

## Priority Issue: Hunger and Shelter

United Ways across Ohio, as elsewhere, have traditionally been leaders in advocating for those among us who are hungry and cold. Even as we move toward making long-term impact in our communities, we recognize that food and shelter must come before addressing any kind of permanent change in an individual's life.

United Way World Wide serves as secretariat and fiscal agent for the Emergency Food and Shelter Board Program (EFSP) and has been at the forefront for many years. The United Way of Ohio acts as the chair and fiscal agent for the Ohio State Set-Aside Committee for the Emergency Food and Shelter Board while many local United Ways coordinate and distribute EFSP funds throughout Ohio's communities, demonstrating our commitment.

Challenges in our current economy have created levels of crisis not seen for many years. The need for emergency assistance has skyrocketed with the present levels of unemployment and rising costs. Those previously financially stable are now struggling to keep up with costs for food, utilities and health care. Current statistics from the U.S. Census and Departments of Agriculture and Job & Family Services show:

- Of America's top 10 poorest cities, three are in Ohio; no other state has more than one in the top 10.
- Almost 1.5 million Ohioans are living in poverty, and about one third of those are children.
- More than 1.2 million or one in eight Ohioans participate monthly in the federal Food Stamp Program, an increase of 46% over the past five years.
- Food pantry usage increased nearly 25% from the fourth quarter of 2007 to fourth quarter, 2008.
- One in four Ohioans over the age of 18 earn \$10 or less an hour.

In addition, Ohioans are losing their homes at ever greater rates, causing shelter usage to climb. According to Ohio Supreme Court data, home foreclosures increased from 59,041 in 2004 to 85,773 claims in 2008. Through September of 2009, there have already been 66,453. In a 2008 statewide "point in time count" from the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, 12,821 Ohioans were homeless in an eight-hour period. These figures do not represent the number of people who experience homelessness over the course of an entire year, which is much greater.

Although we understand that Ohio lawmakers are working diligently to bring jobs to our state, lower healthcare costs and foreclosure rates and increase wages, those solutions will take time. Legislation and funding for emergency food and shelter is vital to stabilize our population until these issues are resolved.

### Ohio United Way requests:

- That the Legislature maintain current funding of \$12 million per year for the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.
- Give serious consideration to increasing funding to \$17 million per year for the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks.
- The Legislature establishes a permanent line item for this funding to protect emergency food assistance in Ohio now and in the future.
- The Legislature maintain the current funding of \$53 million per year for the Ohio Housing Trust Fund for emergency shelter and housing.
- The Legislature maintain that the county recording fees continue to be directed into the Ohio Housing Trust Fund.