

Priority Issue: Hunger and Shelter 2012

United Ways across Ohio, as elsewhere, have traditionally been leaders in advocating for those among us who are hungry and cold. Even as we move toward making long-term impact in our communities, we recognize that food and shelter must come before addressing any kind of permanent change in an individual's life.

United Way Worldwide serves as secretariat and fiscal agent for the Emergency Food and Shelter Board Program (EFSP) and has been at the forefront for many years. The United Way of Ohio acts as the chair and fiscal agent for the Ohio State Set-Aside Committee for the Emergency Food and Shelter Board while many local United Ways coordinate and distribute EFSP funds throughout Ohio's communities, demonstrating our commitment.

Challenges in our current economy have created levels of crisis not seen for many years. The need for emergency assistance has skyrocketed with the present levels of unemployment and rising costs. Ohioans previously financially stable are now struggling to keep up with costs for food, utilities and health care. Current statistics from the Children's Defense Fund, Children's Hunger Alliance, 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies and PCSAO show:

- Almost 22 percent or more than one in five of Ohio's children lives in poverty and half of those live in extreme poverty. It is nearly 1 in 2 in the Youngstown area.
- In Ohio, 25 percent of families report not having enough money to buy the food they need.
- About 1.6 million people (13.5% of all Ohioans) received food support benefits from Food and Nutrition Services during fiscal year 2010. Most of these recipients (81%) were not receiving public assistance, indicating that many of them may be among the working poor.
- Nearly 40 percent of Ohio households presently earn less than \$35,000 annually.
- It currently takes an hourly rate of \$13.39 in a 40-hour work week to afford the Fair Market Rent of \$696 per month for a two-bedroom apartment in Ohio. As a result, 44 percent of renters in Ohio cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment.

In addition, Ohioans are losing their homes at an alarming rate, causing shelter usage and drain on other supportive services to climb. According to Ohio Supreme Court data, home foreclosures increased from 59,041 in 2004 to 85,483 claims in 2010. In a 2011 statewide "point in time count" from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, 13,003 Ohioans were homeless in a single night, which is a 4.8 percent increase from 2010, and whole family homelessness increased by 8.4 percent over the same period. These figures do not adequately represent the number of people who experience homelessness over the course of an entire year, which is much greater.

Although we understand that Ohio lawmakers are working diligently to bring jobs to our state, lower healthcare costs and foreclosure rates and increase wages, those solutions will take time. Legislation and funding for emergency food and shelter is vital to stabilize our population until these issues are resolved.

Ohio United Way requests:

- That the Legislature maintain current funding of \$12 million per year for the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.
- Give serious consideration to increasing funding to \$17 million per year for the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.
- The Legislature establishes a permanent line item for this funding to protect emergency food assistance in Ohio now and in the future.
- The Legislature maintain the current funding of \$53 million per year for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund for emergency shelter and housing.
- The Legislature maintain that the county recording fees continue to be directed into the Ohio Housing Trust Fund.