

## State Budget Increases Food Programs

After all was said and done in Harrisburg over July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, food and nutrition advocates across Pennsylvania heaved a huge sigh of relief. The General Assembly added \$1 million to the State Food Purchase Program (SFPP), bringing the total to \$17,450,000 for the fiscal year that began July 1<sup>st</sup>. It also added \$603,000 to the Farmers' Market Nutrition Program (FMNP), pushing that appropriation back up to \$2 million.

Deserving of credit are the many legislators from both parties who supported these increases. The leadership of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Mike Waugh (R-York) and Michael O'Pake (D-Berks), and of the House Agriculture Committee, Art Hershey (R-Chester) and Pete Daley (D-Washington), earned kudos for speaking up for these programs during budget deliberations.

Many pantry and cupboard volunteers, in collaboration with

regional food banks, contributed to this success. Bolstered by their own experience in serving neighbors in need, they picked up their telephones and put pencils to paper to raise awareness with local legislators on just how critical the situation had become.

The increase in the SFPP will be reflected in the Department of Agriculture grants that are made to each county. As a result, pantries and cupboards should see an increase of 7 percent in the food supply. This increase follows two consecutive years of cuts that - together with rising need - had caused many facilities to run short of food. The additional funding for the FMNP merely restores that

Program to its funding level of three years ago. According to Barry Shutt, Director of the Bureau of Food Distribution in the PA Department of Agriculture, it is enough to serve about as many WIC families and seniors as last summer but not enough to even begin whittling down the long waiting list.

With the economy still not rallying and the state losing good jobs faster than it gains them, a growing number of working families need the help of local food providers. Until the broader economic problem is adequately addressed, the increased appropriations provided by the General Assembly provide a critical safety net for people in need.

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## Keeping Democracy Alive

Our American democracy is designed to elevate and empower the will of the people. That's the theory. But for it to work, the people must vote.

Are you prepared to vote on November 2<sup>nd</sup>? How about the people you help? All it requires is a simple registration completed before October 4. You may request a Voter Registration Mail Application by calling 1-800-552-VOTE. Complete the form, sign it and mail it to your county's voter registration office. For more information, go to the PA Department of State website at [www.dos.state.pa.us](http://www.dos.state.pa.us).

Another way Americans can keep democracy alive is by speaking to their elected representatives between elections. For example, currently before the United States Senate is a bill (S. 2370) to raise the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$7.00 an hour. Nothing would do more to reduce hunger and food insecurity than passage of this bill. So contact senators Specter and Santorum and ask them to support S. 2370. You can reach them via a free FAX by going to Hunger Action's website at [www.pahunger.org](http://www.pahunger.org)

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## Federal Budget Prep Stalls

Congress has recessed for the summer, leaving most of its work on the next budget for September. Hardly anyone expects this mountain of work to be finished in time. Instead, Congress will keep the government running by passing a continuing resolution that funds programs at this year's level.

That would avoid disruption in most programs which, given the huge federal deficit, are not likely to receive an increase in any event. But the WIC Program, which is experiencing a squeeze due to a growing caseload and rising milk and cheese prices, could be harmed by the delay. The Bush Administration has requested an additional \$498 million for WIC (bringing the total to \$5.087 billion), and WIC advocates say even more will be needed. A continuing resolution based on this year's budget would leave WIC under-funded as it begins the new fiscal year.

Election-year politics is part of the reason Congress is far behind schedule. The push from the Bush White House to again *borrow* money for another tax cut also complicates the situation. There is strong bi-partisan support for extending middle class tax cuts and paying for them by raising revenue in other parts of the budget. But President Bush opposes these revenue measures and appears prepared for an election year showdown with fiscal conservatives.

Congress will recess again in October and during most of November. Thus, the budget for most federal programs may be finished by December or perhaps as late as February.

## Nutrition Educators Oppose FNS Plan

Nutrition educators are up in arms about a new proposal from the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to further restrict the way that information about healthy nutrition may be provided.

The strong reaction has been triggered by a May document that would require nutrition educators using Food Stamp Program (FSP) funds to focus their efforts first and foremost on "women with children who are Food Stamp Program participants." Children and youth would be considered a secondary audience under the proposed plan. Elderly persons, men and single adults would be a third priority. People who are low-income but not participating in the FSP would be a fourth priority. If implemented, this would cause a sharp narrowing of Pennsylvania's Nutrition Education Program. Currently nutrition educators may provide their services to persons with incomes up to the WIC Program level (185 percent of poverty) and are not required to give higher priority to certain categories of people.

The Food Trust, a Philadelphia group that is opposing the change, has identified some of the negative consequences that the Framework would bring to Pennsylvania:

- 250,000 children would lose nutrition education in their schools;
- Local nutrition programs that have demonstrated success in helping people would be forced to close; and
- Obesity-related health costs, currently costing PA over \$4 billion a year, would continue increasing.

Just Harvest, an advocacy group from Pittsburgh, pointed out that the only place where nutrition educators could target women on food stamps is the local food stamp office. That, it says, would be a mistake. "We fear that implementation of this Framework would draw county workers away from the basic Food Stamp Program, while at the same time limiting vulnerable people who may benefit from the (nutrition) information."

Hunger Action also has voiced criticism. In comments to FNS, it noted the General Accounting Office recently reviewed all FNS nutrition programs and found no need to more sharply target education services. Given this background, "it is tempting to conclude that the purposes of the proposed Framework are simply to cut back the current levels of service and reduce spending." That would be a pity "especially at a time when America faces an epidemic of overweight and obesity."

