



## PA Groups Call for Investment in Child Nutrition

Nearly 70 Pennsylvania organizations have called on Congress to invest in nutrition programs for our nation's children. A **Call to Congress**, organized nationally by a coalition that includes FRAC, the American School Food Service Association, the National WIC Association and America's Second Harvest, asks that child nutrition programs be updated so that participation may expand and nutritional quality may be enhanced.

Signers of the **Call** include the State College Area School District, the PA Council of Churches, the YWCA of McKeesport, Food for Families in Johnstown, the Interfaith Coalition of Food Centers of Delaware County, the Lancaster Recreation Commission, Early Head Start of Philadelphia, the Second Harvest Food Bank of Northwest PA (Erie), and the PA School Food Service Association (Allentown Chapter).

The Senate Agriculture Committee

will adopt a plan for child nutrition programs in late June. Beginning in September the House Education and Workforce Committee will carry that responsibility. Representatives Greenwood (Bucks County) and Platts (Adams and York counties) serve on the House Committee.

The **Call to Congress** supports increased investment to achieve the following:

- 1) Better access by rural children to summer and child care meals by lowering "area eligibility" from 50 percent to 40 percent;
- 2) Providing school meals to more children of the working poor by expanding free meal eligibility to 185 percent of poverty;

3) Making afterschool suppers available to more children by offering this pilot nationwide;

4) Attracting more sponsors to the Summer Program by streamlining requirements; and

5) Reducing obesity among children by expanding the role of WIC in nutrition education.

In the Senate, bills authored by Senator Herb Kohl (D - WI) would achieve several of these objectives. S. 1020 would promote School Breakfast; S. 1021 would strengthen Summer Food by dropping area eligibility to 40 percent and simplifying reimbursement; and S. 1022 would expand afterschool

*Continued on page 2...*

## Rendell Policy Director Promises Nutrition Council

The Rendell Administration will establish an interagency nutrition working group this summer. Donna Cooper, Director of the Governor's Policy Office, brought that welcome announcement to participants in the **Strengthening the Food Resources Safety Net** conference held May 14-15 in Harrisburg.

Anti-hunger advocates have sought an interagency policy council on food and nutrition for several years. The purposes of the council as proposed by advocates would be to coordinate nutrition programming among State agencies, facilitate communication and collaboration between the public and private sectors, and develop coherent nutrition policy for the Commonwealth. Edward Rendell, while still a candidate for Governor, promised to convene such a body if elected.

Cooper stated the Governor will constitute the new body this coming summer. Participants will include key deputy secretaries from the five executive agencies that administer food and nutrition programs. Cooper also described how implementation of the Governor's early childhood

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Visit our website at  
[www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org)

# How Should Pennsylvania Raise Needed Revenue?

The state budget crisis looms large over the welfare of the hungry in Pennsylvania. State government has used up the Rainy Day Fund and other one-time sources of revenue that have kept the State operating through this fiscal year. The State Food Purchase Program and the Farmer's Market Nutrition Program have so far escaped severe cuts. But unless something is done, the next round of belt-tightening may not bypass these crucial programs.

Hunger Action's Board of Directors met June 9<sup>th</sup> to assess the situation. While not endorsing any particular plan to increase the Commonwealth's revenue, the Board affirmed a grassroots campaign encouraging legislators to act now to increase State revenue.

The campaign includes postcards that list seven revenue-enhancing options. These include 1) closing loopholes so all corporations pay a fair share of taxes; 2) raising the personal income tax and cutting the property tax; 3) applying the sales tax to business and professional services; 4) raising the fines on reckless drivers; 5) taxing cell phone and pager services; 6) raising the tax on beer; and 7) bringing more legalized gambling into Pennsylvania.

The Board affirmed the absolute importance of communicating with legislators now so that they will aggressively move towards a fiscal plan that will not result in future cuts to programming for the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians. To register your opinion with your legislator, go to [www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org) and use the direct fax on **Safeguarding Pennsylvania's Food Safety Net**.

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## Child Nutrition... from page 1

suppers and drop area eligibility to 40 percent in the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

S. 995, authored by Senator Pat Leahy (D-VT), would provide an extra 2-10 cents in reimbursement for schools serving more "fluid milk, fruits and vegetables". The bill also would provide grants to schools for farm-to-cafeteria projects and would separate funding for the WIC Farmers' Market Nutrition Program from core WIC funding. S. 1007, authored by Leahy and Senator Richard Lugar (R-IN), would prohibit competitive foods on school grounds until the end of the last lunch period.


