



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Passover/ Easter 2014

When I take a woman into my arms to comfort her because she is dying of AIDS, and the drugs don't work anymore, and she just puts her scrawny arms around me, suddenly there is God so quickly it would astonish you. (Kip Tiernan)

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

"...And suddenly there is God so quickly..."if only we had the eyes and hearts to see as Kip did. These days many hearts seem hardened to the every day suffering of poor and homeless people. Talk show hosts seek to entertain by encouraging audience comments on how just about every public assistance program is tainted with fraud. Yet, we hear very little about the economic inequities that create a class of people who need these programs to survive. (e.g. 400 Americans own more than the other 180 million!)

How does this unthinking mean spiritedness happen? Is it cell phones? (guess they are not so smart after all) Too much streaming video? HBO? CNN? Too much rushing about and not enough reflection?

Recently, I ran across a provocative phrase. One that reminds me of Passover and Easter. Both narratives evoke great hope. After long suffering comes new life. But as Fr. Gustavo Gutierrez, Liberation Theologian says, "God's Hope is not an easy hope." We can't just sit back and expect hope to find us and remedy bad situations. **We need to act. We need to speak up.** Creating hope demands work...Comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable....

The stories within the articles in this newsletter will break your heart. But the good news is that there are persistent and passionate advocates who keep an eye out for legislation that might help ease life a bit for poor people. With your help we continue to do our part in fostering policy that helps instead of punishes.

PPUF OFFICE NEWS- We have been fortunate to call Old South Church home for over 32 years. For the next few months the whole place will be in a state of upset! The Church is undergoing long awaited renovations and repairs. (see photo of our office) So every one is rallying to help in the effort. It could take a few months. We are developing back up plans so the people who look to PPUF for assistance can get what they need. Margaret, Georgia and I will be working from home during the noisiest and dustiest parts of the renovations. But we will be able to get phone messages and email through our usual contact information. We also want to say **Happy 40th Birthday to Rosie's Place!** As Kippy loved to say, she could have opened Rosie's on Good Friday but preferred Resurrections so opened on Easter Sunday 1974. If you can...please support ppuf's efforts



In Struggle and Hope.-- Georgia, Margaret & Fran

Welfare 'Reform' Would Only Deepen Poverty Crisis

Vicky Steinitz & Margaret Rhodes

One might think that the legislature would be busy figuring out how to provide more help for those in need. But no, instead the Senate and House Conference Committee is considering how to “reconcile” two mean-spirited welfare bills that chip away at the meager benefits now in place.

The Senate bill would impose work requirements on pregnant women in their third trimester, even though it’s unlikely any employer will hire them.

Both would deny public housing to many immigrant groups, including domestic violence survivors who do not yet have green cards, and citizen children whose parents don’t have an eligible immigration status.

Both bills would give the current or future administration a blank check to change the standards for disability, and thereby cut off benefits to thousands of children whose disabled parents are unable to work.

Both bills require applicants to prove they have looked for a job, even if they don’t have a phone, Internet access, money for transportation or anyone to watch their children.

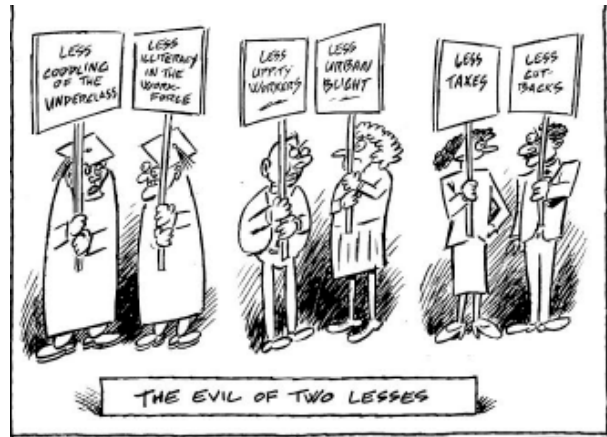
The provisions now before the Conference Committee will unfairly cut the rolls, create new hoops for recipients to jump through, and put applicants in Catch-22 situations, further undermining the state’s commitment to people in need.

Why this hard-heartedness? For decades, politicians and regulators have asserted their right to control poor citizens by relying on myths about those in need. These myths are familiar to anyone tuned into popular media: the poor are lazy and must be forced to work; they don’t value education; they squander their resources on drugs and alcohol; they cannot care for their children properly. Those on “welfare” stay on it for their whole lives and engage in rampant fraud.

Research studies have repeatedly debunked each of these myths. Still, these fictions have prevailed over fact in public consciousness. There is irrefutable evidence that poor people are as hardworking and moral as any other group and that what fraud exists is minimal or committed by providers. However, all of this evidence is ignored while the entitlement of the powerful to demean the poor in exchange for resources thrives.