National groups also are opposing the change. For example, the Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors stated that most FSP nutrition education would simply cease rather than attempt to focus only on women who receive food stamps.

FNS expects to finalize the Framework in October and begin implementing it a year later. However, given the strong opposition to the proposal, it is likely to receive further review, especially if the Administration changes hands after the November election.

## Hunger Action Wins National Award

The Congressional Hunger Center has named PA Hunger Action as a recipient of its **Victory Against Hunger Awards** for 2004.

Congressman Tim Holden, who represents Lebanon, Dauphin and a part of Perry counties, nominated Hunger Action for the award. He stated: "Over the past five years Hunger Action has served the Commonwealth of PA through its sustained and persistent work to make the Food Stamp Program more accessible to eligible households. This work has been highly productive."

In making the award, the Congressional Hunger Center cited two Hunger Action achievements: a research project testing the relative effectiveness of telephone and face-to-face eligibility screening and work with DPW following passage of the 2002 Farm Bill to implement state administrative options to simplify and streamline the FSP.

Hunger Action is one of 26 organizations nationwide to receive the award. The Greater Philadelphia Coalition Against Hunger and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank also were honored.

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### *Democracy...from page 1*

At the state level, a bill currently before the House of Representatives (HB 2646) would give tax payers the opportunity to donate a part of their Personal Income Tax refund to fighting hunger. Sponsored by Representatives Ray Bunt (R-Montgomery) and Mike Sturla (D-Lancaster), the bill has been approved by the Finance Committee and now awaits action on the House floor. Contact your House member and push for quick action. You can use Hunger Action's website for that too.

## The Cost of Self-Sufficiency

The Self-Sufficiency Standard Report put out this June by PathWaysPA reveals the alarming gap between the federal poverty level and the earnings required to be self-sufficient in Pennsylvania. Even those households whose earnings place them well above the poverty level are unable to meet their families' basic needs.

For a family to be self-sufficient, it must be able to meet basic needs without having to choose between them and without public or private subsidies. To determine the cost of self-sufficiency, PathWaysPA looked at 70 different family types in each county in Pennsylvania. The expenses considered are housing, child care, food, transportation, health care, miscellaneous (clothing, shoes, paper products, diapers, over-the-counter medicines, household items, personal hygiene items, and telephone service) and taxes. For families with children, child care and housing are the largest cost items with food being the third.

The study concluded that a single adult in Allegheny County needs to earn \$8.07 an hour to be self-sufficient. An adult with a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$17.67 an hour, and a household with two adults, a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$10.32 an hour per adult. In Philadelphia County, a single adult needs to earn \$8.14 an hour, an adult with a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$18.35 an hour, and a household with two adults, a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$10.23 an hour per adult. In Warren County, a single adult needs to earn \$6.44 an hour, an adult with a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$12.14 an hour, and a household with two adults, a preschooler and one school-age child needs to earn \$7.73 an hour per adult.

The report shows it is virtually impossible to be self-sufficient on a minimum wage job, even in rural counties. These figures also show just how challenging it is for a single parent with multiple children to attain self-sufficiency. Such families have two options: lower costs (through public or private supports) or increase incomes through better-paying jobs. Of course, only the latter choice will lead to self-sufficiency.

PathWaysPA suggests that incomes can be raised through increasing access to higher education, functional context education, nontraditional employment for women, microenterprise training and development, individual development accounts, labor market reforms, reduced gender- and race-based wage disparities, and sectoral employment initiatives.

The report was published by PathWaysPA in cooperation with a national organization, Wider Opportunities for Women. To download the report's summary visit [www.pathwayspa.org](http://www.pathwayspa.org). There you also will find a Self-Sufficiency Budget Worksheet. You also can download other states' Self-Sufficiency Standard reports on Wider Opportunities for Women's website [www.sixstrategies.org](http://www.sixstrategies.org).



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## Healthy Options in Schools

The House Education Committee is currently considering legislation sponsored by Rep. Melissa Weber (R-Montgomery) that would affect what foods are sold in Pennsylvania schools. Sponsored by 19 Republicans and 11 Democrats, the bill (H.B. 2672) would establish procedures for contract approval regarding the sale of carbonated beverages, non-nutritious beverages and non-nutritious food.

The focus of the bill is to provide parents, community members, and pupils the opportunity to review food and beverage contracts in a public hearing before those contracts are approved. The agenda at such a hearing would include:

- The nutritional value of the foods sold in the district;
- Information about availability of fresh fruits, vegetables and grains, including but not limited to locally grown produce;
- The amount of fats and sugars in the foods being discussed; and
- Barriers to participation in school breakfast and lunch programs.

The legislation also would forbid contracts that provide advertising in

the schools in exchange for electronic products unless parents receive an opportunity to request that their child not receive the advertising.

Weber stated she introduced the legislation because of her concern about the high rates of childhood obesity. She stated: "This would not mandate what foods are available but would provide information so that informed decisions could be made."

At a July 6<sup>th</sup> hearing on childhood obesity hosted by the House Education Committee, Hunger Action presented recommendations to curb childhood overweight and obesity. Included was "an annual nutritional assessment" by school districts that would be conducted with public input. The assessment, which would be similar to the public hearing suggested by HB 2672, also would address the nutritional needs of pupils during the summer and district involvement in the Summer Food Service Program. The Committee is scheduled to hold a second hearing on September 8<sup>th</sup>.

### THE PENNSYLVANIA HUNGER ADVOCATE

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The Center is a nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating the causes of hunger through advocacy, education and collaboration. Supporters of this work include food providers, growers, religious organizations, food industry members, advocates and consumers.

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