



# Poor People's United Fund

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Fall 2014

## Boston's Spare Change Community

*"The pilgrimage of faith and justice must always be made in the company of others. What then is our response when one of us has been exiled, ostracised? Do we merely cluck our collective tongues and say, "Too bad.". Or do we make ourselves heard?" (Kip Tiernan)*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The world is in a perpetual state of upset these days. It seems like much of the planet is in a state of rage. Gigantic passenger planes disappear off the face of the earth...people are beheaded...war looms over the horizon, viral diseases are rampant...women are knocked out cold in elevators... young black teens continue to be victims of racial violence....the poor are punished for being poor. Poor people did not select poverty. It was chosen for them.

Yet if we listen to the public dialogue it seems we have grown tired of helping people. We have shelters for men, shelters for women, shelters for families, shelters for vets. In a graphic illustration of who is on the bottom of everyone's list... a rusty old bridge is declared unfit and over 400 people who had just a cot to call home at Long Island Shelter are unable to get even that modicum of comfort. Sparse belongings, medicines, treasured photos .....gone. Falling wages and government's retreat from poverty programs have all played into a growing agony for poor people.



There are serious ethical and moral dilemmas when we speak of justice and poor and homeless people. It is no longer a matter of sheltering the homeless and feeding the hungry. It is a matter of the distribution of wealth.

But as Kip says we cannot just cluck our collective tongues. We must make ourselves heard. PPUF continues to join with dozens of other advocates to speak for the most vulnerable among us.

In one **new effort**, we will join with the advocates of *Homes for Families* in training a group of passionate and powerful parents, each of whom has experienced homelessness, poverty and systemic barriers. The Homes for Families **Consumer Advocacy Team** (CAT) asks these parents to go through a public policy training series and meet monthly to receive and give updates on current issues. The CAT group will also provide input and feedback that can be used to shape organizational policy. This year, **in Kip's memory, PPUF will sponsor one CAT team.** Formerly homeless people will find their voices and speak out on their own behalf! Kip would love it!

*In Struggle and Hope.*  
*Georgia, Margaret and Fran*

P.S. Please support PPUF, if you can.

**Betty Reid Mandell, 1924-1914 by Georgia Mattison**

**Betty Reid Mandell taught me a lot about providing resources for the poor and about monitoring their access to these services. We worked together many times at the Dudley Square Welfare office in Roxbury. We asked two questions to those in the waiting room; what do you need, and how long have you been waiting to be seen.**

**Betty would pull out a twenty page list of Survival Tips that she updated every few months. The list gave access information and a complete explanation of eligibility requirements for people who needed these services and for advocate and direct service organizations like PPUF, so they too could ask, "what do you need?" "How long have you been waiting for services?" We documented the long waits and the treatment the case managers and receptionists gave to their customers. Betty was always sympathetic to the over worked case managers but not to their abusive behavior which we documented. At the end of the day we would verbally report our findings to the Director of the Office. She wrote up our notes and sent the report to the Director with copies to Legal Services.**



**Betty was always there to call attention to the dishonorable and disastrous treatment of the poor. Betty was a member of the PPUF Board of Directors. A beautiful obituary was published about her in the Boston Globe, October 1. I and the countless people that she touched will miss her enormously.**

## AND THE CALLS KEEP COMING

We continue to get more calls and more desperate calls. Many are from people who have fallen behind on rent, due to an emergency (medical or loss of job or just too many bills) and are in danger of being evicted. Alas, we do not funds to help these callers and refer them to other agencies, though without much hope that any agency can provide help. Many callers are short on food, particularly now that food stamps have been cut again. One caller had managed to have her rent reduced by \$60, only to have her food stamps reduced from \$200 to \$32 a month, no doubt a mistake but leaving her with \$32 to feed four people until she can get it straightened out. Our callers are deeply grateful for any help we can give them. Two called to ask if there was some way they could do volunteer work for us, to repay us for helping them out. Many call us back just to say again—thank you. You, our contributors, are the ones to be thanked—you make the lives of our callers a little easier and give them hope.