The biggest obstacle to enacting these changes is funding. Earlier this year the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) suggested that "savings" in the National School Lunch Program could be the solution. These savings could be achieved by requiring parents to verify the financial information provided on applications for free

and reduced price school lunches. According to the USDA, this new requirement would be appropriate because currently schools are certifying more children for free or reduced price lunch than actually are eligible. The method by which the USDA reached this conclusion has been widely criticized and the USDA has backed away from it. But the damage has been done; the impression has been created in Congress that there are many children in school receiving a lunch for which they are not eligible.

If the application process is made more demanding, however, many parents won't go through it. When that happens, their children are required to pay full price. But did the families fail to provide verification because they knew they weren't eligible? Generally not. Two USDA studies completed in the '80s showed that over 80 percent of the families that failed to provide required verification were actually eligible for free or reduced price meals. In other words, tougher verification requirements hurt

needy children who should be getting free or reduced price school meals.

The debate around verification will be a major issue this fall as Congress moves to reauthorize child nutrition programs. To send a FAX to your representative about this, or to ask Pennsylvania's senators to sponsor one of the bills introduced in the Senate, go to [www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org) and follow the prompts on our homepage.



PA Legislative  
Session  
Calendar

June 2, 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 16,  
17, 18, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 30

House only \*    Senate only \*\*

## Study Documents Life After Welfare

Previous Department of Public Welfare (DPW) studies of families after welfare have been unable to account for a sizeable group of parents (about 17 percent) that do not appear in wage-match data. What has happened to them?

A study of 300 such parents by the West Chester University Graduate Social Work Department begins to fill this gap. According to its February report 30 percent of these parents are employed even though their earnings do not show up in the State's data. Another 47 percent have other sources of income (SSI, OASDI, Veterans or retirement pensions). The remaining 23 percent are truly adrift with no wages and no regular source of unearned income. Overall two-thirds of the parents studied remain in poverty.

The West Chester study, when combined with annual reports issued by DPW, creates a more complete picture of the parents who have left welfare.

- ◆ 33 percent have achieved regular employment and are moving toward self-sufficiency through rising wages;
- ◆ 55 percent have periods of employment interspersed with periods of unemployment when they have little or no income;
- ◆ 8 percent have a regular source of unearned income; and
- ◆ 4 percent have nothing.

The study included a survey of 57 parents who had been permanently sanctioned from the TANF program due to willful failure to meet TANF requirements. For more information contact Hunger Action or the DPW Bureau of Program Evaluation (717-783-2874).

## Shorts

A comprehensive study commissioned by the U.S. Treasury sees big problems ahead for the US government. Deficits will grow dramatically once "baby boomers" begin to retire. The report estimates that it would take an immediate and permanent 66 percent across-the-board income tax increase to close the gap. Massive spending cuts are the other alternative. The Bush Administration reportedly has shelved the report.

The anti-hunger network works in a bi-partisan way with Republicans and Democrats. That approach has been effective, starting with senators Bob Dole and George McGovern back in the '70s. Grover Norquist, the anti-tax radical who has the ear of the President, sees things differently: "Bi-partisanship is just another name for date rape."

So you thought that elderly people generally qualify for only \$10 in monthly Food Stamp benefits? Wrong. According to the USDA, the average monthly allotment for elderly people living alone is \$43 a month; for elderly people not living alone the average monthly allotment is \$118.

## Director's Column



The people currently in charge in Washington want to be thought of as strong supporters of families and hard work. But in May,

behind closed doors and faced with a choice between giving a tax break to parents making the minimum wage or to businesses that want to avoid all taxes by moving headquarters to a post office box in Bermuda, the people in charge cut low-wage families out of the \$400-per-child tax refund.

Their main man in Congress, Tom DeLay from Texas, said low-wage parents were left out because they don't pay *income* taxes. But that misses the point. Even if working parents don't make enough to owe *income* taxes, they pay *payroll* taxes. For the two-parent family of four earning \$25,000 a year, payroll taxes are \$3,825 a year – no small sum.

Now those payroll taxes are designated for Social Security and Medicare. But in fact, so long as we all pay more into the Social Security system than is currently needed for those purposes, the federal government uses the extra for other expenses. Someday it will have to pay back Social Security and Medicare. But for now, the people running the show in Washington keep collecting payroll taxes from low-wage parents, using the money to run the federal government, and giving tax breaks to the super-rich. But not to the guy making \$5.15 an hour.

