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Public policy strategies for economic justice



 **Florida
Impact**
*Mobilizing Communities
Against Hunger and Poverty*



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State Budget Cuts in a Time of Need

Florida's new governor Rick Scott — former CEO of Columbia/Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) — is partially addressing the state's projected \$3.6 billion shortfall with a package of cuts totalling \$562 million from the Florida departments of Health, Children and Families, Elder Affairs, and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities. Wanting to be known as the Jobs Governor, he has promised to cut 6,000 state jobs on his way to creating 700,000 private-sector positions. One of his first steps: the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF), which administers the state's SNAP/food stamp program.

A report released this year, *SNAP Access in Urban America: A City-by-City Snapshot*, examines food stamps and hunger in 22 of America's largest urban areas. Only 76 percent of eligible people in those cities participated in the SNAP program in December 2008, but two of Florida's communities exceeded this rate: Jacksonville/Duval County served 86 percent of its SNAP-eligible residents; and Miami-Dade County, 91 percent.

Even with the dramatic increase in applications, the DCF was able to reach a record-high percentage of those eligible. Jacksonville more than doubled its enrollment in SNAP since 2005, making it second on the list for increased percentage over the previous five years. Among the cities profiled, Miami had the third highest child poverty rate (34 percent).

Florida's ACCESS program has been a national model, providing a system in which households can

apply for SNAP on the Internet and conduct their follow-up interviews by phone. Such measures have saved the state \$83 million over the years. In fact, DCF has won federal awards totaling just over \$24 million over the last three years for its effectiveness. Still there are those we are not reaching, and both cities left unclaimed benefits on the table. Miami missed out on an estimated \$18.9 million; and Jacksonville, \$8.3 million.

Despite its stellar performance, DCF lacks sufficient funding to update technology and add the staff necessary to keep up with the growing need of recent years. Even when the economy picks back up, many Floridians with lower paying jobs in industries like tourism and agriculture may well still be eligible for SNAP to help provide the nutrition their families need. Maximizing SNAP will reap benefits for the state by bringing in millions to jumpstart the local economy. Every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.73 in local economic activity. By comparison, each \$1 spent in permanent tax cuts (like the corporate tax-rate cut proposed by the Governor) is said to generate \$0.30 in economic activity.



(http://www.economy.com/dismal/article_free.asp?cid=102598)

Still the Governor’s budget proposal looks for savings in ACCESS Eligibility Services, which processes SNAP applications. Despite the 2 percent monthly rise in those applications, the Governor’s budget cuts 71.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. This represents a *savings* to the state budget of \$2.91 million — meaning that DCF will see none of the additional federal bonus grants it

generated for the State last year. Even funding for overtime for the overtaxed, remaining DCF personnel was denied. The budget does add 56 FTE for DCF workers partially paid for by private hospitals, health care facilities, and other nonprofits that see the benefit of enrolling their clients in SNAP. In fact, this growing private subsidy now accounts for 5 percent (209) positions of public assistance eligibility staffing.

Keeping Up with the Growth of SNAP in Florida

Clients Served		Fiscal Year		
	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	
Families	1,121,768	1,465,182	1,926,486	
Persons	2,201,683	2,833,816	3,618,713	
Benefits	\$1,619,994,824	\$2,478,354,544	\$4,034,447,154	
Eligibility Determinations		Fiscal Year		
	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	
Applications	4,386,874	5,145,717	10,515,075	
Reviews	1,115,112	1,284,477	2,161,034	
Critical Performance Measures		Year To Date		
	From	To	Rate	
% of Food assistance applications processed within 30 days	JULY 2010	DECEMBER 2010	86.55%	
% of Food assistance applications processed within 7 days	JULY 2010	DECEMBER 2010	86.51%	
% of all applications for assistance processed within time standards	JULY 2010	DECEMBER 2010	98.13%	
% of food stamp benefits determined accurately	OCTOBER 2009	AUGUST 2010	99.32%	

Maximizing Florida's Reach With the Federal Child Nutrition Programs

Unlike the dramatic increases in Florida's SNAP (food stamp) rolls, participation in the state's federal child nutrition programs, by comparison, has languished and, in some cases, even dropped off. While Florida's child poverty rate (like its national ranking) has gone up, the average daily attendance at summer nutrition programs has declined. Although the state's Household Food Insecurity rate has moved from 9% (2007) to 14.2% (2009), there are 200+ fewer schools offering school breakfast.

