance. Customers are also referred to both company sponsored and state sponsored weatherization programs.*

*Additional opportunities are being discussed.*

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)

*On September 16, the Governor and Lt. Governor submitted a request for emergency assistance to members of the Ohio Congressional Delegation. The request includes additional financial assistance in the form of enhanced Federal Medicaid Assistance Percentage (FMAP), increasing food stamp benefits as well as the LIHEAP Block grant, and extending unemployment insurance.*

*Additional funding for the food assistance program, direct support to foodbanks, and unemployment insurance extensions were included in the recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.*

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)

*On September 16, the Governor and Lt. Governor submitted a request for emergency assistance to members of the Ohio Congressional Delegation. The request includes the restoration of federal matching funds for state child support incentive payments. The recommendation has also been sent to staff in the*

*Governor's Washington, D.C., office, who, in turn, will discuss these issues with the Ohio Congressional Delegation. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act passed the U.S. House and Senate in September and will likely be signed by the President. The bill addresses subsidized guardianship and other foster care and adoption issues.*

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

*The Treasurer's office has agreed to take the lead and will work with others 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

*This has been completed and details will soon be sent to the Task Force.*

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

*ODJFS is proceeding with the development of the waiver. They will work cooperatively with the Ohio Department of Health and other interested parties – this will likely take at least 6 months. The State Medicaid Director recently attended a session on family planning waivers sponsored by the National Association of State Medicaid Directors. Other states who have successfully developed and submitted waivers report that it takes a minimum of 18 months to complete the entire process.*

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

*The Governor issued a press release on September 19, 2008 encouraging Ohioans to make an "Emergency Relief" donation through the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.*

12) Explore the feasibility of establishing a liaison within the Administration focused on encouraging anti-poverty, public-private collaborations

*The Governor's office will report on the feasibility of establishing a liaison within the Administration focused on encouraging anti-poverty, public-private collaborations.*

13) 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

*This addition is being considered by the Ohio Benefit Bank office and other key stakeholders.*

14) Investigate and promote Green Collar Jobs programs throughout Ohio that will train and place unemployed individuals in living wage jobs

*In progress at the Governor's office, including a speech the Governor recently delivered to the Blue and Green Alliance. This will also be addressed in the longer term recommendations.*

*Significant investments in "Green Collar Jobs" were included in the recently passed American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.*

15) Work through the appropriate agencies to investigate the use of a Self-Sufficiency Index to provide a benchmark for anti-poverty efforts

*The Governor's office will begin discussions with agency staff and will work with OBM on a special analysis section of future budgets having identified the intended outcome of anti-poverty related investments as self-sufficiency.*

16) 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

*This was completed in October 2008.*

17) Make use of the expertise of the Benchmarks and Measures work group to establish performance measures for various shorter term recommendations

*The Governor's Office is aware of this and may make use of this expertise.*

18) 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

*The Governor's Office will assist OBM in adding this to the special analysis section of future budgets.*

19) Work through the Ohio Board of Regents to engage colleges and universities on establishing a match to the AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps*VISTA education award

*The Governor's office will connect with the Board of Regents regarding the recommendation to engage colleges and universities on establishing a match to the AmeriCorps and AmeriCorps*VISTA education award.*

20) 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

*On behalf of the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force, the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA) hosted 21 regional conversations on reducing poverty in Ohio.*

21) Encourage state and county employees dealing with poverty issues to attend a simulation and Bridges Out of Poverty training

*The Governor's Office is investigating the feasibility of this recommendation.*

22) 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

*Discussions between GOFBCI and the Corporation for National and Community Service are in progress.*

# Budget Ideas Submitted

January 6, 2008

Governor Strickland:

We submitted to you in September our list of shorter term recommendations as called for in Executive Order 2008-11 – and as part of this report, we included an addendum with over thirty "budget ideas" to be considered as the Administration puts together the executive budget for 2010-2011. We thought it would be helpful to send a more prioritized list.

We send these suggestions with a sincere appreciation for the difficult decisions you and others will make in light of severe budget deficits caused by historic declines in state revenues. As you are making these very difficult decisions, here are the three poverty-reducing initiatives we would prioritize:

1. Expand the Ohio Food and Agricultural Clearance Program to $17M 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 $8.5M per year). Currently 1.6M people are served each quarter; the increase in funding would serve an additional 400,000 people per quarter.

2. Implement presumptive eligibility, self-declaration and administrative verification of income for Medicaid for children. This change would likely result in an additional 2,000 - 4,000 children accessing health coverage in Ohio.

3. Establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit indexed at 5% of the federal EITC. Over 800,000 people who already file for the federal Earned Income Tax Credit would benefit.

While it did not make our prioritized list, we did want to use this opportunity to suggest that the state consider issuing a photo ID card at time of release from a period of incarceration. The photo ID will help formerly incarcerated Ohioans access job training opportunities as well as other benefits and work supports.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as part of the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force – and for your leadership in these very challenging times.

Sincerely,

Members of the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force

# Conversations on Reducing Poverty in Ohio

Overview:

On May 28, 2008, Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies (OACAA), in partnership with several other organizations, including the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks, Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development, and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, hosted Ohio's first Poverty Summit. More than 300 people attended the Summit – an engaged group who made time to be at the conference to discuss the problems of poverty in Ohio. During the Summit, Governor Strickland signed Executive Order 2008-11S, which created the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force.

The goal assigned to the Task Force was to reduce the percentage of Ohioans living at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). The objective of the Task Force was to deliver practical and pragmatic short-term and long-term strategic recommendations to the Strickland Administration for consideration in its ongoing effort to reduce poverty in Ohio. All recommendations were required to be specific, clear, and executable, and were to be delivered to Governor Strickland by April 30, 2009.

EO 2008-11S named the director of the Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, Greg Landsman, as chair of the thirty member Task Force, which included OACAA Executive Director Phil Cole as a member. Mr. Landsman and the Task Force organized a plan and a schedule for Task Force meetings and also for several larger working groups.

All meetings of the Task Force and its Work Groups were held during regular business hours in downtown Columbus, leading to a concern that working Ohioans and those outside of Franklin County would have difficulty participating. To address this concern, Mr. Cole volunteered the services of OACAA and its member organizations to host Regional Conversations on Reducing Poverty. OACAA represents the interests of Ohio's fifty-two community action agencies (CAAs). OACCA serves the needs of low-income people in all of Ohio's eighty-eight counties. It administers nearly $500,000,000 of resources aimed at alleviating the problems of poverty in Ohio's communities. Statewide, OACAA and local CAAs employ more than 6,000 people who provide service to nearly 800,000 Ohioans.

With the CAA network secured, additional collaborations were created to support the regional conversations. Each CAA formed a team from its local base by reaching out to county Job and Family Services (JFS) offices; elected officials; those living in poverty; local community organizers; and locally active non-profit organization. Jane Forrest-Redfern of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) suggested the World Café model as a method to facilitate the meetings. As stated at the Web site http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-worldcafe.html, "…World Café Conversations are an

intentional way to create a living network of conversation around questions that matter." Dawn Tyler Lee, Assistant Vice President in the Office of Government Affairs at The Ohio State University suggested two trainers who taught the World Café facilitation method to staff from the CAAs and their regional partners. A grant from the Gund Foundation, administered by OACAA, supported the World Café training session. County JFS offices provided their teleconference facilities as the remote sites used on February 20, 2009, when the local organizers reported on the Regional Conversations on Reducing Poverty to the members of the Anti-Poverty Task Force, who gathered at the ODJFS videoconference room at the Air Center Facility in Columbus. ODJFS staff members Graig Pellman and Tom Smith provided the technical expertise at the Air Center Facility on February 20.

Thanks to OACAA, the Ohio Community Action Agency network, ODJFS and the county JFS offices and other local partners, more than 1,800 Ohioans participated in one of twenty-one Regional Conversations on Reducing Poverty. Conversations were held in CAA offices; libraries; colleges; community meeting halls, including the United Way of Greater Toledo and the United Way of the Greater Dayton Area; government buildings; and other locations. The conversations were attended by people from all backgrounds and demographics, including many members of the low-income community. Several common themes emerged as the groups discussed how their communities would look without poverty and how to get to that ideal. These included:

- The need for good-paying jobs with good benefits;
- The need for lifelong learning opportunities;
- The need for affordable housing; and
- The need for reliable public transportation.

