

State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



Speaker's Task Force on Children in the Recession

Legislative Office Building, Suite 4100
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.cga.ct.gov/coc/taskforce.htm

Meeting Minutes

**Wednesday, October 28, 2009
10 AM, Room 2-C, Legislative Office Building, Hartford**

Present: Representative Karen Jarmoc (co-chair); Representative Diana Urban (co-chair); Senator Edward Meyer; Representative Cathy Abercrombie; Senator Robert Kane; Representative Michelle Cook; Representative Chris Lyddy; Elaine Zimmerman, Connecticut Commission on Children; Jeanne Milstein, state Office of the Child Advocate; David Fink, Partnership for Strong Communities; Lucy Nolan, End Hunger Connecticut!; Maggie Adair, Connecticut Association for Human Services; Jim Gatling, New Opportunities; Erika Tindill, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence; Annie Chittenden, CT SafePet; Jamey Bell, Connecticut Voices for Children; Mark Masselli, Community Health Center Inc.; Lynda Trebisacci, parent advocate; Maria Mojica, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; Susan B. Dunn, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut; Amy Morales, Alcorn Family Resource Center; David Radcliffe, Meriden Children's First; Carol Walter, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness; Eva Bunnell, Congressman John Larson's office; Karen Weseliza, Congressman Joseph Courtney's office; Amy Lappos, Congressman Jim Himes' office; Hilda Santiago, Congressman Christopher Murphy's office; Elaine Werner, U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman's office; Lee Reynolds, U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd's office.

1. Welcome and opening comments

Representatives Karen Jarmoc and Diana Urban, co-chairs of the task force, recapped what was learned at the first meeting in September: Connecticut is the first state in the country to form a legislative task force to examine the impact of the recession on children and youth. It is estimated that the economic cost to Connecticut from lost earnings and

poorer child health is \$800 million per year. Because of this recession, 35,000 more children will enter poverty.

2. Format and schedule for public hearings

The goal will be to hold at least one hearing in each of the state's five congressional districts. The task force hopes Congress members will participate in the hearings held in their districts.

Each hearing will last about two hours and be held in the early evening and on a Saturday, to enable working parents and students to attend. The task force hopes to hear from families, service providers, and business leaders.

The hearings will focus on:

- Streamlining services
- Employment, including youth employment
- Making families stronger during a time of stress
- Food and nutrition
- Empowering communities
- What should be waived during this crisis to help families and children?
- Youth and planning for college
- The American Dream: Can We Keep It?

3. Narrowing the Lens from the Nation to Connecticut

The first meeting of the task force looked primarily at the national picture. This meeting focused on Connecticut's children, through the following panel discussion:

A. Hunger

Lucy Nolan, executive director of End Hunger Connecticut!, and Gloria McAdam, president and CEO of Foodshare, discussed the current state of food insecurity in Connecticut, what they expect to happen as the recession progresses, and possible solutions.

Problem: Currently, 122,000 Connecticut households, or 8.8% of the total, are "food insecure." Another 45,000, or 3.2%, are "very low food secure." The 211 info-line received 6,000 calls in 2008 regarding food and nutrition questions; this year, it already has received 9,000. Food pantries have seen a 30% increase in requests for food over last year, while donations have remained flat.

On July 1, the income limit for participating in the SNAP program was raised from 130% of the federal poverty level to 185%. The SNAP program is the most efficient

means in fighting food insecurity. Although private charities and volunteer programs such as food drives are helpful the SNAP program is by far the largest provider, providing more than 60% of all food to families in need in Connecticut. The SNAP program (a federally funded program) also puts dollars back into the local economy. Research shows that every \$1 of SNAP money spent results in \$2 worth of local economic activity.

Despite the success of the SNAP program in Connecticut many that qualify are not participating. It is estimated that 55% of families that are eligible are not participating. Connecticut could receive more \$300 million to assist these families from the federal government.

SNAP is being underutilized because there is misinformation on who qualifies, the application is complex, and it is difficult for some to travel to the regional Department of Social Services (DSS) offices.

