



# Getting to the Root of the Problem GRASSROOTS

The Newsletter of the Hunger Action Network of New York State

June 2009

## Faces of Hunger Welfare Grant Raised After Action Network 18 Years!

First elected to the State Senate in February 2002, **Liz Krueger** is currently the Vice-Chair of Senate Finance Committee and a progressive leader.

For 15 years, Sen. Krueger was the Associate Director of the Community Food Resource Center (CFRC) in NYC where she was responsible for directing efforts to expand access to government programs for low-income NY. She helped monitor the effectiveness of Federal and State programs, especially as they dealt with hunger.



Senator Krueger has become the voice of the anti-hunger movement in Albany, and is looked to by many progressive groups as their cham-

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The State budget passed in April included the first increase in the basic welfare grant in 18 years, as well as \$30 million in various job initiatives for welfare participants and a \$4.4 million increase in funding for emergency food programs. The proposed cut to the state supplement to the SSI program for the poor blind, elderly and disabled was rejected.

Most of the deep cuts proposed by Governor Paterson in December, from programs such as homeless prevention were eliminated, largely due to the receipt of billions of dollars from the federal economic stimulus package. The projected state budget deficit had seemed to grow almost weekly, topping out at more than \$15 billion. The state also qualified for over \$400 million in extra federal welfare funds due to the skyrocketing food stamp caseload.

The Governor had proposed raising the basic welfare grant by 10% a year for the next three years. Advocates had wanted

the extra federal welfare dollars to be used to do the three year increase all at once but this was rejected by state lawmakers, who did agree to start the hike in July 2009 rather than January 2010. Hunger Action was disappointed that lawmakers instead decided to spend \$120 million of the extra federal funds to pay for the county's three year share of the grant increase, even though the hike will be phased in.

Lawmakers agreed to a modest hike in the personal income tax for the state's wealthiest taxpayers. The budget include a three-year temporary personal income tax increase for those earning over \$300,000 married filing jointly to 7.85 percent; for those earning \$500,000 the rate would go up to 8.97 percent. Lawmakers rejected the proposal to raise the sales tax on clothing.

Lawmakers agreed to expand the bottle bill to include water bottles and for the state to receive 80% of the unclaimed deposits, more than \$150 million annually. Since the proposal was passed, the bottling industry has been lobbying furiously to change the details of the bill,

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## Notes from the Executive Director

The recently enacted state budget was one of the best for low-income New Yorkers in recent years, starting with the first hike in welfare benefits in 18 years. There was also a major expansion in jobs programs for welfare participants and many of the draconian cuts included in the Governor's initial budget proposals were eliminated due to the influx of billions of dollars from the federal economic stimulus package.

Many challenges still remain. Recent reports from Hunger Action Network, Community Voices Heard and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies document many problems with the state's safety net and welfare to work programs. These problems are worsened by the national recession as more families are struggling to get by.

Most Americans are aware of the failures of our financial, economic and political systems. Fueled by the insatiable demand for campaign contributions to run their campaigns, elected officials gave a green light to the greed of Wall Street. And when the system crashed, it was primarily the most powerful and rich who have been bailed out, leaving our children and grandchildren with a mountain of public debt while unemployment lines grow and many families lose their homes. The time is ripe for radical, fundamental change – but neither major party is offering much at this point.

The debate over universal health care is a good example. Most Americans, doctors, nurses and economists favor a single payer, Medicare for All type program where one program pays all bills and the huge waste and bureaucracy of the for profit health insurance system is eliminated. President Obama repeatedly has said that single payer would be the best system – if we were starting from scratch. But the Democratic leadership refuses to allow single payer to be even discussed while the Republicans attack even minimal reforms, such as public option, as socialism. Our elected officials feel it is more important to protect insurance companies – and drug firms – and their campaign contributions than it is to provide a cost-effective quality health care system for all Americans.

Hunger Action recently received a major grant from the Methodist Church to expand the Faith and Hunger Network. The voice of the faith community is needed more than ever, to say that health care should be a human right and that it is immoral for a country as rich as America to have so much poverty, especially among children.

“We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of few,” remarked US Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis. “But we can't have both.” Or, as a Canadian entrepreneur once put it, “The world is run by the Golden Rule. He who has the gold, rules.”

In peace and justice,

Mark A. Dunlea



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# 2009 Food Policy Agenda

Below is Hunger Action's 2009 Food Policy Agenda.

Gov. Paterson has re-introduced the Healthy Schools Act to improve nutrition in schools. Due to opposition from lawmakers, he has weakened the ban on junk food (first passed by HANNYS in 1992) and dropped the expansion of school breakfast. Also missing is any increase in state funding for school meals, which has not been increased in 20 years.

The Governor continues to cite anti-obesity as a major priority. Unfortunately he dropped the soda / anti-obesity tax early in the budget negotiations. Recent proposals to list calories on restaurant menus and to restrict trans fat are more likely to pass.

The Governor did secure \$10 million in funding for a loan program to help locate more supermarkets in low-income neighborhoods, but this primarily will help NYC, not upstate.

1. Establish the NY Food Policy Council ([www.nyscfp.org](http://www.nyscfp.org)) by law, rather than just Executive Order. Create a broad-based advisory council that includes strong community food security advocates. The present council is floundering.

2. Provide state funding to increase the value of food stamps (SNAP) utilized at Farmers' Market. NYC has its own program and the NYS Federation of Farmers Market ran a pilot last year with foundation funding.

3. Establish the NYC Wholesales' Farmers Market (possibly in conjunction with a relocated Hunt Points Produce Market.) \$30 million in state funding has been provided.

4. Increase the percentage of the food consumed in NYS that is produced locally by 5% in 2009 and 10% in 2010. To accomplish this goal it shall :

a. every state agency within 60 days to prepare a report outlining what it is presently doing to purchase local food and to promote the purchase of local food; and what authority it has and steps it could take to increase the purchase of local food;

b. within six months the Department of Ag and Markets shall produce an estimate of the percentage of the food consumed in NYS that is grown locally and to identify steps that can be taken to increase such percentage.