We live in a state where the inequality gap between wealthy and poor citizens is one of the highest in the nation. It is unconscionable for us to be inflicting further hardships upon our most desperate citizens. We urge the Conference Committee to keep these destructive provisions out of the welfare bill.

We appreciate the efforts of those Representatives who worked to ameliorate some of the worst features of the House bill and who are now supporting the Decker Amendment. The struggle goes on.



When A Picture Is Not Better: The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program SNAP/Food Stamps Rollout

by Georgia Mattison

The Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program SNAP, also known as Food Stamps, delivers food through a debit card called Electronic Benefits Transfer EBT. The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance DTA electronically loads benefits on this EBT card every month. In August of 2013 the Massachusetts Legislature voted that every household had to have a new card with a photo except for the elderly, disabled, blind, and victims of domestic violence. The rollout began at the beginning of December 2013.

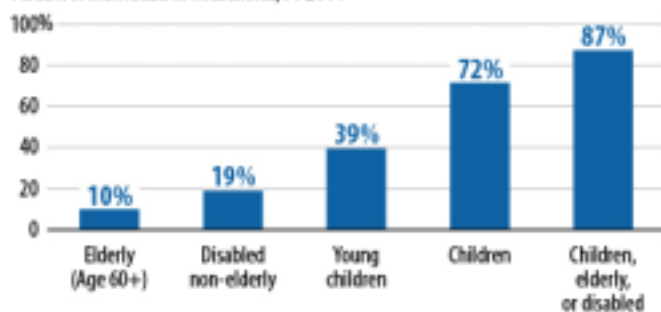
DTA wrote a letter in October to explain the change to recipients. Their new photo card would come in the mail at the beginning of December. They did not tell them or the Grocery stores that their old card would be deactivated before their new card arrived. The first two weeks in December were a disaster for 12,000 households who had no access to their benefits for much of December. This happened because many new EBT Photo cards were returned as undelivered even though the address was correct and because the old EBT cards were deactivated before DTA confirmed that the new card had arrived. I met with Stop n Shop store Manager Charlene Mathes and Michael Baker from Representative Sanchez' office and with Angela Vo from Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz office on December 17 to discuss the chaos the non-working cards created in this and many stores in the Commonwealth. By this date the worst was over in terms of the abandoned food baskets of up to \$700 a day that Charlene said had occurred since the beginning of December.

The store never received information from DTA about this big change mandated by the Legislature. I gave them information written by Massachusetts Law Reform Institute explaining the new program and most importantly the reason the cards were not working. They still as of this date have not received anything from DTA. Many stores began calling MLRI for information.

The chaos I witnessed every day for two weeks is painful to describe. Non-working SNAP cards blindsided shoppers who left full baskets in humiliation thinking they had done something wrong. The

The Vast Majority of SNAP Recipients Live in Households With a Child, Senior, Or Disabled Person

Percent of individuals in households, FY 2011

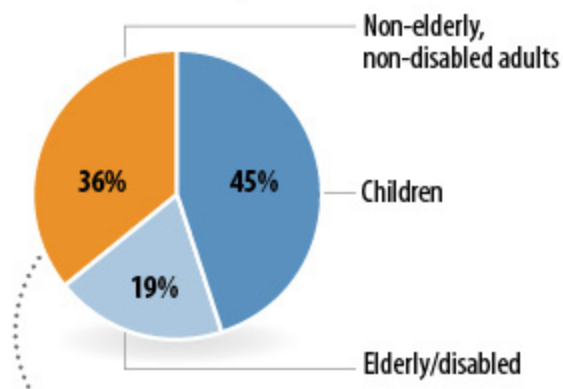


Source: USDA Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Research and Analysis, Characteristics of SNAP Households, FY 2011. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | [chopping](#)

many times I chased after them to offer help I was rebuffed. I gave PPUF cards, Representative Sanchez cards and MLRI cards to the store to give to these shoppers to get help. The other response was that these shoppers thought there was something wrong with the store registers and were angry with the store employees. The Store was glad to have this information in order to educate their clerks and customers. Participants who did go to their DTA office to find out what happened to their new photo card experienced long lines and crowded lobbies. Many had to return more than once.

DTA had a year for implementation after the Legislature passed this law and it was signed by the Governor last August. Instead DTA rushed this complicated initiative into practice. For agencies including PPUF, December is a hard month because of holiday needs and this initiative added many extra hours to

Close to Two-Thirds of SNAP Recipients Are Children, Elderly, or Disabled



advocate for food for these SNAP families. There was also a major snow storm in the middle of the month. Information that advocates and legislators gave to DTA officials was ignored and denied. They insisted that the roll out was going well.

