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COHHIO

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



OhioVOTES trainees proudly don their voting t-shirts. More on OhioVOTES on page 2.

Restrictive Voter Registration Rules Thrown Out!

Voter protection advocates scored a big win on Friday, September 1, when a federal judge threw out Ohio's restrictive voter registration rules.

New voter registration rules that became effective earlier this year called for any "paid" voter registrar to complete an on-line training program with the Secretary of State. Even more onerous, people were threatened with criminal penalties if they made mistakes. Because the law was so unclear, staff at many nonprofits did not know if they were considered "paid" simply because they

assisted a client or consumer with a voter registration card as part of their intake process.

Nonprofits no longer need to be concerned about these nebulous restrictions. All references to this training program and threat of criminal penalties have been blocked.

If your agency is doing voter registration, you no longer have to sign the registration cards at the bottom or send an affirmation form in with the cards. All cards should still be turned in within 10 days.

Minimum Wage Certified for November Ballot

Signatures were recently certified officially certifying places the minimum wage issue on the November 7th ballot.

The Fair Minimum Wage Amendment proposes an increase in the minimum wage from its current rate of \$5.15 to \$6.85 per hour starting January 1, 2007. In addition to the \$1.70 raise, the amendment also includes an annual inflationary adjustment that

allows the minimum wage to increase as the cost of living rises.

Other ballot issues may include a measure to bring slot machines to Ohio; two smoking issues -- one to ban indoor smoking, and the other to keep the ban from taking effect; and the repeal of workers' compensation cuts enacted by the legislature earlier this year. Watch for more next month.



Jocelyn L. Travis
 Director
 jocelyntravis@cohhio.org

Ohio Disability Vote Coalition Hopes to Build Electoral Power

The Ohio Disability Vote Coalition held a kickoff on August 24 at the Statehouse Atrium to deliver their 2006-2008 priorities agenda.

The mission of the Vote Coalition is to maximize the political power of Ohioans with disabilities through nonpartisan voter education, registration and participation of all people with disabilities at all levels of the election process. For more information or to become a member, contact Sue Hetrick at shetrick@abilitycenter.org or 866.575.8055.

OhioVOTES NOTES

- **VOTE by MAIL** – You should have recently received your absentee ballot in the mail. Encourage everyone you know to take the quick and easy route: VOTE by MAIL.
- **October 3-10 – Make your Mark!** Make it simple. Make it fast. Make it count. For one week only, you can register to vote and vote absentee *at the same time* at any county board of elections. For more information call the OhioVOTES hotline at 1-888-8VOTE OH, or check the website.
- **Boards of elections** need pollworkers! Please call your local board. The pay's not great, but the need sure is!
- **OhioVOTES is coming** to your organization soon! Nonpartisan voter education trainings and presentations are available to your organization by calling Jocelyn Travis at 614-280-1984 (ext. 23). Let's work together to get out the vote on November 7!

With less than 60 days to the election, COHHIO is offering attractive, colorful VOTE buttons (left) and posters (right) for you to wear and display in your organization from now until November 7. Additional voter motivation materials will be available from COHHIO in the coming weeks, so call Jocelyn Travis (614-280-1984, ext. 23) if you'd like to be on the recipient list.



OhioVOTES, a nonpartisan project initiated by COHHIO, is dedicated to expanding the role of Ohio's 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations in voting and elections. If you are interested in supporting OhioVOTES, please contact Director Jocelyn Travis at 614.280.1984 ext.23 or info@ohvotes.org

Notes of Faith

from COHHIO's Executive Director

Poor Ohio. We recently earned the top spot on the nation's least coveted list, America's poorest cities. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Cleveland edged out Detroit this year for the title, with nearly one in every three residents living in poverty. Cincinnati also made the list at number eight, making Ohio the only state with two cities in the top 10. Rural Ohio has its own woes: 19 percent of children live in poverty, making our state one of only five in the last five years in which child poverty rates have increased by more than five percent.

Below, a few more unpleasant poverty stats from the 2006 American Community Survey:

-The poverty rate among African-Americans in Ohio increased from 26.2% in 2004 to 30.9% in 2005. The poverty rate among Latinos increased from 17.4% in 2004 to 25% in 2005, an increase of 7.6%. In comparison, the poverty rate among whites decreased by .2% from 2004 to 2005.

