

Prepare 2007

Public policy strategies for economic justice



The Four Basic Needs of Our Children



Like the prophets, we never forget that God is concerned about the everyday and that the blights of society take precedence over the mysteries of heaven.

--Rabbi Marla Feldman
Union for Reform Judaism



Mobilizing Communities Against Hunger and Poverty



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The Four Basic Needs of Our Children

. . . maintaining a strong safety net for those who are most vulnerable is the modern manifestation of our obligation to “leave the corners of our fields for the poor and needy.” We believe that supporting public schools so that every child in America has access to a free and appropriate education and that paying workers enough to support themselves without having to choose between shelter and food, medication or heat, are family values. If we don’t bring these progressive religious values into the public arena with us, we will abandon the public square to those offering a different view of religion and values.

**--Rabbi Marla Feldman
Union for Reform Judaism**

The annual Florida legislative session is largely about how to spend our state’s vast collective resources. The annual “Appropriations Bill” is the largest piece of legislation (over 400 pages) and the only one the Constitution requires legislators to pass each session. For all of us, it is an annual opportunity to create a better place for children to live . . . to provide—as any good parent would—for their basic needs: shelter, health, education, and nourishment. And it is in our state’s budget as it is in our individual family budgets, that these priorities are best reflected. If one of the children in our family is sick and in need of health care, it does not occur to us to take money needed for a doctor and apply it to the purchase of a boat or expensive car. In the same way, our state’s first priority and order of business should be the well-being of its children; and it is here that we have outlined four specific areas of legislation and budget allocations that would address the four basic needs of our children in the state of Florida.

A Child Needs a Safe Home . . . 1

By slashing the appropriation of housing funds . . . we will find ourselves wholly incapable of meeting anything close to the demand for workforce affordable housing in Florida. We will be unable to house the elderly, the infirmed . . . Every constituent group, every newspaper, and every citizen that has ever weighed in on the issue of the cap has without exception called for repeal. No support for the cap, not by anyone, not anywhere.

**--Jaimie A. Ross
Affordable Housing Director
1000 Friends of Florida**

Florida’s affordable housing programs are an economic engine, supported by low income advocates as well as every major industry group and employer in the state. Florida has developed an infrastructure of public-private housing delivery that is the envy of the nation. Still in 2005,

the Governor proposed and the Legislature approved a permanent housing-program ceiling of \$243 million — a level lower than the monies generated in 2002. The 2007 Florida Legislature represents a last chance to “scrap the cap” before it takes effect on July 1, 2007.

Florida's Sadowski/Workforce Housing Coalition Calls For a Repeal of the Cap on Housing Trust Fund Scheduled for FY07-08

1. The Florida Legislature enacted a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing, known as the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act. The funding was deliberately tied to documentary tax revenues so that as real estate costs and population increases drove up doc stamp receipts, the monies available for housing would increase proportionately.



2. Sadowski Act monies are statutorily dedicated by formula to the state and local housing trust funds with 70% of the revenue dedicated to local governments through the SHIP program and 30% of the revenue dedicated to the state to fund successful programs such as SAIL and HAP.

3. The Florida Legislature has closely scrutinized both the state and local housing trust funds and Florida's housing programs. These reviews have shown that Sadowski Act monies have been an unequivocal success in promoting home ownership, building quality rental housing, leveraging public dollars with private investments, and providing an economic boost to Florida far in excess of the amount of funds appropriated for housing.

4. Additionally, the current shortage of affordable housing for our workforce as well as hurricane damage has led to the new CWHIP and hurricane recovery housing programs, which are funded from the Housing Trust Funds.

5. Between ongoing successful programs such as SHIP and SAIL, the new CWHIP Program, and hurricane housing recovery, the Legislature appropriated \$433 to \$443 million each of the past two years. Combined with increasing need to serve additional segments of the workforce, the need for housing funding will far exceed the \$500-\$600 million per year that is being distributed to the trust funds currently.

