



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR THE CHILD POVERTY COLLABORATIVE

Introduction

The Human Services Chamber is a collaborative effort of nearly 40 leading local human services providers dedicated to increasing the impact of the human services sector, speaking out on issues important to our organizations and the people they serve, and advocating for solutions to issues related to our work. Members of the Human Services Chamber work with people experiencing poverty every day and have a unique and important perspective on what policies contribute to poverty and the best solutions to have a broad impact on addressing poverty in our community. We also work to bring resources, including private funding, into this community to support our work. The Human Services Chamber respectfully submits, for your consideration, the following recommendations for the Child Poverty Collaborative. It is our hope that the voices and strengths of those who have extensive experience working directly with individuals living in poverty will be leveraged in your final recommendations.

Overview

The causes of poverty are, as you are aware, many and complex. There are no easy answers, and no simple solutions for remedying the staggeringly high child poverty rate in our region. No one taskforce or recommendation is going to solve this problem entirely. Such is the nature of an issue so complex. However, relying on the expertise and feedback of those who run many of our region's leading human services agencies, the Human Services Chamber has developed recommendations for steps that could have the greatest impact, especially when paired with a strong commitment from local leaders and funders, for reducing the poverty rate. While we believe the recommendations below provide concrete steps our community can take to begin to address the poverty rate, this work must be undertaken with an understanding of the many factors beyond economics that contribute to poverty. Racism, geographic issues, and lack of access to quality health care for both physical and mental health services contribute to poverty.

We also must commit to dispel myths about those living in poverty. People who are experiencing poverty live fragile lives; one mistake could be the difference between being able to provide for their family or not. It is also important to note that childhood poverty is, in fact, family poverty. If we are to reduce the childhood poverty rate, we must commit to empowering parents, who want what's best for their children, to succeed. Individuals living in poverty are, by and large, working, but not earning enough. They are trying to provide for their families, but are unable. People don't choose to be poor or "live off the system" in a way they are sometimes portrayed. Poverty is not only an individual problem. It is a social problem, and we must be willing to acknowledge the structures that result in an individual living in poverty and be willing, as a community, to develop systems-level solutions.

We also must ensure that there is regional buy-in and cooperation from the city, the county, the nonprofit community, the business community, the faith community, and the general public. Cooperation will be a critical part of success.

Priority Recommendations

Below are specific steps we feel could be taken that would be most impactful as part of a more comprehensive plan to address our high poverty rate.

1. Housing and Safe Communities

Housing is often an individual or family's biggest cost. Affordable, safe, stable housing is critical to ensuring individuals are able to find good employment and able to care for their families. Stable housing is essential for ensuring children stay in the same schools, which is important for their academic and social development. When faced with an unexpected or emergency expense, people living in poverty do not have a savings account or a line of credit to fall back on. As a result, they may be unable to pay for housing in order to cover their unforeseen expense. This could lead to eviction, which is bad for the family, and can result in loss of a job, exacerbating the problem. Increasing funding for and awareness of **emergency rental assistance programs** that already exist to keep these individuals and families stable, and expanding their use, could be effective in ensuring stable housing for families and reducing poverty.

Additionally, it is critical that these families live in safe communities. **Investing in programs that reduce violence**, including human services programs and community based policing, can help to ensure families live in stable, safe neighborhoods. This stability is critical to reducing poverty rates. It is also important that subsidized housing is distributed throughout the county. Concentrations of poverty are not good for anyone.

2. Childcare Assistance

Childcare is becoming increasingly costly for families. In order for a parent to retain gainful employment, allowing them to provide for their family, quality childcare is often a necessity. A strong childcare system must be available at a variety of hours, including nights and weekends, and provide nutritious food options to children. Many jobs do not follow a 9am-5pm schedule, and we must ensure that any parent who is employed is able to leave their children in the care of a trusted, quality childcare program, regardless of their work schedule. This is particularly important during the summer months when children are not in school. Quality childcare facilities should be located throughout the county and accessible for families. Many families rely on public transportation. Having to transport children from a home to a daycare facility, then going to a job, returning to the daycare facility, and then back home, can be a long, taxing process. Ensuring quality childcare facilities exist in neighborhoods is critical, as it will reduce the burden of transportation on parents. **Strong investment in a quality childcare system** that are neighborhood-based and operate at a variety of hours throughout the year would help parents secure and retain gainful employment.

