

# Open Letter to the PA House and Senate

## Please Restore General Assistance

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May 22, 2012

Open Letter to Pennsylvania House and Senate Members:

Our state budget reflects our values. It is a statement of what matters most. Like you, we believe:

- No child should be homeless. In fact, no one should be homeless.
- People with disabilities and older adults should be able to live safely and with dignity.
- Women and children should be able to live free from violence, especially in their own homes.

We urge you to ensure that our state budget reflects our values by restoring General Assistance in its entirety or, at minimum, to restore key components. General Assistance protects those most in need and saves taxpayers' money. Please restore this cost-effective prevention program.

Please consider these facts. General Assistance is:

### ➤ **A True Safety Net Program of Last Resort**

Pennsylvanians use the \$205 a month to pay for shelter and recovery program fees and basic subsistence until they get back on their feet. Women fleeing abuse are an excellent example of people who use this program as a bridge to a new life. GA provides a hand-up, not a hand-out. In fact, the only people who can receive General Assistance are:

- *Individuals with disabilities and sick adults without minor children who have proof from their doctors*
- *Domestic violence survivors, many of who have just fled their abusers*
- *Adults participating in intensive alcohol or drug treatment programs*
- *Children living with an unrelated adult, and*
- *Adults caring for someone who is sick or disabled, or for an unrelated child*

### ➤ **Cost-Saving and Cost-Effective**

People forced to live on the street end up using more costly services such as emergency rooms and inpatient care; police will be called upon more. The loss of General Assistance will be more expensive for taxpayers. (<http://pacaresforall.org/>)

- *If just 7% enter the criminal justice system, \$150M savings becomes \$9M cost*
- *If just 1% enter psychiatric hospitals, \$150M savings becomes \$20M cost*
- *If just 20% end up in homeless shelters, \$150M savings becomes \$23M cost*

### ➤ **A Lifeline**

Many of those who get General Assistance are waiting for federal disability insurance (SSDI) to come through, a process that can take as long as 24 months. When federal disability insurance is approved, the state is repaid. In fact, in 2011, the state received nearly \$30M in revenue.

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### ➤ **Good for Business**

In fact, General Assistance prevents homelessness and supports recovery. People use it for housing - shelter fees, room in a boarding house, etc. Without it, nearly 70,000 of the poorest people will have nowhere to live, nowhere to change their clothes or go to the bathroom, no mailing address, let alone be prepared to find employment.

### ➤ **Irreplaceable**

United Way member agencies report that demand has risen significantly while donations have remained stagnant or gone down; many have already laid-off staff. They cannot pick up the slack, nor can faith groups. Lutheran Advocacy Ministry says: *"We can do a lot with five loaves and two fish, but we cannot feed, shelter or tend to all who have been cut loose at once."* <http://lutheranadvocacy.org/blogs/toxic-charity-and-human-service-cuts/>

### ➤ **A Bridge to Recovery**

General Assistance helps people enter and stay in treatment so they can rebuild their lives and become productive citizens. It is a short-term program that paves a way forward.

### ➤ **Help for Good Samaritans**

Sometimes a neighbor or friend takes in a child to provide stability for him or her while a parent is absent in the short term. Not only does this help the child, but it prevents use of foster care and the child welfare system at much greater cost.

### ➤ **Benefits Every County**

### ➤ **Offered by Thirty Other States**

### **There is no evidence of widespread waste, fraud and abuse.**

Auditor General Jack Wagner has never issued an audit of the General Assistance program. In summarizing his department's findings with respect to General Assistance, Auditor General Wagner said: "In all our audits, we never had a recommendation to cut a person off ... What we have repeatedly said is, "you need to fix the system."

Please join the undersigned in calling for General Assistance to be restored in Pennsylvania's 2013 budget. We can afford General Assistance. And the neediest Pennsylvanians cannot afford to live without it.
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Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
The Undersigned

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### Statewide Organizations

AARP Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Coalition to End Homelessness
AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania	Pennsylvania Community Providers Association
Coalition for Low Income Individuals	Pennsylvania Council of Churches
CLARIFI (Formerly Consumer Credit Counseling Services)	Pennsylvania Jewish Coalition
Campaign for What Works	Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council
Community Action Association of Pennsylvania	Pathways PA
Community First Fund	Pennsylvania Association of Rural and Small Schools
Home Leasing	Pennsylvania NOW, Incorporated
Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania	Public Citizens for Children and Youth
Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in PA	Self-Determination Housing Project of Pennsylvania
Methodist Advocacy Ministry in PA	Spanish American Civic Association
NeighborWorks PA	Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative Advocacy Network
Pennsylvania Alliance for Children and Families	United Way of Pennsylvania
Pennsylvania Catholic Conference	
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence	

### Local and Regional Organizations

Allegheny Valley Association of Churches	Community of Caring
Allentown Housing Authority	CPM Housing Group
ARC of Crawford County	Diamond and Associates
Bernadine Center	Dignity Housing
CADCOM	District Attorney's Office, City of Philadelphia
Centre County Women's Resource Center	Education Law Center
City of Allentown	Family and Community Service of Delaware County
CLARIFI (Formerly Consumer Credit Counseling)	Family Answers, Allentown
Coalition Against Hunger	Family Connections of Easton
Columbia County Housing and Redevelopment Authority	Family Services of Chester County
Community Action Committee of the Lehigh Valley	Family Services of Western PA
Community Development Consulting	Fortunate-Entities Housing and Development, Inc
Community Help Centre	Friends Association for Care and Protection of Children
Community Intervention Center	Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank
Community Justice Project	Housing and Neighborhood Services Erie
Community Legal Services of Philadelphia	

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HDC MidAtlantic
Homeownership Counseling Association of the Delaware Valley
Housing and Neighborhood Development Services
Housing Authority of the County of Beaver
Housing Authority of the County of Dauphin
Just Harvest
Juvenile Law Center
Lehigh County Conference of Churches
Mental Health Association of Southeastern PA
NeighborWorks of Western Pennsylvania
New Jerusalem Now
PCCA
People's Emergency Center
Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations
Philadelphia Alliance and Philadelphia Coalition
Philadelphia Unemployment Project
Philadelphia VIP
Project H.O.M.E.
Providence Connections
Resources for Human Development
Right Sized Homes
Schuylkill Community Action

Second Harvest Food Bank of the Lehigh Valley
Service Access and Management, Du Bois
Shalom House
Shelter Service, Inc, Lewistown
Speak Unlimited
Success Against All Odds
Sullivan County Housing Authority
Tenant Union Representative Network
The Simple Way
United Christian Ministries, Inc., Osceola,
United Neighborhood Centers of Northeastern Pennsylvania
United Way of the Capital Region
Warren-Forest Counties Economic Opportunity Commission
Warrior Run Development Corporation
Westmoreland Community Action Partnership
Women Against Abuse
Women of Excellence
Women's Community Revitalization Project
Women's Law Project
Wyoming County Community Support Program and Hands on Recovery
YWCA of Greater Harrisburg