6. Beginning in FY07-08, the doc stamp distributions into the housing trust funds will be reduced to \$243 million per year. This \$243 million cap is less money than Florida's programs received back in 2002, when the distribution of funds was \$245 million and the median existing home price was just over \$140,000. If we don't "scrap the cap" Florida will be faced with attempting to force \$500-\$600 million or more of housing funding under that cap—a train wreck in the making.

7. Unlike many a crisis, Florida prepared for this one by creating an effective housing funding system. The Housing Trust Funds were designed to have more money available when housing costs escalated. Coupled with our innovative housing programs, we have enough resources to address the housing crisis — but only if the cap is repealed.

1. All material from this article is provided by the Florida Housing Coalition. Well-researched and detailed tables as to what the cap will mean in dollars for your particular county can be found in the Advocacy section at www.flhousing.org. Go to "Economic Impact of Proposed Housing Trust Fund Raid." Florida Impact is a member of the Sadowski/Workforce Housing Coalition.

A Sick Child Needs Care...¹

Florida KidCare provides health care coverage to over 1.4 million children and comprises four child health programs: Medicaid for children, Florida Healthy Kids, Medikids, and Children's Medical Services Network. These programs are meant to provide a seamless network of coverage for children of all ages, whose families' incomes are too high for Medicaid but too low for the family to afford private health insurance. KidCare is Florida's version of the federal State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) under Title XX1 of the Social Security Act. SCHIP represents the single largest expansion of health insurance coverage for children since the initiation of Medicaid.

State Advocacy—

KidCare participation has dropped by nearly half of its high enrollment of 336,689 children in April 2004 to a low of 186,080 in February 2006. The challenge is to remove the barriers that may be hindering access to child health insurance in Florida. The following reasons and solutions are proposed:

Barrier: Confusing and inefficient application process. Because each of the KidCare programs target a unique age, income group, or special need, a family applying for KidCare may have to go through as few as one or as many as four administrative entities to enroll a child in the program. A family enrolling multiple children may have to meet different standards and provide different documentation for each child.

Solution: The current KidCare administrative structure is derived from the state's choosing to

use existing programs to implement the original SCHIP law. Almost ten years later, this structure is no longer viable. The KidCare Coordinating Council³ wants to create a single administration for marketing, eligibility, contracting quality assurance, and financing. The end goal would be to create a seamless KidCare program, where the issue of which program is serving a child is irrelevant; a family would simply know that their child is receiving KidCare coverage and apply through a single KidCare application.

“Florida has the second highest rate of uninsured children in America, and the state is not maximizing its full share of federal child health-care funds.”²

Barrier: Coverage gaps during transitioning of children between programs. When children on Medicaid are no longer eligible because they exceed either the income or age thresholds for the program, they may be placed into one of the other KidCare programs. However, of those already in the Florida Healthy Kids network, only 41 percent were approved for enrollment into one of the other programs.

Solution: To address this gap, KidCare should institute “presumptive eligibility,” in which a child is enrolled upon receipt of an application and then only removed from the program if documentation shows the child not eligible. An alternative proposal would be to expand Medicaid eligibility for a limited period of time to allow continuous coverage while a family completes the Healthy Kids application process.

Barrier: Inconsistent Marketing and Outreach policies and processes. Originally public outreach activities were coordinated and administered through the Florida Department of Health. These included paid community outreach coordinators who worked through the schools, health departments, and other locations to educate families about the program. But in July 2003, federal and state funding for KidCare outreach was eliminated over concerns that increases in enrollment would cause Florida to exceed its federal SCHIP allotment. Also the 2004 Florida Legislature converted the year-round KidCare enrollment to two one-month enrollment periods, enacted later that year. Consequently the number of average monthly applications declined: the average of 7,450 applications per month dropped to a low of 4,662 applications in June, 2004. This result led to the next year's Florida Legislature's reversing this policy in June 2005. There is still confusion among client populations over whether KidCare is open for enrollment year-round. Subsequently the 2006 Florida Legislature used these diminished numbers to reduce the state's budget allocation for KidCare.

Solution: Maintaining stability in the program would have a significant effect on facilitating enrollment and retention. The state's original and successful community coordination, retention effort, and outreach should be restored and funded for maximum KidCare participation by eligible families.