3. Workforce Program with Public Investment

One key way to help pull families out of poverty is to ensure a dependable, livable income. By investing in workforce development and strategically connecting employers and those seeking employment, we can have an impact on the poverty rate. While there are many things that can be done to expand employment opportunities, including altering hiring

practices so as to not exclude individuals with a criminal record, or expanding the list of workforce readiness credentials beyond high school diplomas and GEDs, we believe a strong partnership between the government, workforce development programs, and employers could be effective in reducing poverty. **Strong investment, including public investment, in programs that bridge the gap between workforce training and taking on a job** would be good for the individuals and for employers. Workforce development programs can train people with the skills to fill jobs that employers currently need filled, which would be identified by local companies. During the initial employment period, the government could share with the private employer in paying the wages of this new employee as they are transitioning into the workforce, giving them an opportunity to receive the training they need to be comfortable and effective in the position. Allowing them to transition into employment with the help of a public subsidy would give them an opportunity to make a wage high enough to stabilize their family without relying solely on the employer. By empowering individuals to be trained in needed industries, partnering with private employers to get them jobs, and easing the transition into the workforce with the help of the public sector, we could ensure people not only get good jobs, but are well prepared to work and stay in those jobs. This is good for the individual, the government, and the employer.

In order to access employment throughout the region, we also must commit to expanding our transportation system. This includes public transportation, but we must also think about expanding access to cars for people. In this region, a car is often a necessity to travel to and from work. Helping people afford to purchase a car, assisting in providing for emergency assistance for individuals who experience issues with their cars, and ensuring access to driver's education classes are all considerations. Expanding match savings programs, where individuals' savings to go toward a car purchase, are matched by a private source, to help individuals be able to afford cars could be a good initial step.

Additionally, we would encourage employers to pay good wages, offer benefits such as paid sick time and paid family leave, ensure good working conditions, and guarantee reasonable hours and predictable schedules for their employees. Especially with childcare and transportation needs, it is critical for people to be able to predict their schedules.

Additional Considerations

Obviously there are many more issues to address beyond these three recommendations. In order to truly have a broad and lasting impact, it is important to address as many issues simultaneously as possible. Examples of the additional issues include:

- More robust public transportation
- Ensuring solutions reflect the fact that people of color and women are disproportionately affected by poverty.
- Education funding at all levels, from Preschool through college
- Investment in trades for individuals who choose not to attend college
- Encouraging a two-generational approach to parenting, when necessary
- Evaluating suspension and expulsion practices of local school districts, which can be disruptive for both the student and their parents.

- Access to treatment for people with mental health and substance abuse issues.
- Stronger protection for renters, which can be done at the city or state level
- Increase access to healthy food options and work to eliminate food deserts

How We Can Help

As was stated, these recommendations were developed with the expertise of those who are working every day to address the needs of individuals in our community living in poverty. We would welcome the opportunity to further engage on these issues or answer any questions you have about our recommendations. We are also happy to help connect you to local experts on any number of human services issues.

We look forward to continuing to monitor the great progress you have made toward developing a comprehensive plan to address poverty in our community, and to working with you to ensure the final results reflect realistic and impactful goals. We also, in continuing to do our work, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the implementation of your recommendations.

Our Members

Agency Members

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 Alzheimer's Association of Greater Cincinnati
 Beech Acres Parenting Center
 Center for Chemical Addictions Treatment
 Center for Independent Living Options
 The Central Community Health Board of Hamilton County, Inc.
 The Children's Home of Cincinnati
 Cincinnati Union Bethel
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Individual Members

Peter Bloch