

PA Hunger Advocate

Promoting Nutrition and Food Security
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From the Desk of the Executive Director

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the e-newsletter of *The Pennsylvania Hunger Advocate*. Although the plan to launch an electronic version of the newsletter in March was delayed by those proverbial “technical difficulties” we hope to bring you more timely information via the new format which will be issued on a monthly basis.



As you read these pages we welcome your feedback and suggestions on how to improve the newsletter – which is Hunger Action’s primary communications vehicle – and also to begin or renew a commitment to advocacy on behalf the hungry and food insecure Pennsylvanians we serve. It will only be through the concerted efforts of individual citizens and anti-hunger organizations that a strong, united voice for change will be heard on behalf of those who need government’s purse, policies, and programs to sustain themselves and their families.

Please read this issue with an eye towards getting involved, as there is much herein to engage you.

On the technical side of this call to action, if you would like to sign up to receive email action alerts, regarding important and timely opportunities to contact your elected officials, go to <http://pahunger.e-actionmax.com>. You will then choose the appropriate option to get connected: if you receive the newsletter directly from Hunger Action, please enter your email address without a password to log in and update your profile; **or**, if the newsletter was forwarded to you, please choose the “Sign Up” button in the middle of the heading.

I hope you have the interest to get connected and can take a few minutes to learn more about hunger and food insecurity issues in our Commonwealth and how your voice can make a difference in the lives of others less fortunate. Both *The Pennsylvania Hunger Advocate* and our website – www.pahunger.org - are resources to assist you along the way.

State Budget Battle Lies Ahead

As it has every February for the past ten years, Hunger Action held its Annual Budget Briefing on February 5th. A group of thirty-

plus anti-hunger advocates and emergency food providers were convened to review and digest the Governor's spending plan for the upcoming fiscal year as it pertained to several food- and nutrition-related line items. The group listened to comments from state officials representing the Governors Office, Senate Appropriations and House Appropriations Committees, complimented by insights provided by experts in federal and state budget policy. In conveying the criteria and process behind developing the budget and in anticipating contentious negotiations that lie ahead, all speakers agreed it will be a very difficult process to arrive at a fair and balanced budget at the end of the day. The primary culprit underlying this budgetary angst are revenue projections for the current fiscal year that indicate a \$2.3 billion shortfall and what those figures portend relative to realistic projections for the new fiscal year. With hard decisions already made in presenting a balanced Executive Budget in the context of a still-freefalling economy – by virtue of the scope and nature of program cuts if not outright elimination – and with many more changes still to come during House and Senate negotiations, the need for vigilance regarding those expenditures of importance to anti-hunger advocates has never been more important. Here's what we believe to be fair and reasonable appropriations for the Commonwealth's 2009-2010 budget:

State Food Purchase Program	\$24 million
Farmer's Market Nutrition Program	\$3.5 million
PA Agricultural Surplus System	\$1 million
Neighborhood Assistance Program	\$19 million
Rx for PA School Food Services	\$6 million
Healthy Farms/Healthy Schools	\$1 million

To learn more about these vitally important programs and to join in our advocacy efforts to fund them at the levels above, please visit Hunger Action's web site. Questions? Contact Joe Quattrocchi at jquattrocchi@pahunger.org.

A Kinder, Gentler Budget

With the submission of his first budget to Congress on February 26, President Obama has charted a course much different from that of his immediate predecessor. However, as with other incoming Administrations, the President's inaugural spending plan outlines proposals for major priorities, provides totals for annual appropriations by federal government department, and projects revenues, including proposals for new sources and for tax cuts. Broadly put, the budget would invest in solutions to some of the

nation's most pressing problems, including:

- the failing health insurance system;
- climate change and the need for renewable energy sources;
- economic insecurity; and,
- inadequate education and job preparation.

Focusing in on spending priorities effecting low-income individuals and families – some building upon the provisions of the recently enacted economic recovery legislation – the budget helps people at the lower rungs of the economic ladder in several ways.