As Mr. Cole stated during his presentation to Governor Strickland and his fellow Task Force members at their last meeting:

> These conversations were a success. Many communities asked that the Conversations be held again. They were great examples of the purest form of democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville would have been proud.

Meeting Summaries:

The **Lima Allen Council on Community Affairs (LACCA)** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 17, 2009 at its office in Lima. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: centralized intake services; job opportunities; family mentoring; community collaboration; and education. Allen County listed education for families and One Stop centralized services as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked the Upthegrove Family Enrichment Center for partnering with them to host the Conversation. They reported that approximately 60 people attended, including people living in poverty and representatives from law enforcement and Lutheran Social Services. They discussed existing services that are helping to reduce poverty in their community, including centralized services and coordination between LCCA and the Allen County JFS office; Culture of Poverty classes; Family Promise programming and food banks and soup kitchens. They noted that shelters for families are needed, as is the need to avoid duplication of services.

The **Community Action Commission of Belmont County** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 11, 2009 at the Bellaire Public Library. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: the availability of living wage jobs; adequate transportation; an educational system that determines individual needs and encourages personal excellence and lifelong learning; rules and regulations that assist people rather than penalizing them; and a better community networking system. Belmont County listed raising the poverty guidelines and improving transportation as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that approximately 33 people, representing a good cross-section of the community, attended the Conversation. They noted the need to include the working poor and the effects of the Benefit Cliff in discussions of poverty. They also described some of the specific transportation problems in their community, including the lack of public transportation for those who work later shifts.

**Supports to Encourage Low-Income Families (SELF)** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 10, 2009 at the First St. John United Church of Christ in Hamilton. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: streamlining and enhancing access to support services; establishing affordable, sustainable public transportation; supporting and rewarding mentoring, education/training, creativity and collaboration to break the cycle of poverty; creating jobs and creative opportunities for employment; and rewarding employment by providing transitional supports as people work toward independence. Butler County listed public transportation and better cooperation/ collaboration between state and local service providers with more transitional employment support services as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked their partners: the Butler County JFS office, the City of Hamilton, the Butler County Educational Service Center, and community volunteers. They noted that a reporter from the *JournalNews* attended (see article in the Newspaper Articles section), along with approximately 110 others. They explained that Butler County is the eighth most populous county in Ohio, and it includes four major population areas. One small transit system serves one of the population centers. A recent plan to coordinate all transportation services in Butler County had to be

abandoned when funding from the Ohio Department of Transportation was redirected to more populous area of the state.

The **Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland (CEOGC)** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 9, 2009 at the Trinity Cathedral in downtown Cleveland. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: avoiding the Benefit Cliff; incentivizing individual saving and asset development; expanding transitional jobs programs; social enterprise; and improving the system to connect ex-offenders with services prior to their release. Cuyahoga County listed jobs, healthcare for adults, food, and general resources and improved cooperation among community action organizations as important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked their partners, including the City Council of East Cleveland, Head Start, community activists, and the Empowerment Center of Cleveland. They reported that the Conversation included 64 guests and 15 staff members. They noted the importance of childcare services, which may not be offered all day, and the need to align them to work well for parents employed in full-time jobs.

The **Community Action Organization of Delaware, Madison & Union Counties, Inc. (CAODMU) and Delaware Job & Family Services** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 11, 2009 at its office on Hawes Administration Building in Delaware. The discussion led to a list of six items necessary to create a community without poverty: good jobs that pay a livable wage; affordable healthcare, daycare and housing; education for people living in poverty that includes creating an awareness of community services and post assistance; resources for mental health and drug abuse services; adaptation by agencies and individuals to declining resources (learning to do with less and becoming self-sufficient); and more transitional programs. The group that met in Delaware County listed improved collaborative partnerships between the social service community, government agencies and the faith-based programs and increased awareness of poverty and its related issues and impact as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that more than 50 people attended the Conversation, which was held on a stormy night. They noted that Delaware County includes a more suburban, affluent section to the south, adjacent to Franklin County and the City of Delaware and a rural section to the north, where more poverty exists. They emphasized the importance of the 2010 Census and making people aware of the connection between the Census results and funding that will be made available to Delaware County.

The **Erie-Huron Counties Community Action Commission, Inc.** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 10, 2009 at Sandusky High School in Sandusky. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: jobs with living wages; financial education; affordable healthcare;

transportation; and vocational training, perhaps focusing on green energy. The Erie-Huron participants listed jobs that pay a living wage and financial education as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that more than 50 people attended the Conversation, including 20-to-25% low-income citizens. They thanked the team partners, including the NAACP, the Erie County United Way, and a city and county elected officials. They noted the need to eliminate duplication, to encourage banks to be more pro-active, and to coordinate transportation. Also related to transportation, the team leaders recommended progress on the Erie-Huron airport as a way to improve the economy of the region.

The **Lancaster-Fairfield Community Action Agency** hosted a series of Conversation on Reducing Poverty focus groups at various locations in Fairfield County. Six focus groups met between February 9 and February 20, 2009, and three focus groups were scheduled for the following week. As reported t the teleconference, the discussions led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: employment with benefits and decent wages; an expanded public transportation system; healthcare coverage; education; and job training for dislocated workers . Fairfield County listed increased employment opportunities with benefits and affordable housing, which includes attention in the areas of ownership and rental options, utilities, and mortgage/foreclosure and rent assistance, as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that with their Partner, the United Way, they met with approximately 52 people during the first six Conversation focus groups; 85% of the attendees were low-income citizens. Those attending found the Conversations to be a place to express themselves and an affirming experience. The team leaders also found the Conversations to be powerful and moving, as the spoke with community members who are struggling to meet basic needs.

**IMPACT Community Action** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 9, 2009 at the Mt. Olivet Baptist Church in Columbus. IMPACT serves Franklin County. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: employment for all citizens with intensified focus on ex-offenders; education and workforce development training to prepare communities for the changing job market; universal healthcare for all citizens; restructuring of social service programs to create a system with better coordination and collaboration; and faith-based organizations uniting with the community to inspire hope. IMPACT listed funding to support immediate job training for stimulus jobs and longer tern training to prepare the workforce to compete in the global economy and Universal Health Care as the two most important items to move the community forward.

Impact's partners were the Franklin County Job and family Services, the Columbus Urban League, and the Federation of Settlement Houses. During the teleconference, team leaders reported that 136 people attended the Conversation; approximately 60% of

them were low-income. A reporter from the local NBC news affiliate attended the meeting. They reported that the group encourages more churches to be actively involved in reducing poverty and discussed the need to provide services for ex-offenders. They plan to hold follow-up conversations and agreed with a suggestion from the Summit County team that World Café-style conversations about reentry would be helpful.

The **Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 11, 2009 at its office in Cincinnati. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: access to employment with benefits and a living wage; access to high quality education including vocational and career training; access to affordable health care including mental health and substance abuse treatment; safe and affordable housing; and acceptance of all cultures. Hamilton County listed more employment opportunities including a special focus on ex-offender reentry and cradle to grave quality education that includes like skills and vocational training as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked their partners from the Hamilton County JFS office and the FreestoreFoodbank. Team leaders reported that 120 people attended the Conversation, and more were interested in attending, had space been available. Approximately 40% of those attending were low-income. The found the World Café process to be widely accepted by the group – a supportive and welcoming venue that resulted in a compelling experience. For some who attended, they felt it was the first time their voices were heard. The team leaders noted that a continuing theme throughout the meeting was the need to take personal responsibility.

The **Lorain County Community Action Agency** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 10, 2009 at the Lorain County Community College - Spitzer Conference Center in Elyria, Ohio. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: jobs that pay a living wage with medical benefits (or access to healthcare for everyone); education that starts in early childhood and continues as lifelong learning; local and regional planning that makes optimal use of resources for today with forecasting towards tomorrow; leaders that care and believe in making change ("authentic creative community leadership"); and local collaboration that holds partnering with low-income individuals as a core principle (help people help themselves). Lorain County listed a focus on transportation and ensuring access to services (noting that services are now scattered and not consistently accessible by public transportation) and a focus on employment and preparing people for tomorrow's jobs and transitioning low-skill workers into living wage opportunities as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that 60 people attended the Conversation, with approximately 20% being low income. They described Lorain County as a mix of urban and rural, which influenced their discussions about transportation. The county lacks consistent access to the available transportation

services, and the group suggested offering a One Stop service area on a consolidated public transportation route.

