

Breaking Ground

The Monthly Newsletter of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio

..... July 2005

Blackwell's TEL/TABOR moved to '06 Ballot Coalition will continue to educate and expand opposition

Secretary of State Ken Blackwell and his Citizens for Tax Reform has pulled their TEL/TABOR constitutional amendment from the '05 ballot and has submitted petitions for the '06 general election.

COHHIO and the Coalition for Ohio's Future (CFOF) has vowed to continue efforts to educate Ohioans about numerous problems in the proposed amendment. The CFOF is a non-partisan, non-profit organization consisting of over 150 endorsing groups, whose members include doctors, firefighters, police and other public safety professionals, teachers, business groups, labor, faith-based groups, senior citizens' advocates and many more.

"It is clear that TEL/TABOR is not in the best interest of public policy in the state of Ohio," said Bill Faith, Executive Director of COHHIO. "This tactical move will allow our Coalition to expand, recruit and continue to build our strategic opposition to this effort. Ken Blackwell knew the issue would lose on the 2005 ballot, we will make so it will lose next year as well."

The constitutional amendment would forever force state and local governments to follow an unworkable and rigid budgeting formula. Its inflexible spending formula eventually would underfund critical services that all Ohioans depend on such as public safety, senior citizens services, education, healthcare and maintenance of roads, bridges and highways.

Some of Blackwell's support has been shaken by the move to '06. Scott Pullins, president of the Ohio Taxpayers Association stated "Blackwell says he is a friend of taxpayers, but nothing could be further from the truth. Every time he gets involved, Ohioans get shafted."

Many lawmakers are also expressing their concern with this proposal.

"My preference would be that it not take place," said Senate President Bill Harris, who sees constitutional spending restraints on state government as an impingement on representative Democracy. The proposal, he added, "Takes away the flexibility to interact". In addition, House Speaker Jon Husted said that a TEL was unnecessary.



For more information on the Coalition for Ohio's Future, please visit www.ohiosfuture.org

Ohio to Introduce Programs to improve Access to SSI/SSDI Benefits for Homeless Clients

Ohio was recently selected to receive a SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery) technical assistance grant designed to enhance access to SSA disability programs for homeless persons. The goal of the project is to create a statewide model to expedite SSI/SSDI claims for the homeless. This technical assistance opportunity was made available by the Federal Partners for the Policy Academies to Improve Access to Mainstream Programs. The Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio’s Chronically Homeless Work Group was responsible for applying for this technical assistance opportunity. They will be responsible for siting pilot locations throughout the state to join in this important work and will oversee those efforts into the future.

In coordination with this effort, four of Ohio’s nine Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grantees have been selected as pilot locations for a new program that will benefit homeless clients with a mental illness by expediting their SSI/SSDI claims. The four pilots, located in Columbiana, Lake, Stark and Summit counties recently participated in a three-day training in Ravenna, Ohio featuring by national experts Gary Shaheen, Director for Employment Program Development with Advocates for Human Potential, and Yvonne Perret, Executive Director of The Advocacy and Training Center. The training, “From Homelessness to Employment: Tools for Recovery” which was three-pronged, focused on providing an introduction to the SSI/SSDI programs, exploring successful strategies for expediting SSI/SSDI claims and finally, using SSI/SSDI as a tool to begin recovery and create work incentives. The Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) will oversee these pilot programs, which they call “SSI/Hope/Recovery/Employment”. As ODMH sits on the Interagency Council, their pilot programs will work in collaboration with the Interagency Council’s pilots.

The Interagency Council expects that this work will extend beyond the ten pilot communities to eventually become statewide practice.

A Forum on Pay Day Lending

The Catholic Conference of Ohio is sponsoring a statewide briefing on Predatory Payday Lending. The purpose of this meeting is to examine the predatory impact of payday lending and to explore the possibility of crafting a legislative remedy.

The meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 8 from 10-3 at St Therese's Retreat Center, 5277 E. Broad Street. If interested in attending, please contact JimTobin at jtobin@cducation.org. Please register by August 31.

Balance-of-State SHP Grantees Benefit from Training

Over the last few years, members of the Balance-of-State Continuum of Care Advisory Committee have struggled to identify strategies that would result in the capturing of increasingly important housing emphasis points - one of the criteria the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) use to score continua in the annual Continuum of Care competition. Recognizing that programs with large supportive services budgets detract from the Balance-of-State's ability to acquire the critical housing emphasis points, the Advisory Committee set out to work with the state's Supportive Housing program (SHP) grantees to amend their budgets reassigning "services" costs as "operations" costs, whenever possible. Fortunately, activities once categorized by grantees as service-related costs are often more accurately defined as operations costs. As HUD prefers to see more of their dollars spent on housing and operations, rather than supportive services, amending one's program budget to reduce supportive services costs adds to the competitive viability of the program and that of the (Balance-of-State) continuum as a whole.

