

Dear Friends:

It has been 17 years since New York State lawmakers last raised the welfare grant. The basic welfare grant is still \$291 a month for a family of 3. The welfare shelter allowance - despite more than 20 years of litigation where the courts have ruled it is illegally low - still falls way below the real cost of housing.

We are asking Governor Spitzer to correct this shameful situation by raising the basic welfare grant in the state budget he will release at the end of January 2008. If he restored the basic grant to its purchasing power in 1990, it would come to \$475 a month.

To draw attention to the problem of low welfare benefits, we are asking state officials and concerned New York residents to take the Public Assistance Challenge - to live on the welfare grant for one week, starting Jan. 1. (You can then join us at the annual People's State of the State Rally on Tues. Jan. 8 at the State Capitol at noon.)

Now quite a few people have thrown up their hands when they have looked at the Public Assistance Challenge, exclaiming "it is impossible to live on what welfare gives you." Yes, it is impossible, but more than half a million New Yorkers are forced to do so.

Even if you decide you can't possibly exist for even a week on the welfare grant, we hope you will still take the challenge. Sit down each day with your family and discuss what things you would have to cut out of life that day if you lived on welfare. Even that process will be an eye-opener.

Ask your state legislator to take the Public Assistance Challenge. And when they tell you it is impossible, say that's the point, that's why we need you to tell the Governor to raise the grant.

If you would like to participate in the challenge (even as an exercise) please let us know by contacting Mark Dunlea, Hunger Action Network of NYS, dunleamark@aol.com, 518 434-7371 xt 1#, 275 State St., Albany NY 12210. www.hungeractionnys.org. Groups can also order postcards on the welfare grant to send to Governor Spitzer.

PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CHALLENGE: CAN YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIVE ON A PUBLIC ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR A WEEK?

New York's public assistance grant has not been increased for 17 years. Families dependent on public assistance are asked to survive on a grant that is less than half the federal poverty line. In order to bring public attention to the plight of New York's poorest families, we are asking public officials, clergy, media personalities, and others to try to live for one week spending no more than the amount allowed by the public assistance grant.

Family Size	<u>One</u>	<u>Two</u>	<u>Three</u>	<u>Four</u>	<u>Five</u>	<u>Six</u>	<u>Seven</u>	<u>Eight</u>
Monthly Amount	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$200.20	\$231.49	\$268.99	\$306.84	\$338.49	\$376.74
Weekly Amount	\$25.85	\$41.31	\$46.20	\$53.42	\$62.07	\$70.81	\$78.11	\$86.94

Public Assistance Challenge Guidelines:

What are families expected to pay for with their "basic allowance?"

- Transportation - all non-work related transportation.

- ❑ Personal Care Items - toilet paper, dishwashing soap, deodorant, disposable diapers, toothpaste, housecleaning supplies, etc.
- ❑ Clothing - obviously we can survive for a week without buying new clothing but please include in your expenses the cost of laundry and dry cleaning. Most public assistance recipients do not own their own washers and dryers so please calculate the cost of each load of wash as if you had to use a public laundromat. (For Saratoga Springs, \$1.75 per load of wash; 8 minutes per quarter for the dryer so you can estimate about \$3.00 per load plus detergent. This would probably be higher in New York City.)
- ❑ Meals away from home --- any fast food, coffee, etc.
- ❑ Items not Eligible for Food Stamps: Households CANNOT use food stamp benefits to buy: Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco; Any nonfood items, such as pet foods; soaps, paper products; household supplies; vitamins and medicines; food that will be eaten in the store; or hot foods.
- ❑ School supplies, books, newspapers
- ❑ Parental contributions for school trips, Girl or Boy Scout troop dues, religious contributions
- ❑ Telephone service, cell phone fees, internet access, monthly cable fees, pay phone charges - these can be divided by 4.33 to calculate a weekly amount
- ❑ Co-pays for prescription drugs; doctors visits, etc.

Items which may be covered by other allowances and food stamps and therefore should not be included in your daily expenditures:

- ❑ Rent - although many families are forced to use part of their basic allowance for rent, we will assume that your shelter allowance covers your rent or mortgage
- ❑ Food - assuming you spend no more than the USDA "Thrifty Food Plan" amount for food
- ❑ Home energy - including heat
- ❑ Work-related transportation

Notes:

The public assistance "grant" in New York is actually made up of a number of allowances, many of which vary not only by family size but also by county of residence and fuel used to heat your home. Most families on public assistance also receive food stamp benefits. In order to simplify this exercise we will focus only on the basic allowance (sometimes referred to as the Food & Other Allowance or the PreAdd Allowance) that varies only by family size. Since the food stamp benefit calculation assumes that a portion of the basic allowance is used to purchase food, the food stamp expected contribution towards food expenditures has been subtracted from the basic allowances used in this exercise.

Family Size	<u>One</u>	<u>Two</u>	<u>Three</u>	<u>Four</u>	<u>Five</u>	<u>Six</u>	<u>Seven</u>	<u>Eight</u>
Monthly Pre Add Allowance	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$238.00	\$307.00	\$379.00	\$438.00	\$498.00	\$558.00
Expected Food Stamp Contribution	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$37.80	\$75.51	\$110.01	\$131.16	\$159.51	\$181.26
Net Monthly Pre Add Allowance	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$200.20	\$231.49	\$268.99	\$306.84	\$338.49	\$376.74

Note: Expected food stamp contribution was calculated as 30% of income after subtracting the maximum "excess shelter deduction" of \$431 and the standard deduction which ranges from \$134 to \$191 per month depending on family size. Some elderly recipients may have a lower expected contribution because their shelter deduction is not subject to the cap.

Limiting the exercise to the basic allowance makes a HUGE assumption --- that a family is able to pay all rent with the shelter allowance, pay all domestic utilities with the Home Energy Allowance and the Supplemental Home Energy Allowance, pay heating costs with the Fuel for Heating Allowance and cover food costs with the food stamp benefits plus its expected contribution. Since these other allowances and food stamp benefits have not kept up with the increases in living costs, most families dependent on cash assistance are forced to use a part of their basic allowance to cover these other costs and have even less to spend.

Nevertheless, we believe that the basic allowance is so inadequate that even if a family does not have to use any of it to cover rent, utilities and heat AND the family receives the maximum food stamp benefit, it would be impossible to cover basic family needs with this meager amount. Therefore we are challenging folks to give this a try.

Public Assistance New Year's Challenge

___ Yes, I will participate in the PA Challenge on Jan. 1, 2009

Name(s) _____

Organization / Office _____

Address _____ Town/City _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ email _____

Return to: Hunger Action Network, 275 State St., Albany NY 12210; 518 434-7371 xt1#; fax 434-7390, dunleamark@aol.com