



The Welfare Agitator

Welfare Justice Project

FOOD STAMPS HAS NEW NAME AND MAKES SOME IMPROVEMENTS

SPECIAL POINT OF INTEREST:

DPW HAS A NEW CASH GRANT

In March of 2009 DPW implemented a new supplemental grant called Transitional Cash Assistance (TCA). This temporary grant is an incentive for TANF families that move from TANF to work. Through this temporary grant, families whose TANF cases close due to employment will receive \$100 per month (\$50 twice a month) for three months.



The Food Stamp Program is a federal food nutrition program. The Program was reauthorized in the Farm Bill in the spring of 2008 and along with the reauthorization came a name change for the food stamp program. PA did not implement the new name change immediately but in mid-spring of 2009 the new name was implemented. The Food Stamp Program is now officially the **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP**.

In an effort to expand eligibility to more households, PA has increased the income guidelines for the program. As of July 27, 2009 SNAP maximum income guidelines were increased from 130% to 160% of the federal poverty guidelines for households without an elderly and/or disabled person and to 200% for households with an elderly and/or disabled person. The new guidelines are as follows:

Household Size	Maximum monthly income (before taxes)	Maximum monthly income for those over age 59 and/or disabled	Maximum SNAP benefit per month
1	\$1,387	\$1,734	\$200
2	\$1,867	\$2,334	\$367
3	\$2,347	\$2,934	\$526
4	\$2,827	\$3,534	\$668
5	\$3,307	\$4,134	\$793
6	\$3,787	\$4,734	\$952
7	\$4,267	\$5,334	\$1,052
8	\$4,747	\$5,934	\$1,202

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Extended Food Stamps (EFS) allows certain households that are transitioning from TANF to work (causing income to increase) to continue to receive the same amount of benefits as they received prior to the increased income. *Basically the food stamps are frozen for five months before the new income is considered.* Effective August 1, 2009 this provision has been expanded to include **all** households that are leaving TANF due to increased household income from work.

"Justice denied anywhere diminishes justice everywhere" - Martin Luther King, Jr.

DPW MAKES IT HARDER TO GET SPECIAL ALLOWANCES - BAD!



DPW has a long history of providing its consumers with supportive services to help them

achieve their self-sufficiency goals in the form of transportation allowances, clothing allowances, etc. However, the powers that be have decided that the burden of getting to and from job training programs, getting appropriate clothing for job interviews and new jobs, getting books and supplies and equipment is now the consumer's. Keep in mind that people on TANF are living at 30% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$403 per month for a family of three) and it is impossible for them to provide these necessities for themselves. DPW's new policy (effective August 4, 2009) is as follows:

1. Before a request for special allowances is approved, the con-

sumer must verify that the item or service is required for training or employment purposes and all other available resources have been explored first.

2. Consumers must provide a receipt, within two weeks of receiving the special allowance, to verify that it was used for the intended purpose.

If a receipt is not submitted within 14 days or if the consumer has \$10 or more of the allowance left over, the caseworker will initiate an overpayment to recover the allowance.

3. The caseworker is required to be sure that: the allowance is necessary to support participation in a work activity or work-related activity; the individual does not already have the item; the consumer is not receiving the same item or service from another source; the item or service is not available from another source (at no cost to the con-

sumer); other options have been exhausted prior to authorizing special allowances and that participation is not possible without the allowance.

4. Consumers are required to estimate how much the item or service will cost and caseworkers will compare the costs to a list of the range of prices for it.

These changes were instituted with no input from consumers or advocates and we are working on clarification and modification of this harsh new policy. Caseworkers will probably execute this new policy with great force. **If you have problems accessing special allowances, call Rochelle at 412-431-8960 ASAP! PROTEST this new policy by calling the Secretary of Welfare Estelle Richman at 717-787-2600 and tell her how you feel.**

REMEMBER, YOU CAN STILL CALL THE "CUSTOMER SERVICE CENTER" AT 1-877-395-8930 TO MAKE UPDATES OR CHANGES TO YOUR CASE, CHECK THE STATUS OF YOUR APPLICATION, GET GENERAL INFORMATION OR TO REQUEST FORMS AND DOCUMENTS.

SOME UNEMPLOYED LOSE FOOD STAMPS BECAUSE OF STIMULUS



When President Obama increased unemployment benefits as part of his economic stimulus, he also made

some Americans ineligible for hundreds of dollars a month in food stamps (now called SNAP).

Under the plan, laid-off workers receiving unemployment checks get an additional \$25 per week in their checks. This extra money has pushed many people over the food stamp limit, making them ineligible.

And for those hurt by the change, there's no way around it. People have no option not to accept the \$25 per week.

A record 32.5 million people

participate in the program. Because unemployment benefits and food stamp eligibility both vary from state to state, it's impossible to say how many people are hurting.

We don't know if Congress members knew that this stimulus payment would hurt some people. After all, the stimulus checks were intended to ease the effects of the recession not cancel out benefits from other programs. They might have known, but were in a rush to pass the stimulus and get the money out the door-- and not thinking too much about the implications. Congress could have declared that the \$25 stimulus payments would not affect food stamp eligibility.

But they didn't. Food stamp eligibility is based on a strict gross income guideline, depending on family size for most people under 60 or not disabled.

