

# WRN News

WELFARE REFORM NETWORK

JANUARY 2009

## State & City Budget Update

Despite the State's projected \$15.4 billion deficit for SFY 2009-10, Governor Paterson included a 30% increase to the basic welfare grant in his Executive Budget released in December 2008. This increase would be phased in with three installments of 10% each year for a three-year period beginning on January 1, 2010. When fully implemented, the average family of three on public assistance would receive a monthly basic allowance of \$387, up from the current allowance of \$291. Thanks largely to our efforts, we exposed the inadequacy of the welfare grant that has shrunk to less than 50% of the federal poverty level today and succeeded in moving this to the top of the Governor's list of budget priorities. We will continue to advocate for continued increases in future years, as the 30% increase is still not enough to account for the rise in the cost of living since the grant was last raised in 1990. In addition, the SFY 2009-10 Executive Budget includes an increase in the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program (HPNAP) of \$4.4 million, on top of a one-time \$1 million emergency increase announced on January 2, 2009. This funding is critically needed, as HPNAP was cut by 16% in the enacted budget in April 2008 and again by 6% as part of the August 2008 across-the-board cuts. These cuts, combined with declining private donations and rising demand, have resulted in the Food Bank for NYC now facing the largest food crisis it has seen in 25 years.

While seeing an increase in the public assistance grant and HPNAP was a big accomplishment, there are other areas of the SFY 2009-10 Executive Budget that contain potentially devastating cuts, including reductions to: SSI State Supplement, Homeless Intervention Program (HIP) and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) supportive housing programs, NYS Refugee Resettlement Assistance Program (NYSRRAP), NYS Citizenship program, Strengthening Families Initiative, HIV Employment program, Nutrition Outreach Education Program (NOEP), and NYC Homeless Prevention contracts. In addition, several programs previously funded with TANF dollars were not included, such as: Technology Training, Language Immersion/ESL, Adult & Family Literacy, VESID/LIVES, Basic Education, and ACCESS Welfare-to-Careers. The new Career Pathways program targeted to welfare recipients and disconnected youth did not receive new funding. However, since implementation is set to start in February 2009, the re-appropriation of \$5 million in funding included in the SFY 2008-09 State Budget will be sufficient to support the first year of the program through early 2010.

In 2008, State agencies were required to submit inventories of programs ranked High, Medium and Low according to their relevance to the core mission of the agency to

the Division of Budget (DOB). OTDA has ranked most of its programs as "High," including public assistance, Food Stamps, SSI, adult shelters, employment programs, summer youth employment, educational resources, Bridge, wage subsidy, emergency homeless, and the new career pathways program. Transportation and technology training programs were ranked "Medium," and the Access welfare-to-careers program was ranked "Low." The Governor used this ranking system to make some decisions about funding priorities for SFY 2009-10.

On the City level, in November 2008, City FY 2009 Budget Programs to Eliminate the Gap (PEGs) proposed by Mayor Bloomberg for the Human Resources Administration (HRA) were partially restored and funded with alternative PEGs by the City Council. Specifically, this includes: \$2 million for Employment Services, including funding for adult basic education, literacy services and training vouchers (including BEGIN and Back-to-Work); \$1.3 million for Transfer Scatter Site 2 (SS2) Clients to HASA Case Management; and \$1 million to prevent the closure of the Hamilton Job Center. However, additional PEGs were adopted, including: a grant diversion program to place cash assistance recipients into entry level temporary and clerical positions using the recipient's cash grant to offset personnel cost; a reduction in funding for contracts that provide comprehensive case management and referral to substance abuse treatment; and new policies to ensure compliance with recertification requirements, prevent fraud, and assist senior citizens in obtaining SSI benefits. Full descriptions for each of these PEGs are contained in the New York City Council Budget Note for HRA (link below).