Our organization has a Food Pantry and we gave out extra emergency food to a few families to tide them over until they had a working card. The over 3000 SNAP EBT grocery retailers in the Commonwealth never received timely information. Only a DTA staff person, Mr. Gomez, visited 250 stores to put up signs as to what EBT shoppers can buy or not buy. In a letter to me from Executive Office of Health and Human Services Secretary Polanowicz, he offered Mr. Gomez as proof DTA had contacted the retailers about the EBT Photo Card.

The New England office that supervises the region was so concerned that eligible families were not getting food that they wrote a letter advising DTA to halt the roll out until the cards were fixed and the retailers were contacted. When that didn't happen they sent two robo-calls to the affected retailers educating them about this new program.

Even worse, Maine and New Hampshire are planning to adopt this disasterous approach because Massachusetts DTA Commissioner Stacey Monahan has told them how well it is working. At least Massachusetts made exemptions to the photo for the elderly, disabled, blind, and victims of domestic violence. In these other states there are no exemptions. The EBT Photo Card is especially difficult for the elderly to obtain.

The worst, Senator David Vitter (R-LA) has proposed a bill for all states in the country to replicate "liberal" Massachusetts.

---SOME OF WHAT WE DO AT PPUF---

Advocacy

At PPUF we work to uphold the dignity and rights of the poor by participating in key meetings and demonstrations, attending relevant conferences, and meeting with our Congressional representatives, both at the state and federal levels. Staff attends monthly Food Stamp Improvement Coalition meetings, Emergency Assistance (emergency shelter) hearings, and the Welfare Coalition meetings. PPUF argues in favor of more aid for and fewer restrictions on those who desperately need help. We participate in rallies at the State House to protest harmful changes to Emergency Assistance regulations. PPUF staff attended the National Anti-Hunger Policy Conference in Washington, D. C. and met with Congressional staffers to bring our concern about massive cuts of the food stamp program to their attention.

Referrals to direct service organizations

We receive calls from individuals searching for various forms of assistance. When we are unable to provide direct assistance, we refer them to other organizations that will be able to address their needs directly.

Our own direct service

Kip strongly believed that there should be some place where desperate people could get help without having to jump through hoops or provide proof of unemployment, disability, or other signatures of poverty. Here at PPUF we provide direct assistance to help mitigate food insecurity by providing those who call us and express need with a \$10 Stop and Shop Card every two months; While this may seem like a small amount, people are deeply grateful for what we are able to give.

Morphed Values

Mary Woodman Amato- May 2009

Yesterday a friend, found dead under a sidelined train.
Layers of sadness coat the crusty old soul.
Today, a long cold day in the rain.
With fewer and fewer newspapers to recycle,
she layers them between old bones and
chilly, damp earth. Drowsily she remembers
soft, colorful scatter rugs... a hallway with thick runner ...
(someone's hip phrase for survival)...she waits at the corner.
Too old to "dumpster dive"....
Like the cats in Key West waited...
No need for garbage cans here ...hands will do,
waiting patiently for leftovers ...
no more Friday night's supper of hash
and poached eggs...a week's leftovers of steak & chops.
Those were the days my friends...
We talked of values – (moral),
We talked of fighting poverty and its causes...
not the people who were poor.
Poverty, hunger & disease...
We were secure in the belief that our country worked to fight injustice,
Conversations in warm rooms, sipping hot cider, in the fall.
When did the conversations morph from valuing enough,
sharing excess, being grateful for abundance -
to greedy accumulation, increasing share,
We asked for the tired, the poor, and oppressed.
and sharing nothing?
Now we have them...us.
Our new abundance
She waits at the corner. Too old to dumpster dive –
Still too proud to beg, she waits, in hunger, sick and tired.
Our sister, our brother, waits for us to remember who we are.
Wake up America ... The only war we need to win
is the war that intends to deny what we all witness
each and every day:
The injustice of Poverty and Hunger!



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Non-Profit Organization

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WAYS to Support PPUF

Come to *SHARE A LAUGH* comedy show
June 12th at Somerville Theatre

Featuring

Wendy Liebman

Tony V, Abbi Crutchfield, Jane Condon, Jim McCue,
Rich Ceisler, Chris Tabb

75% of ticket your purchase goes to PPUF!
(designate to ppuf when checking out)

<http://communityworks.givezooks.com/events/share-a-laugh> or
communityworks.com

OR

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(see ppuf.org)

as a gift for a friend's Birthday Anniversary

OR

Deposit your spare change at a TD Bank branch.

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