Federal Advocacy —

Because SCHIP is not guaranteed continued federal funding like other entitlement programs (e.g., Medicaid) and requires a state match⁴, advocacy for child health care coverage is required at both the state and federal levels.

When SCHIP was created in the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, the program was authorized for ten years. Congress will consider reauthorization this year and has already started preliminary hearings in Washington. The primary issues before Congress are:

1. Should annual SCHIP appropriations at the 2007 level (just over \$5 billion) be frozen in perpetuity?
2. Should the allocation formula to redistribute funds from states that have not used their annual allotments (Florida being one) to those that have expanded their programs be changed?
3. Should certain eligibility restrictions, especially the prohibition against dependents of state employees from being eligible for SCHIP, be repealed?

National enrollment of children in SCHIP programs has increased from 660,000 ever enrolled in FY 1998 to 6.1 million in FY 2005. This is a good national health care trend, but one that would be reversed if Congress chooses to permanently freeze the annual SCHIP appropriations at the 2007 level. This move would inevitably lead to states exhausting their federal allotments and funding shortfalls for the state's child health programs. Since SCHIP has maintained bi-partisan support, the main struggle will likely come down to this issue—the budget allocation amount.

¹A large share of the narrative in this article is taken from the analysis provided to the Florida Senate Committee on Health Care, October 2006.

²"No Shelter from the Storm: America's Uninsured Children," September 2006, Campaign for Children's Health Care.

³The Florida KidCare Coordinating Council is a legislatively mandated state-level body responsible for providing an annual report and recommendations for improving the KidCare program to the governor and legislature.

⁴SCHIP requires the state to provide 29% of program costs to draw a federal match of 71% for FY2006-07.

A Child Needs an Education . . .

In 2002, Florida voters approved an amendment to the state's constitution to provide a high quality pre-kindergarten learning opportunity for every four-year-old. Following the referendum, the 2003 Florida Legislature created the Universal Pre-kindergarten Council to make recommendations regarding VPK implementation, which fully embraced the concept of a high quality universal Pre-K program. The 2004 Legislature enacted legislation to implement the Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) Education Program.

The VPK program's goal is to prepare Florida's young children for successful entry into kindergarten by focusing on early literacy towards the broader state agenda for having all Florida children reading on grade level by the end of third grade. A month after the 2005 school year began, nearly 97,000 four year olds were attending VPK classes being offered by over 4,000 public and private providers across the state. Enrollment in VPK programs is now at 107,000 children (nearly half of all four-year-olds). Summer enrollment accounted for 11,510 of those children (July 2006). Responsibility for the day-to-day management of the program is assigned to the Agency for Workforce Innovation; licensing and credentialing, to the Department of Children and Families; and the creation of standards, curriculum, and accountability, to the Department of Education.

Of the fourteen recommendations developed by the Universal Pre-kindergarten Council, the following eight have yet to be implemented:

1. Include ongoing assessments used to inform instruction;
2. Require each program/provider to establish referral processes for children who need support;
3. Embrace strong parental involvement;
4. Require age-appropriate, literacy-focused, individually-directed, and research-based curriculum that instills a love of learning in each child;
5. Institute ongoing staff development combined with multi-level reimbursement and career ladder opportunities;
6. Contain a five-year target of at least one staff member in each UPK class with an associates degree and, after eight years, at least one staff member in each class with a BA degree;
7. Require a school year of 1080 hours with 720 contact hours; and
8. Place all School Readiness programs and VPK in the Department of Education under a Chancellor of Early Education.

“The Voluntary Pre-kindergarten (VPK) Program's goal is to prepare Florida's young children for successful entry into kindergarten by focusing on early literacy...”

A Child Needs Nourishment . . . ¹

The 110th Congress will reauthorize the “Farm Bill.” That important legislation has a breadth and reach far beyond American agricultural policy. Our top priority is a strong Nutrition title that reauthorizes and improves the Food Stamp Program, the nation’s first defense against hunger.