Last month, with leadership from the Partnership Center, a HUD technical assistance provider in Cincinnati, COHHIO together with the Ohio Department of Development (ODOD) and the Ohio Department of Mental Health (ODMH) convened five regional meetings throughout the state for the purpose of reviewing Balance-of-State SHP grantees' budgets so that services costs, more suitably defined as operations costs, could be appropriately moved. Trainer, Natalie Hutcheson of the Partnership Center, discussed typical categories of costs that could be moved. She then reviewed each SHP grantee's program budget and provided individualized advice for amending the budget.

Once grantees are prepared to make changes to their budgets they will petition the Columbus HUD Field Office to formally amend the budget.

The Partnership Center is scheduled to carry out additional trainings in urban centers throughout Ohio (Entitlement Counties) to help SHP grantees amend their budgets. For information related to when and where these trainings will take place, please contact Mary Behle of The Partnership Center at 513/891-4016, Extension 14.

COHHIO, together with ODOD and ODMH wish to extend thanks to The Partnership Center and, in particular, Natalie, for their skilled leadership throughout this process.

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If so, please switch to email delivery.
To switch: email Tom Betti at COHHIO at tombetti@cohhio.org.

Youth Empowerment Program:

Youth Address issues at Statewide Meeting

By Sasha Bowers, Age 16

YEP youth from around the state met in August at Ohio State University to address issues of homeless youth. The state youth council decided that we should be focused primarily on four issues. These issues are Older Youth Housing, Fair Wages, Educating people on the real impact of TEL, and Homeless Education, including Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools.

On the last day we held our annual Franklin Park Picnic, we hosted 150 people with lots of activities including: cookout, games, sports activities, arts and crafts, face painting, tours of the conservatory, fishing and of course, the McGraw-Hill sponsored t-shirt design contest. The kids also got to go in the educational garden and taste-test homegrown veggies. It was a really relaxing and non-stressful service project. This was a day when YEP youth can show off their leadership skills. It was great day full of work and fun!

After we cleaned up from the picnic, we had a special guest join the youth for a discussion about youth housing issues. Several YEP youth were able to meet with Tony Coder from Ohio First Lady Hope Taft's office. The youth were impressed that Mr. Coder was really interested in our issues. Many times during our discussion he seemed shocked about what we had to say about the reality of our situations. We talked openly about what services are being provided and what services are missing for homeless youth and young adults. Foster care, affordable housing, living wages, lack of youth shelter options and education were the key concerns of the youth. Mr. Coder asked us our opinions about what could be done to make things better. We talked to him about some of our ideas on better access to more appropriate services and allowing independent youth to access support and services through foster care. Other things we discussed included, allowances for older youth to stay with parents in supplemented housing and access to state-funded higher education. Our youth also complemented the state's effort to include youth in the Interagency Council on Homelessness and Housing and the Ohio Department of Development for working with us to find solutions to the youth housing crisis in Ohio.

If you want to know more please look for updates on YEP issues and projects every month in the COHHIO newsletter.

*Youth Empowerment Program:
Working to KEEP KIDS in SCHOOL*

By Alwiya Shariff, Age 16

YEP youth decided to join other youth from around the country to address problems with “Zero Tolerance” policies in schools. Zero Tolerance policies were created in the 1990’s as a way to deal with students carrying weapons and drugs to school by requiring automatic suspension of the students who violate these rules. YEP youth agree with this part of the regulations as a way to keep schools safe. However, the problem that has evolved is that policies have been expanded beyond just weapons and now include automatic suspensions for breaking almost any rule. Some examples are: being suspended for any verbal argument, all parties being suspended for any physical altercation, even if a bully hits another unprovoked, talking back to a teacher for any reason, and two day suspension for being tardy to class.

YEP first began to discuss this problem after hearing some youth from Connecticut describe how over 14,000 students, including 1000 kindergarteners, were suspended in their district in one year. As we investigated among our own YEP youth we found that many have also been suspended multiple times for non-physical or non-drug related incidents. We found one seventh grade youth suspended over 75 days, all for non-violent offenses, two youth in Cleveland were suspended 5 days for a verbal disagreement, before class, about the skills of the girls basketball team. And worse yet, a YEP honor student in Akron was suspended when a bully was making fun of her for being homeless. Intimidated she ignored the bully and walked to the shelter two blocks from school. The bully caught up with her and began hitting her in the front yard of the shelter. A school employee saw the fight and both girls were suspended for 10 days. There was no allowance for justice as everyone in a fight is automatically suspended under these policies.

Why are these policies being enforced? One theory developed by the YEP Akron youth council is that Zero Tolerance polices are being adopted in response to overcrowding in schools. Some classes in Akron are up to 50 students with only one teacher. They are sometimes in hot, windowless classrooms and in order to gain some control and lighten the population, teachers and principals enforce these unfair policies. As the fight for fair education funding continues, more schools and students are facing this issue. YEP youth have worked hard to keep kids in school. We feel that education is the key component in breaking the cycles of homelessness and poverty. We are trying to keep kids in school, we do not support unfair policies that keep them out!

On a national level YEP has participated in Parent/Student groups that are working for fair solutions by compiling recommendations. If you would like a copy of the national Best Practices recommendations or to find our more please contact Angela Lariviere, Nick Bates, or Alwiya Shariff at COHHIO.