The **United Way of Greater Toledo** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 11, 2009 at the Erie Street Markets Civic Center in Toledo. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: be a community that will develop jobs with livable wages; school readiness and early childhood education, including accountable parents, multiple strategies to reach goals and Individual Education Plans for every student; affordable housing in multiple communities and restructuring neighborhoods; a "system change" as it relates to poverty; and a holistic approach that reached beyond symptoms. Lucas County listed getting more business leaders involved to talk about sustainable livable wage job creation for low-income workers and revamping the education system to increase parental involvement, to meet the different needs of each child at all education levels and to provide adult education partnering with employers for hands-on training as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked their partners, including the Lucas County JFS office and the City of Toledo. They reported that 90 people attended the Conversation, including 45-to-50% who were low-income. They also thanked the YMCA and JCC of Greater Toledo for providing its Fun Bus to assist with childcare during the meeting. Attendees included city officials, families from a local shelter, media representatives, and a college class. Their discussion identified education and parental engagement as key factors in reducing poverty. They noted that parental involvement is more likely when the parents had positive school experiences and when schools serve as hubs for community involvement.

The **Community Action Organization of Delaware, Madison & Union Counties, Inc. (CAODMU) and the Madison County Continuum of Care Community** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 12, 2009 at the Madison County Senior Citizens Center in London. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: adequate resources, including jobs, houses, training, post-secondary education availability; for a livable wage; gradual transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency; adequate safety nets for situational poverty; good community planning; and encouraging government entities and officials to interact with nonprofits including faith-based and other volunteers to address the issues of poverty. The group that met in Madison County listed encouraging business and school partnership to provide for meaningful jobs for the future and advancing the public policy on local and regional affordable transportation as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, a team leader reported good attendance at the evening Conversation with approximately 20% of those attendees being low-income. The group identities business and school partnerships as an economic development tool.

The **Ohio Heartland Community Action Commission** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on January 29, 2009 at the Salvation Army office in Marion. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: putting people back to work; the Bridges Out of Poverty concept; affordable health care; help for those who cannot read or understand paperwork; and more higher education and assistance for those needing a GED. Marion County listed encouragement of displaced workers to learn new skills and use of the Bridges Out of Poverty concept (mentoring by volunteers) as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that 90 people attend the Conversation, with approximately 25% being low-income. The World Café model was well-received by the group, and the team leaders are considering holding a second meeting. The group discussed the Bridges Out of Poverty concept and mentoring by volunteers as methods as informal supports that leverage other services. In response to a question, they suggested that senior citizens who have found that they need to continue working or to return to the work force would make excellent mentors.

The **Community Action Partnership of the Greater Dayton Area** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 12, 2009 at the United Way of the Greater Dayton Area in Dayton. The agency serves Darke, Greene, Montgomery, Preble, and Warren counties The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: meet people's basic needs through the provision of decent affordable health care, education, and training, decent affordable housing, living wage jobs, transportation and affordable childcare; a change in attitude toward a realization that poverty s not a choice (treat the poor with respect; end racism and segregation); educating people, especially youth, on responsible spending and the accumulation of assets that will appreciate in value; more workforce development efforts; and greater use of user-friendly centralized databases of information about resources available to low-income persons. The five-county group listed greater use of public assistance programs with transitional benefits to allow persons to retain some benefits over a period of time once their incomes rises and more programs that directly engage individuals in one-on-one settings to break down barriers between persons of differing race, ethnicity or socio-economic status as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that, although they expected 90 people to attend, 144 arrived for the Conversation, and they were able to accommodate all of them. They estimated that 20-to-30% of the people attending were low-to-moderate income, and the group as a whole was diverse. It includes representatives from the government, faith-based, and business communities, as well as a representative from the City of Dayton Youth Commission. The group recommended more supportive transition programs that do not penalize people as they try to succeed and building on the Circle® model as a collaborative effort to reduce poverty and provide opportunities for people of diverse cultural, racial, and income levels to work together.

**Pickaway County Community Action (PICCA)** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 18, 2009 at the Brooks-Yates MRDD School in Circleville. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: strong, effective education and training opportunities for all ages; quality jobs paying a living wage; a community that understands poverty, acknowledges that it exists and has compassion for those in poverty; a strong blending and coordination among all community resources; and life skill education and training offered at all levels. Pickaway County listed employment growth with jobs that pay living wages and providing life skill education and training at all levels as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked partners including the United Way of Pickaway County**,** Inc., and Judge Jan Long. They reported that 44 people attended the Conversation; approximately 20% of those attending were low-income. Due to a severe winter storm, the meeting was rescheduled to February 18, a fact which may have adversely affected the attendance. However, the Conversation was described as a fantastic and enjoyable process, and plan to schedule a second meeting where they can drill down into the topics raised at the first meeting. The team leaders described their results as similar to those reported by Hamilton County, with a high priority placed on jobs and life-long educational opportunities.

The **Community Action Committee of Pike County and Pike County Job & Family Services** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 12, 2009 at the ***Pike County Government*** Center in Waverly. The meeting organizers invited people from the neighboring counties, and the meeting included people from Pike, Ross, Highland, Adams, and Brown counties. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: education, living wage jobs, readjusting the standard of living for the entire community/nation, collaboration among agencies, and meeting basic needs. The group meeting in Pike County listed legislation for education and employment incentives and living wage jobs with benefits as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that 65 people attended the Conversation, with approximately 20% of those being low-income. Attendees included elected officials, pastors, unemployed residents, and students from two local high schools. The World Café model was well-accepted by the group which discussed education, nutrition, jobs, health insurance, and collaboration as key issues. In response to a question from the moderator, the team leaders described Pike County's public transportation system, known as CATS, which works well for all county residents.

The **Community Action Council of Portage County** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on January 29, 2009 at the Kent State University campus in Kent. The discussion led to a list of several items, including the five listed here, necessary to create a community without poverty: leadership from all sectors, jobs and benefits, education, equal access to services and cooperation with integrity. Portage County listed

meaningful and comprehensive training and equal access for all and taking government back so that it reflects the community's priorities services as two of the important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked the Portage County JFS office for partnering on the project. They reported that 120 people attended the Conversation and that 70% of those attending were low-income. The meeting was help in conjunction with a Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. The team leaders had organized transportation and childcare, and a diverse group had participated, including residents from a homeless shelter, university professors, and a state representative. Team leaders reported that they intend to continue the process to determine what to do next for the community.

**The Central City Economic Development Community Action Council, Inc. (CCEDC-CAC)** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 18, 2009 at the ***Urban Flats Complex*** in Mansfield. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: identifying and building on strengths; finding short-term and long-term solutions; justice; networking with the justice system; and monthly job fairs and pro bono work. Richland County listed graduated poverty guidelines and informing leadership of what is needed and having the flexibility to implement it as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders reported that 40 people attended the Conversation, with approximately 33% of those being low-income. The described the group attending as diverse and said the World Café provided the perfect venue for low-income and younger residents to speak up. They plan to hold similar meetings for more in-depth discussion and will expand them to half-day to whole-day sessions, and they see the meetings as a way to keep the community mobilized and moving forward. They identified the First Call referral system used in Richland County as a valuable tool to reduce poverty. The group also discussed the importance of improving the judicial system and reentry services so that ex-offenders can become production members of their communities.

**The Stark County Community Action Agency** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 17, 2009 at the William Hunter Center in Canton. The discussion led to a list of five items necessary to create a community without poverty: creating jobs and providing training and education; collaboration of the community and government; drawing business to the community; supporting each others endeavors; and the ability to listen and learn. Stark County listed a locally designed strategic plan of action and employment for ex-offenders as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked the partnering organizations, including the Stark County JFS office, The Stark Community Foundation, the Stark County Commissioners Board, an the Stark County Out of Poverty Partnership. One third of the Conversation participants were low-income, and the participants included representatives

of the faith-based community, the chamber of commerce, and the United Way of Greater Stark County; and area service providers. Team leaders said the World Café model provided for an enjoyable, enthusiastic meeting with an engaged group. They noted the importance of planning, reducing duplication, and coordinating activities.