5. NYS shall take all steps available under federal law to increase access to the federal food stamp program. This shall include the elimination of fingerprinting of food stamp applicants in NYC, and requiring local districts to provide expedited food stamps no later than the next business day after application (A4169 / S2369). Pass legislation to accept all federal food stamp waivers.

6. The State should play a national leadership role with respect to the federal reauthorization of the various child nutrition programs..

7. Enact the Healthy Schools Act (S4418).

8. The state should support efforts to enable residents to grow their own food and to increase their purchase of locally grown food. This includes support for community gardens

9. The state should expand its efforts to address the problems of food deserts (lack of fresh food sources in particular

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communities), including assisting supermarkets, food co-ops, farmer markets, CSAs and other initiatives.

10. Develop a state climate policy that addresses challenges to the agriculture system.

# Federal Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization

In 2009, Congress will review the Child Nutrition and WIC Reauthorization Act of 2004. This legislation, which is set to expire on September 30, 2009, includes all the Federal child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast and the National School Lunch Programs, the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP), the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC).

To sign on to FRAC statement of principles, outlined below, go to [http://frac.org/Legislative/action\\_center/statement\\_principles.htm](http://frac.org/Legislative/action_center/statement_principles.htm).

These programs touch millions of children each day. They are shown to improve educational achievement, nutrition, and overall health. Reauthorization provides the opportunity to improve these programs so they better meet the needs of our nation's children.

Thousands of diverse national, state and local organizations are committed to a reauthorization bill that has a bold vision to eliminate child hunger.

The extraordinarily successful, cost-effective child nutrition programs play a critical role in helping children, especially those in low-income families, achieve access to quality nutrition, child care, educational and enrichment activities while improving their overall health, development, and school achievement.

In addition, the adult component of CACFP provides needed nutrition assistance to elderly and impaired adults. However, federal support has not always kept pace with children's need for these programs, food cost inflation, the costs of delivering services, or increased scientific knowledge.

A well-conceived, adequately funded reauthorization bill can reduce hunger and food insecurity in America, help reduce childhood overweight and obesity, improve child nutrition and health, and enhance child development and school readiness.

To this end we call on the Administration and Congress to enact a reauthorization bill that:

assures and strengthens program access and supports participation by underserved children and communities; enhances nutrition quality and provides adequate meal reimbursements; and modernizes technology and simplifies program administration and operation.

A substantial investment of new funding must be included in the budget - something which has not happened yet. With enhanced Federal support, priorities for the 2009 Child Nutrition reauthorization should include:

I. Improving access to nutritious foods in schools, child care centers and homes, in afterschool programs, on weekends, during the summer, and in the home.

**School Meal Programs:** Numerous studies document the positive effect school breakfast has on reducing hunger and improving nutrition, classroom behavior, test scores, grades, and school attendance. Through expansion of breakfast programs, including "universal" and in-classroom programs in all low-income areas, all children can receive breakfast at no charge to ensure that many more of them begin the day with the nutrition they need to succeed.

In addition, under the current school meals fee structure, many students from working poor families cannot afford the

reduced-price meal charge. Free meal eligibility should be expanded so that children from households with incomes up to 185 percent of the national poverty line can receive meals at no charge.

As a discretionary program, it is critical for Congress to support WIC's current eligibility rules and nutritional support so that infants and young children continue to experience the full complement of WIC's health benefits.

II. Enhancing the nutritional environment to promote healthy eating habits for women and children.

National nutrition standards, consistent with the Dietary Guidelines, should be established for foods and beverages sold outside of the school meals programs.

III. Modernizing and streamlining program operations to improve program integrity and efficiency.

Across all programs, steps should be taken to streamline program operations, allow more cross program certification, increase flexibility, and maximize the use of technology and innovation to reduce barriers to eligible families and children and to reduce the administrative burden for service providers.

In 1946, Congress passed the National School Lunch Act as a "measure of national security, to safeguard the health and well-being of the Nation's children and to encourage the domestic consumption of nutritious agricultural commodities." The upcoming child nutrition reauthorization provides an opportunity to build on this strong tradition and to ensure the continued health and well-being of our nation's most vulnerable population - our children.

# Putting Jobs into NY's Welfare to Work Program

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed into law legislation that repealed the nation's principal anti-poverty entitlement program for children – Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) – and replaced it with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Hunger Action's new report - Putting Jobs into New York's Welfare to Work Program - examines whether New York's implementation of TANF has improved the economic status of poor New Yorkers, including children. A prime focus is whether the state's welfare to work programs, have been effective in the last decade in helping welfare participants become employable and self-sufficient.

The unfortunate conclusion is NY's welfare to work programs, especially its Work First approach, has been a failure. The federal government in fact consistently ranks NY's programs as one of the worst in the country in terms of its effectiveness in helping people find jobs.

One of the key reasons that the state's approach of putting welfare participants into any job, no matter how dead end or low pay, is that it lacks any program to provide post-employment training or education for welfare participants, despite this being the cornerstone of the Work First rhetoric. The result is that few welfare participants finding work actually escape poverty and many return shortly to welfare.

Hunger Action has been calling for the state to increase its investment in transitional jobs, that combines a real job and a paycheck with access to education and training. Fortunately the state did agree to provide nearly \$30 million in increased funding for such initiatives in

the recent state budget (see story on page 11).

The weakness of the state's welfare to work programs are worsened by the changing demographics of the welfare population. Those remaining on welfare today tend to have multiple barriers to employment, which require a greater investment in job training and education.

Key findings of the report include: Subsidized employment (e.g., wage subsidies, transitional jobs) is the most effective welfare to work programs in move participants into jobs, as well as keeping them there.

- Welfare reform has been ineffective in improving the employability and income of participants.

- New York State has a poor record in providing education and job training to welfare participants, thus failing to help them become more employable.

- The state's poor track record with welfare to work is shifting more costs onto local counties / NYC as only a handful of TANF participants find jobs; five times as many merely shift into the county-state funded Safety Net program.

- The State's welfare to work program has a particularly negative impact upon people of color and women.

- The state fails to help welfare participants that find jobs that enable them to escape poverty. Welfare leavers are more likely to be found in the lowest-paying industries with little opportunity for advancement or wage increases over time, having acquired few new jobs skills, and often shortly return to welfare. The average wage is \$8.50 an hour.

