



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Summer 2020

**“No prophet can call us to a change of heart more powerfully than the oppressed, the exiled,
the alienated, the outcasts.”** *Kip Tiernan*

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I have been wanting to write to you for many months to talk about all that's happening. But with each try I immediately got stuck. Where in the world does one begin? But as Kip liked to say, “Pull up your socks and get going!” So I yanked at my socks and pulled out of the hole I was in. I decided the best way forward was not to go through a litany of all the awful stuff but rather just let you know what PPUF has been doing since this all began.

Perhaps like me you have been looking for inspiration? I found it in the faces of the nurses, doctors and other essential workers who with fatigue in their eyes and mask indentations in their skin kept on going. But I certainly have found neither inspiration nor leadership coming from Washington DC. The country has largely been abandoned by those folks.

More inspiration comes from Black Lives Matter. Standing their ground. Not going to take it anymore. No more lies. No more promises. Change **now**. Demanding that resources be reallocated to communities ignored for a long long time. Enough already. Enough.

It brings to mind a reflection written by theologian, Sister Marie Augusta Neal. She was thinking about poverty when she wrote her statement, but it can be applied to racial equality as well, *“When the poor reach out to take what is rightfully theirs, what does the Gospel mandate the non-poor to do?”*



The PPUF Board met virtually in order to figure out how we could do more to help. We knew poor folks would be under greater stress now and wanted to provide them with Stop and Shop gift cards as a way of easing the stress.

We decided we would reach out to other organizations that work with people who were struggling to survive from day to day before the pandemic.

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During our search we came upon a wonderful story. A group that had been providing meals to poor and homeless people in Lawrence had to close due to the pandemic. They knew this would be terrible news to the folks who had come to depend on them for food. Refusing to be deterred from their mission... they got a refrigerator – plugged it in inside their closed facility then put it outside and stocked it with food! Determination! KUDOS!



It did not take us long to come up with a list of people doing everything they could to reach the growing numbers of people who need help. **Tree of Life in Boston, House of Mercy in Lawrence, Mass Coalition for the Homeless, Beyond Bond and Legal Defense Fund, Hawthorne Youth and Community Center in Roxbury, Advocates on the Cape working with newly released prisoners, A School nurse who makes sure kids have enough to eat while out of school, and Open Hand Pantry in Haverhill.** We will continue our outreach.

Are we doing enough to help people who have fallen off the edges and are looking for a lifeline. The answer of course is NO! Thousands of people were hungry before the pandemic. Thousands more are now lining up on bread lines.

But we need to remain vigilant of issues that impact the lives of poor people while the country concentrates on the pandemic and racism.

Georgia continues to meet with advocates to keep an eye on programs that families need to survive. She says the SNAP (food stamps) coalition had Food Bank reports which were worrisome. Pantries are overwhelmed with the need. Some pantries have started demanding ID, even SS# to triage need. I recently heard of one food pantry that saw 200 people each week, pre-pandemic, that now sees 900. The fallout from this makes some pantries unavailable for the undocumented. Food Banks are trying to monitor this situation. Online SNAP meetings continue to have minimum 130 participants on the call! See Georgia's article for more detail.

Oh as if we didn't have enough to worry about, the election is coming up. We need to keep an eye on voter suppression! (See Margaret's Article on **Page 3**)

You may recall that PPUF has been providing administrative and moral support to a group of local activists/advocates who have been working hard to bring positive attention to Safe Injection Facilities. It's been tried in other parts of the country and also in Canada. It does save lives. A woman whom I knew from Rosie's Place and from her advocacy for Safe Sites, Aubri Esters, died in June. Doctors, nurses, lawmakers, mayors, city department heads, shelter staff who knew Aubri were moved by her story and her commitment to helping people who needed it. She was 35.

I've reprinted what Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley said about Aubri. (**Page 4**)

As Kippy said to you in a 1990 letter, "*Can you help us today? Because today is the only day we have really. Tomorrow is for those who can see their way clearly to it. And while our faith remains strong as ever, our check book is very queazy. Anything you send will be greatly appreciated.*"

Be safe out there!

In Struggle and Hope, Georgia, Margaret, and Fran

Need During A Pandemic

By Georgia Mattison

At the beginning of March, Governor Baker told all the Departments under him to work remotely. This order collapsed access to the Department of Transitional Assistance DTA benefits as their computers were not secure to work remotely.. Since then on average of 130 advocacy organizations have been meeting with DTA weekly to restore SNAP, cash assistance and all other DTA programs. DTA offices are still not open but DTA online application and phone availability are more accessible. Essential programs have been restored by virtue of nonprofits taking over.



The bulk of SNAP applications are handled by Project Bread. Project Bread had to install extra phone lines to handle the volume. They also added more staff with expanded evening and weekend hours. The SNAP coalition also importantly worked with DTA to apply for waivers to make all SNAP applications emergency ones. Clients would receive benefits in a week and documentation would be by personal declaration.

Advocates in the weekly meeting pushed DTA to expedite the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer P- EBT card mandated last April by Congress. This benefit of \$400 a month is for low-income students in the School Lunch program. This benefit was only for Spring so needed to be pushed to become available. It has been a boon for families trying to feed their kids at home because of the pandemic.

The Boston, Worcester, and Western Mass Food Banks reported an avalanche of need at food pantries Massachusetts food insecurity is 37% up from 14%. The Stop n Shop cards dispersed by PPUF are much needed.