Far too many people in our communities lack resources to put food on their tables consistently for themselves and their families. Indeed, the most recent survey² of food security documents that more than 1.5 million people in Florida live in households that struggle against hunger. It is absolutely essential that the 2007 Farm Bill address the pressing problem of hunger. There are three Florida congressional delegates that sit on key committees through which the Farm Bill will pass. They are Senator Bill Nelson on Senate Budget and Representatives Kendrick Meek (on House Ways and Means) and Tim Mahoney (in House Agriculture).

The Food Stamp Program has nearly eliminated malnutrition from the national landscape and helps prevent the problem of hunger from becoming worse in our communities. Food Stamp Program participation closely tracks economic trends, responding quickly to increases in need, whether due to local or national economic circumstances or to disasters, as seen in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Food stamps help strengthen families and the American communities where those families live—rural, urban, and suburban. More than 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children, allowing their parents to obtain food at grocery stores for meals at home. Much of the remainder goes to seniors and persons with disabilities. Through the nationwide use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards, food stamp transactions have been streamlined for consumers and store clerks, and EBT has quantifiably reduced the chances of program abuse.

“...more than 1.5 million people in Florida live in households that struggle against hunger.”

Food Stamps pay dividends for low-income consumers, food producers and manufacturers, grocery retailers and communities. As food stamp purchases flow through grocery checkout lines, farmers’ markets, and other outlets, those benefits generate almost double their value in economic activity, especially for many hard-pressed rural and urban communities desperately in need of stimulus to business and jobs.

The Food Stamp Program’s basic entitlement structure must be maintained while greater resources are provided to the program to more effectively fight hunger in our communities. There are several key areas for program investment:

Neither the average food stamp benefit level of \$1 per person per meal, nor the \$10 per household monthly minimum benefit is sufficient to help families purchase an adequate diet.

Adequacy of Benefits Must Be Improved. The first step to reducing hunger in the United States is to ensure that everyone in the Food Stamp Program has the resources to purchase and prepare a nutritionally adequate diet. Neither the average food stamp benefit level of \$1 per person per meal, nor the \$10 per household monthly minimum benefit is sufficient to help families purchase an adequate diet. This dietary shortfall negatively impacts recipients' health and nutrition and impedes the ability of children to learn and adults to work. Another key element to securing an adequate diet will be finding ways to improve access to affordable and healthful foods for food stamp households in low-income neighborhoods.

Access to the Program Must Be Expanded. Too many people in our communities are in need of food stamps but cannot get them. Only one out of three people in a food bank line is enrolled

in food stamps. Those people in need of food but excluded from the Food Stamp Program include working poor families with savings slightly above decades-old and outdated resource limits, many legal immigrants, and numerous indigent jobless people seeking employment.

We are fortunate to live in a nation with an abundant and varied food supply. The Farm Bill reauthorization provides an opportunity to invest significant resources for making food stamp benefit sufficient to real world needs, connect more eligible people with those benefits, and open eligibility to more vulnerable populations—all of which will move our communities and the nation closer to a hunger-free America.

¹Information for this article derived from the Food Research and Action Center's sign-on letter to Congress.

²<http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR29/ERR29.pdf>.

Where's the Legislative Directory?!

Communicating with Your State and Congressional Delegates

Impact is very pleased to introduce "Let Your Voice Be Heard," its new on-line advocacy tool at www.flimpact.org. We are now listing your delegation of representatives in the Florida Legislature and the U.S. Congress at this site. And now with the help of "Democracy in Action," Impact makes it even easier for you to communicate with those delegates through its on-line advocacy tool. We can provide prepared emails on our legislative priorities that you can access and forward to your state and federal delegates throughout the year under your own signature. We hope this will enhance your capacity for citizen activism on issues concerning children and poverty!

This new service is supported by the donations of our network members. Please consider a generous contribution to Florida Impact as we prepare for another legislative session—our 28th year representing issues of economic justice in the Florida Legislature!



Celebrate Florida Impact *In its 28th Year!*

Since 1979, Florida Impact has been dedicated to reducing hunger and poverty in Florida. Impact educates and enlists the people of Florida to secure justice for and with those whose economic rights have not been realized. We also work to increase access to food programs by conducting aggressive outreach strategies and public policy advocacy. Through your generous support we can continue to inspire the people of Florida to do justice.

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