- The state's "work first" approach negatively impacts upon participants. Pushing participants into low-wage dead end jobs has a negative impact on their long term income. Wages more likely increase

for participants who begin working at higher paying jobs.

The report recommends that New York should significantly increase the number of participants engaged in on the job training, wage subsidy, subsidized employment, grant diversion and transitional jobs. The state should formally state that the goal of welfare to work is to enable participants to be employable in jobs that enable them and their families to become economically self-sufficient.

Other key recommendations include:

- New York – and particularly New York City - should reduce reliance upon workfare (WEP) programs.

- The state should conduct a cost-benefit and performance analysis of its various welfare to work programs.

- New York should substantially reduce the rate of sanctioning and withdrawal and denial of applications.

- The state needs to increase oversight of local district performance in welfare to work. The best and most cost-effective solution would be state take over.

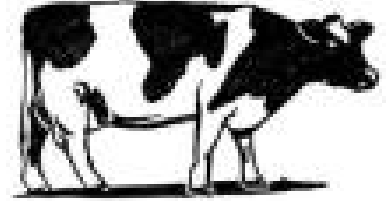
- The State should increase work incentives for welfare participants, including earnings supplements, a higher Earned Income Disregard, Individual Development Accounts, and a higher minimum wage and Earned Income Tax Credit.

- New York should increase access to transitional benefits, including child care.

- New York should strengthen its job creation efforts, with clear target goals for low-income employment.

With federal TANF reauthorization up next year in Congress, New York should work with advocates and other states to reform the federal TANF program to make it supportive of helping participants finding sustainable employment and reducing poverty.

# Hunger Action Network Green Space



## 2009 CSA Season Launched in NYC

CSA or Community Supported Agriculture is a program to collectively purchase vegetables from a small scale local farmer. Members buy into a “share” of the farmer’s crops and pick up weekly for the growing season. To learn more about CSAs in NYC, visit [www.justfood.org](http://www.justfood.org)

Hunger Action is excited about the start of our 2009 CSA season! In partnership with Just Food, NYC Coalition Against Hunger, and United Way, we worked to create 3 CSAs in NYC. In 2007, we created the West Harlem CSA, in 2008, the Long Island City Queens CSA, and this year we are pleased to announce the launch of the Flatbush Farm Share in Brooklyn.

Historically, Community Supported Agriculture has been mostly available to high earners who could afford to make a large initial investment. The purpose of this project and partnership is to make fresh vegetables more accessible to low income communities with little access, while creating a sustainable food system that builds communities and benefits farmers.

Most CSAs require that members pay the whole amount of the share up front. Our CSAs are different. We have sliding scale pricing and accept food stamps and payment plans. In West Harlem, a member paying with food stamps can pay as little as 45\$ for 22 weeks of vegetables. We have worked extensively to

reach out to public housing, religious centers, head starts, emergency food programs, and community organizations to inform the community of this resource.

As we enter the third year of this project, we have high hopes for the sustainability of the CSAs. We are working along with the members of each CSA to develop a core group that will take over responsibility of running the program as well as ensuring that it remains accessible to people of all incomes.

The West Harlem CSA is entering its third year of operation and has a new site and a new farmer! The distribution will take place at Broadway Presbyterian on 114<sup>th</sup> and Broadway.

We are excited to announce our new farmer, Windflower Farm. Ted and his wife Jan have been providing for CSAs in New York City for the past 8 years. He markets exclusively to New York City doing both CSAs and Local Produce Link deliveries. Windflower Farm is in Valley Falls, NY in Washington County. [www.westharlemcsa.wordpress.com](http://www.westharlemcsa.wordpress.com)

The Long Island City CSA is beginning its second year of operation. The Farm at Millers Crossing will again provide vegetables for the CSA. This year members can sign up for fruit and egg shares! [www.licca.wordpress.com](http://www.licca.wordpress.com) Flatbush Farm Share is entering its first year of distribution and already has a strong core group who did most of the outreach for



the program. The Farm at Millers Crossing will also provide vegetables for the Flatbush Farm Share. Members can sign up for fruit, egg, and coffee shares. [www.flatbushfarmshare.com](http://www.flatbushfarmshare.com)

For more information or to find out how you can become a member, contact Veda at 212-741-8192 ex. 2#

### Food Stamp Hotline

If you live in Putnam, Ulster, Sullivan or Dutchess County, call 1-866-526-2978 to have Hunger Action help you apply for food stamps.

## Budget...from p. 1

having ignored the details over the last nine years while the proposal was under consideration.

Low-income advocates for Medicaid had a mixed view. "We are pleased that some important actions were included in this year's budget, such as simplifying the processes for enrolling in and keeping public health insurance coverage, providing funding for the clinics in the community that care for New York's uninsured individuals and families, and continuing some reforms to the way Medicaid reimburses for care in various settings," said Lara Kassel, Coordinator of Medicaid Matters NY.

"Hospital rate reform will continue this year, though it is a shame that primary care investments could not have gone further given they rely on that reform," she added.

Some of the setbacks in health care included: Special interest politics resulted in numerous "charity care" funding pools for hospitals, putting public and safety-net hospitals at a serious disadvantage; Imposing higher premiums in the Child Health Plus program; Requirement for county opt-in on future Family Health Plus expansion which jeopardizes the opportunity for adults across the state to access health coverage; and, requiring limits on frequency, amount and duration of prescriptions in Medicaid, and the creation of a step-therapy approach for prior authorization

The final budget also included some reforms in the Empire Zone corporate welfare program as well as changes in the Rockefeller Drug Laws, which should reduce criminal justice costs. The budget may also increase savings in prescription drugs.

# Property Tax Circuit Breaker

by Ron Deutch, New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness

The Governor and State lawmakers are discussing how to provide property tax relief. Many of the proposals focus on some form of cap on increased taxes, especially for schools. Many NYers are required to pay far too much of their income in property taxes. Some NYers are literally being taxed out of their homes, paying 20 or 30 percent or more of their income in property taxes.

The only relief mechanism that can effectively deal with this problem is a Property Tax Circuit Breaker. It would ensure that people are not required to pay too much of their income in property taxes. A circuit breaker would provide taxpayers with a refundable tax credit for a percentage (e.g., 70%) of the amount by which their property taxes exceed a reasonable percentage of their income.