With the passage of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, Florida will not only receive new funding for the start-up of the Afterschool Meal Program but have access to competitive grants for expansion of the existing child nutrition programs, like school meals and summer nutrition. One example: grants to assist local educational agencies (LEAs) to aggressively certify eligible children for school meal programs..

Direct certification confirms a child's eligibility for free school meals through his/her SNAP participation without the need for an additional application. Direct certification typically involves matching SNAP records against student enrollment lists, either at the State or LEA level. Parents or guardians of children identified through these matching systems are notified of their child's eligibility for free school meals, and they need to take no further action for their children to be certified.

This more efficient method helps to bring more eligible children into the program. States and LEAs directly certified 1.6 million more SNAP participants in SY 2009-10 than they did a year earlier. And this--coupled with the recent extraordinary recession-related increase in SNAP

caseload--should have delivered comparable growth in Florida's school breakfast and lunch programs. Instead the state's direct-certification enrollment went down. In Florida, 81% of school-age SNAP participants were directly certified in SY2008-09. In SY2009-10, this percentage decreased 9 percentage points to 72%.

The US Department of Agriculture identified Florida as one of the states that is below or at the national median rate of 72% and did not apply for the Direct Certification first Round Planning or Implementation Grants. Given the state's numbers and their downward trend, this was a missed opportunity.

Texas and New Jersey placed their child



nutrition programs under their state departments of agriculture in 2003 and 1997, respectively. In its new home, the Bureau of Child Nutrition Programs in New Jersey reported a successful year as both the number of participating sponsors and the average number of meals served per day increased statewide. Senate Bill 1312 by Florida Senator Gary Siplin (D-Orange/Osceola) would similarly transfer the federal child nutrition programs out of the Florida Department of Education and into the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (DACS). The

move would 1) better align the administration of those programs with the USDA, which administers them at the federal level; 2) ensure government efficiencies via organizational proximity to other food distribution programs (like Fresh from Florida); and 3) make a more proactive connection between nutrition and health by promoting the consumption of locally grown fresh fruits and vegetables.

An act providing for a type two transfer of the administration of the federal child nutrition programs would simply transfer all administration from the one Florida agency to the other. In addition to Florida Impact, several organizations are working together to support this transfer:

United Way of Florida, Florida Pediatric Society, Palm Beach County Community Food Alliance, Florida School Nutrition Association, American Heart Association, Florida Catholic Conference, and the Jacksonville Children's Commission, to name a few. The goal of the transfer is to deliver more robust child nutrition programs in Florida.

Ensuring Health Care for Florida's Children

Florida was ranked 49th for healthcare access and affordability by the Washington-based Commonwealth Fund based on rates of state insurance coverage, infant mortality, and childhood obesity. Ten years ago, eleven states had rates of uninsured children above 16%. Today, only three states have such a large proportion of children who lack access to routine medical care. Florida is one of them with 17.8%, trailing only Texas at 18 percent. Meanwhile, Florida's state officials — led by the new Governor — have been returning grants intended to help pay for the implementation of the federal Affordable Care Act. State leaders have refused to implement the Act while the state's legal challenge moves through the courts.

Predating the Affordable Care Act, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) encourages States to provide health coverage for uninsured children in families whose incomes are too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private insurance. States receive an enhanced federal match (greater than the state's Medicaid match) to provide for this coverage. One way Florida could improve its ranking is ensure access to KidCare, its version of CHIP.

States that have adopted strategic enrollment and retention policies for CHIP have been awarded a portion of \$206 million in federal bonus money. But Florida was only able to meet five of eight benchmarks required to earn one of the grants and so walked away with nothing. Florida still has 338,724 uninsured children, of which 245,561 qualify for free or subsidized insurance but aren't signed up. Uninsured children cost taxpayers more to treat when they suffer from unchecked illnesses, undiagnosed developmental delays, and simple infections that develop into serious ailments requiring a trip to the emergency room.