**Summit County Community Action Incorporated** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 12, 2009 at Alpha Phi Alpha in Akron. The discussion led to a list of several items, including the five listed here, necessary to create a community without poverty: eliminating unmet needs/removing systematic barriers; education/a total commitment to community-based services and early intervention; responsive/authentic elected officials; access to affordable healthcare; and prevention/linking resources. Summit County listed centralizing resources and creating an educational system that supports and sustains families as the two most important items to move the community forward.

During the teleconference, team leaders thanked their partners, including the Summit County JHS office, Congresswoman Betty Sutton's office, the East Akron Community House, the Knight Foundation, and the Catholic Commission. They reported that 80 people attend the Conversation; about 33% of those attending were low income. Team leaders said the World Café model created and atmosphere where people felt free to speak and that those participating felt that the Conversation put the topic of poverty "back on the table." One of the team members said her role at the meeting was to listen and that she heard people explain how it feels to work through the systems that are serving people in need. The group wanted a distinction to be made between the chronically poor and what they termed the "first-time poor" – those recently impacted by the economic downturn. They asked that the chronically poor not be forgotten as efforts are made to reduce poverty in Ohio.

The **Washington-Morgan Counties Community Action** hosted a Conversation on Reducing Poverty on February 12, 2009 at the Senior Nutrition Site, O'Neill Senior Center in Marietta. The meeting was held for the citizens of Washington, Morgan, Gallia, and Meigs counties. The discussion led to a list of several items, including the five listed here, necessary to create a community without poverty: more jobs; better education; financial literacy, especially for children; better and affordable healthcare; and public transportation in rural areas. The participants listed more public transportation and expanding community action agencies as two of the important items to move the community forward.

To close the teleconference, the team leaders reported that 75 people attended the Conversation, with 75% of those attending being low-to-moderate income. One hundred percent of those attending the meeting reported being affected by the economic downturn. In addition to the items provided in their written report, team leaders called for an understanding of rural issues, noting that "one size does not fit all" when policies are created.

## Conversations on Reducing Poverty:
## The two best ideas to move toward becoming a community without poverty.

| | MEETING LOCATIONS BY COUNTY | Allen | Belmont | Butler | Delaware | Erie/Huron | Fairfield | Franklin | Hamilton | Lorain | Lucas | Madison | Marion | Montgomery | Pickaway | Pike | Portage | Richland | Stark | Summit | Washington/Gallia/ Morgan/Meigs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Education/ Training | Education/Education for Families | * | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | * | | |
| | Financial Education | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Jobs/Skills/Training | | | | | | | * | | * | | | * | | * | | * | | | | |
| Coordination of Services | One Stops; Centralized/Coordinated Services | * | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | |
| | Improved collaborations – social services, community, government, faith-based | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Eliminate the Benefit Cliff | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | * |
| | Encourage business/school partnerships | | | | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Raise/Graduate Poverty Guidelines | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | | | * |
| Improve Public Transportation | | | * | * | | | | | | * | | * | | | | | | | | | |
| Affordable Housing (to own & rent; utilities; foreclosure & rent assistance. | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Jobs/Wages/ Healthcare | Living Wage Jobs | | | | | * | | | | | * | | | | * | * | | | | | |
| | Increased employment opportunities w/ benefits | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Universal health care | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Employment opportunities, including for ex-offenders | | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | * | | |
| Civic Capacity and Action | Bridges Out of Poverty | | | | | | | | | | | | * | * | | | | | | | |
| | Legislation for education and employment incentives | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | | | | | |
| | Take government back to reflect community priorities/Tell leadership what is needed and have flexibility to implement | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | * | | | |
| | Locally designed strategic plan of action | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | * | | |
| | Revamp the education system/Include adult education partnering | | | | | | | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Increase community awareness of poverty's impact | | | | * | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

NOTE: Cuyahoga County did not rank its recommendations.



# Red tape holds down Ohioans, task force says

## 21 suggestions offered to reach needy with aid

**By Catherine Candisky**
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Reducing government red tape will go a long way toward giving needy Ohioans access to existing programs and services, a state panel examining ways to reduce poverty says.

A 30-member task force assembled by Gov. Ted Strickland has issued 21 recommendations, many of them administrative initiatives aimed at expanding outreach efforts and making it easier to apply for programs such as food stamps and subsidized child care.

"Many of these are federally funded, so it will not cost a lot for the state," said Roger McCauley, executive director of the Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development and a member of the task force.

For example, an estimated 500,000 Ohioans are eligible but not receiving food stamps, a program paid for entirely by the federal government.

Nearly 70 percent of Ohio children without health insurance — 105,000 youngsters — are eligible but not enrolled in the State Children's Health Insurance Program, largely paid for by the federal government.

"That's because the paperwork is hard and re-enrollment is hard," said Amy Swanson, executive director of Voices for Ohio Children. "The problem for those families is navigating the system."

The task force called for allowing electronic applications for all work-support programs and other benefits, and letting caseworkers interview families by telephone when reviewing requests to renew benefits.

In addition, the panel called for timing things so families can submit a single application for several programs and renew benefits at the same time.

"Allowing phone interviews for renewing benefits is really important to low-income people who cannot afford to take time off from their jobs, nor are they paid for time away from their jobs," said Lisa Hamler-Fugitt, executive director of the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks.

Strickland assembled the task force this summer to come up with ways to help the 3.4 million Ohioans living in households earning no more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. That's $42,400 a year for a family of four, a level economists generally agree is necessary to cover basic needs.

Long-term proposals that might take more time and money are to be submitted in April.

Strickland spokesman Keith Dailey said the governor would review the report and determine how best to proceed.

The report did not estimate the cost of proposals, which also include:

- Creating a simplified and shortened application process for low-income disabled Ohioans to seek Medicaid and Social Security benefits.
- Studying the effect of creating an earned-income tax credit for Ohio.
- Seeking permission from federal regulators to expand family-planning services provided through Medicaid to low-income men and women.

"My biggest concern and worry about all the work we're doing here is, there won't be the money to implement any of it," McCauley said. "A lot of this stuff won't cost anything, but some other things, like the earned-income tax credit, will cost a lot."

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*The Columbus Dispatch*
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# Gov. Strickland's task force tackles problems of poor

## Panel needs ideas fast that won't cost much

**By Catherine Candisky**
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Franklinton's Pauline Edwards has been involved in anti-poverty efforts for decades and says they have always fallen short.

The tendency, she said, is to focus on lessening the plight of the poor rather than addressing the underlying causes to help put an end to poverty.

Still, she accepted an invitation to serve on a task force assembled by Gov. Ted Strickland in hopes of breaking that trend.

"You still want to throw money at situations that you've been throwing money at for years, and that hasn't worked," Edwards cautioned the panel at its first meeting yesterday in Columbus.

"If we do that, 20 years from now we'll still be sitting at this table."

The 30-member task force will make short-term recommendations for reducing the number of Ohioans living in poverty to Strickland on Sept. 10. Long-range proposals will be submitted to the governor in April.

"He's looking for a top-10 list of things the state can do, very practical, very executable," said Greg Landsman, director of the governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

The problem is glaring.

A third of Ohioans are unable to afford food, housing, clothes and other necessities. That's 3.4 million people in households earning no more than 200 percent of the federal poverty level — $42,400 a year for a family of four — and a level economists say is necessary to cover basic needs.

Less than a decade ago, one in four was in the same boat.

With a tight state budget and projected revenue shortfall, Landsman and others on the panel cautioned that costly solutions are not viable options, at least in the short term.

The task force includes Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner and state Treasurer Richard Cordray, representatives from several state agencies, faith-based groups, nonprofit organizations, businesses and labor unions.

During a two-hour meeting, the panel had little trouble outlining some of the problems facing Ohio families: the cost of living growing faster than wages; an expanding class of working poor; too many students dropping out of school; not enough summer jobs for teens; increasing home foreclosures; a growing immigration population; and unprecedented numbers of grandparents raising children.

And what to do? Many on the panel said federal poverty standards must change to reflect the reality that it takes twice the government-set income level to get by.

Others said assistance is available but difficult to obtain because of excessive bureaucracy. For instance, 30 percent of those eligible for food stamps don't receive them and it can take years for government bureaucrats to process applications for disability assistance, Medicaid and other benefits.

Edwards and another panel member representing low-income families were quick to give examples. Cassandra Lovejoy said she and her son have been treated shamefully when they've asked for government assistance.

Her son, who suffers from Crohn's disease, applied for disability assistance through the Supplemental Security Income program three years ago and is still waiting for help. Lovejoy once waited 20 minutes in line at the county welfare office before inquiring and being told the attendant had left for lunch and she and others waiting for help should join another lengthy line.