### Key Resources:

OTDA Commissioner David Hansell, "Increasing Welfare Payment is a Budget Priority," *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, December 21, 2009:

<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/article/20081221/OPINION02/812210354>

SFY 2009-10 State Executive Budget Materials:

<http://publications.budget.state.ny.us/eBudget0910/ExecutiveBudget.html>

OTDA Program Inventory and Key Data, October 24, 2008:

[http://publications.budget.state.ny.us/budgetFP/coreMissionBudgeting/OTDA\\_CoreMission.pdf](http://publications.budget.state.ny.us/budgetFP/coreMissionBudgeting/OTDA_CoreMission.pdf)

New York City FY 2009 Budget Materials:

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/omb/html/publications/publications.shtml>

New York City Council Budget Note - HRA, November 2008:

[http://council.nyc.gov/downloads/pdf/budget\\_note\\_hra\\_11\\_08.pdf](http://council.nyc.gov/downloads/pdf/budget_note_hra_11_08.pdf)

-Jill Poklemba, FPWA

Dear WRN Supporter:

**The Welfare Reform Network (WRN) is initiating its annual dues appeal for 2009 – and we need your support more than ever.** Since its inception in 1990, the Welfare Reform Network has relied on annual contributions from members like you to supplement the generous sponsorship of the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). Your dues help fund a coordinator to work with the steering committee and FPWA’s Income Security Policy Analyst, who has improved the quality of the WRN News and raised the public advocacy profile of WRN.

The Welfare Reform Network achieved a lot in 2008:

- We’ve continued to lead the fight to increase the basic public assistance grant.
- **We were able to prevent Intensive Case Services TANF funds from being used for anti-fraud activities.**
- We conducted a survey to determine the barriers to obtaining regulated child care, particularly for HRA welfare-to-work recipients, which have resulted in under-enrollment in some centers.
- We continued our work to “build a bridge” with HRA and OTDA staff
- Our Policy and Advocacy Committee (PAC) gathered information through presentations and interactive discussions about its top 3 priorities: 1) Expand access to education and training; 2) Mitigate the harm caused by sanctions and expand access to benefits; and 3) Monitor the implementation of the Health and Human Services (HHS)-Connect Technology Tool. In 2009, we will build a public awareness campaign and advocacy strategy to build upon these efforts.
- We brought you innovative and informative panels, such as our April 2008 forum, “How Poverty is Presented in the Media,” and continued access to notable and speakers including: NYS OTDA Commissioner David Hansell, Anna Marie Smith, Mark Levitan, and NYS Assembly Member Deborah Glick.

With your **membership dues** we will be able to continue fostering this critical linkage between program recipients, service providers and advocates.

**We need your voice, your ideas, your participation and, yes, - we need your financial support.**

Sincerely,  
The Welfare Reform Network (WRN) Steering Committee

**Count me in as a contributing WRN member! Enclosed is my donation of:**

\$50      \$75      \$125      \$200    I am including an additional \$\_\_\_\_\_

**Please make checks payable to: FPWA-WRN. Send your check today to: FPWA-WRN, 281 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010.**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Organization:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**FPWA Hosts Roundtable on HIV Prevention Strategies New & Old for Women and Girls in NYC**

On November 6<sup>th</sup> FPWA hosted a roundtable event - “HIV Prevention Strategies New & Old for Women and Girls in NYC”. The event was co-sponsored by the Women’s Institute at Gay Men’s Health Crisis, New York AIDS Coalition, Women of Color Policy Network–Wagner School of Public Services at New York University, Women’s HIV Collaborative of New York and the Young Women of Color HIV/AIDS Coalition.

The event focused on connecting the dots of social and economic conditions, criminal justice and public health data, and aimed to explore HIV prevention strategies beyond Diffusion of Effective Behavioral Interventions (DEBI) models, and to develop a local/domestic response to the epidemic among women and girls in New York to reflect on what consumers and providers would like to see changed in HIV prevention strategies and women services.