Since 1998, when Florida first established KidCare, the state has added nearly half a million

children from low-income families to one of four free or low-cost insurance programs that insure 1.2 million kids. Florida offers free or low-cost (\$15 per month per family) comprehensive healthcare insurance for every child from families who meet income eligibility criteria (\$35,300 for a family of four).

The state has addressed some obstacles to KidCare enrollment. It cut the number of pages in its application to a single sheet from the original 23-page Medicaid application, and forms are available in English, Spanish, and Creole. The state also uses a passive re-enrollment method. Parents get a letter every six months inquiring about their financial situation. If nothing has changed, they don't need to respond, and their child stays enrolled. The typical child covered under KidCare's Healthy Kids program lives with both parents who, between them, have some college education. But KidCare's award-winning outreach campaign budget was eliminated in 2003, resulting in low public awareness of its existence.

The Florida KidCare Coordinating Council, chaired by the State Surgeon General, has identified full funding for KidCare as the best opportunity to make it easier for eligible children to remain in the program and to help newly eligible children enroll. This includes the financing of projected growth, outreach, and increased medical and dental costs as a way of maximizing Florida's CHIP federal funds and including all eligible, uninsured children."

Advocates for Florida's low-income residents will be urging that the budget cuts to address the state's estimated \$3.6 billion shortfall are not made at the expense of those least able to bear it. The quality of life for all of Florida's residents is impossible to separate from the denial of access to affordable health care.

Florida's Housing Trust Funds Generate a Solid Return on Investment

JOBS is the ubiquitous word of the year, the foundation upon which all political arguments are framed downtown at the Capitol this winter under the new Rick Scott administration ... The Florida Legislature must find a way to trust the [Sadowski] trust fund to do its work, which is to create jobs.

--Tallahassee Democrat, 30 January 2011

Advocates will continue to focus on the cap placed on the expenditures of Sadowski trust fund revenues for affordable housing. Rep. Gary Aubuchon (R-Lee/Charlotte) is sponsoring House Bill 639, which would repeal the cap and put an end to the raids on dedicated housing trust funds to plug holes in the State's budget.

The good news is Rep. Aubuchon is also the all-powerful House Rules and Calendar Chair, which should help the bill move through a small number of committee assignments and on to the House floor for passage. The bad news: Governor Scott has proposed the complete elimination of the State and Local Housing Trust Funds via his Budget Recommendation Conforming bill. There was, however, no corresponding call for a repeal of the documentary stamp tax that funds the Housing Trust Funds. Instead, the monies are all permanently swept into General Revenue, i.e., a tax but no trust fund. The Governor's budget does propose a small general revenue appropriation for housing—just over \$37 million of the \$193 million that would be swept into the General Revenue fund this year alone. He also proposes cutting housing spending the next fiscal year. All of this means 1) no housing trust fund; 2) the doc stamp income would go to general revenue; and 3) housing would never be given anything close to the amount of funds that would have been generated by the Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

State Funding	Economic Benefit
for every \$1 million	\$4.62+ million housing built or sold
	\$7.66 million economic activity generated
	\$2.98 million income earned
	77 jobs created

The Back Story

In 1992, the Florida Legislature established a dedicated revenue source for affordable housing through the William E. Sadowski Affordable Housing Act. Creative and highly accountable programs for the use of those monies were created in an umbrella format comprising two trust funds, the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Government Housing Trust Fund. Revenues for these two trust funds were intentionally tied to a documentary stamp tax on real estate transactions, so that as property values went up, the monies available for affordable housing would increase proportionately. Since the Sadowski Act's implementation, state and local housing trust funds have produced or preserved over 200,000 homes for Floridians.



Florida Impact
Mobilizing Communities Against Hunger and Poverty



Since 1979, Florida Impact has leveraged nearly \$4 billion in additional public funds to serve an estimated 800,000 low-income Floridians. This is accomplished with aggressive, strategic outreach to maximize federal food and nutrition programs in Florida. Impact organizes the direct involvement of community leaders in advocating for public policies and programs responsive to the needs of low-income families. Impact is a three-time winner of the Congressional Hunger Center's Victory against Hunger Award and serves as the lead, convening organization for the Florida Partnership to End Childhood Hunger.

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