"People that clearly need help need to be able to get it," Edwards said. "It must be accessible."

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# Self-sufficiency proves a stretch

Jeannette Davis, 29, of Columbus, is a single mother who earns $30,000 a year from two jobs, much less than a new report says is needed for necessities. Her kids, from left, are James King Jr., 6, Jerica Aleigh, 9, and Justus Davis, 10.



ERIC ALBRECHT | DISPATCH

## New Ohio report finds costs of basic needs much higher than federal poverty levels

By Catherine Candisky
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

No one has to tell Jeannette Davis that she doesn't make enough to cover rent, food, transportation and other basic needs for her family.

The 29-year-old single mother from Columbus earns about $30,000 a year working two jobs. Still, she can't afford to pay her share of the health coverage offered by her employer and struggles to keep enough food in the house for her children, ages 10, 9 and 6.

A report released yesterday found that families like Davis' need an annual income of $33,431 to cover the necessities without government or private assistance.

Commissioned by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, the analysis shows how much income is necessary to be self-sufficient in each of Ohio's 88 counties for 70 types of families, including childless adults, single parents and couples with children. Making low-income families self-sufficient was a key goal of national welfare reform more than a decade ago.

The report also underscores a long-held com-

See **STRETCH** Page **A4**

### Setting standards

The central Ohio self-sufficiency standard as a percentage of the federal poverty level for three types of families in 2008:

| COUNTY | One adult, one school-age child | One adult, one preschooler, one school-age child | Two adults, one preschooler, one school-age child |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delaware | $29,991 - 214% | $44,024 - 250% | $49,693 - 234% |
| Fairfield | $29,380 - 210% | $41,635 - 237% | $47,406 - 224% |
| Franklin | $29,917 - 214% | $43,730 - 248% | $49,818 - 235% |
| Licking | $26,669 - 190% | $36,602 - 208% | $43,757 - 206% |
| Madison | $24,975 - 178% | $34,302 - 195% | $42,083 - 199% |
| Pickaway | $23,815 - 170% | $31,125 - 177% | $38,270 - 181% |
| Union | $27,239 - 195% | $36,878 - 210% | $43,877 - 207% |
| FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL | $14,000 | $17,600 | $21,200 |

Source: University of Washington School of Social Work

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

## STRETCH

FROM PAGE A1

plaint by advocates for the poor and others that the 45-year-old federal poverty guidelines should be scrapped because they grossly underestimate what it takes to get by.

"It costs a lot more to be poor than it used to," said Philip E. Cole, executive director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. "If we are serious about helping people out of poverty, when we talk about self-sufficiency, we need to know exactly what we're talking about."

The report found almost nowhere in Ohio where a single person can get by while earning the state's $7 minimum wage. (Belmont, Carroll, Morrow and Van Wert counties were the exceptions.)

In Franklin County, a single person needs to make $8.36 an hour to cover basic needs, or $17,652 a year; that's about $7,200 more than the federal poverty guideline.

Add children to a family, and costs go up quickly.

A single mother of a preschooler in Franklin County needs to earn $16.22 an hour, or $34,260 a year, to pay for their basic needs; that's 2½ times the poverty level for a family of two.

A married couple with two children — one in preschool and one of school age — must have an annual income of $49,818 to make it in Franklin County; that's more than double the poverty level.

The report's author, Diana Pearce, director of the Center for Women's Welfare at the University of Washington, considered the costs of housing, food, child care, transportation, health care and taxes. She also assumed that all adults, regardless of family composition, worked full time.

"There are no takeout or restaurant meals in here," Pearce said. "This is a bare-bones budget."

The factors that most influence expenses are location and family makeup. Housing costs vary greatly across Ohio, and families with young children can spend a quarter or more of their income on child care.

The report will be given to Gov. Ted Strickland and leaders in the Ohio General Assembly. The findings also will be presented to the governor's Anti-Poverty Task Force, which is expected to make recommendations to Strickland this fall.

Cole said policymakers should consider how much it costs to be self-sufficient when they create economic-development incentives and guidelines for job-training and other government-assistance programs.

For example, self-sufficiency standards can be used to ensure that companies receiving tax breaks to locate in Ohio provide jobs that pay enough for employees to get by, Cole said. The analysis also is available for schools to use in personal-finance classes.

Davis, the single mother, was living in a homeless shelter when her second of three children was born.

"It's depressing when you go to work every day and try and make something of yourself, and it's still not enough," she said. "I have to make choices. Are we going to eat, or are we going to buy medications?"

This summer, she and her children went door to door in their Far East Side neighborhood to solicit $225 in donations to pay for her boys to play football and her daughter to join a cheerleading squad.

Although Davis' earnings have increased in recent years, getting by has, in some ways, become harder because her family no longer qualifies for food stamps and subsidized housing.

"We've turned a corner, but when I didn't work when my kids were younger, I got so much help."

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SHARI LEWIS | DISPATCH

People wait outside St. Lawrence Haven for the food pantry to open in the afternoon. "It costs a lot more to be poor than it used to," says an advocate for the poor.

### Paying for necessities

What a new report says it costs three types of Franklin County families for essential living expenses:

| MONTHLY COSTS | ONE ADULT | ONE ADULT, ONE PRESCHOOLER, ONE SCHOOL-AGE CHILD | TWO ADULTS, ONE INFANT, ONE PRESCHOOLER |
|---|---|---|---|
| Housing | $577 | $729 | $729 |
| Child care | 0 | $1,194 | $1,356 |
| Food | $202 | $457 | $572 |
| Transportation | $211 | $217 | $416 |
| Health care | $125 | $296 | $355 |
| Miscellaneous | $111 | $289 | $343 |
| Taxes | $245 | $729 | $802 |
| Earned-income tax credit | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Child-care tax credit | 0 | -100 | -100 |
| Child tax credit | 0 | -167 | -167 |
| **SELF-SUFFICIENCY WAGE** | | | |
| Hourly | $8.36 | $20.71 | $12.23* |
| Monthly | $1,471 | $3,644 | $4,306 |
| Annual | $17,652 | $43,730 | $51,668 |

* Per adult. Source: University of Washington School of Social Work

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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The Columbus Dispatch

High 85 | Low 65
Details B6

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50 CENTS

# Poverty extends to outskirts

## Need rises beyond urban core, as poor grow in Delaware, Fairfield and Licking counties

By Sherri Williams
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

Three weeks ago, Amber Browning of Delaware left her housekeeping job when her child-care arrangements fell through. Without employment, the single mother of four turned to a nonprofit agency to get her children shoes and supplies for the coming school year.

Delaware County is Ohio's fastest-growing, but pockets of poverty exist there and are increasing, according to U.S. Census Bureau data released last week.

There were 1,428 more people in the county living below the poverty line last year than the year before, reflecting an increase from 3.7 percent of the population in 2006 to 4.5 percent in 2007, according to U.S. Census estimates.

It's not the 16.3 percent in Franklin County, or the 11.8 percent in Licking or the 9.6 percent in Fairfield.

The federal poverty threshold for a family of four was $21,203 last year and $20,614 in 2006.

Although the rest of central Ohio might consider Delaware County — population 161,000, with its booming growth and large-tract homes — an affluent place, not all of its residents are prosperous, said Jim Cesa, executive director of the Community Action Organization of Delaware, Madison & Union Counties Inc.

"We still have a population that is significant that is living below the poverty line," he said. "That translates to 6,000 to 7,000 people, and that's not a good thing. It also costs more to live in Delaware County."

Parents in Delaware County who are straddling the poverty line are staying there to keep their children enrolled in solid suburban schools, said Kevin Crowley, executive director of People in Need Inc.

"It is very expensive to live in Delaware," said Browning, 30. "I struggle a lot in trying to find a job close to home but also trying to keep up with the growing community. The rent goes up because the city is growing. Utilities are, too."