## **Poor Families: Where Do Coakley and Baker Stand?**

*by Margaret Rhodes & Vicky Steinitz*

Once again, it is difficult to find any mention in this year's political campaigns of the rising child poverty and homelessness rates or the difficulties faced by those attempting to get onto or exist on the welfare rolls. While Martha Coakley and Charlie Baker, the gubernatorial candidates, are vigorously competing for the "women's vote," poor women do not seem to be in their sights.

Coakley's platform includes more state-funded pre-school slots, support for the minimum wage increase and the paid sick leave referendum. It is silent on welfare questions. Coakley has been attacked for not supporting a class action suit brought by foster child advocates demanding overhaul of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Coakley has responded that she supports reform but that the main problem has been and remains insufficient funding.



While Baker now says that he will provide additional funds for childcare subsidies to poor families, it was under his administration that funds for DCF were cut. Baker opposes the paid sick leave bill and declined to endorse an increase in the minimum wage.

After winning the Republican primary, Baker promised to "clean up welfare once and for all." He continues to call for an end to "the culture of dependence" and making "transitional assistance transitional." His proposed "reforms" include support for the just enacted legislation requiring "job search" before applying for benefits, a cap on the number of months of school or training that could be used to meet the work requirement, and increasing the age at which recipients become exempt from the work requirement from 60 to 66.

His most recent move has been to endorse a program that would limit public housing residents to three years, after which they would be evicted, if any adult in the household was not working or in school. During the three years, job training and other supports would be offered. Coakley has neither endorsed nor condemned the proposed program (already in effect for limited numbers in Worcester.) When asked about it, pointing to foreclosures, high rents, and homelessness, she said, "I start with the idea that there are now, and there always will be, people in Massachusetts who need help with housing, who need help putting food on the table." These responses crystallize the difference between Baker and Coakley on poverty and welfare. To the small extent they talk about it at all, Baker focuses on welfare abuse and the need for more stringent controls; Coakley makes some gestures of support but is vague about what she would do.

It is unfortunate that those who are homeless, on welfare or in public housing in Massachusetts do not have a strong advocate in either candidate. However, given the positions of the two candidates, it is also clear that the lives of poor people will be less oppressive under Coakley's leadership than under Baker's.

## Latest Welfare Reform Law: The Tear Gas Version

Georgia Mattison reports that the new Welfare Reform Law was enacted in late June on an inaudible voice vote that denied public debate or a roll call. The Welfare Coalition had worked mightily to navigate a bill in the Massachusetts House of Representatives that lifted the threat from the Senate of an assault on future applicants. But it was not possible to hold back the cloud of tear gas from the Senate President, Therese Murray, that would now greet new applicants. The law called “An Act to Foster Economic Independence,” follows the tradition of titles obscuring the intent by naming it the opposite similar to United States Congressman Paul Ryan’s “Path to Prosperity” for poor Americans.

The Welfare Coalition is now trying to provide less stringent regulations for the 30 day up front job search for Welfare applicants so they will not get lost in a mist of stinging confusion. They must document a job search with no cash assistance, transportation, childcare or job counseling before they can actually be eligible for assistance. If they are disabled they must apply for the federal benefit called Social Security Insurance (SSI) in a confusing hand off to a federal agency. If they don’t meet SSI’s very strict standards then they must do the job search and work requirement even if they were considered exempt with the current rules. The disabled have been in effect given an upfront denial by the new law.

The Welfare Commissioner Stacey Monahan has been terminating recipients at an unprecedented clip by not allowing a routine extension of a 24 month time limit to continue unfinished Education and/or Training. According to Legal Services attorneys, a refugee family was not allowed an extension to finish her training as a spot wasn’t available in time for her to beat the time limit. She had already found a part time job even through suffering from PTSD.

The equivalent of tear gas to discourage applicants and lack due process by the Welfare department should steadily contract the caseload. The Governor signed off on this abandonment. Are we looking at the end of this benefit in order to appease the political right wing?