By making permanent:

- refundable tax credits as a refund to people with earnings too low to owe federal income taxes
- the Child Tax Credit available to families with earnings as low as \$3,000
- a larger Earned Income Tax Credit for families with 3 or more children
- the expansion of Unemployment Insurance

By creating:

- an Access and Completion Incentive Fund to help low-income college students finish school
- a National Housing Trust Fund
- an automatically triggered emergency fund when energy prices spike (which will no longer require annual appropriations)
- a Nurse Home Visitation Program for first-time mothers

By increasing financial support for:

- Pell Grants for low-income college students
- charter schools
- the Women, Infants and Children (WIC) nutrition program (full funding)
- the Child Nutrition Reauthorization (by \$1 billion per year over the next ten years)

On this last point, Hunger Action counts itself among advocates calling for a \$20 billion increase over the ten years to fund targeted improvements in child nutrition programs that would extend access, expand participation, improve the nutritional quality of food, and reduce burdensome paperwork requirements. This is the departure point for our advocacy efforts and we will keep you posted in future newsletters. Questions? Contact Joe Quattrocchi at jquattrocchi@pahunger.org.

State Senate Bill 9

Under the guise of budget cutting and pandering to the fear of taxpayers paying for undocumented immigrants, Senate Bill 9 was able to pass the Senate 41 to 9 this past Wednesday. If voted into law, this bill would require all applicants for public benefits, such as unemployment compensation, food stamps, and medical assistance, to provide government-issued identification in order to receive such benefits. For those citizens without such documentation (11% of American adults, 18% of seniors, and 25% of African American adults), they would be left without the benefits for which they would otherwise be entitled. Furthermore, it is estimated that it would cost \$19 million to upgrade systems just to be compliant. Watch your inbox for developments in this bill and for opportunities to take action. For more information, contact Laura Tobin at ltobin@pahunger.org.

What Does ARRA Do For PA?

On February 17 President Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) into law. The legislation is expected to put 143,000 Pennsylvanians to work or keep them at work. Similarly, the growing number of the unemployed will receive an additional \$25 in unemployment benefits and will be able to qualify for an extension on those benefits through the end of the year. Most importantly, this legislation will prevent hunger. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (<http://www.cbpp.org/files/1-22-09bud-fs.pdf>), over 1.26 million Pennsylvanians will see a total of \$779 million in Food Stamp benefit increases. The Commonwealth will also receive approximately \$11.5 million in assistance for administration of that program. For more information, please contact Laura Tobin at ltobin@pahunger.org.

Hunger Takes Center Stage In New Legislative Body

On Monday, February 9, the [Pennsylvania Legislative Hunger Caucus](#) was formally launched by Co-Chairs Senator Mike Brubaker (R, Lancaster) and Representative John Myers (D, Phila.). Recognizing the burgeoning problem of hunger among Pennsylvanians – and especially its disproportionate impact on children – these legislators have taken up the mantle of food insecurity in the Commonwealth and have appealed to their colleagues to join the group.

Growing membership in the Hunger Caucus has been impressive since its launch just two months ago. As of this writing, the caucus counted 75 legislators among its ranks - 45 Senators and 30 Representatives – and is truly bi-partisan with 33 Republicans and 42 Democrats already on board. The steady growth and overall composition of the caucus embodies the realization among the General Assembly that hunger and food insecurity is a problem that knows no political affiliation.

This level of interest across chambers and parties should bode well for anti-hunger advocates in advancing our efforts to secure enhanced budgetary investments in food and nutrition programs that benefit food insecure Pennsylvanians. Hunger Action looks forward to a collaborative relationship with the caucus and will keep you posted on our work with them. For more information, please contact Joe Quattrocchi at jquattrocchi@pahunger.org.

Investing In Our Children

There has been much debate about stagnant (if not dropping) test scores, higher levels of absenteeism and incidences of behavior problems, as well as concerns with the physical condition of elementary, middle school and high school students. All contribute to an underlying sense that our country's educational system is in decline.

Many prescriptions for these problems have been advanced – tying students' academic performance to merit pay for teachers, requiring an increased allocation of time for physical education and activity, and giving parents more choice as to the type of school their children will attend to name a few. All should be considered reasonable responses worthy of thorough investigation and further development.

However, they miss the mark. Without incorporating adequate nutrition in the mix, improving test scores (as one measure of academic achievement), providing teachers with learning-ready students and supplying kids a healthy alternative to the calorie laden, nutritionally-deficient food which contributes to overweight and obesity, redressing the ills that plague today's schools and the people who populate them will never come to fruition.

So what better place to start a nutrition revolution than in schools – the very place that has the most to gain for school administrators, teachers and students alike? And the ammunition is in place to make this a reality. It's the 2009 Child Nutrition

Reauthorization.