This has become a public embarrassment so the people in charge are trying to make it right (or cover their tracks). To be charitable, maybe it's a little of both.

# Fat and Hungry: Will Political Leaders Ever Get It Right?

Excerpts of a speech by Dr. J. Larry Brown at the  
"Strengthening the Food Resource Safety Net" Conference  
May 14, 2003



"We have moved from a nation that had come close to ending hunger, to one that today has more than 200 food banks serving the states in the nation. These banks, in turn, house and distribute food industry leftovers to more than 50,000 food pantries and soup kitchens in virtually every community in the nation. Starting out as an "emergency response " to the crisis precipitated by Washington leaders, this incredible network of charitable organizations has never stopped growing. And by definition, it no longer constitutes an emergency response. After twenty years, it has become part of the hunger landscape.

"The growth and visibility of this charitable network has given political leaders, already fractured in their consensus about ending hunger, a way out. They now tout private charities as the answer to hunger, thereby taking themselves off the hook for doing so little to end it.

"But as we struggle to get on top of this issue, a new weapon is now being used against the poor. Overall, the American population is growing more obese. Among the poor, government studies show that low-income people as a group are not more likely to be obese than non-low-income people. Other studies now seem to suggest that this is no longer the case. However such trends may shift, we need to know much more about the degree to which social, cultural, and genetic factors are contributing to the increase in obesity among the entire population. We do know much, though, that can help explain how low-income, food insecure Americans can be overweight.

"The lack of adequate resources for food can result in weight gain in several ways. One factor that contributes to the co-existence of obesity and food insecurity is the need for low-income families to stretch their food money as far as possible. Without adequate resources for food, families must make decisions to maximize the number of calories they can buy so that their members do not suffer from long-term hunger. Low-income families may therefore consume lower-cost foods with relatively higher levels of calories per dollar to stave off hunger, when they lack the money or other resources like food stamps to purchase a healthier balance of more nutritious foods. From a cost-benefit perspective, one of the best choices a low-income family can make to get the most calories for its food dollar is a Big Mac or a Whopper.

"This trade-off between food quantity and quality is shown by research on coping strategies among food-insecure households. Along the continuum of typical coping strategies, food quality is generally affected before the quantity of intake decreases. Households reduce food spending by changing the quality or variety of food consumed before they reduce how much food is eaten. As a result, while families may get enough food to avoid feeling hungry, they also may be poorly nourished because they cannot afford a consistently adequate diet that promotes health and averts obesity. In the short term, the stomach knows only that it is full, not whether the meal was nutritious.

"In addition, obesity can be an adaptive response to periods when people are unable to get enough to eat. Chronic ups and down in food availability can cause people to eat more than they normally would when food is available.

"My friends, this is a most difficult time for those of us whose vision is an America where no one goes hungry. But we must keep our heads about us even while others are losing theirs. We will not retreat. We will fight....fight for a government whose policies are as good as the decency of the American people. But as you work here today and tomorrow, I urge you to remember how your tremendous work often is misused by others, and how those you serve are frequently blamed for their hunger. Please join in pressing our nation's leaders, including your own Pennsylvania senators, to address hunger as a primary responsibility of government. Let us all commit to insisting that America join the ranks of other industrial democracies that long ago took steps to protect all of their people from the entirely preventable scourge of hunger."

# Joyful 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration Acknowledges Unfinished Business



*Board Members, Pat Druhan, Teresa Amott and Leonard Washington enjoy Hunger Action's 25th Anniversary Dinner*

Over 100 good friends of Hunger Action gathered in Harrisburg on May 14th in festive celebration of the Center's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Dr. Teresa Amott, President of the Center, lauded the organization's anti-hunger leadership over the last quarter century, but she also struck a solemn note in referring to the ongoing need for that work to continue.

President Amott noted, "While we are here to celebrate many accomplishments of the Center over the last twenty-five years, we must also realize that there is yet work to be done. There is still hunger in Pennsylvania."

A video presentation "25 Years of Leadership" elicited commentary from former advocates. Tim Whelan, now with Capital Region United Way, reminisced on the passion involved in the Center's activities. He spoke of financial hard times when the Center almost folded and the commitment it took from advocates and funders to keep the doors open. Kathleen Daugherty, former executive director of the Center, reminded the group of times when the Center had to speak out courageously and sometimes that meant "alone".

Sen. Allen Kukovich (D-Westmoreland), a longtime advocate for enough nutritious food for all Pennsylvanians, was the keynote speaker for the evening. Kukovich referred to a time when he was a young representative and worked side-by-side with the Hunger Action Center (then PCFN) for a more effectively managed commodity distribution system.