The stimulus law was intended not just as a jolt to the economy but also to ease the burden. Besides unemployment benefits, the stimulus law also increased food stamp benefits and the income guidelines for eligibility.

There is a silver lining to this gray cloud though! PA has increased the SNAP guidelines so people whose benefits were cut off because of this payment can now re-apply. Call Just Harvest at 412-431-8963 for assistance with an application.

NEW TAX CREDIT HELPS WORKING PEOPLE



The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) passed last February included a new refundable tax credit for working people, the Making Work Pay Credit (MWPC). The credit is worth up to \$400 for an individual and \$800 for a married couple filing jointly. Employers began withholding less tax from paychecks in April so that workers could have the money in small increments now instead of waiting until they file their 2009 tax return. Workers will receive \$400 spaced out in their paychecks between April 1 and December 31, 2009 rather than waiting until they file a tax return to get the credit. This increase in income could be as much as \$50 per month.

You did not need to do anything to start getting the credit and it won't be counted as taxable income when you file your tax return. If your employer did not change the withholding on your pay, don't worry, you'll be able to claim this credit when you file your 2009 tax return.

This extra tax credit is good news for workers, but because most people are getting the money in advance and everyone's situation is different, some people could end up getting more money than they're entitled to. Workers in the following categories may want to change their withholding to avoid owing money to the IRS at tax time: workers with more than one job at a time; joint

filers when both spouses work; people who work and receive Social Security, SSI or Veteran's Disability benefits; and workers who are claimed as a dependent by someone else.

If you wish to change your withholding to avoid owing additional tax, talk to your employer about withholding additional taxes by changing your W-4 form. For more information about the MWPC and other tax changes from the ARRA, visit the Just Harvest website, www.justharvest.org or www.irs.gov.

WIC HAS NEW FOOD PACKAGE

Wonderful things are happening with the new Women, Infants and Children Supplemental Food Program's (WIC) food package. The new food package starts October 1, 2009. People who have WIC appointments starting August 15th will get their new food package vouchers for October then. **Changes include:**

- * Addition of fruits and vegetables which can be canned, fresh, or frozen with no additives; organic fruits and vegetables are allowed (more expensive so you will get fewer products for the money)
- * Addition of whole grain bread and rice products
- * Addition of tofu and soy milk for adults, but children will need a medical prescription to receive these products.
- * Cheese will not be automatically given anymore - the choice is the client's, but they will lose some of their milk if they choose cheese. For a pound of cheese, three quarts of milk will be eliminated from the food package.
- * Children 2 years old and up will get low-fat milk such as 2%, 1%, or skim.
- * Clients may purchase canned beans with their vouchers instead of dried beans.
- * Infants 6 months and older will be allowed jarred fruits and vegetables.

These changes, the first in 30 years, were developed to improve the health of pregnant and breast-feeding mothers and children.

NEW TANF WORK ACTIVITY AVAILABLE - GOOD!



Job search for many is very challenging these days, so in an effort to provide TANF consumers with more options DPW has created a new program called Vocation-Specific Work Experience (VWE). Available for consumers who are in

an education & training program, this activity will allow consumers to gain "real life" experience in the field that they are studying and can be used as a work activity. Participants will be paid minimum wage for a maximum of 20 hours per week.

This payment is considered income and will be counted for cash grants and SNAP benefits, *although 50% of the income will be disregarded*. For more information, speak to your caseworker, case manager or call Rochelle at Just Harvest.

OTHER NEWS...



INVITE WJP TO DO AN ADVOCACY CLINIC!

THE WELFARE JUSTICE PROJECT IS AVAILABLE TO COME OUT TO YOUR ORGANIZATION AND CONDUCT ADVOCACY CLINICS FOR YOUR STAFF AND/OR PARTICIPANTS. THE CLINICS CAN BE GENERAL INFORMATION OR SPECIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT A PROGRAM OR POLICY.

HOURS AND TIMES ARE FLEXIBLE, SO IF YOU ARE INTERESTED CALL ROCHELLE AT 412-431-8960 TO SET UP SOMETHING!

SAVE THE DATE!
Just Harvest 21st Annual Harvest Celebration Dinner
Wednesday, October 21, 2009. Raj Patel, author, journalist and activist on the global food system will speak at the Just Harvest 21st Annual Harvest Celebration Dinner at Omni William Penn. East End Food Coop will receive the Seeds of Justice Award. Stupendous Silent Auction, too. Call 412-431-8960 for more info or to volunteer.

Just Harvest is hiring a new Co-Director

Just Harvest seeks a highly skilled and committed activist as Co-Director for Policy and Communication. To be our primary public policy advocate, public spokesperson, and manager of grassroots organizing and mobilization. Also key grassroots fundraising responsibility and shared Executive Director role. More details @ www.justharvest.org

Cover letter, resume and references by 9/15/09 to search@justharvest.org or mail to Just Harvest, 16 Terminal Way, Pittsburgh, PA 15219, att: Search. See full job description at www.justharvest.org. AA/EOE
No phone calls accepted

JUST HARVEST IS HOLDING A POVERTY SIMULATION ON SEPTEMBER 18 AT THE PITT STUDENT UNION...SEE FLIER INSIDE FOR DETAILS!



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