For over a decade many groups have been calling for the passage of a circuit breaker. The concept has had bi-partisan support in both houses of the Legislatures. The overwhelming majority of NYers that provided testimony to the Suozzi Property Tax Relief Commission called for a circuit breaker above all other measures. The Commission, strongly supported a circuit breaker but encumbered it with other, highly controversial measures

A Siena poll on the topic of circuit breakers and tax caps showed 75% support.

So what are the answers that some politicians are now floating? Bringing back the STAR Rebate checks that were eliminated because they do not deliver property tax relief in any meaningful way to those who need it most? Add-



ing a new public employee pension tier? A state spending cap? All these fail to address the problem of people being taxed out of their homes!

To be effective, a circuit breaker needs to have several important components. It must provide enough property tax relief to keep people in their homes; cover all local property taxes (not just school taxes); include renters who also pay property taxes but through their rent; and not have different rates for downstate and upstate.

A very effectively targeted circuit breaker bill (S4239), has been introduced by Senator Liz Krueger.

The Omnibus Consortium, a coalition of property tax reform groups, unions, and fiscal watchdogs, believe that now is the time for Albany to deliver meaningful property tax relief. ([www.omnibus-taxsolution.org](http://www.omnibus-taxsolution.org)).

In recognition of the State's fiscal problems the Consortium has proposed phasing in a circuit breaker over the next 4 years and paying for it with the savings from the failed STAR Rebate program that was eliminated in this year's state budget.

# Bread for the World on Federal Budget

The 2010 U.S. budget by the Obama administration, reveals a healthy funding boost in the international poverty-focused development assistance programs. The proposed \$3.4 trillion budget includes \$20.5 billion for programs to fight poverty in poor countries.

The budget also demonstrated the president's commitment to fulfill his campaign goal of ending child hunger in the United States by 2015. The administration requested an additional \$1 billion per year for child nutrition programs, which are being reauthorized this year; and \$7.77 billion for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) Program.

"The president's budget request shows his administration's interest in strengthening the U.S. response to global hunger and poverty," said Rev. James McDonald, Bread's vice president of policy and programs. "The administration wants to continue to support the effective programs put in place by the previous administration, such as the AIDS and malaria initiatives and the Millennium Challenge Account. But there is also a strong interest in reshaping the U.S. approach to foreign assistance to make it more streamlined, accountable and coherent."

Rev. McDonald praised the administration's commitment to a larger role for development alongside defense and diplomacy. President Obama asks for \$1.4 billion for agriculture development. "This is an important initiative, especially right now with hunger on the rise around the world. More than a billion people are going hungry since food prices spiked last year and the global economy went into a tailspin. Of course we need a strong emergency response, but this initiative also demonstrates a long-term vision and commitment to global food security," he said.

Rev. McDonald added that the \$8.6 billion Global Health Initiative in the proposed budget signals a welcome recommitment to two of the Millennium Development Goals — improving maternal health and reducing child mortality. "A comprehensive health strategy that recognizes the critical need to address malnutrition among women and children will improve the lives of millions of infants and mothers."

However, the global health investments in the FY2010 budget present only a modest increase for maternal and child

health and nutrition programs. "More is needed to ensure that the food and financial crises do not cause permanent damage to the health and development of young children," he said.

Bread for the World is also gratified to see a request to fund the Hunger-Free Communities Program. The \$5 million request will help churches, food banks, and other anti-hunger groups in local communities to work together to address hunger at the state and local level in new and creative ways.

## Foreign Aid Reform

Rev. David Beckmann, president of Bread for the World, is urging the House of Representatives to pass the Initiating Foreign Assistance Reform Act of 2009 (H.R. 2139).

The bill was introduced by Rep. Howard Berman (D-CA-28), chairman of the House foreign Affairs Committee and Rep. Mark Kirk (R-IL-10). It requires President Obama to develop and implement a comprehensive national strategy for global development, improve evaluation of development programs, and increase the transparency of U.S. foreign assistance to developing countries.

"It is a good initial step in making our nation's foreign assistance more effective, efficient, and transparent," said Rev. Beckmann. "Coordinating and improving our foreign assistance can have far-reaching effects on reducing hunger and poverty, making the world more politically stable. In turn, a more effective U.S. foreign assistance system would make for a more secure United States."

Rev. Beckmann said that a comprehensive U.S. strategy for global development needs to be linked to an ongoing monitoring and evaluation system to determine what works and what does not. Currently, U.S. global development policies and programs are scattered across 12 departments, 25 different agencies, and nearly 60 government offices.

U.S. foreign assistance is still largely governed by a law passed in 1961 by Pres. John Kennedy. "It is woefully outdated, inefficient, and ill equipped to provide the level of relief needed to address hunger and poverty in today's complex world," said Rev. Beckmann. "U.S. foreign assistance has helped reduce child deaths, improve agricultural capacity, and increase school enrollment. But more lives can be saved if we improve how we deliver foreign aid. It will mean less waste and more impact for our tax dollars."

## White Plains Budget Forum

On February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009 the Empire State Economic Security Campaign of Westchester County along with a group of advocates and individuals held a public legislative budget forum at the WestHelp homeless shelter in White Plains. There were more than 50 people there, most of them residents of the shelter. Senator Suzi Oppenheimer and Assemblyman George Latimer were also in attendance.

The meeting started with a presentation by Mark Dunlea on the proposed state budget, including an increase in the welfare grant, cuts to SSI, health care and other issues. David Schwartz of the Working Families Party gave an overview of the fair share tax reform campaign, which called on NY state to raise taxes on those making over \$250,000 a year. "That budget (deficit) shouldn't be solved by cuts and services that affect low- and moderate-income people," said Schwartz "You can't solve the problem by simply making budget cuts. ... Everybody is going to have to bite the bullet in this economic climate. It's sharing the sacrifice."

Dennis Hanratty of Mount Vernon United Tenants spoke about the problem of affordable housing in Westchester County, and the cuts to housing and homelessness programs proposed in the budget. "People shouldn't be forced to live in homeless shelters, everyone should have their own affordable and dignifying housing unit in Westchester County," noted Hanratty. He added that it was far cheaper for nonprofit advocacy groups such as his to assist tenants rather than having tax-payers pay for shelters.