-The numbers of Ohio residents living in deep poverty, which is defined as 50% of the Federal Poverty Threshold, remains a prominent concern across the state. In 2005, these individuals were surviving on annual incomes of less than \$10,000 for a family of four. In 2004 646,279 individuals lived in deep poverty, slightly less than the 657,415 individuals who lived in deep poverty in 2005.

-Of those living in poverty in Ohio in 2005, 45.3% were living in deep poverty, slightly more than the national rate of 43.1%.

Poor Ohio. Years of ignoring domestic programs have taken their toll. But pity is the last thing we need; as poverty climbs in Ohio, immediate action is required on a state and federal level. **This election season, congressional candidates and incumbents must be pushed to detail proactive agendas for investing in the priorities of working Ohio**

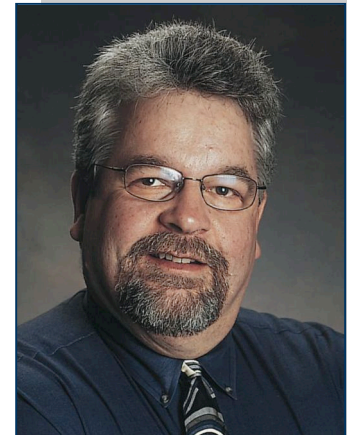
families, including education, healthcare and affordable housing.

Investment in education: When 36 percent of the average Ohio family income is required to pay for annual expenses at a four-year public university, we're pricing kids out of a college education and relegating them to low wage jobs void of health care benefits.

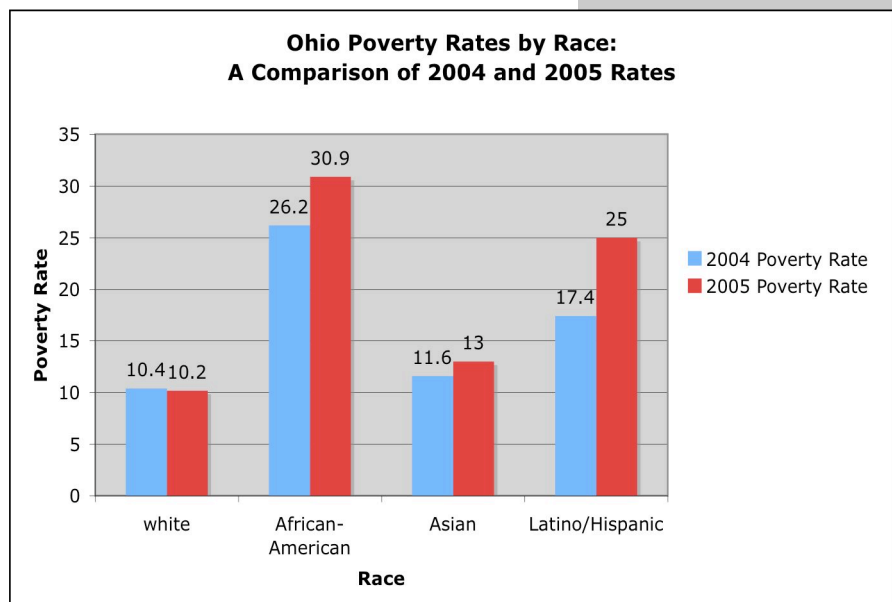
Investment in healthcare: Since 2002, 181,000 non-elderly Ohioans lost their employer-sponsored health insurance, and the number of flat-out uninsured non-elderly adults grew by 114,000. The number will continue to grow the longer the issue is ignored.

Investment in affordable housing: Only one in four Ohioans needing subsidized housing receives federal assistance. Ohio's 716,000 lowest wage earners make nowhere near the \$12.14 per hour required to afford the fair market value of a two-bedroom apartment.

Many want to celebrate this 10th anniversary of welfare reform. We must remind legislators at every turn that Ohio's troubling statistics are a stark reminder of how much further we need to go.



