

# PA CARES FOR ALL

## Coalition to Save General Assistance

[www.pacaresforall.org](http://www.pacaresforall.org)

March 7, 2012

Dear Legislative Leaders:

We write to express our dismay at the Governor's proposed budget cuts to programs that serve the most vulnerable Pennsylvanians. Funding cuts to mental health services, intellectual disability services, addiction treatment programs, services for people who are homeless, and the Homeowners Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP) program would have catastrophic consequences for our Commonwealth.

**We are especially troubled by the proposal to eliminate the General Assistance (GA) cash assistance program and slash funding for GA-related Medical Assistance.** These cuts will eliminate a lifeline for people in desperate crises. This is not how Pennsylvanians want our government to treat abused women, people with disabilities, orphaned children, and people struggling to overcome drug addictions. **We urge you to reverse these cuts in the final 2012-13 budget.**

General Assistance is a last-resort program providing extremely meager benefits to 68,000 Pennsylvanians with no income. There is no other safety net for its recipients: if someone is able to work or has another source of income, he or she is ineligible for GA. The overwhelming majority of recipients are individuals with physical and/or mental health disabilities; most of these individuals are applying for federal SSI disability benefits that will reimburse the Commonwealth once approved. GA also provides a lifeline to women escaping domestic violence. It supports people in intensive drug or alcohol treatment programs. And GA supports caregivers and children unable to live with their families.

The average \$205 monthly GA benefit is starkly low, but this small sum frequently keeps individuals from becoming homeless. With \$205 a month, many people on GA can rent a room. They can pay for the bus to get to needed appointments. This \$205 pays for clothes, co-pays, over-the-counter medicines, laundry, soap, and toothpaste. And this money is a lifeline enabling domestic violence victims to escape abuse. Without the prospect of income, victims have no option but to stay with or return to their abusers, enduring continued violence. Without GA, other people will turn to homeless shelters or end up in state psychiatric hospitals or jails/prisons

Cutting GA also makes poor budgetary sense. For many recipients, GA operates as a loan program, whose benefits are repaid when their federal SSI benefits are approved. For others, \$205 a month in GA is far cheaper than the alternative costs Pennsylvania faces if these people are left destitute. These costs include homeless shelters (\$1,050 a month), foster care (\$600 - \$1,800 a month), incarceration (\$2,750 a month), and state psychiatric hospitals (\$20,584 a month).

Pennsylvanians are compassionate people, who want to ensure that people in dire need of financial support get the help they need. GA's meager benefits provide last-resort support. Eliminating that vital support would leave people with disabilities and people coping with abuse both destitute and hopeless. Pennsylvanians do not want such a cruel budget.

We urge you to reject the proposed elimination of the General Assistance program and cuts to GA-related Medical Assistance, as well cuts to as other programs that provide critical support for Pennsylvania families.

Sincerely,

ACHIEVA

Acquired Brain Injury Network

ACTION-Housing, Inc

Advocacy Committee for Justice and Peace of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia

AIDS Law Project of Pennsylvania

Allegheny Valley Association of Churches

Allentown Women's Center

The Brashear Association, Incorporated

Broad Street Ministry

CareLink Community Support Services

Catholic Social Services

Center for Advocacy for the Rights and Interests of the Elderly (CARIE)

Centre County Women's Resource Center

Cherry Hill Women's Center

Coalition Against Hunger

Coalition for Low Income Pennsylvanians

Community Justice Project

Community Legal Services

Concern for Health Options: Information, Care and Education (CHOICE)

Consumer/Family Satisfaction Team of Beaver County

Consumer Health Coalition

Daemion Counseling Center

Disability Rights Network of Pennsylvania

Drug and Alcohol Service Providers Organization of Pennsylvania

East End Cooperative Ministry

East Side Bread Basket

Face to Face Legal Center

Family and Community Service of Delaware County

Family Connection of Easton, Inc.

Family Practice and Counseling Network

The Food Trust

Frontline Dads

Germantown Jewish Centre

Graymatters Consulting

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

HIAS Pennsylvania

Homeless Advocacy Project

Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

Interim House

Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia

Jewish Family & Children's Service of Pittsburgh

Jewish Federation of Greater Philadelphia

Just Harvest

Juvenile Law Center

Legal Clinic for the Disabled

Liberty Resources, Inc.

Lutheran Advocacy Ministry in Pennsylvania

Lutheran Settlement House

Maternity Care Coalition

Mental Health Association of Franklin & Fulton Counties

Mental Health Association in Pennsylvania

Mental Health Association of Washington County

Michael's Place, The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Council of Pittsburgh

NAMI PA Montgomery County

The Navigators Philadelphia Metro Team & Kingdom Care Reentry Network

New Voices Pennsylvania: Women of Color for Reproductive Justice

Osterhout Disability Law, LLC

Pathways PA

Pennsylvania Alliance for Retired Americans

Pennsylvania Association of Rehabilitation Facilities

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Pennsylvania Community Providers Association

Pennsylvania Council of Churches  
Pennsylvania Health Law Project

Pennsylvania Mental Health Consumers' Association

Pennsylvania Prison Society

Pennsylvania Statewide Independent Living Council

The Philadelphia Coalition

Philadelphia Jewish Labor Committee

Philadelphia Unemployment Project

Philadelphia Women's Center

Project H.O.M.E.

Providence Connections

Public Citizens for Children and Youth

Rainbow Kitchen Community Services

School Nutrition Association of Pennsylvania

The Service Employees International Union, Local 668 (the Pennsylvania Social Services Union)

Silver & Silver

Smithfield United Church of Christ

South Hills Interfaith Ministries

Southwestern PA Food Security Partnership

SPEAK Unlimited Inc

Transitional Services, Inc.

TRUST-HOPE for the Hurting

UCP/CLASS (United Cerebral Palsy/  
Community Living and Support Services)

Unitarian Universalist Pennsylvania Legislative  
Action Network

The United Way of Beaver County

United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania

Volunteers of America Delaware Valley

Washington City Mission

Westmoreland County Food Bank, Inc.

Witnesses to Hunger

Women Against Abuse

Women's Law Project

WOMEN'S WAY