Kukovich noted the accomplishments of Hunger Action "in doing so much to combat hunger in Pennsylvania over the past quarter-century," He also offered, "This celebration does not mean our work is done. Hunger is something no one in this Commonwealth - or this nation - should experience. I will continue to support efforts that strive for a Pennsylvania that does not know hunger."

The entertainment for the evening, Danzante Flamenco, a Harrisburg Hispanic dance company, left the assemblage dancing in the aisles and primed to begin the next quarter century of anti-hunger advocacy.

## *Conference Highlights...from page 1*

education initiative would improve the nutritional outcomes for at-risk children. "Full-day kindergarten across the state would provide access to school breakfast and school lunch to these children," she said. In addition, she said under the Governor's plan Family Resource Networks would be established in school districts where 60 percent or more of the children qualify for free or reduced price school meals. These Networks would build connections among parents, the schools and community service organizations in an effort to meet the nonacademic needs of students and families.

Conference keynote Dr. Larry Brown of the Center on Hunger and Poverty at Brandeis University gave the 120 nutritionists and anti-hunger advocates in attendance food for thought as he described the paradox of obesity and hunger. (See speech excerpts on page 4.) Brown described the rise of the charitable food network as a reaction to the deep cuts in federal food programs during the 1980s. He warned that opponents of public nutrition programs are using the rise in obesity as a weapon to attack the very programs that have been so successful in reducing hunger in America.

Michelle Lombardo of Wellness, Inc. in Duluth, Georgia also spoke of the challenges of nutrition and obesity in a fast food nation. She stressed maintaining a low-fat diet, eating high-fiber foods, drinking lots of water and engaging in regular exercise as necessary components of good health. Lombardo's vivacious presentation showcased the approach of her preventive healthcare company, which creatively gears nutrition education to children and adults.



*A bounty that should be there for all - Hunger Action's 25th Anniversary Dinner*

# Birkenshaw Describes State of Child Nutrition

Patricia Birkenshaw, Food and Nutrition Division Chief at the PA Department of Education, shared her unique perspective on the state of Pennsylvania's child nutrition programs with program administrators and advocates. Speaking May 15<sup>th</sup> at the **Strengthening the Food Resources Safety Net** conference in Harrisburg, Birkenshaw made a valiant effort to speak about each of the four major programs under her jurisdiction during the hour she had been given. But she clearly needed more time.

Starting with the school-based programs, Birkenshaw noted with pride that the current school year is the first in which every school district in Pennsylvania is operating the National School Lunch Program. Participation in school lunch is up 7 percent this year; breakfast participation is up 11 percent.

In contrast, Birkenshaw's comments about the Child and Adult Care Food Program were less upbeat. The Program is heavily regulated and burdened with numerous compliance issues. The number of sponsors of the home-based program is down, reflecting the fact that smaller sponsors have not been able to cover their costs. On a more positive note, the number of sponsors for afterschool snack sites is increasing.

Birkenshaw directed the largest share of her remarks to widespread concern about the large number of at-risk children who are not receiving summer meals. Either the Summer Food Service Program or the National School Lunch Program can fill this need. While advocates are hopeful that the Seamless Summer Waiver will prompt many more schools to offer summer meals at open community sites, Birkenshaw was careful to describe some of the complexities of that approach. "State dollars are in play with summer meals served under the Seamless Summer Waiver. And we all know those are in short supply."

In closing Birkenshaw highlighted the challenge of childhood obesity and the innovative nutrition education already going on in many schools. "The importance of this issue needs to be elevated," she said. "New partnerships and some changes in policy will be required."

# Anniversary Snapshots



*Donna Cooper, Governor's Policy Office, announces formation of food policy council*



*Camille Erice of Danzante Flamenco entertains at the 25th Anniversary Dinner*

## Our Phone Is Ringing



Hunger Action's Food Information Line helped 152 callers in April and 178 callers in May. Remember the number: 1-800-FOOD-997.



*Joyce Rothermel, Margaret Bott and Audrey Maretzki revel in 25th festivities*

# 25 Years of Leadership to End Hunger

## *What's Next for Hunger Action?*

In the course of celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> birthday during the past few months, the same question has repeatedly been raised: will Pennsylvania need the Hunger Action Center for another 25 years?