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### *Jazz Benefit for PPUF*



### *AARDVARK Orchestra*

*Saturday December 20th 2014 at 7:30 pm*

*Emmanuel Church, 15 Newbury Street, Boston*

*Admission \$20*

*Information: 617-776-8778 or 617-452-3205*

## *Housing Facts*

*(Though the story speaks of Malden the problem is true for most cities and towns in MA.)*

MALDEN – Mass Senior Action’s Metro North chapter members formed a housing advocacy committee in January to address the lack of low-income housing in the Malden area and to ensure that plans for future development include enough affordable housing to lessen the shortage.

The Malden Redevelopment Authority’s initiative to drive high-end residential housing into the city’s downtown is of concern to many MSAC members who worry that affordable housing is given scant attention in the rush to build multi-million dollar apartments.

“We must find out what is the current low-income housing situation in Malden and have more low-income housing for people in our city,” said Metro North board member Kenneth Goldstein during the chapter’s January board meeting.

The planned residential developments include an estimated \$20 million, five-story building with 80 high-end market rate apartments on Florence Street. Also, in the heart of downtown, a six-story mixed use development known as the Residence at Malden Square, providing 195 new apartment units plus 9,600 square feet of ground floor retail space, is on the drawing board.

MSAC members argue that there are two key issues that must be addressed in Malden’s housing. First, there is not enough affordable housing available to meet the growing need. Currently there is a more than 6 year wait to get into the Malden Housing Authority. Second, there is a fundamental misunderstanding among housing officials of what is “affordable” for Malden area residents.

**According to Malden city officials, to qualify for much of the affordable housing in Malden, an individual must meet the threshold of earning 60 percent of the city’s median income. With a median annual income of \$51,043, a resident must earn at least \$33,633 to qualify for an affordable housing unit. Using the city’s affordable housing criteria, monthly, affordable rent in Malden is determined to be at least \$1,042.**

MSAC member Bill Regan has seen the impact of the low-income housing shortage first hand. His daughter works full time, but her salary doesn’t meet the affordable rate in Malden or any of the Metro North communities. “Politicians throw around the word affordable,” Regan said at the Metro North board meeting on Jan. 14. “Affordable is what you can afford, not what the building owner says is affordable. If you do not make \$50,000 a year then an apartment for \$1,200 a month is not affordable even if some chart says it is.”

Mayor Christenson and Tri-City Community Action Program Executive Director Philip Bronder-Giroux vowed to explore low-income housing solutions for seniors, including expanding low-income housing for veterans.

Regan and Goldstein said the Metro North chapter will hold the Malden City Council and the Redevelopment Authority accountable for promises made to seniors about affordable housing in the city’s new plans.

“Housing is a human right and we want our community to move forward and bring seniors and veterans with the development,” said long-time MSAC member and veterans advocate Howard McGowan. “We don’t want our most vulnerable residents to be left behind when the rest of the city grows and prospers.”

If you would like to add your voice to the low-income housing effort, contact MSAC at 617-284.1234 or attend the Metro North Chapter meeting.



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### WAYS YOU CAN SUPPORT *PPUF*

***SPARE CHANGE*** donations.... *take your spare change to any TD bank penny counter and deposit it to our account. ( # 8250954845) So far we have collected \$630 dollars in coins!*

**Put your pen to paper!** Do you enjoy the newsletter, but feel it is missing something? If so, we welcome submissions. Additionally, if you would like to submit a letter to the editor on a poverty-related issue, we'd be happy to provide you with support.

**Lend an ear!** Please contact us if you are interested in fielding phone calls and facilitating callers with referrals to outside services.

**And of course, follow us @poorpeoplsunitd and "like us" on Facebook**

**Payroll deduction** There are many local businesses that include Community Works as a payroll deduction option. You can designate a gift to PPUF through Community Works!  
For a list of participating workplaces go to [communityworks.com](http://communityworks.com).

MA State employees can give to PPUF thru **COMECC # 302588**  
Federal employees can give to PPUF thru **CFC # 43273**

**Purchase a copy of *Urban Meditations* as a holiday gift!**

To order a book Call 617-262-5922 or visit [ppuf.org](http://ppuf.org)

**Donate!** We are grateful for donations of any size.