Karmitice Charles, a resident of WestHelp told his story and why he wanted to see a raise in the state welfare

grant. Charles told the audience that he has been a taxpayer for 10 years and now cannot find employment and relies on public assistance, which does not cover his basic needs. He asked the legislators to support an immediate increase of 25% in the welfare grant.

Anita Wilenkin from Open Door Family Medical Center informed the audience about health resources available to low income residents.

The audience was given a chance to ask direct questions to their legislators.



Many of those in the audience felt ignored by the legislators that represent them.

This event was sponsored in part by the Westchester Economic Security Coalition, a local faction of the Empire State Economic Security coalition. For more info, or to learn how to get involved, [vmyers@hungeractionnys.org](mailto:vmyers@hungeractionnys.org), or [www.WestchesterES2.wordpress.com](http://www.WestchesterES2.wordpress.com)

## NYC Benefit June 10

Hunger Action is holding a fundraiser for its new NYC office on Wednesday, June 10, 6-8pm. We have space in DC 1707 offices at 75 Varick St.

This year we successfully helped raised the welfare grant for the first time in 18 years; got \$25 million in the state budget for transitional jobs and other job programs for welfare participants and low-income individuals; and increased funding for emergency food programs by \$4.4 million. The personal income tax for the wealthy was increased and the Bigger Better Bottle Bill was finally expanded.

Please support our work in New York City by buying tickets or making a tax

deductible donation if you can't attend. Music will be provided by Ray Carona along with light refreshments. We also want to thank Senators Liz Krueger and Rhoda Jacobs and Assemblymember Keith Wright for their long time support of efforts to end hunger in our communities.

For more info, call 212 741-8192, t 6#.

Price: \$35 regular; \$10 or less for individuals from low-income communities.

Please make checks payable to: Hunger Action Network of New York State PMB 1500, 75 Varick Street. Ste 1404, NY NY 10013

# CVH Faults Back to Work Program

Over a dozen welfare recipients stood in front of City Hall in NYC recently to call on Robert Doar, the Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA), to revamp the failing \$53 million Welfare-to-Work Contracts. The current contract renewal process is set to be finalized by June 30, 2009.

Back to Work is a job readiness and job search welfare program designed to prepare and place work ready welfare recipients into jobs.

“HRA has failed us. Commissioner Doar has failed us. Back to Work has failed us. We are here today to let Commissioner Doar and the NYC Council know that we do not accept costly, failing programs. Changes are needed now!” said Janet Rivera, Board Member of Community Voices Heard (CVH) and former Back to Work (BtW) program participant.

CVH, a group started by Hunger Action, was joined by Council Members including Letitia James, Chair of the Contracts Committee. James said, “In these economic times, when so many are searching to put their skills to use in a meaningful career, it is imperative that programs meant to help individuals transition to work programs also provide them with the training and support needed to be successful in the long-term. It is in the best interest of individuals in these programs, participating job providers, and taxpayers to closely examine any imperfections in HRA’s back-to-work programs.”

The press conference took place prior to a joint public oversight hearing held by the City Council General Welfare and Contracts Committees on the BtW program.

In November, CVH released a report, *Missing the Mark: An Examination of NYC’s Back to Work Program and Its Effectiveness In Meeting Employment Goals for Welfare Recipient*. Findings pointed to a failing program - poor job placement, weak job retention, high rates of recidivism, limited access to education and training, punitive sanction policies, and people “falling through the cracks” without receiving needed services.

CVH members stood with a giant “Failure to Comply” poster board notice that they had crafted for Commissioner Doar. FTCs are punitive actions given to welfare recipients who fail to meet their federal welfare work requirements, many of which are given in error. The group claimed the Commissioner was failing to comply with his “scope of work” requirements through administering a program that fails to assist welfare recipients in their aspirations towards self-sufficiency.

At the hearing, at which Hunger Action testified, Council Member de Blasio said, “As our city is facing the worst economic crisis we have seen in decades, it is more important than ever that programs like Back to Work operate smoothly and effectively. I have serious concerns about whether the City is taking the right steps to get people out of poverty and into jobs. To address this problem, we need to expand transitional jobs programs and provide more education and training for public assistance recipients.”

The Independent Budget Office (IBO) reported on preliminary findings from a study it is conducting on the program. While the IBO findings reveal the BtW program meeting its job placement goals, they also highlight extremely low

job retention with only 9.4% of those for whom employment plans are completed getting and keeping jobs for 180 days. This means that roughly two thirds of clients who were placed in unsubsidized positions through Back to Work and retain those jobs for 30 days are no longer in those same jobs five months later. The NYC Comptroller’s Office has also expressed concerns.

Janet Rivera, Jonathan Sawyer and Anita Walton, all CVH members, testified at the hearing calling on NYC Council to ensure that Commissioner Doar makes fundamental changes the Back to Work program such as reforming sanction policies, providing better information about and connection to education and training opportunities, and making the program optional (instead of mandatory) for public assistance applicants.

CVH’s recommendations for program improvement include: (1) adjusting the contract payment system to reflect broader program goals and benchmarks such as case management and education access, (2) carving out money for an external evaluation of the program to follow the Mayor’s trend towards exploring the success and failure of anti-poverty programs through research, (3) setting aside resources for external monitoring and capacity building of vendors, and (4) establishing pilot sector-based Back to Work Centers to mirror recent initiatives by the Department of Small Business Services to do the same.

Community Voices Heard (CVH) is a grassroots, membership-led organization of low income families with chapters in New York City and throughout New York State. CVH has over 15,000 low-income members in NYC.

# New Welfare Jobs Programs

The State's budget included nearly \$30 million in increased funding for various jobs related programs for welfare programs. Groups such as Hunger Action Network, Community Voices Heard, CSS, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies and STRIVE had pushed for various parts of this package. Hunger Action provided key lawmakers and staff with advance copies of its report on the State's welfare to work program to help build support for the initiatives.

The State Senate took much of the lead in the budget negotiations.