Besides working with the SNAP Coalition I have been working with the legislature and the Welfare Coalition to get An Act to Provide Short Term Relief to Families in Deep Poverty out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee to the floor for a vote.

The Welfare Short term relief bill was just voted down in the Senate. More support needed for the poor was lost. Project Bread is there to guide people to the nearest Food Pantry. They also raise money every year especially through the Walk for Hunger. They use a lot of their funds now to take applications for SNAP. If the Commonwealth did their job, Project Bread could do their mission to help the Families on Welfare who need the extra support that the legislature just voted down!

Get Out The Vote

Margaret Rhodes

The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude. The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

(United States Constitution, 15th Amendment)

The right to vote is a basic entitlement of our country, central to what it means to be a citizen. Increasingly, however, many of the poor and many people of color find themselves disenfranchised-- by new voter identification laws, by increased restrictions on voting, and by laws prohibiting jailed felons and ex-felons from voting. We wrote about this in a 2016 PPUF Newsletter. The situation since then has only become worse.

Thirty-five states request or require some form of ID in order to vote, and seven require a very limited set of government-issued photo IDs, which are challenging for poor people to afford or to obtain. In addition, many states have reduced voting days and hours, reduced early voting, limited the number of polling places, limited registration times, purged voter lists and restricted voting by mail.



There are also serious concerns about the voting machines that will be used in the 2020 election. In many states the machines are more than ten years old, and new ones have malfunctioned, as evidenced in the June primary election in Georgia. Some states still exclude ex-felons from voting, and many exclude current prisoners from voting. Florida was forced by the courts to allow ex-felons to vote in 2019, but Florida then imposed a requirement that the ex-felons pay all fines prior to being able to vote. The dispute is back in court.

Some of the new restrictions on voting have been justified by fears of supposed fraud; multiple reviews, however, have found little evidence of fraud. Some restrictions have been imposed for fear of Covid 19, compressing voting hours, for example, to limit the exposure of personnel at the polling sites. The corollary, however, is greater exposure to Covid 19 by those waiting in lines for hours to vote. It has meant that many poor people in particular have been de facto denied the right to vote. A mail-in ballot would solve the problem.

While this may seem like a new issue, devised often by Republican State administrations keen to exclude Democratic voters, it is a very old issue indeed. After fierce debate and opposition to the Fifteenth Amendment in 1865 through 1868, the Amendment was finally ratified, enabled by Southern Confederate leaders being excluded from Congress and replaced by Black Congressmen. Soon thereafter, however, Southern states found ways to exclude the registration of Blacks and some poor whites, by instituting literacy tests, and outright intimidation of Blacks. It was not until the Civil Rights Act of 1965 that these practices were prohibited, but voting inequities continue to the present. The weakness of the 15th Amendment is that while it prevents discrimination by race in voting nationwide, states retain their right to establish other requirements that discriminate in indirect ways, as detailed above.

Increasing voter turnout in November is crucial. We must assure that people know where and how to cast their ballots and can vote by mail. The Trump administration has been working to prevent voting by mail because it would facilitate a larger turnout, likely to their disadvantage. They claim without ANY evidence that it would lead to massive fraud. We believe that voting by mail WILL increase voter turnout and will reduce public exposure to Covid 19 as well. Join us in the fight to increase the vote and enable voting by mail. Here are a couple of places to start: the Daily Cos can send you postcards to mail to swing states (campaigns@dailykos.com.) RECLAIM THE VOTE works particularly in voter suppression states to register voters and inform them about elections.

Addendum: Voting In Massachusetts

The MA legislature and Governor have been working on proposals to make voting in the Primary and General election more accessible and safe. In MA you still have to register before the election, but the deadline to apply may be expanded to 10 days before the primary and 20 days before the general election. In addition, all voters can vote by mail if they apply to do so, and they can apply online. Early voting has been expanded to four days before the election, We hope these proposals will be finalized soon.

Remembering : Rep. John Lewis who said, *“The vote is the most powerful non-violent tool we have in our democratic society, and we must use it.*

Statement of Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley Honoring Aubri Esters

June 18, 2020

Madam Speaker, I rise today to ask the House of Representatives to join me in honoring and celebrating the life of Ms. Aubri Esters, an outspoken and beloved activist.

Aubri was a voice for the unheard. She was unabashed in sharing her story and her lived experiences to advocate for the wellbeing of those most marginalized, including other transgender individuals, people with disabilities, people with substance use disorders, and trauma survivors.

In addition to serving on the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ Harm Reduction Commission, Aubri co-founded the organization SIFMA Now!, a coalition dedicated to building public support for supervised consumption sites and other life-saving harm reduction efforts. Whether on the ground working directly with impacted communities or in the Massachusetts State House advocating for progressive health policies that center on those most vulnerable, Aubri was committed to saving lives.

On Thursday, June 11th, our community lost a true activist leader, table shaker and accomplice in the fight for health care justice. Aubri will be missed dearly, but her legacy lives on in the policy she helped to create, in the hearts of her fellow activists, and in the minds of policy makers whom she engaged and enlightened.

Madam Speaker, I ask the House of Representatives to join me in recognizing the life of Aubri Esters and her contributions to the Massachusetts 7th Congressional District. We remember Aubri with tremendous gratitude for her life-saving advocacy. May she forever rest in power.



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Safe & Interesting Outing: A Visit to the Kip Tiernan Memorial



Find it on Dartmouth Street between Boylston and Newbury Streets.
At the *Copley* Green Line Station.