

Connecticut's Plan for Reducing Childhood Poverty

Prepared by the Connecticut Commission on Children

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The High Cost of Poverty

- Children in poverty are more likely to have the following health problems:

low birth weight

bacterial meningitis

infectious diseases

asthma

anemia

poor cognitive development

stunted growth

obesity

missed immunizations

hunger/food insecurity

lead poisoning



The High Cost of Poverty

- ❑ Children in poverty are up to three times more likely to die during childhood.
- ❑ Children who are poor are more likely to lack housing, adequate food, and health care, and to receive lower scores in math and reading tests.
- ❑ By the time they begin formal schooling, children in low-income families already lag significantly behind their more affluent peers – academically, socially, and physically.



The High Cost of Poverty

- Child poverty is also very costly for businesses, consumers and the state:
 - Every year a child spends in poverty costs society \$11,800 in lost future productivity.
 - The Connecticut labor force is projected to lose as much as \$1.1 billion in future productive capacity for every year that the current number of Connecticut children live in poverty.



Strategic, Bipartisan Policies

Connecticut has:

- enacted legislation establishing a state goal to reduce child poverty by 50% by 2014.
- created a Child Poverty Council to report annually on strategies and gains in child poverty reduction.
- combined the State Prevention Council and the Child Poverty Council to emphasize prevention strategies rather than crisis models, so children are reached at the earliest stages of development.



Strategic, Bipartisan Policies

Connecticut also has:

- brought in national experts to 1) review 67 recommendations from the Child Poverty and Prevention Council and 2) come to a consensus, across party lines, on best and proven practices to meet the 2014 target. (More on those later.)
- agreed to create a results-based accountability (RBA) model for all state contracts related to poverty reduction, thereby embedding accountability and outcomes on the state and local levels.
- developed a community-state plan to embed proven strategies with an untapped federal funding stream from SNAP E&T, a federal match program. (More on that later.)



What the Experts Told Us

- The Child Poverty and Prevention Council compiled 67 recommendations for meeting the state's goal of reducing child poverty by 50 percent by 2014.
- To help prioritize the recommendations, the Council assembled a panel of nonpartisan poverty experts from around the country.



What the Experts Told Us

The panel included:

- ❑ **Larry Aber**, Ph.D. – Professor of Applied Psychology and Public Policy at New York University; Member, New York City Commission on Economic Opportunity
- ❑ **Rebecca Blank**, Ph.D. – Professor of Public Policy and Economics and Co-Director of the National Poverty Center at the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan
- ❑ **Rucker Johnson**, Ph.D. – Professor at the Goldman School of Public Policy, University of California, Berkeley
- ❑ **Mark Greenberg**, J.D. – Executive Director, Task Force on Poverty for the Center for American Progress, Washington D.C.
- ❑ **Ron Haskins**, Ph.D. – Co-Director of the Center on Children and Families at the Brookings Institution; Senior Consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore
- ❑ **Clifford Johnson** – Executive Director, Institute for Youth, Education and Families, National League of Cities, Washington D.C.



What the Experts Told Us

The panel reviewed the recommendations using three criteria:

1. Is there hard evidence that the step would have a positive impact?
2. If yes, is there evidence the step would be cost-effective?
3. Would the step help reduce poverty within the 2014 timeframe?



What the Experts Told Us

- The panel identified four major policy areas that met the criteria:
 - A. Family income and earnings potential
 - B. Education
 - C. Income safety net
 - D. Family structure and support.

- Within those four, it identified 13 specific policies...



What the Experts Told Us

A. Family income and earning potential

- Income tax-based assistance for workers, including a refundable state earned income tax credit to supplement the earnings of low-wage parents.
- Increased access to affordable child care, including subsidies for all low-income families, at least up to 200% of the poverty line
- Expand rental assistance, structured in ways to increase poor families' income and their incentives to work.



What the Experts Told Us

B. Education

- High-quality early education can narrow the poverty and race gaps in school achievement. Full-day, full-year preschool and full-year K-3 would allow more parents to work their way out of poverty.
- Increasing the distribution of good teachers to low-income schools would help close the achievement gap.
- Increasing cash assistance and other forms of support for post-secondary education pays off in the long run.



What the Experts Told Us

c. Income safety net

- A growing proportion of single mothers are neither employed nor receiving cash assistance. The state should consider helping the parents least able to sustain employment, regardless of whether they receive TANF.
- Many low-income families don't receive the income supports for which they're eligible. More outreach to them is needed.