Three of the programs - transitional jobs, green jobs and health care - will be administered by local districts in a competitive application process due out in June. Advocates should contact their local districts to make sure they apply.

The recent federal economic stimulus package provides funding for up to 80% of the cost of new employment programs for welfare participants. The state hopes to expand these initiatives with the additional federal dollars.

The three job programs outlined below were funded through the \$406 million in TANF contingency funds the state received due to high food stamp caseloads. There is no guarantee that this funding will be available next year. The state welfare office (OTDA) decided to distribute these funds to local districts via an RFP process in June. They hope that success with these programs will encourage the districts to use more of their block grant (FFF) in future years.

**Transitional Jobs Program.** \$5M in TANF funds will be allocated to districts to establish employment opportunities, with priority to areas of the state

with high unemployment rates. The program will provide subsidized employment placements for up to 12 months at a rate of at least \$8 per hour, with a paid educational/training component of at least 7 hours weekly. Preference is to be given to PA population, with funds also targeting individuals with a criminal history.

This program is in addition to the existing Wage Subsidy and Transitional Employment Programs, which Hunger Action and other groups helped initiate earlier in the decade. While this funding has gone primarily to wage subsidy, at Hunger Action's request \$1 million in last year's RFP was allocated to transitional jobs. State funding was increased \$10 million to \$14 million. Both programs provide employer wage subsidies as an incentive to hire individuals who are unable to secure a job through conventional means.

Rather than issuing a new RFP, OTDA will increase awards to our existing contractors, enter into agreements with other RFP applicant organizations not originally selected due to funding limitations, and extend the program for an additional year.

**Green Job Corps.** \$5M in TANF and \$2M in general funds will be awarded to districts on a competitive basis for comprehensive employment services in green jobs sector. The program may serve TANF eligible individuals, with priority to PA recipients, and Safety Net Singles. Funds will support subsidized employment of up to 35 hours weekly, job preparation, basic education and support services.

**Health Care Jobs.** This new initiative came from the Senate. \$5M TANF and \$2M in general funds will be allocated

to districts for health sector employment opportunities, with priority to districts with over 1,500 active adults in receipt of PA in households with children. The program may serve TANF eligible individuals and Safety Net singles. It will establish temporary subsidized employment opportunities in the health sector for up to one year. Districts will be encouraged to work with community based organizations. Priority to providing outreach and education services for low-income individuals and targeting areas of high poverty or high levels of limited-English proficiency.

**Career Pathways.** The final budget also included \$10 million in funding (up from \$2.5 M) for the Career Pathways program, an initiative promoted last year by groups such as Hunger Action. The Governor's budget had included no funding. The Career Pathways Program is a workforce development strategy that links education and occupational training to jobs in specific industry sectors.

OTDA will increase awards to existing contractors, enter into agreements with other RFP applicant organizations not originally selected due to funding limitations, and extend the program for an additional year.

**Wheels for Work.** The budget includes \$7M (up from \$4M in 08-09) to support vehicle distribution program for working families, an initiative of Hunger Action and SENSES. This funding will be used to increase the award levels of the current 28 contractors, and to release a new RFP to support programs in the 14 counties not currently served by an existing program. Hunger Action has pushed for part of these funds to be used to train PA participants as auto mechanics.

## Faces ...from 1

pion. She is a nationally recognized expert on the problems of hunger and homelessness, and the lack of affordable housing, healthcare, and job training. She is a strong advocate for tenants' rights, affordable housing, improved access to health care and prescription drug coverage, and more equitable funding for public education.

Sen. Liz has been a tireless advocate in expanding federal nutrition programs. "As food prices soar and the economy plummets, we need to use every option available to maximize benefits and support hungry New Yorkers." She is sponsoring legislation to provide expedited food stamps in emergencies by the next day after application.

Krueger has been vocal in opposing Mayor Bloomberg's refusal to expand food stamps to able bodied adults under the economic stimulus package. "If NYC sticks to its outdated policy then NY's hungry will continue to suffer and our economic crisis could very well be prolonged. In today's economy it is unrealistic to expect every unemployed adult to find work within a 3 month period. These adults are not trying to avoid work, they just can't find jobs in today's economy," she said.

"Food Stamps are a win/win for NY. Every new dollar in Food Stamps is immediately spent in a neighborhood food store or green market, helps low-income families meet their nutritional needs, and creates jobs in our urban communities and on our farms," she added,

Senator Krueger's current initiatives include: a bill to support recycling and expand the bottle bill; a bill to restore local control over NYC housing policy; and legislation expanding access to food stamps and safety net assistance for needy families and individuals.

# Hamilton Hill Food Processors moves to Schenectady

Hunger Action Network's food processing project, Hamilton Hill Food Processors, will be opening its doors in Schenectady very shortly. In addition to producing Hunger Action's food products, Healthy Community Harvest, Hamilton Hill Food Processors will become a community resource in Schenectady.

The project's main goals are:

- 1) Connect local farms to a food insecure neighborhood to provide affordable food to low income residents.
- 2) Provide employment and economic development opportunities for low income residents.
- 3) Provide additional markets for New York's farmers.
- 4) Promote healthy foods to help fight childhood obesity.

We already have a variety of healthy bread spreads and jams for sale. Check out [www.healthycommunityharvest.com/](http://www.healthycommunityharvest.com/) for a list of stores carrying it in the Capital District or to order online.

Hamilton Hill Food Processors will participate in job and skills training and youth development. The facility will also become a local food processing resource and shared use community kitchen.

Construction on the facility began in March and will be completed by mid June. The facility will offer a complete commercial kitchen, office space, food storage areas, and conference rooms. The facility is located at the Schenectady County Community Business Center at 920 Albany St.



Hamilton Hill Food Processors will fill a need for additional Community Shared Use Kitchens in New York. Currently there are only 12 in the entire state with only 2 accessible to residents of the North Eastern parts of the state. A shared use community kitchen provides small scale food entrepreneurs the space to prepare and process their own value-added food products

Hamilton Hill Food Processors will also provide technical and practical expertise to assist these entrepreneurs in starting a small scale food business. Hamilton Hill Food Processors will assist individuals navigate the state and federal requirements for food processing, assist in the following: recipe development, marketing, graphic design, nutritional analysis's, scientific analysis's product procurement, sales and distribution.

