

## OTHER VOICES

# Child Poverty Will Cost State

By Karen Jarmoc

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Connecticut is confronting significant challenges. Increasing job loss, homelessness, and hunger are part of our state's portfolio. We've overcome enormous challenges before, and we will prevail over this one. But our children will suffer the consequences well past the fiscal recovery.

This week, the newly formed Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession convened at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford to begin its work to stymie the tidal wave of harm which may engulf the young people in our state as a result of the recession. Connecticut is the first state in the nation to step forward to initiate a comprehensive and thoughtful response.

According to a recently released report issued by The Foundation for Child Development and Youth Well-Being and Duke University, the recession will send between 2.6 million and 3.3 million children into poverty, costing American taxpayers \$1.7 trillion. The estimated economic impact on Connecticut, according to a report issued by First Focus of Washington D.C. entitled, "The Cost of Doing Nothing, The Economic Impact of Recession Induced Child Poverty," will be in the millions annually. Policy analysts from both organizations indicate that virtually all the progress made in children's economic well-being since 1975 is likely to be wiped out by the downturn.

Analysts further expect that due to the recession:

- An additional 35,000 Connecticut children will fall into poverty,



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- As adults, these children will earn an average of \$19,000 less annually than their Connecticut peers who avoided poverty,
- Their health will worsen. By age 37, they'll be 20 percent less likely than their peers to report being in very good health,
- The economic cost to Connecticut from the forgone earnings and poorer health status of these children will run to \$800 million per year.

Already, the evidence is staggering. Here in Connecticut, more children are hungry, homeless, and living in families under tremendous stress. Our state served an unprecedented 33,000 children free summer lunch in 2009, up from 31,000 last year, according to the Department of Education. A staggering 25% of those using food pantries in Connecticut are working families. Additionally, few things hurt children more than housing instability and homelessness. Just in terms of academic performance, they increase the chances of repeating a grade or dropping out of high school.

One out of five Connecticut children under the age of 12 — 102,000 youngsters — are hungry or at risk of hunger. Food insecurity affects child development. Babies and toddlers from food-insecure families are 76 percent more likely to be at developmental risk than those from food-secure families.

In the past two years, increasing rates of infant mortality and low birth-weight infants, along with dropping rates of mothers receiving timely prenatal care during the first trimester, suggest that a once-positive Connecticut trend may be reversing direction, erasing three decades of improvement. Low birth weight costs our state \$195 million per year in preventable hospitalizations.

The bi-partisan Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession, includes representation from all pockets of our state as we work to ensure the future well-being of Connecticut children. Individuals from business, philanthropy, health-care, congressional and senate policy analysts, and child advocacy groups will assist in collecting data and making recommendations through the duration of the recession.

Specifically, the task force will:

- Review budget implications related to children and the recession.
- Identify trends and research resulting from the recession related to housing, employment, homelessness, child care, unemployment and make recommendations to the Speaker on appropriate budget and policy action,
- Host public hearings throughout Connecticut on this important issue,

- Recommend efficiencies and offer ways to streamline services and access points for families,
- Report quarterly to the Speaker and leadership of the Legislature on key findings and,
- Identify appropriate stimulus opportunities.

We cannot turn back the realities thrust upon so many Connecticut families by the collapse of our economy. What we can do is take action and work to turn the tide to decrease the number of children and families who fall into a lifetime of poverty.

To learn more about the Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession, visit:  
[www.cga.ct.gov/coc/taskforce.htm](http://www.cga.ct.gov/coc/taskforce.htm).

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*State Representative Karen Jarmoc (D-Enfield) is co-chair of the legislature's "Children in the Recession" task force.*