What the Experts Told Us

D. Family structure and support

- Enroll more youth in programs shown to reduce teen births.
- Review the tax code to remove marriage penalties
- Amend welfare programs to avoid abrupt benefit changes.
- Adopt programs that help males complete high school and enter the workforce.



What the Experts Told Us

- In response to the experts' recommendations, the Child Poverty and Prevention Council:
 - selected target populations: children aged birth to 5, late teens and early adults (16-24), and working poor families.
 - adopted 12 priority recommendations in four major categories, Family Income and Earnings, Education, Income Safety Net, and Family Structure and Support.
 - hired the nationally respected **Urban Institute** to create an economic model of which priority recommendations from these four categories, when combined, would have the greatest impact on child poverty reduction.



What the Experts Told Us

- The Urban Institute created an economic model of Connecticut and found that the state could **reduce its child poverty by 35 percent** if it made five policy changes...



What the Experts Told Us

- The Urban Institute's recommendations:
 1. For families with incomes of less than 50 percent of the state median, provide child-care subsidies. This would increase employment as well as reduce family expenses.
 2. Provide enough education and training programs to result in associate degrees for half of the adults with high school diplomas, GED's for all high school dropouts, wage increases of 20 percent of those already employed, and a 6% increase in employment for the unemployed.



What the Experts Told Us

- The Urban Institute's recommendations:
 3. Increase participation to 85 percent in safety-net programs like SNAP (food stamps), LIHEAP, WIC, subsidized housing, and Medicaid;
 4. Ensure full payment of child-support awards; and
 5. Provide case management and a wage supplement for recent TANF leavers.



A New Tool: SNAP E&T

- **It's a federal program that offers a 50-cents-on-the-dollar match to organizations – public or private – that help food stamp recipients find regular employment or increase wages.**
- These expenses can involve adult literacy, securing equivalency diplomas, post-secondary education, transportation, child care...



A New Tool: SNAP E&T

- As long as federal criteria are met, funds may also go toward fatherhood initiatives, teen-pregnancy reduction, re-entry programs, and stay-in-school programs...
- Or provide child-care services at the same rate of reimbursement as the Childcare Block Grant, for the hours a food stamp recipient is receiving employability services.



A New Tool: SNAP E&T

- Who may receive matching funds?
 - State and local agencies
 - Nonprofit organizations
 - Community colleges
 - Other education and training organizations
 - Prison re-entry programs



Model legislation utilizing SNAP E&T

- Connecticut participates in SNAP E&T thanks to the legislature's adoption in 2008 of Public Act 08-161, which:
 - Creates a fiscal mechanism for communities to come together and participate in SNAP E&T. It brings in community colleges as stakeholders, along with business, higher education, and municipalities.
 - Defines how state and community can use the federal match funds. Funds must go toward legislated child-poverty goals and proven strategies for reducing child poverty.
 - Assigns administration of SNAP E&T in Connecticut to the state Department of Social Services (DSS), which must give priority to providers who utilize strategies aligned with the Child Poverty and Prevention Council goals and findings.



A New Tool: SNAP E&T

- So who's participating in SNAP E&T?
 - By October 2009, applications had been submitted by 13 collaboratives, representing 94 Connecticut cities and towns – or more than half the communities in the state.
 - The total in federal matching funds they could receive: an estimated **\$8.25 million**.



A New Tool: SNAP E&T

- The 94 towns and cities participating as of October 2009:

Ansonia
Ashford
Avon
Barkhamsted
Bethel
Bethlehem
Bridgeport
Bridgewater
Bristol
Brookfield
Brooklyn
Burlington
Canaan
Canterbury
Canton
Chaplin
Colebrook
Columbia
Cornwall
Coventry
Cromwell
Danbury
Darien
Derby

East Haddam
East Hampton
East Hartford
Eastford
Farmington
Goshen
Greenwich
Hampton
Hartford
Hartland
Kent
Killingly
Litchfield
Mansfield
Meriden
Middlebury
Middletown
Milford
Monroe
Morris
New Britain
New Fairfield
New Hartford
New Haven

New London
New Milford
Newtown
Norfolk
North Canaan
Norwalk
Norwich
Old Saybrook
Orange
Oxford
Plainfield
Plainville
Plymouth
Pomfret
Portland
Putnam
Redding
Ridgefield
Rocky Hill
Roxbury
Salisbury
Scotland
Seymour
Sharon

Shelton
Sherman
Southbury
Stamford
Sterling
Thomaston
Thompson
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For more information, contact:

The Connecticut Commission on Children

18-20 Trinity Street
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

(860) 240-0290
www.cga.ct.gov/coc