Crowley said other parents, such as Browning, who has three children attending Delaware schools, come to

See POVERTY Page B2

### Poverty in central Ohio

A snapshot of the population living below the federal poverty level in central Ohio counties and the state.

| COUNTY | YEAR | MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME | NUMBER LIVING IN POVERTY |
|---|---|---|---|
| Delaware | 2005 | $75,767 | 6,736 4.6% |
| | 2006 | 79,173 | 5,732 3.7% |
| | 2007 | 80,448 | 7,160 4.5% |
| Fairfield | 2005 | $51,044 | 10,133 7.5% |
| | 2006 | 55,113 | 10,316 7.5% |
| | 2007 | 59,033 | 13,266 9.6% |
| Franklin | 2005 | $45,410 | 154,772 14.5% |
| | 2006 | 45,803 | 175,184 16.3% |
| | 2007 | 47,900 | 178,458 16.3% |
| Licking | 2005 | $49,980 | 17,595 11.7% |
| | 2006 | 50,386 | 14,627 9.6% |
| | 2007 | 53,551 | 17,982 11.8% |

Number living in poverty statewide

| 2005 | 2006 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|
| 1,450,650 | 1,486,363 | 1,464,133 |
| 13% | 13.3% | 13.1% |

Note: Because of the change in population, the number of people living in poverty can go up while the percentage remains the same.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

## POVERTY

FROM PAGE B1

**Central Ohio nonprofit agencies say that even in affluent areas, more people with jobs are struggling to make ends meet and must turn to community resources for help with necessities.**

his agency for help with school supplies for their children.

"I can't imagine those kids going to school and can't afford new shoes in the Olentangy school district, which has the most humble and most affluent," Crowley said. "I'm sure it's got to be tough."

Although Browning's children understand their family's financial situation, their mother wonders how they handle having less than their peers.

"I worry about what my children are going through at school and what people are saying about them," Browning said. "We're not as well-off as other people are."

Last year, Crowley's agency received more than 160 more requests for emergency help with rent, utilities, food and medication than the year before, he said.

Generations of Delaware County families are coping with tough economic choices by "doubling and tripling up (in homes) and sharing expenses," Crowley said.

Higher gasoline prices are a barrier for needy families to get the help they need in Delaware County, he said. "We're getting calls from folks calling for food but (who) don't have the gas to come pick it up."

In the past two years, more than half of the people who have sought emergency food at the Lancaster-Fairfield Community Action Agency are new clients, said Kellie Ailes, executive director.

"Most of the people who come here are employed," she said. "They have lower-than-self-sufficient wages and benefits and need to depend on community resources to stabilize their families."

In Licking County, workers at the LEADS Community Action Agency are seeing more clients with fewer resources, said Terry Boehm, community-services director. In the past two years, the nonprofit poverty agency paid 40 percent more utility bills for clients. People are seeking assistance with basic necessities such as food and utilities.

"No one gives help with gas, and this is a pretty rural area," Boehm said. "We don't have the mass transportation. We see a lot of people on bikes. You used to never see that."

Karen LeMasters has run the pantry at the Newark Church of the Nazarene for three years. She sees the same faces, but also new ones, many of them working people who need help with the necessities.

"For some, it's not even the loss of a job," said LeMasters, who added that the number of clients has risen 10 percent in the past year. "It's that prices have gone up, so the need is there and they come to us."

The estimated poverty rate for Licking County doesn't surprise Boehm. "It feels like it's more. There could be people out there we still haven't seen yet, coming into the door."

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## Poverty

(Continued from page 1)

aimed at those who live at 200 percent of the poverty level, when the reality is many live at half the poverty level, especially in Southeastern Ohio, and they often end up falling through the cracks.

"As the economy gets worse, more and more people are struggling to make it, but compare making $30,000 a year to $6,000 a year," Frech said. "There needs to be more done for those on the bottom. The economy is tough on a lot of people, but for these individuals it's brutal."

The Department of Job and Family Services provides food boxes to many families at the end of the month because their food has completely run out. Through a survey the department has conducted, many report that they are concerned that they can't purchase healthy food for their families, often being forced to live off soups that offer little nutrition because food and vegetables are so expensive, Frech said.

"People are going hungry as we speak," Frech said. "We see this as a crisis. We aren't sure what constitutes a crisis if this doesn't. Times are hard for everybody, but they are impossible for these folks."

Because of the unique conditions that make up poverty in Southeastern Ohio, representation of Appalachia on the task force is essential, Garbo said.

"Southeastern Ohio representation is critical," he said. "We have unique issues here. It's not that poor people in Cleveland don't suffer, but we have a higher percentage of poverty.

"We are seeing a new picture of poor people," Garbo added. "These aren't the welfare stereotypes, but working people who are having a hell of a time making ends meet."

# State task force to look at poverty

## Local experts: Will it help the poor?

By MATT GALLAGHER
Messenger staff writer

Gov. Ted Strickland signed an executive order Wednesday establishing the Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force, but Southeastern Ohio poverty experts are not convinced it will make a difference in the lives of poor people.

The task force will develop strategic recommendations for the governor's administration to consider, aimed at reducing the percentage of Ohioans living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The poverty threshold for a family of four is $21,200 a year.

While local advocates for the poor praise the measure as a good step, they also express doubt that the task force will produce real change for the area's poor, especially those living in extreme poverty.

Nearly 1.5 million people in Ohio are living at or below the poverty level, and 3.4 million people are living at or below 200 percent of the poverty level, according to a news release from the governor's office.

"It's really compassionate for a state to establish such a task force. Not many do," said Bob Garbo, executive director of the Athens-Hocking-Perry Community Action Agency. "But that being said, show me the meat. It would be nice to have the Legislature jump in and co-sponsor the issue, because that's where the money comes from. The governor is limited by money."

Jack Frech, director of Athens County Job and Family Services, agreed that it is a good step, but said he has his doubts given the governor's track record with budgets.



"There needs to be more done for those on the bottom. The economy is tough on a lot of people, but for these individuals it's brutal."

Jack Frech, director
Athens County Job
and Family Services

"I have to admit skepticism, considering the governor's last budget," Frech said. "He has a tendency to take money from those living below the poverty level and give it to people who aren't as bad off. He'll increase children's programs for medium incomes, but forget about the folks trying to make it on $300 a month."

Frech pointed out that the task force is

(Continued on page 6)

PORTAGE COUNTY

# Taking action over poverty

## About 100 gather at KSU to discuss problem, solutions

By Colin McEwen
Record-Courier staff writer

Of the 153,000 people in Portage County, 36,000 are at or below the poverty level. Another 20 percent lack a high school diploma. And 30 percent of the poor in the county are children.

Poverty is a critical problem everywhere, and Portage County residents met Thursday at the Kent Student Center at Kent State University to discuss solutions as part of Gov. Ted Strickland's initiative to vastly reduce poverty in the state.

Coordinated by the Community Action Council and KSU, the "Conversation on Poverty" was free and open to all as a way to engage dialogue on the critical issue.

"This is a way Kent State can get into action," said Geraldine Hayes Nelson, KSU associate dean of undergraduate studies, who just hours earlier attended the Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration in the same building. "With the condition of our nation, it is going to take all of us in the community getting together and getting involved."

About 100 people participated in the public event, including community service workers, members of local governments, educators, concerned citizens, students, retirees and appropriately, people living in poverty.

Old and young, and people of different races, ethnicities and social backgrounds gathered around 20 tables to exchange ideas with each other about the causes and solutions to poverty.

In what is known as World Cafe style, those in attendance were presented with questions about poverty, then worked as a group to answer them, before switching tables after 20 minutes and doing it again with new mix of people.

Among several discussion questions was "What does it take to create a community without poverty?" There was at least a dozen answers including jobs, education, healthcare, living wage, confidence and ambition.

The coalition of community organizations and organizers will send in the results, and expect to host a follow-up discussion in February.

Portage County was among the first in the state to hold such a workshop discussion on poverty, said CAC Director David Shea.

"Poverty has increased dramatically and this is a good time to address it," he said. "One of the things we can do is get together. We're not experts — or else there would be no poverty."

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January 30, 2009



Local

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Wednesday, February 11, 2009 | Page C1

# Forum discusses challenges facing poor

**Event attended by more than 100 in Hamilton will assist Gov. Strickland's Anti-Poverty Task Force.**

By Tiffany Y. Latta
Staff Writer

HAMILTON — More than 100 people turned out to a forum Tuesday, Feb. 10, to discuss the challenges facing people living in poverty.

Among the obstacles discussed were: lack of public transportation, jobs, education, child care and a growing number of working poor who are unaware of the services available to help them.

Adrienne Arnold, 40, of Fairfield spoke of life as a single mother of three who receives some government assistance for child care.