The idea of having a local food processing resource is very exciting. Hunger Action has already been approached by individuals who wish to take advantage of the kitchen. The kitchen will allow small food businesses and farmers the ability to create their own products without the typical large upfront costs associated with building a kitchen of one's own.

# FPWA Finds Weakened Safety Net

A new report by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA) reveals a weakened safety net system that is not sufficiently capturing many of the people in need.

“Despite an increase in the need for public assistance a year into a deep recession, the welfare rolls actually decreased in 2008 by over twenty thousand recipients,” stated Fatima Goldman, Executive Director. “One correlation we found is the significant increase in the rate of denials of applications for public assistance in the past decade, jumping from a 26% denial rate in 1999 to 42% in 2007.”

FPWA examined data over a 10-year period from the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance’s (OTDA) to assess the changes in number of applications, denial rates, withdrawal rates and case “churning” – welfare recipients cycled on and off welfare with repeated openings and closings of their cases.

The report found that welfare restructuring over the past decade has created a multitude of roadblocks that limit access to basic assistance. In specific:

- Despite a 35% increase in the number of applications comparing the years 1999 and 2007, the number of people receiving welfare decreased by 45% during that time period.

- Two factors contributing to the decline in caseloads since welfare reform are the increased rates of application denials and withdrawals statewide, despite an increase in overall welfare applications.

The FPWA report also examines the impact of welfare reform on the unemployed and low-income workers. Although welfare reform’s stated goal was

to promote self-sufficiency, results of its implementation in NY have largely been the contrary – leading to financial hardship, low-wage employment and a return to welfare.

The research also found that:

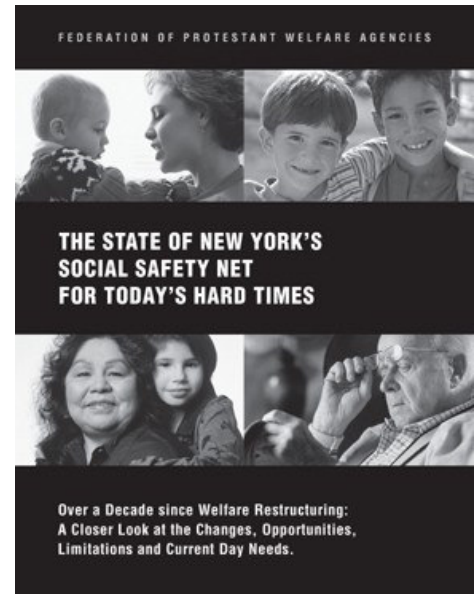
- The new sanctioning system under welfare reform impacted many families and led to increased hunger and homelessness as people’s benefits were cut and cases were closed. NYC currently has a quarter of its engageable caseload sanctioned or going through the sanctioning process.

- Welfare reform also strictly limited access to education and training despite the fact that education and training has proven to be the best route out of poverty. City University of New York (CUNY) lost 22,000 out of 30,000 of its students on welfare after enactment of the Welfare Reform Act.

- Even those who were successfully placed into jobs were earning very low wages. In NYC, the average wage of welfare recipients was \$8.30/hour in 2007. (statewide average was \$8.50).

- Many have had to return to welfare. During the period from 2003 to 2008, between 21% and 30% of NY’s closed public assistance cases were individuals who had left public assistance for greater than one month, and then returned to full public assistance status.

Despite the return on investment vocational training and education provides, NY has struggled to improve its outcomes. Though the federal law allows up to 30% of the participating welfare caseload to be in vocational education, NYS has only 9% of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)



population in this activity, and only 14% of the population is engaged in any type of education and training activity. And limiting access to education and training subsequently limits earning potential. The average wage for someone without a high school/GED degree is \$22,256, whereas with a high school/GED degree it is \$31,408, with an associate’s degree it is \$38,480, and with a B.A./B.S. it is \$51,324.

“My story with welfare started as a domestic violence survivor who had no family or support in this new country. I was in crisis, and I knew that there was no other way for me and my daughter to survive. As an immigrant with little English, I faced the reality of being homeless with no money, job or any skills. I needed assistance to stabilize my family. I also wanted to learn English, get an education and a career so that I could take care of myself and my daughter,” stated Jamila Alhada, a single mother who currently received public assistance.

# Faith Groups: Health Care is A Moral Right

More than 300 people attended a single payer health care forum in Albany on March 29th. The event was initiated by The Presbyterian Church.

Co Sponsors of the event included: Albany Presbytery, Capital Area Council of Churches, Interdenominational Ministers Conference, Single Payer New York, Capital District Area Labor Federation, Capital District Alliance for Universal Healthcare, Solidarity Committee, Hunger Action Network of NYS and Faith and Hunger Network



The keynote speaker was Congressman John Conyers (D-Michigan), the lead sponsor of HR 676, the US National Health Care Act, Single Payer Medicare. The bill, which would replace private health insurance with a single public financing system to provide comprehensive coverage for everyone in the nation, has the most support of any universal health care proposal now in Congress. It also is the plan that is most favored by the American public, doctors, nurses and researchers.

Single payer legislation is also pending in both houses of the NYS Legislature

and a state study on various universal health care options is due shortly after the budget is released. A majority of Assembly members and a majority of Democratic Senators have sponsored single payer legislation; Gov. Paterson was a sponsor as a member of the State Senate. A state funded study on various universal health care options is due shortly after the budget is released.

The groups urged President Obama and Congress to reject a Massachusetts style plan that mandates that individuals purchase health insurance.

”America deserves the health benefits offered to the people of every other country in the industrialized world, all medically necessary care and freedom from the fear of economic ruin due to illness. The bottom line is that single payer is the one proposal that guarantees quality, affordable health care to every American. This would also be a great benefit to our economy in our time of crisis, helping to control costs for taxpayers, consumers and employers,” said Mike Keenan, President of the Troy Area Labor Council.

Single payer merely means that one program pays all bills, like Medicare does for senior citizens. It eliminates the paperwork, high administrative costs and profits of the for profit private insurance system. An article in the New England Journal of Medicine concluded the single payer approach would save \$350 billion a year in costs; somewhat smaller savings estimates have been made by the Congressional Budget Office. A study done for the State of California estimated that a state single payer plan would reduce health costs by \$38 billion annually over a ten-year period.