The answer depends on how we define success. There is strong evidence that hunger has been decreasing – by a significant amount since the early '70s and bit by bit in recent years. If that trend continues, one can imagine the day, sometime during the next 25 years, when the overall rate of hungry households in Pennsylvania will be very low – perhaps only one percent, as is currently the case among households with incomes above 185 percent of poverty. But what if we define success by reference to food insecurity? This is a more controversial standard because, critics allege, such folks are only at risk of hunger. "They aren't actually hungry," the argument goes, "so what's the problem?"

Compounding the difficulty is that the concept of "food insecurity" covers a situation that is becoming more widely accepted: routinely getting one's groceries from a food pantry. Ten years ago a visit to a food pantry was called "an emergency". Now, thanks to the vitality of food bankers, the commitment of volunteers and the surplus of food produced by farms and processors, food pantries have become an integral part of the food system. Yes, even for many working people. It's a system that not only benefits the poor but also farmers, food manufacturers and corporate donors.

As matters stand, the future holds more of this kind of food insecurity, not less. In recent years low-wage working men and women have had virtually no one to champion their cause. Their usual allies have moved on to other issues. Thus, it's likely that wages for the unskilled and uneducated will continue to erode, leaving more parents with the inability to support their families. Given current trends, food pantries and cupboards will become more important as the years go by, not less.

Is that a problem? As Dr. Larry Brown indicated in his recent speech (see page 4), most of our current political leaders don't think so. If nearly everyone's belly is full, that must mean we've solved the problem. Recently, however, it has begun to appear that there is a hidden defect in this line of thinking: obesity. Free food, like cheap food, tends to make one fat. So if our plan to prevent hunger depends to a significant degree on local food pantries, we can expect more obesity and higher health costs.

And there is a second price to pay: the cost of injustice. What happens over time to people whom, despite their best efforts to earn their own way, must regularly depend on charity to feed themselves and their children? What happens to the sense of citizenship in such a society? Many of our political leaders, particularly those from the Democratic Party, are fond of reminding us of the importance of getting food pantry clients to vote. Of course, they are right. But maybe the distance from the food pantry line to the voting booth is farther than we think.

If the challenges of the coming years are increasing obesity and a declining sense of citizenship, what are the implications for the Pennsylvania Hunger Action Center and other anti-hunger advocacy groups? First of all, nutritional science will need to become a more important part of the work. Without that expertise, our message – which will certainly have more to say about food insecurity than hunger – will increasingly be called into question. Secondly, food banks and other charitable food providers will need to be convinced to vigorously critique their own work. If that doesn't happen, the anti-hunger network faces a major split in the years ahead. Thirdly, all of us in the anti-hunger network will need to forge stronger alliances with other groups in our society that speak for low-wage employees. That offers the best hope of helping people understand that until work is again adequately rewarded, we should expect sweet charity – along with obesity and political apathy – to keep growing.

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"Complacency will not, cannot, address the need of our nation's hungry.

It requires people committed to taking action on behalf of economically disadvantaged children and adults in America." - Sandi Dill, Indiana County Community Action Program



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## Got a Minute, Send a Fax

Getting the message out doesn't have to take a lot of time. Hunger Action's homepage has a direct fax option to legislators on topics which affect the hungry in Pennsylvania. It probably takes three minutes to send a fax letter that can make the difference for a family struggling to make ends meet. Got a minute? Send a fax.

[www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org)

## Food for Thought

Springtime brings the game of baseball, which has long been a source of wisdom. Consider the words of Ozzie Smith, the great St. Louis Cardinal shortstop, upon his induction into the Hall of Fame: "How good can you be? The only way to find out is to do it. You don't even know what you're reaching for. You just keep reaching."

In next year's Pennsylvania budget, Medicaid will cost \$11 billion (one-quarter of total state spending), a cost that will be shared by the State and federal governments. The Bush Administration wants to turn the Medicaid into a block grant. The advantage for the federal government is that it could then pay a fixed amount each year to each state. Why any state would want a block grant isn't clear; under a block grant, the states would shoulder 100 percent of future increases in medical costs.

The IRS audited one out of every 64 taxpayers who claimed the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) last year, twice the usual rate. Now the IRS says it wants to start requiring more EITC documentation before approving claims. The crack down is designed to eliminate "errors and cheating". But the IRS has no such plans to crack down on errors and cheating by high-income people. "If the government pays you money, it wants an exact accounting," said a Washington tax attorney. "If it doesn't collect as much as you owe, it really doesn't care."

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The Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating the causes of hunger through advocacy, education and collaboration. Supporters of this work include food providers, growers, religious organizations, food industry members, advocates and consumers.

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