"I appreciate the help, but it's still tight," Arnold said.

Arnold expressed the frustration of many residents and social workers who participated in the two-hour Conversation on Poverty held at First St. John United Church of Christ, 412 S. Front St.

The forum hosted by the Butler County Planning Committee was one of 23 being held around the state as part of Gov. Ted Strickland's Anti-Poverty Task Force.

The task force will receive the results Feb. 20 and work on ways to reduce the number of people living in poverty in Ohio.

Gary Sebastian, 44, of Fairfield said he was recently laid off and is struggling to support his family.

Sebastian, who has a ninth-grade education, said he needs to get a GED and training, but said it's tough to pay rent and keep food on the table and attend school.

Case workers like Sherve Hampton of Supports to Encourage Low-income Families and Shared Harvest Foodbank Director Tina Osso said public transportation is among the biggest obstacles for people in need.

"A lot of clients don't have the transportation they need to get to interviews, to a job or to school," Hampton said.

Others said part of the solution is a one-stop shop for the needy, reducing penalties for people working their way out of poverty and better awareness of services available.

"There were a lot of common threads here. This is information that we can pass on to the governor's task force that was compiled by a diverse group of people who really care," said Jeffrey Diver, director of SELF.

MariettaTimes.com

## 'Conversation' on poverty forum held

By Connie Cartmell, ccartmell@mariettatimes.com
*POSTED: February 13, 2009*

Anne Walker, 47, of Stockport in Morgan County, a single mom of three, worked three jobs - 100 hours a week - not long ago to keep her family going.

She slept in her car in parking lots between jobs and raised her children on her own, on and off for 10 years working at Wal-Mart, cleaning a bowling alley and in a factory cafeteria.

"You do what you can," Walker said. "I am no longer living day to day."

Hooking up with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) program through Washington/Morgan Community Action turned her life around, she said.

Walker graduated from nursing school in 2003 and now owns a 30-acre farm, is reconciled with her husband and is off assistance programs. Her children are grown and doing well.

Walker was one of about 70 area residents invited to join a "conversation" on poverty Thursday evening at the O'Neill Senior Center.

Sponsored by Community Action in partnership with the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, the program was on behalf of Gov. Ted Strickland's Anti-Poverty Task Force. The group, a cross-section of all ages, was selected from those who have participated in services offered by Community Action agencies.

"These conversations will benefit low-income populations by providing a forum for all to share ideas on how to reduce poverty," said host David Brightbill, executive director of Washington/Morgan Community Action.

But before Walker and other participants could sink their teeth into specific recommendations, the toughest job may have been defining "poverty."

"Poverty is different for different groups of people, and it also depends on your lifestyle," said Judi Snyder, 61, of Marietta.

Strickland's initiative calls for gathering ideas from across the state through 22 such "conversations." The governor specifically requested that one be in southeast Ohio, said Carrie McNamee, director of senior and community service with Community Action.

At the end of the forum, responses were gathered to be shared with Strickland's task force, she said.

In a conversational format, 12 tables of five people brainstormed over four specific questions. A note-taker recorded responses at each table. At a set time, participants switched tables and shared responses.

"This is the first time we've done this kind of program, and I'm pleased with how many people have come out," Brightbill said. "Everyone will be answering the same questions."

Tom Reed, executive director of Gallia-Meigs Community Action, helped coordinate the event.

"This is the right time to have this conversation," he said eagerly. "We've got to do something. We are seeing people now we've never seen before. The year started out with elderly people needing services earlier than ever."

Reed expects that this year will be more challenging for the work of community services.

Walker questioned guidelines.

"I know someone who has a brand new SUV, every person in the family has a cell phone, yet the family has all kinds of public assistance," she said. "Is that poverty?"

For Marti Angert, 70, of Marietta, who is part of the local foster grandparent program, times have been tough in the past, but she does not consider herself in poverty today.

"I was a displaced homemaker at 44. I never worked outside my home. I went back to school, applied for help for me and my two children because I am visually impaired, and when I was 60, I got a degree in early childhood education," Angert said.

She is concerned about today's generation.

"This is a depression we are in now. I don't think the younger generation is prepared," Angert said.






# County readies anti-poverty agenda

*By Mark Curnutte*
*mcurnutte@enquirer.com*

The creation of meaningful jobs and improvements in job training and education are the recommendations Hamilton County will send to Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland to address the growing problem of poverty in the state.

More than 60 social service providers - public and faith-based - private citizens and representatives of charitable foundations met for two hours Wednesday morning at the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency in Bond Hill. They formulated the county's response to Strickland's request from 22 communities across Ohio for his anti-poverty task force.

Participants exchanged information about job-training programs, earned-income tax credits for the poor and services to the elderly.

"A lot of dots connected, but the themes of jobs and education kept coming up," said John Young, president and CEO of the Freestore Foodbank.

More than 3.4 million Ohioans live at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. The federal poverty level for a family of six is $28,400. Ohio's task force will aim to provide practical and short- and long-term solutions to the state's poverty in the form of a five- to 10-year vision.

Poverty has deepened and spread across the state since the governor organized the task force in May by executive order. From the 22 discussions and sets of recommendations, the process will narrow to regional meetings. Then the anti-poverty task force will make recommendations to Strickland, said Amanda Wurst, his spokesperson.

This process through the state's community action agencies does not deal with federal economic stimulus money that might come into Ohio.

"It is critical that the governor plan carefully," said Gwen Robinson, community action agency president and CEO. "Though the current economic crisis is difficult for everyone, times which were already incredibly challenging have become even dire for the low-income."

The long-term recommendations will be delivered to Strickland before April 30 and will include detailed ideas on how the state can reduce its poverty rolls.

All major economic indicators for children show more strain on the Hamilton County's youngest citizens, according to a survey of the latest data available from the Children's Defense Fund and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Kids Count 2008" report for Ohio. The numbers and percentages of children under 18 living in poverty and receiving public health care, food stamps and free or reduced school lunches are up dramatically since 2001.

"People shared a lot of personal stories, too, about their immediate struggles with food shortages and housing foreclosures," said Moira Weir, director of Hamilton County Job and Family Services.

One man that participated, listening and telling his story, was Anthony Campbell, 25, of Avondale.

Enrolled in the community action agency's Blueprint for Success program, which provides academic help and vocational training, Campbell is trying to move his fiancée and four children out of poverty and into a safer environment.

He will graduate from the program Feb. 26. He has learned the basics in carpentry and plumbing and will continue his studies as an electrician.

"I want to do my part, I want to do everything I can," said Campbell, a U.S. Navy veteran who served three years. "There are a lot of good programs to help people. But there is hopelessness out there. A lot of people don't think there is any way out."

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## Job creation, development top agenda at poverty forum



Michelle Niedermier, left, of Lucas County Job and Family Services, Sanaa Eid, and Rachel Davies discuss poverty at a forum conducted by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. The group will gather information to send to Gov. Ted Strickland.
( THE BLADE/JEREMY WADSWORTH )

**By STEVE EDER**
**BLADE STAFF WRITER**

Creating jobs and economic development are two of the best ways to reduce poverty in Lucas County. Those were among the suggestions made last night at the Conversation on Reducing Poverty at the Erie Street Market Civic Promenade.
Attendees also were concerned with the growing number of people looking to the government or social service programs for help, and that so many people are newly encountering poverty because of situational reasons, like job losses or health-care expenses.
The meeting, which included about 100 community members, was designed to gather ideas for an upcoming report to the governor about curbing poverty.
"There's a way that we've dealt with generational poverty, but with plant closings and downsizings, we are seeing situational poverty - something we've never seen before," said Linda Stacy, who moderated the gathering and works with organizations that assist low-income families. "Some of the strategies we've used in the past may not be appropriate now."
She added: "The folks" - the people who are new to poverty - "are less likely to know what's available because they've never had a need for it."

The meeting, which included two hours of small table discussions on the state of poverty in the region, was among 22 of its kind held across the state to make recommendations to Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland's Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force.

During table discussions, community members were asked to discuss what it takes to create a community without poverty, what is happening in the community, what's already being done to address poverty, and what needs to be done to alleviate it.
Deb Ortiz-Flores, the executive director of the Lucas County Department of Job and Family Services, said the conversations were productive and will help determine the needs of the community.
"It may not be major public policy, but it is valuable," Ms. Ortiz-Flores said.
The event was hosted by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies, with help from the United Way of Greater Toledo, the Erie Street Market, and the YMCA.
Organizations serving low-income residents, public officials, and low-income residents were invited to attend the event.
The chief concern - creating jobs - resonated with Bill Kitson, CEO of the United Way of Greater Toledo.
"If we can find a way to get people jobs, some of these other issues will be taken care of," Mr. Kitson said.