President-elect Obama has also been a

supporter of single payer health care in the past and touted its benefits during his election campaign. While he said recently that he would enact single payer if he were “starting from scratch,” he has so far failed to put the issue on the table as part of his forums on health care.

The federal single payer bill (HR 676) has gained the support of 94 representatives in the last session of the US House, 480 union bodies, 39 state AFL-CIO’s (including NY’s), 117 Central Labor Councils, 20 international unions, the US Conference of Mayors, the Houses of Representatives in Kentucky, New Hampshire and NY (State Assembly), and hundreds more cities, counties, faith groups and organizations. Cong. Tonko is a sponsor in the new session. (72 sponsors have re-signed in Congress this session, with more being added every week. NY sponsors so far include Clarke, Engel, Hinchey, Maloney, Massa, Meeks, Nadler, Tonko, Velazquez).

A recent national survey by Indiana University of 2,193 doctors found almost 60% in favor of national health insurance (NHI) — a 10 percent increase in support since 2002. A March 2007 poll by CBS/ NY Times found that 64 percent of respondents said the government should guarantee health insurance for all; 27 percent said it should not. An overwhelming majority in the poll said the health care system needed fundamental change or total reorganization.

”America’s health care system is in deep trouble. Nearly 50 million Americans are currently without health insurance, more than 75 million went without insurance for some length of time within the past two years, and tens of millions

continued on next page



more have inadequate coverage. More than 18,000 Americans die annually due to a lack of insurance,” stated Mark Dunlea, Executive Director of Hunger Action Network. A 2008 study published in the journal *Health Affairs* concluded that as many as 101,000 deaths a year could be prevented by ensuring that all patients receive quality care in a timely manner.

The U. S. spends 16% of gross domestic product (GDP) on health care (\$7,129 per capita), twice what any other industrialized nation spends, yet ranks 37th in performance according to the World Health Organization. We lag behind other industrialized countries in life expectancy and infant mortality. Health care bills cause over 50% of bankruptcies and three out of four of those bankrupted by medical bills had health insurance.

The reason the US spends more and gets less than the rest of the world is because we have a patchwork system of for-profit payers. Private insurers necessarily waste health dollars on things that have nothing to do with care: overhead, underwriting, billing, sales and marketing departments as well as huge profits and exorbitant executive pay. Doctors and hospitals must maintain costly administrative staffs to deal with the bureaucracy. Combined, this needless administration consumes one-third (31 percent) of Americans’ health dollars.

The groups urged President-elect Obama to reject the idea of mandating that individuals purchase insurance. The recent insurance mandate in Massachusetts is already running into problems due to higher taxpayer costs than anticipated; inadequate coverage being offered; and many residents deciding to pay the penalty rather than buying insurance they can’t afford.

”We’ve done many experiments tweaking private health insurance. It doesn’t work. Two decades of state level reform efforts have demonstrated that mandate plans don’t reduce costs or the number of uninsured. They add bureaucracy and regulation, not healthcare value. We’ve done an experiment with national health insurance. It works. Medicare is not perfect, but Americans with Medicare are happier with their insurance than those with private insurance. Doctors have less hassle getting paid by Medicare than by private insurers,” added Dr. Paul Sorum, Chairperson of the Capital District chapter of the Physicians for a National Health Program.

Variants of the mandate model, first proposed by Richard Nixon, were passed with great fanfare in Massachusetts (1988), Oregon (1989) and Washington State (1993). All failed. As costs soared, legislators backed off from enforcing the mandates or funding new coverage for the poor. Massachusetts’ recent reform, which largely excuses employers from the mandate but imposes steep fines on the uninsured, appears poised to follow a similar path. Of the middle-income uninsured that are required to pay the full premium for coverage, few have signed up. Meanwhile, the state has already announced a \$147 million shortfall in funding for subsidies for the poor.

”We can’t afford to include bloated administrative overhead and profit in universal coverage. Administrative costs in

the for-profit health insurance system consume nearly one-third of our health care spending. We will never have enough money to provide everyone with decent care until we eliminate private insurance, the main source of waste and inadequate coverage,” said Dr. Richard Propp, Chair of the Capital District Alliance for Universal Healthcare.

”Single payer reduces administrative costs and provides an infrastructure to supports chronic disease management, an emphasis on primary care and the use of electronic medical records. The fragmented private insurance system created the perverse incentives that have set us so far behind other countries in these areas. Mandate proposals preserve the fragmentation,” Propp concluded.

Under a single-payer system, all Americans would be covered for all medically necessary services, including: doctor, hospital, long-term care, mental health, dental, vision, prescription drug and medical supply costs. Patients would regain free choice of doctor and hospital, and doctors would regain autonomy over patient care.

Physicians would be paid fee-for-service according to a negotiated formulary or receive salary from a hospital or non-profit HMO / group practice. Hospitals would receive a global budget for operating expenses. Health facilities and expensive equipment purchases would be managed by regional health planning boards.

A single-payer system would be financed by eliminating private insurers and recapturing their administrative waste. Modest new taxes would replace premiums and out-of-pocket payments currently paid by individuals and business. Costs would be controlled through negotiated fees, global budgeting and bulk purchasing.

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**Please make checks payable to and return to Hunger Action Network of NYS, 275 State St., Albany NY 12210**

## **Hunger Action Starts EFP Caucus**

In an effort to increase communication and collaboration amongst the state's emergency feeding programs, Hunger Action Network is organizing a statewide EFP caucus.

The caucus will offer EFPs the opportunity to share problems, strategize po-

tential solutions, and it will help us all get a clearer idea of the ongoing concerns that EFPs face. This will include strengthening the EFP voice in how best to spend the \$30 million plus we get from the state for emergency food (HPNAP).

We plan to form a listserv and to organize regional and statewide meetings (via conference call and in person).

If you are interested in participating in the caucus please contact Deb Catozzi (518)434-7371 ext 3 or [dcatozzi@hungeractionnys.org](mailto:dcatozzi@hungeractionnys.org).