



## Ohio Anti-Poverty Task Force

# Shorter Term Recommendations

1) Work through the appropriate state agencies to exercise the following options to reduce barriers to work supports and other benefits (with a particular emphasis on federally funded programs and children's healthcare):

- Expand categorical eligibility for food stamps

*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

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- 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) recently hosted 22 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.*