

# Michigan Department of Human Services, partners bust welfare myths DHS reveals statistics that show economic pain is not limited to poor, urban areas

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DETROIT - Michigan's troubling economic climate has caused an unprecedented number of families to seek help paying their bills or putting food on their tables. However, that hardship is not just happening to families in poor, urban areas. The economic pain is being felt everywhere, including in the suburbs or wealthier areas of the state. This is just one of the many myths that are tarnishing the purpose of the welfare system, which is why the Michigan Department of Human Services is continuing its statewide campaign to bust those myths with facts, Director Ismael Ahmed said.

"Misunderstandings lead to myths, which create a stigma that may prevent some people who truly need help to come forward. We want to put a stop to that," said Ahmed on the issue. "Today, it is more likely than ever before that your relative, friend or neighbor receives one or more welfare benefits because of unemployment or home foreclosure.

"We are taking a stand to educate people on what welfare really does for Michigan's vulnerable children, adults and families."

DHS representatives and partners dispelled myths at a Detroit event today as part of the department's "Welfare 101: busting myths about welfare" campaign. The campaign was launched on April 1 in an effort to reduce widespread negative perceptions and show how valuable the welfare system is for so many Michigan residents, as well as to the state's economy.

For example, Michigan successfully pursued and secured more than \$500 million in additional funds in fiscal years 2009 and 2010 to help residents directly and to create jobs statewide.

As many as 180,000 households that currently receive food assistance saw an increased benefit in March of about \$88 per month on average. In fact, Michigan is one of only five states that have been able to change how we calculate benefits, resulting in more food assistance for thousands of people.

Just this one program could put an estimated \$16 million in additional direct food dollars into Michigan communities each month and nearly \$200 million into communities each year.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that every \$5 of food benefits generates about \$9.20 in economic activity in communities. The additional direct food benefits put into communities could generate an estimated \$360 million in annual economic activity, including through increased demand for goods and services.

"Our fellow Michiganders who receive some sort of state and federal assistance are integral members of both urban and rural local economies," said Dan Piepszowski, senior director of community leadership development with the Detroit Regional Chamber.

"They, like all of us in this great state, consume the goods and services necessary to support our families. We all need to look deeper when we hear characterizations and recognize that we are connected economically and socially as Michiganders."

In fiscal year 2009, more than 2.5 million people in Michigan - or more than a quarter of the state's population - received one of five welfare programs. That includes cash, food, medical, state disability or child development and care assistance. Thousands more used benefits or services related to energy assistance, adult and child abuse or neglect, foster care or adoption, home help services or other assistance.

Among the myths busted during today's event:

Myth:

Welfare recipients only live in poor, urban areas, not the suburbs or wealthier areas of the state.

Fact:

Michigan residents are struggling to put food on their tables and pay their bills in communities statewide. DHS has seen an unprecedented increase in the number of families seeking temporary assistance, including in Michigan's more-affluent

suburban communities.

For example, communities such as Dearborn Heights, Saline, Bloomfield Hills and Sterling Heights each saw more than 50 percent increases in the number of people coming to the DHS for food assistance. For Medicaid, it was more than 30 percent each.

Foreclosures are also impacting some of Michigan's more prosperous counties above the statewide average. Oakland and Washtenaw counties, for example, each saw more than a 75 percent increase in foreclosures from 2005 to 2009.

Home foreclosures also increased in Wayne County by 57.4 percent - lower than the statewide increase of 66.7 percent.

"The housing market has hurt people all over Metro Detroit, not just those who live in the city of Detroit," said Dwayne A. Haywood, director of the Wayne County DHS. "The time has come to work together to reduce those misperceptions."

Barbara Anders, DHS' financial and quality service deputy director, encouraged people to dispel the myths.

"It is more important than ever before to do your part to educate the skeptics," Anders said. "Be vigilant and make sure you don't fall into this trap yourself. Welfare is a temporary measure for those vulnerable residents whose needs are great."

Other partners in attendance included: Governor's Commission on Community Action and Economic Opportunity, Neighborhood Legal Services of Michigan, Adult Well-Being Services, WARM Training Center, Governor's Office of Community and Faith Based Initiatives, Gleaners Community Food Bank, Cass Community Social Services, United Negro College Fund, Detroit Area Agency on Aging, The Heat and Warmth Fund (THAW), Legal Aid, Black Family Development, Accounting Aid Society, Wayne RESA, Wayne Metropolitan Community Action Agency, Northwest Activities Center and Fair Food Network.

For more information about Welfare 101: Busting myths about welfare, please visit [www.michigan.gov/welfare101](http://www.michigan.gov/welfare101). Follow DHS on Twitter @MichiganDHS or become a fan at [www.facebook.com/MichiganDHS](http://www.facebook.com/MichiganDHS)