Four of the sponsoring organizations presented their recent research projects with overlapping findings, which all point to the need for educational and employment opportunities for women and girls in poor neighborhoods. In particular, FPWA calls for reframing HIV prevention strategies for women and girls in communities of color by taking into account their socioeconomic conditions rather than solely focusing on changing individual behavior. Following these presentations was an active group discussion to identify actions that may help to create change.

The groups are working together to present their research to legislators and policymakers in a unified way.

FPWA’s Report, “HIV Prevention for Women’s and Girls in Communities of Color: Reframing HIV Prevention Strategies”, can be downloaded here:

[http://fpwa.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=copy\\_of\\_HIVPrevention](http://fpwa.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=copy_of_HIVPrevention)

-Rachelle Rae House, FPWA

## LEGAL UPDATE



### *Lovely H. v. Eggleston*

In December 2005, the Legal Aid Society and private law firm Milbank, Tweed, Hadley & McCloy brought a class action case called *Lovely H v. Eggleston* against the New York City Human Resources Administration. The case was brought to challenge HRA's involuntary transfer of more than 30,000 clients with disabilities from their local Job Centers to one of three segregated disabled-only "hub centers" in the Bronx, Brooklyn, or Manhattan. Disabled clients who were participants in the WeCARE program were reassigned to these hub centers and denied the chance to access services at neighborhood Job Centers. As a result, most of these disabled clients were required to travel longer distances at greater hardship to access services, than were non-disabled clients. The plaintiffs alleged that these illegally segregated disabled-only hub centers violated the Americans with Disabilities Act and state and local anti-discrimination laws. The plaintiffs also alleged that HRA lacks systems and procedures needed to provide reasonable accommodations to disabled clients at their local Job Centers.

#### **April 2006 Order: Involuntary Transfers to WeCARE Hub Centers are Illegal**

In an important victory for the disabled clients, in April 2006, the district court granted a preliminary injunction in the case. The court barred New York City from involuntarily reassigning the welfare cases of disabled clients to hub centers. The court agreed with Legal Aid that the use of hub centers constituted unlawful segregation and discrimination on the basis of disability. The court found that requiring disabled clients to travel to hub centers "clearly violates the mandate that persons with disabilities be given the opportunity to participate in mainstream service delivery mechanisms."

#### **The Result of the April 2006 Order: - Hub Centers Disbanded, Retroactive Benefits for Some Clients to Be Restored**

As a result of this decision, HRA disbanded the hub centers and returned WeCARE clients to their regular Job Centers. The *Lovely H.* litigation team moved for an award of retroactive benefits for clients whose cases were closed or sanctioned in connection with their transfer to a hub center. This motion has not yet been decided by the court. However, the City has already agreed that thousands of disabled recipients who lost benefits due to the City's discriminatory practices are entitled to have their cases reevaluated with retroactive benefits issued.

#### **The *Lovely H* Case Now: Negotiations on Disability Accommodations at Job Centers**

In November 2006, the plaintiffs amended the complaint so that it is focused on clients who are or will be participants in the WeCARE program. The main issue in the case is the allegation that HRA has a pattern of denying reasonable accommodations to disabled clients at their local Job Centers. For example, the plaintiffs allege that HRA has no reliable system in place for clients to communicate with HRA via telephone, fax or mail. As a result, clients have to travel in-person to their Job Centers to conduct any business with the Center. Plaintiffs are engaged in settlement negotiations with HRA on the case and attempting to agree on procedures to accommodate disabled clients at Job Centers.

#### **Homebound Clients - Some Clients Had Homebound Status Revoked in Error and Were Mistakenly Called in for Appointments- Call Legal Aid with Problems**

Plaintiffs discovered that HRA committed errors in the way that it processes the cases of homebound clients, causing many homebound clients to lose their benefits in error. Starting in February 2007, HRA changed the way it coded homebound clients on its computer systems. Before then, HRA coded everyone on a case as homebound if anyone was homebound. After February 2007, HRA coded each person individually as homebound. In making these computer changes, HRA committed many errors. As a result, some homebound clients were erroneously called in for in-person appointments. Many were sanctioned or had their cases closed in error for missing these in-person appointments. HRA is working to correct these errors and restore lost benefits. If you have a client who was homebound and who has been incorrectly getting called in for appointments, contact Katie Kelleher (KKelleher@legal-aid.org) at Legal Aid for assistance in getting the homebound code restored and lost benefits paid.