Along with SNAP, there are many other federal food assistance programs that families are not utilizing, even though they qualify. Specifically, many families see DSS as a major obstacle to participating in these government programs. The Department has not been able to efficiently handle the current work load. DSS is moving to modernize its application process, but it will take time.

Solutions: Streamlining the application process for federal and state programs, creating more access to DSS regional offices, doing more and better outreach, and increasing efficiency of DSS in processing applications and providing services.

B. Housing and Homelessness

David Fink, policy and communications director, Partnership for Strong Communities, and Carol Walter, executive director, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

Problem: An estimated 4,154 people were experiencing homelessness in Connecticut on the night of January 28, 2009. 801 total children were counted along with their families. 793 children in families and 17 unaccompanied youth were counted in emergency shelter or transitional housing programs; 8 children in families and 1 unaccompanied youth were counted in locations unintended for human habitation.

Homelessness has shown to be a lagging indicator in a recession. Meaning at this time during the recession we have not seen the worst of it and that even when the recession improves homelessness will still be a problem. Currently a majority of people homeless have young dependent children. It is estimated that Connecticut could see a 30% increase in homelessness because of the recession.

Currently homeless shelters are at or above capacity. Because of this there is not any room for an emergency shelter system. Thankfully the stimulus package did provide 17 million to Connecticut for Homelessness prevention. Expanding homeless prevention programs are important for keeping children from being homeless.

A large problem with housing in Connecticut is that there is a shortage of supply. CT is the 4th worst in building new housing. 26% of CT households are burdened by their housing costs. Which means that 30% of household budget is spent on housing. Because of the lack of housing many families are forced to live in unhealthy conditions such as housing with lead or asbestos.

Solutions include: Creating more safe and affordable housing in communities across CT, increasing access to child care programs so more families can work, and increasing homelessness prevention programs.

C. Family Violence

Jeanne Milstein, state of Connecticut Child Advocate, and Erika Tindill, executive director, Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Problem: The recession will cause children to suffer harder in the area of family violence. Nationally we are seeing an increase in family violence especially in areas such as neglect because families are unable to provide basic needs to children. There is also the possibility for the recession to result in increased fatalities of children.

The most recent budget cuts funding for position in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to work with families that are victims of domestic violence. Governor Rell's most recent veto of HB 7006 will result in even more cuts to victims and their families. Specifically the cuts will eliminate judicial branch workers whose job is to assist the domestic victims in court.

Solutions: Family violence results in long term negative impacts on the family. Dealing with the trauma immediately when it happens can help negate the long term effects on children. Early intervention is critical. Individuals working around children such as teachers or child care workers need to be trained on how to recognize if abuse is occurring and how to respond to it.

D. Family Health Care and Low Birth Weight Babies

Dr. Carol Stone, Family Health Section, Department of Public Health

Problem: Children's health in regards to birth weight is also a lagging indicator. 250 deaths occurred per year from 2006 to 2008. Three fourths of those deaths were children 28 days old or less. There are huge disparities in who is affected by infant

morality and low birth weight from minority children to non-minority. Social economic factors are connected with low birth weight and infant mortality. Low birth weight can lead to infant mortality.

Solutions: The Department of Public Health has created a plan to diminish this problem. They have created action steps that can be implemented in the future. They are compiling a report they will share with the taskforce on the plan to counteract low birth weight. They are also preparing a report on how to solve the disparities in prenatal care. They just received 3.7 million from the federal government for a program to reduce low birth weight in Hartford.

4. Calendar of future meetings

The task force will meet again on the following dates, all at 10 a.m. at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford:

- Thursday, Nov. 19, in Room 2-E
- Thursday, Dec. 17, in Room 2-C
- Thursday, Jan. 21, in Room 2C

5. Work groups

Some of the work of the task force will be done by the following work groups:

- Budget: Review the budget and its implications, including federal stimulus dollars
- Hearings: Develop public hearings aligned with the Congressional districts
- Research: Identify research and trends to inform policy and Policy Package:
Develop comprehensive state policy package including efficiencies and streamlined processes to support families (express lane enrollment)
- RBA: Infuse results-based accountability into all work

Representatives Urban and Jarmoc will appoint chairs for each work group.

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