

PA Hunger Advocate

Promoting Nutrition and Food Security
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State Legislative Update

Well, the deadline has come and gone. Just as in the previous six years, the Commonwealth's annual spending plan has not been delivered on time – July 1st.

Unlike previous **state budget** cycles, however, this year's process may be even more protracted given the chasm between the spend number on the Governor's Budget (recently pared to \$28.8 billion) and that of the Senate Bill 850 (\$27.2 billion). The battle lines have been drawn in negotiations to arrive at a balanced budget that will pass muster with the General Assembly and which the Governor will sign when it arrives on his desk. Republicans, as well as some Democrats, have emphatically stated they will not entertain tax increases on any sort, while the Governor seeks to align his proposed expenditures with – you guessed it – tax increases. The entrenched position of many legislators relative to no tax increases or to any new taxes may stem from the fact that more than half of the members of the General Assembly have been elected since the last general tax vote in 2005. With such a significant number of newer lawmakers having never before voted for a tax increase, the likelihood of them doing so now at their own political peril may be a stretch.

The most recent twist in the annual budget dance has been House Democrats' announcement that they will vote a \$27.3 billion spending plan – backed by Senate Republicans – out of the Appropriations Committee early next week, when it will then go to the floor for potential final consideration. The move is intended to kick start a new round of negotiations and to bring to public light specifically where the cuts (and the pain) will be made; and this will be before the need to trim an additional \$1.7 billion from the plan to offset the drop in state revenues since this plan was first introduced by Senate Republicans this spring. The hope is that this scare tactic will force the no-tax-increase lawmakers from both parties to agree that raising the earned income tax is better than the draconian cuts proposed in the spending plan.

While all the drama and intrigue of the yearly budget process continues to unfold before our eyes, economic pain is already being felt by too many Pennsylvanians. Recently unemployed or suffering the limitations of low-wage jobs, there are many out there who would, most likely, want to see the state government tighten their fiscal belt just as they have had to do. The money you earn is the money you spend. Realistically speaking, though, it's not quite that simple when it

comes to state government's fiscal affairs. Many of the costs pared from the state budget would merely be shifted to local taxing authorities. So, in the end, from the individual taxpayer's point of view, you live with a time-limited increase in personal income tax or you live with increased property taxes of unspecified duration, as well as other levies to pay for the services state government has walked away from.

Yes, the economic condition of our state (and nation) that provides the backdrop for the budget impasse is extraordinary by any definition. Yet, a budget must be passed for government to operate and for the core functions of government to continue. With both sides digging in for what could be a long haul to budget passage, the need for compromise – pare a little more on the expenditure side and plug the remaining gap with “revenue enhancements” – is the only way to arrive balanced budget with as little pain as possible.

Federal Legislative Update

On June 18th, the House Appropriations Committee approved the **FY 2010 Agriculture Appropriations Bill**, clearing the way for full House floor action as early as July 8th. Provisions in this bill would:

- expand the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) Afterschool Meal Program ("Suppers") to DC and CT, bringing the total number of states operating the program to 12;
- fund the WIC program at record levels: \$7.541 billion (\$681 million, or ten percent, above FY 2009) to support an anticipated caseload of 10.1 million persons. (Note: Due to the volatility in food costs and the potential for unemployment and poverty to increase, Congress will need to monitor WIC data throughout the appropriations process to ensure that appropriated levels will fully meet anticipated needs.);
- set aside \$125 million for the upcoming WIC reauthorization, including a number of program improvements such as: increasing fruit and vegetable vouchers, supporting management information systems, implementing the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system, and expanding breast feeding peer counseling program;
- provide SNAP/Food Stamps with the funding level requested by the Obama Administration (\$61.352 billion), an increase of \$7.383 billion over FY 2009, and funds an initiative to increase elderly participation in SNAP/Food Stamps;
- fund the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) at \$180 million, of which \$5 million is for expanding the current 32-state CSFP to six additional states with USDA-approved feeding plans (AR, OK, DE, UT, NJ and GA);
- fund The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) commodity storage and distribution grants at \$49.5 million (the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act enacted earlier this year provides an additional \$25 million in TEFAP funding for FY 2010), bringing the total to \$74.5 million;
- fund TEFAP commodity purchases at \$253.3 million;
- fund the Food Bank Infrastructure Grant Program, which was authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill to provide support to food

- banks primarily in rural areas, at \$5 million; and
- fund The Congressional Hunger Center's Bill Emerson/Mickey Leland Hunger Fellowship Program at \$2.5 million, supporting the critical research, analysis and policy work of the hunger fellows.

While these improvements to many of the food and nutrition programs up for reauthorization later this year are encouraging, some still fall short of advocates' estimates of what is needed to fully extend access and expand participation of low-income individuals and families in these vital programs. It is anticipated the heavy lifting on the 2009 Child Nutrition Reauthorization will commence in September. Stay tuned to the e-newsletter and Hunger Action's website for updates and action alerts.

Senate Bill 1343

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), along with Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Michael Bennet (D-CO) introduced the "Hunger Free Schools Act of 2009" on June 24. This legislation – **S. 1343** – will expand access to free school meals for more low-income children. (It includes all of the provisions of the previously introduced S. 1226/H.R. 2803 "Paperless Enrollment for School Meals Act" and S. 1293 "Enhancing Child Health with Automatic Enrollment for School Meals Act").

Currently the school meals programs use a process known as "direct certification" to automatically enroll children who receive SNAP/Food Stamps, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Food Distribution Program in Indian Reservations (FDPIR). S. 1343 would:

- 1) expand access to child nutrition programs by requiring school districts to utilize data from Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to directly certify more students that are eligible for free school meals;
- 2) improve state performance in enrolling eligible children in school lunch programs by setting a performance standard for directly certifying students for school lunch programs (reaching 95 percent of students required to be directly certified) and providing incentives to high performance states; and
- 3) allow schools or districts serving a high proportion of low-income children to serve free meals to all students and be reimbursed based on socioeconomic data rather than individual applications. (This provision emanated from a USDA decision to terminate the Universal Feeding Program that had been operating as a pilot program in the Philadelphia School District for the past 17 years. That decision was later rescinded and new legislation – S. 1226/H.R. 2803 referenced above – was introduced that used the Philadelphia program as a model for implementation nation wide.)

Contact Senator Specter asking that he become a co-sponsor of this legislation by visiting our web site at www.pahunger.org.

Help Needed

If you live in the greater Harrisburg area and are looking for a great volunteer opportunity, Hunger Action is need of some office help. We are looking for someone who can help during our normal business hours which are Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. Work would include data entry, mailings, and appointment scheduling. Please contact [Laura Tobin](#) for more information at 717.233.6705.

Event News



Chefs Honored

Hunger Action honored the chefs who so generously donated their time and culinary expertise to this year's 10th Anniversary One Great Lunch Event. Each chef from One Great Lunch was recently presented a plaque from Hunger Action commending them for their efforts. Among those honored was Chef Bob Roebuck (pictured above), who spearheaded the efforts for this edition of One Great Lunch. Bob's dedication and hard work helped make this edition of One Great Lunch the best one yet!

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