*-Kathleen Kelleher, Legal Aid*

## A Glimpse Inside State Government: *Assemblymember Deborah Glick makes her annual visit to meet with WRN members*

On October 7, 2008, WRN members enjoyed an in-depth discussion with Assemblymember Deborah Glick, the current chair of the Higher Education Committee and previous chair of the Social Services Committee. Assemblymember Glick spoke frankly to WRN members about the unraveling stability of public finances in the midst of a transitional leadership situation at the helm of State government. The SFY 2008-09 State Budget was an attempt to balance fiscal restraint with funding for essential government programs. However, two rounds of mid-year budget cuts are bringing enormous pain to human services providers.

While the Assembly passed the Millionaires Tax, which is not unreasonable due to the fact that the income tax rate has become less progressive over the years, it is politically unpopular. Therefore, Governor Paterson is unlikely to go ahead with it as a solution to bring in more State revenue. If enacted, it could bring in \$2 billion in new revenue. Assemblymember Glick explained that sometimes constituents don't realize all of the benefits and services they receive from the government which is paid for by their taxes, such as police protection, firefighters, schools, roads, bridges, and public transportation. She suggested that we should make this point stronger as advocates in urging tax increases on those in the highest income ranges.

In preparing for State budget cuts, Assemblymember Glick explained that every State agency must prepare to fight cuts. The Assembly included an increase in the welfare grant in its proposed SFY 2008-09 Budget, but had no partners in either the Governor or the Senate. She believes that budget cuts are a full-fledged attack on services for the poor, which must stop. Instead, people must begin raising questions about government spending in other areas. If we can be more efficient in these areas, then we can prevent cuts to programs that serve people in poverty. The State bureaucracy takes a lot of funding to support education and public welfare programs. Advocates could suggest that this funding be re-invested in benefits and services that go directly to people in need.

In terms of advocacy for GED to college transition programs, Assemblymember Glick said that this should be a key focus for higher education policy

moving forward. She also indicated that expanding student aid is a key priority for the Assembly Democratic conference. The Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) and the opportunity programs are the only forms of State-funded assistance for low-income families. These programs offer both financial resources and academic counseling. Assemblymember Glick said that she is also very concerned about the exploitation of part-time faculty who are not paid adequately.



*Jill Poklemba, Assemblymember Glick and Rachelle House*

Lastly, she reminded us that even legislation to expand access to basic education for welfare recipients (A.7391 of 2008) passed both houses of the Legislature in 2002, but was then vetoed by then-Governor Pataki (Veto #41 of 2002). Often, the City's leadership drives policy decisions at the State level. Therefore, Assemblymember Glick advised, we must always anticipate the City's position on any State legislation and be prepared to respond. She also urged us to educate the rank and file legislators, many of whom do not have much expertise about bigger policy issues, because they are more focused on constituent concerns. She suggested that WRN send a list of its members and the impact of budget cuts on non-profit agencies and clients to all legislators. She expressed that there should be more discussion about services for those with no alternatives. In conclusion, Assemblymember Glick emphasized the importance of sharing client stories about people living in legislators' districts to ensure that all budget cuts are understood in terms of their direct impact on services and clients.

*-Jill Poklemba, FPWA*

## Welfare Reform Network Policy & Advocacy Committee (PAC)

Announces a special 2-part meeting:

### Outlook: Federal TANF Reauthorization

*Featuring Guest Presenters via Conference Call:*

### **Elizabeth Lower-Basch & Allegra Baider** Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)

This presentation will include information about what's at stake in 2010 when the federal TANF legislation is set to expire and will be up for reauthorization once again. PAC members will have the opportunity to engage in an interactive discussion with two national policy analysts to discuss prospects for achieving significant changes, given the new political power structure in Washington, DC. In particular, we will focus on advocacy steps that can be taken in the next year to substantially expand education and training opportunities for welfare recipients in New York City that can only be made possible through changes in federal welfare policy.