Bill Faith,
Executive Director



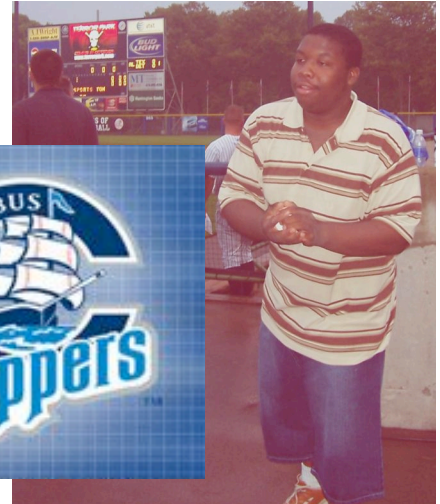
*Youth are not tomorrow's
leaders...WE NEED THEM
TODAY!!*



YEP: Uniting Youth for Change



In August, corporate sponsor Direct Energy invited YEP youth and COHHIO staff to brats and a ballgame with the Columbus Clippers, Columbus' minor league baseball team. Throwing out the first pitch of the game was our very own Alfred Jones! Thank you Direct Energy.



New Faces, New Partners

We would like to welcome our newest YEP VISTA member to Cleveland. Kristen Anderson will be working out of ESOP (the East Side Organizing Project) on youth issues. Kristen has jumped in feet-first, meeting with many youth individually to better identify what direction the youth in Cleveland want to take. Education has surfaced as a top priority. If you want to get involved with

the YEP Cleveland call Kristen at 216-429-0757 for meeting dates and times.

We also have new partners in Toledo and Cincinnati working as volunteers to run YEP group meetings. If you are interested in connecting with our local YEP youth councils, contact Angela Lariviere at angelal@cohhio.org.

ICC Supports Educational Opportunities for Homeless Youth

The Information Control Corporation (ICC) continues its commitment to homeless youth with an employee donation of \$800, which the company matched one-for-one. These funds were used to purchase backpacks and school supplies for high school and middle school youths; and included a gift card for miscellaneous needs. The supplies were given to YEP members.

In addition to supplies, ICC has donated \$2,000 to YEP youth to help pay school fees. Public schools feeling budget cuts

are not only requiring students to pay for extra-curricular activities like football or cheerleading, but for basic classes such as math. One YEP youth is being charged \$79 for her senior level Calculus class alone. Art, computer, and music classes are also carrying large fees, further challenging low-income youths. With the rising trend of students having to pay for public education, we are glad to see responsible members of the corporate community offering their support.

Inter-agency Council News

The Inter-agency council moved forward in July on three initiatives that could help move individuals and families out of homelessness and into permanent housing.

First, the council approved a demonstration project that will show how combing funding from ODJFS and ODOT, among other sources, can assist families in transitioning from homelessness into permanent housing. It is an effort by the state to address populations that fall outside of the current chronic homeless definition, which addresses only single disabled individuals.

Second, the council passed recommendations regarding the Ohio Access work being done to provide information on affordable housing options across the state. In addition, the council moved to support the development of the Housing Registry to

www.ConnectMeOhio.org to enable homeless and disabled people, their advocates, families and caregivers to search for and identify appropriate, accessible, affordable rental housing.

Finally, the council adopted a statewide supportive housing policy that included the following recommendations:

1. Acceptance of a common definition of permanent supportive housing that can be used across state departments
2. Recognition of populations to be housed in permanent supportive housing and the description of a supportive housing unit
3. Endorsement of an estimated need of permanent supportive housing units for planning and policy purposes
4. Prioritization of state funding for permanent supportive housing for those persons who are chronically homeless

AEP Shelter Conservation Program

COHHIO is assisting the Ohio Dept. of Development with a new energy saving initiative for shelters that are in AEP service areas of the state. ODOT has received funds from the settlement of a court case against AEP and are to be used specifically for energy conservation activities in AEP service areas.

After collecting and compiling data from energy specialists (who will review shelters identified as being in an AEP service area) COHHIO will recommend that an energy specialist conduct an energy audit on those shelters identified

as having the greatest need. Based on the information, selected shelters will be awarded services to address those areas of concern that are eligible activities according to the AEP Shelter Conservation Program guidelines. It is anticipated that the shelters participating in this project will significantly reduce energy costs and operating expenses.

If your shelter is in one of these areas and you have not received a survey, please contact Douglas Argue at COHHIO for further information.