All federally-mandated children's feeding programs – National School Lunch and School Breakfast (in-school time), Child and Adult Care Food Program (after school) and the Summer Food Service Program (out of school time) – are reauthorized every five years. This cycle is especially important as twin pronouncements – President Obama pledging to end childhood hunger by 2015 and USDA Secretary Vilsack asserting the nutritional value of food served to students must be improved – both present opportunities to significantly change the nutritional landscape in schools, and hence, to begin a pendulum swing towards higher academic achievement and better health for our future workforce.

Keep tuned this newsletter for updates on the reauthorization process and alerts on how to get involved. For more questions or comments, please contact Joe Quattrocchi at jquattrocchi@pahunger.com.

A Growing Trend - Help For Hungry

For the first time since 1943, a Victory Garden will be grown on the grounds of the White House. A portion of the garden will be reserved to help fight hunger in the DC area. Ideas like this are spreading across the country. The City of Baltimore in Maryland is planting a garden in front of city hall, as well as in urns, window boxes, and raised beds throughout the city. The harvest will be given to the local soup kitchen Our Daily Bread. Home gardens are expected to grow in popularity this season which will hopefully also grow the "Plant a Row for the Hungry" efforts. For more information, please contact Laura Tobin at ltobin@pahunger.org.

Outreach News

School Breakfast Update

Revised Pennsylvania Department of Education policy will allow more schools to serve breakfast. The department issued a revised policy directive that will allow school breakfasts to be included as part of instructional time during regularly scheduled homeroom periods and classroom instruction:

<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/k12/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=54309>

This directive will make it easier for many schools to serve breakfast, and also encourage breakfast in the classroom and homeroom which are very effective in increasing breakfast participation.

Pennsylvania Hunger Action and The Project PA Breakfast Brigade

<http://nutrition.psu.edu/projectpa/breakbrigade2006/index.html>

continue to be available to provide free individualized assistance with any additional concerns and assist with school breakfast implementation or expansion. Project PA can also help schools apply for breakfast mini-grants that are available through the Mid Atlantic Dairy Association.

For more information, please call Chad Newton at (717) 233-6705 or e-mail him at cnewton@pahunger.org.

Summer Feeding Update

Summer is right around the corner and that means the Summer Food Service Programs will be in full swing. During the school year, nutritious meals are available for children through the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs. But those programs end when school ends for the summer. This is where the Summer Food Service Program comes in to fill the gap.

SFSP sites allow children to receive the nutrition they need for proper growth and development. In addition, many of the programs also furnish opportunities to continue a child's intellectual and social development. All in all, the summer food program allows children to return to school healthy and ready to learn.

Last year Hunger Action held workshops Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties to assist existing sponsors and to educate potential new sponsors about the program. This year Hunger Action will be focusing on Centre, Columbia and Franklin counties for the workshops.

For more information on the workshops, please call Chad Newton at (717) 233-6705 or e-mail him at cnewton@pahunger.org.

Food Stamp Outreach

The demand for food stamps continues to grow in Pennsylvania as more people struggle to put food on the table and barriers to eligibility are overcome. In an effort to reach out to those families in need but uncertain of the program and/or its guidelines, Hunger Action has hosted a flurry of outreach events throughout the South

Central PA region this year. New community partners include the South Central PA Holistic Food Network, Here to Help, Tri-County Blind Association, and GACLA. For more information about upcoming events or to arrange an outreach event in your community, please contact Laura Tobin at ltobin@pahunger.org.

Events



One Great Lunch – 10th Anniversary

April 20 will mark the 10th Anniversary of the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center's "One Great Lunch with 8 Great Chefs" event. The 2009 edition of One Great Lunch will occur from 12:00 Noon until 1:30 PM at the Hilton in downtown Harrisburg.

Participants will enjoy a sumptuous and entertaining luncheon prepared by top local chefs. This year's menu includes Roasted Apple and Nut Salad, Yellow Squash, Zucchini and Tomato Risotto, Braised Beef Short Ribs, and a mouth-watering dessert called Chocolate Obsession.

The chefs will also provide demonstrations – both live and on screen - on how the delectable meals are prepared.

"One Great Lunch with 8 Great Chefs" is just that, as well as a great way to treat or say "thank you" to a friend or an associate.

Tickets for "One Great Lunch" are \$25 and are available by calling Hunger Action at 233-6705 or visiting our web site at www.pahunger.org.