### Overview: CUNY COPE Program

### **Maxine Henry, University COPE Coordinator**

Do you think you know what the CUNY COPE program is? Maxine will provide a comprehensive overview of the program, including CUNY's partnership with HRA and COPE's method of engaging welfare recipients in higher education opportunities. This presentation is an essential piece of PAC's learning process to fully understand the ways in which welfare recipients in NYC can access education and training opportunities.

**Tuesday, February 17, 2009**

**3:00pm – 5:00pm**

**Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies**

**281 Park Avenue South (at 22<sup>nd</sup> Street)**

**\*Please RSVP** by contacting: **Jill Poklemba** at **212-801-1393**  
or [jpoklemba@fpwa.org](mailto:jpoklemba@fpwa.org)

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Meeting Calendar</b></p> <p><i>Meetings at the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, 281 Park Avenue South (at 22nd St.), unless otherwise noted.</i></p>	<p><b>WRN 2009 General Membership Meetings:</b>                  All meetings begin at 9:30 am and generally end by 11am.</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>February 3</i>  <i>March 3</i>  <i>April 7</i>  <i>May 5</i>  <i>June 2</i>  <i>July TBA</i></p> </td> <td style="width: 50%; vertical-align: top;"> <p><i>August—no meeting</i>  <i>September 15</i>  <i>October 6</i>  <i>November TBA</i>  <i>December 1</i></p> </td> </tr> </table>	<p><i>February 3</i>  <i>March 3</i>  <i>April 7</i>  <i>May 5</i>  <i>June 2</i>  <i>July TBA</i></p>	<p><i>August—no meeting</i>  <i>September 15</i>  <i>October 6</i>  <i>November TBA</i>  <i>December 1</i></p>
<p><i>February 3</i>  <i>March 3</i>  <i>April 7</i>  <i>May 5</i>  <i>June 2</i>  <i>July TBA</i></p>	<p><i>August—no meeting</i>  <i>September 15</i>  <i>October 6</i>  <i>November TBA</i>  <i>December 1</i></p>		

**WRN Committee Meetings January- February 2009**

**Child Care:**

*Contact chair for January date and 2/12/09 2:00–4:00 pm at FPWA.*

*Contacts: Camilla Flemming peterandcamilla@msn.com and Sandy Socolar, (212) 666-5925.*

**Policy & Advocacy Committee (PAC):**

*2/17/09, 3:00–5:00 pm at FPWA.*

*Contact: ( Jill Poklemba, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies, (212) 801-1393 or jpoklemba@fpwa.org*

**Task Force on Domestic Violence & Economic Justice:**

*At Sanctuary for Families. Please contact Diana Urquhart for location & date, (212) 349-6009, ext 308 or durquhart@sffny.org*

**Education and Training Committee:**

*Call committee contact for information.*

*Contact: Maureen Lane*

**“Know Your Rights:” Client Empowerment trainings**

*2/25/09 1:00 -3:00 pm at Hunter College.*

*Thomas Hunter Rm 115  
 Contact: Roxanna Henry, Welfare Rights Initiative, (212) 650-3592*

**Queer Economic Justice Network:**

*Call committee contact for information.*

*Contact: Joseph DeFilippis, (212) 564-3608.*

**About WRN.** WRN, the Welfare Reform Network, is a coalition of organizations and individuals that advocates for humane income security policies. WRN is sponsored by the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). All meetings are open to the public. For more information about WRN or if you would like to contribute an article, please contact Rachelle Rae House at rhouse@fpwa.org or by phone at (212)-801-1316.

The WRN News is edited by Rachelle Rae House.