The Poverty Measure and What it Means for Ohio

The U.S. Census Bureau's recently released poverty estimates identified Cleveland and Cincinnati as among the most impoverished cities. To provide context for what this may mean for Ohio, COHHIO looked at the poverty measure's development, reviewed critiques, and identified potential responses.

The poverty measure utilized today was developed by Mollie Orshansky and implemented in the early 1960s. While this measure is updated each year for inflation, it has otherwise remained unchanged for the last forty years.

Many have criticized the poverty measure for being outdated and unable to reflect the numerous factors impacting families' wellbeing. In particular, the measure fails to take into account differences in the cost of living for various geographic areas, and does not consider in-kind benefits.

Given the critiques, it seems appropriate to wonder what impact a potentially

outdated tool has on the poverty estimates for two of Ohio's largest cities, Cleveland and Cincinnati, whose poverty rates were 32.4% and 25%, respectively. While there is variance among suggestions for the measure's revision, a focus on updating the measure itself should not obscure the need for investments in Ohio's residents, particularly in regards to health care, education, jobs, and affordable housing.

For more information about the history of the poverty measure and alternative measures, access the following links:

National Poverty Center, University of Michigan, Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy:
<http://www.npc.umich.edu/poverty/#6>

Department of Health and Human Service:
<http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/papers/hptgsiv.htm>

U.S. Census Bureau:
<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/povme>

Homelessness Appropriations Watch

The U.S. Congress reconvened on September 5, 2006 and will be working over the next month to pass FY 2007 appropriations bills including S3708, the Senate funding bill for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education. S3708 includes the Senate Appropriations Committee recommendation that the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) receive \$3.33 billion in funding. Of this, the Committee specifically indicated that \$10.56 million of the total funding is to be used to fund services in permanent

supportive housing to help end chronic homelessness. The funds would be distributed to permanent supportive housing providers through grants awarded by CMHS.

Although the Services for Ending Long-Term Homelessness Act (SELTH) has not made it out of committee, this appropriations bill presents an opportunity for the federal government to address the need for funding for services in permanent supportive housing developments, and provide resources that had previously been limited.

Coalition on
Homelessness and
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We're on the Web!

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Welcome to COHHIO...

COHHIO grew by three new employees in August! Erica Mulryan joined us as the new Housing & Services Coordinator. Erica worked previously as a policy associate with the Mid-America Institute on Poverty of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs and Human Rights, a service-based human rights organization in Chicago, where she coordinated their immigrant asset-building research project. Erica's professional and academic background has largely focused on anti-poverty research and policy analysis as well as issues involving violence against women. We welcomed Paula Argue as OhioVOTES Coordinator. Paula has brought a wealth of organizational experience to help grow and manage COHHIO's new endeavor. Last but not least, we welcome back Kelan Craig. You may remember reading about our Kent State University Intern in past issues of our newsletter. Kelan has returned to be our point person on federal advocacy with U.S. Action.

Conference Features Both Gubernatorial Candidates

Community Research Partners and KnowledgeWorks Foundation are hosting gubernatorial candidates Congressman Ted Strickland and Secretary of State Ken Blackwell at the October 10 luncheon plenary session of the statewide conference, *Investing in Workers: Strategies to Grow Ohio's Economy*. Attendees will hear candidates talk about their workforce development and economic development plans.

Investing in Workers will be held on October 9-10, 2006, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Columbus, bringing together representatives of business, government, philanthropic, public policy, economic development, education and training, and human services organizations.

To register, visit the conference website at www.investinginworkers.org or call 513-929-1134. The conference registration deadline is September 25 and the hotel reservation deadline is September 18. The conference registration fee is \$85.

Collectively Changing Lives Re-Entry Conference 2006

Learn more about issues and strategies pertaining
to the criminal justice/ex-offender population.

Register today!

October 19th-20th

Columbus Urban League

788 Mt Vernon Ave, Columbus Ohio, 43203

Registration fee is \$100 (\$120 at the door), which includes breakfast, lunch and training handouts, and training education hours. **Registration deadline is October 16th, 2006.** Organizations sending 5 or more will receive a special discount. Questions? Call 614-257-6300

About Our Organization...

COHHIO is a statewide advocacy group and service providers network dedicated to ending homelessness while ensuring that Ohioans have decent, safe, fair, affordable housing, especially those with low-income and special needs.