## *Local officials discuss poverty at LCCC meeting*

Adam Wright | The Chronicle-Telegram

ELYRIA — It's a conversation they've had too often. It starts with community groups and public officials discussing what to do about poverty, how to reduce it and how to help those in need who help themselves, but frequently it ends right there, with good ideas and no action.

The 60 people who gathered Tuesday night hoped their discussion would break that cycle with the Conversation on Poverty, hosted by the Lorain County Community Action Agency.

Most of those who attended represented organizations serving low-income residents, but some were those residents themselves. All of them said the time for talk had passed.

Feedback from the discussion will go into a report that will be given to Gov. Ted Strickland for his Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force. Discussions just like the one at Spitzer Conference Center on the Lorain County Community College campus also have taken place in 22 other cities across Ohio since mid-January.

Some of the participants questioned whether the report would do any good considering the current economic crisis in the state and around the globe.

"I don't see how (Strickland's) going to fund this," said Fred Wright, president and CEO of the Lorain County Urban League. "His priority is education. I've been through a lot of task forces, and they never get funded. Everything is just a plan that sits on a shelf."

Jackie Boehnlein, director of strategic organization and development with LCCAA and moderator of the event, said he understood the group's frustration but had hope that it would eventually change.

"You may walk into the same brick wall six times, but what if you break through on that seventh time?" she said. "We've been given a chance to be heard, so let's be heard."

Suggestions about how to reduce poverty included better access to public transportation in the county, jobs that pay a living wage, taking personal responsibility for your actions and choices in life and having leaders who will work toward positive goals.

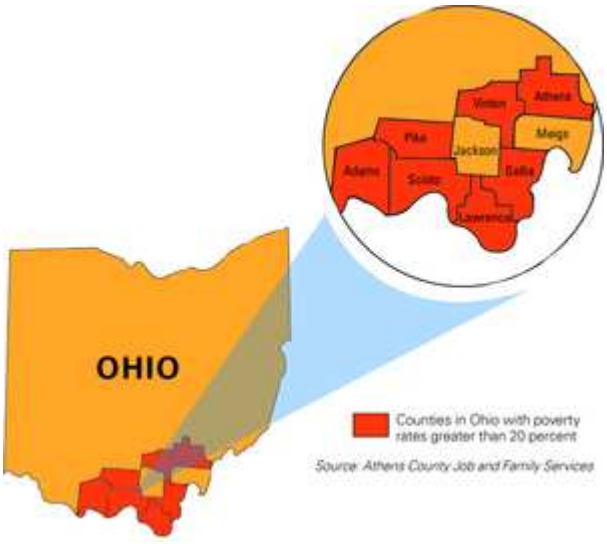
Strickland has asked for the information from all 22 meetings to be on his desk by the end of April.

*Contact Adam Wright at 329-7129 or awright@chroniclet.com.*

THE INDEPENDENT VOICE ON CAMPUS AND IN ATHENS

THE POST

# Strickland ready to fight poverty




## fast facts

- Federal Poverty Level for a Family of 4: $20,000.
- The median household income in Athens County is $27,322 compared to $40,956 statewide.
- Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action has supplied roughly 6,126,700 pounds of food so far this year.
- In 2007, 1.1 million Ohioans — a quarter of Ohio's population over 18 — earned less than $10 an hour.
- 1 in 6 children in Ohio are hungry or at risk of going hungry.
- More than 1,000 families in Athens County are receiving welfare, according to a Athens County Job and Family Services report.

An estimated six out of 10 U.S. citizens will plummet into poverty for at least a year by age 75, according to a report by the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies ' a trap that more than 1.5 million Ohioans fall into ' but Gov. Ted Strickland (D) and his Anti-Poverty Task Force are determined to pull them out.

The task force, composed of 300 Ohioans within five focus groups and a 30-seat panel, presented the governor with 22 recommendations to start fighting poverty last Wednesday.

"There are too many people who aren't in a position to take advantage of their talents, and that ultimately affects everyone," said Greg Landsman, chairman of the task force.

The list, if approved by Strickland, would implement various education strategies and expand some benefits to Ohio's poor almost immediately and without financial charge to the state, he said.

Among many other research ideas, members suggested that the state should investigate new alternative energy-based jobs and work with the Department of Transportation to create new ways to make public transit feasible for rural Ohio. Officials would also study the possibility of an Ohio-earned income tax credit that would refund a percentage of poor families' taxes in Ohio.

The recommendations also include that the governor allows easier access to food stamps for families who are already involved in other financial-assistance programs, request for Congress emergency funding for Ohio food banks and form a statewide "emergency hunger relief campaign."

The short-term list precludes a more

expensive and long-term list of recommendations that the task force will continue to work on until April. The second list might require legislation and more state or private funding, Landsman said.
"It's always a good thing to have people talking about poverty and what we can do about it," said Jack Frech, director of Athens County Job and Family Services. "But most of these short term recommendations are going to take a long time and should have been done a long time ago."
Athens County Job and Family Services began a campaign called Don't Turn Away, Ohio that would immediately increase monthly welfare and food stamp amounts by $100, provide health care to families at or below 100 percent of the poverty line and increase state fixed income for the elderly and disabled, he said.
More than 1,000 families in Athens County are receiving welfare, about $336 a month for a family of two, and about 7,500 families use food stamps ' $298 a month for groceries, according to an Athens County Job and Family Services report.
"(The task force) misses the huge, unspoken elephant in the room," Frech said. "Even when we get people on these programs, they're still poor."
Food stamps do not provide enough money to support every nutrition need, he said, adding that it is "absolutely unacceptable" that individuals have to eat at soup kitchens or food pantries while on government assistance. He began the plan this summer and has received no feedback from the governor or the director of the Ohio Job and Family Services, Frech said.
"If this many people had their lives disrupted by a natural disaster, we'd pull out all the stops to save them," he said. "Right now there are families who are hungry, have no electricity and have no transportation. There's no sense of urgency in (the list of recommendations)."
- Roger McCauley, director of the Coalition on Appalachian Development, said that the short-term recommendations could help the state adopt policies to make ending poverty feasible with the long-term set of recommendations.
However, the poor state of the economy will complicate the process, especially in Athens County, he said.
A lot of Athens' impoverished people hold up to three jobs, but many opportunities in Athens are retail or other low-paying jobs. To really combat poverty in Athens, more businesses will need to move in, he said.
The retail service jobs in Athens in fact pay less than statewide averages, according to the Athens County Department of Job and Family Services In Depth Look at Poverty 2006 report. A retail job on average pays $270 per week in Athens, while the state averages to $439 per week ' putting a family of three below the Federal Poverty Line. "Poverty is a moving target," said Bob Garbo, executive director of the Hocking-Athens-Perry Community Action. "It's no longer that stereotype that we once saw of homeless people ' a lot of folks are working and can't even afford to keep their utilities on."
He said that he is pessimistic that the recommendations will work quickly enough and that citizens should write their elected officials to ask for action now.
Frech also said that donating food and time is always appreciated but that he encourages citizens to write their elected officials to make a real change.
"For a country as rich as ours, there is no excuse for anyone to be hungry," he said.

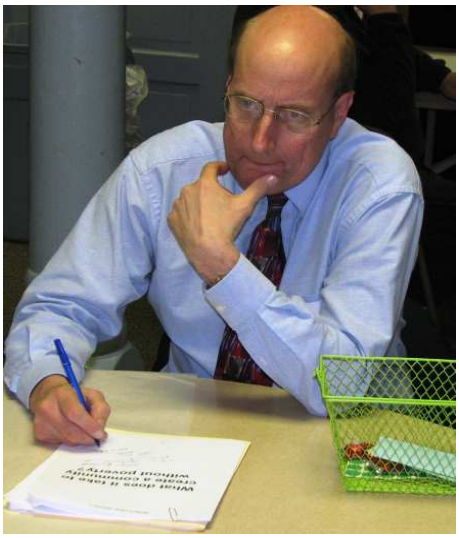












Photos taken at the Regional Conversations on Reducing Poverty in Ohio.