*Youth Empowerment Program Update:
Youth Attend National Youth Leadership Training*

By Ciera Payne, Age 16

Recently, I had the opportunity to attend a national youth leadership training in North Carolina. A YEP youth from Akron also attended with me. I am 16 years old and I have never been out of Ohio, so I definitely found this to be a very interesting experience. For some of the training we talked about a lot of the leadership stuff we have already learned in YEP, but it was really helpful to meet with youth from other parts of the country and learn how they deal with the same problems we face here in Ohio. We met youth from Connecticut, Kansas, and Illinois. We learned a lot about building alliances, gaining power and teambuilding. I feel that we will be able to use this information to help make YEP stronger.

HUD: Housing Market Still Strong

HUD announces the release of its latest analysis of the housing market, based on performance numbers of housing production, sales, affordability, and multi-family (5+ units) housing unit production. The report finds that the housing sector of the U.S. economy remained strong during the first quarter of 2005. Compared to the first quarter of 2004, permits for new homes were up 5.3 percent; construction starts were up 7.3 percent; new housing completions were up 6.0 percent; and shipments of new manufactured homes were up 9.0 percent. Sales of existing homes and new single-family units were also up, despite the continuing rise in their median prices. American families grew their income enough to offset higher interest rates and the increases in home prices. Permits for new multi-family units were up 17.8 percent. These data, and more, are reported for national and regional levels and can be compared to historical trends. The latest issue of U.S. Housing Market Conditions, 1st Quarter, 2005 is available online at "http://www.huduser.org/periodicals/ushmc/spring05/USHMC_05Q1.pdf", or a printed copy is available from HUD USER by calling 1-800-245-2691.

The issue also features discussions on the latest data on the new Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) project, the status of regional housing markets, and in-depth housing market profiles of Amarillo, TX; Austin-Round Rock, TX; Boston, MA; Chattanooga, TN-GA; College Station-Bryan, TX; Dayton, OH; Honolulu, HI; Little Rock, AR; Newburgh, NY-PA; Orlando, FL; Philadelphia, PA; San Diego, CA; Seattle, WA; and Springfield, IL. An added benefit in this issue is the 2004 Annual Index for all four quarters of "U.S. Housing Market Conditions."

Revamp of Newsletter

You may have noticed changes in our newsletter format. We are redesigning our format and want your input! Please send your comments and ideas to Tom Betti at tombetti@cohhio.com

Good Luck, Rick!

After six years of giving his all to COHHIO, Rick Taylor, our Managing Director has moved on. Rick who wore many hats at COHHIO was perhaps best known for his work on the Continuum of Care application, most notably, with the Balance-of-State Continuum of Care grantees.

Rick played a key role in bringing much-needed homeless housing assistance dollars into communities throughout the state. His top-notch technical assistance always punctuated by joviality and witticism, made otherwise complex information, both palpable and enjoyable,

Around the office Rick was helpful and reliable, but notoriously mischievous; rubber bands and rubber chickens often preceding his entry to an office. This, his colleagues will miss (to be sure)!

COHHIO staff wish Rick much luck in his new position as Associate Director of Public Policy for Housing at the California Association of Homes and Services for the Aging.

Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio Membership

Name _____

Organization _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ County _____

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Individual: \$35 (Regular) \$75 (Benefactor) \$250 (Sustainer)

\$10 (Low-Income) Fee Waiver Requested

Agency (according to budget):

\$35 (\$100,000 or less) \$75 (\$100,001 - \$250,000)

\$125 (\$250,001 - \$500,000) \$200 (\$500,001 - \$1 million)

\$250 (\$1 million-\$1.5 million) \$300 (over \$1.5 million)

Please send your tax deductible check to COHHIO at 35 E. Gay St, Ste. 210, Columbus, Ohio 43215.

Thank you for your support!

How to Contact...

NATIONAL

- Corporation for Supportive Housing:** www.csh.org
- Housing Assistance Council:** www.ruralhome.org
- National Alliance to End Homelessness:** www.endhomelessness.org
- National Coalition for the Homeless:** www.nationalhomeless.org
- National Community Reinvestment Coalition:** www.ncrc.org
- National Low Income Housing Coalition:** www.nlihc.org

President Bush - 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500; 202/456-1414; 202/456-2461 (fax); president@whitehouse.gov

Senators Voinovich & DeWine - United States Senate, Washington, DC 20510
Voinovich - 202/224-3353; 202/228-1382 (fax); voinovich@voinovich.senate.gov
DeWine - 202/224-2315; 202/224-6519 (fax); senator_dewine@dewine.senate.gov

Representatives - United States House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515; 202/224-3121

STATE

Governor Taft - 77 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215; 614/466-3555; 614/466-9354 (fax)
Ohio Senate - State House, Columbus, Ohio 43266-0604; 614/644-5466 (fax-Republicans); 614/644-1982 (fax - Democrats)
Ohio House of Representatives - 77 South High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43215; 614/644-9494 (fax)

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COHHIO is a coalition of organizations and individuals committed to ending homelessness and to promoting decent, safe, fair, affordable housing for all, with a focus on assisting low-income people and those with special needs.

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