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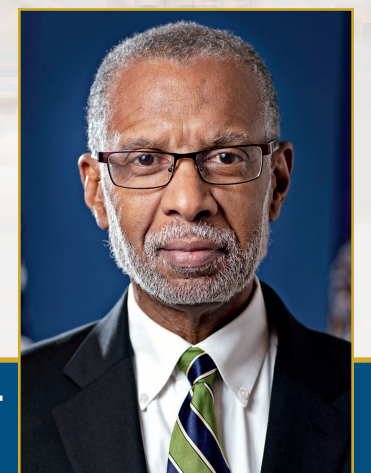
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POVERTY LISTENING TOUR



Report and Updates 2021



**State Senator
Art Haywood**

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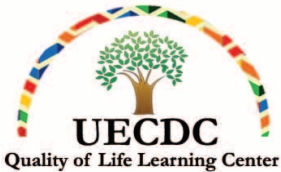
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Acknowledgements

Senator Haywood acknowledges his staff and the Senate Democratic Caucus for their contributions to the 2021 Poverty Report. The Senator thanks all the organizations that hosted stops on the 2019 Poverty Listening Tour. He is also grateful for the legislators who hosted discussions in their districts, including Senators Blake, Brewster, Hughes, Laughlin, and Muth. Most importantly, thank you to the individuals who stepped forward and presented their stories so policymakers could gain a better understanding of poverty and its impact. We are extremely grateful for your perspective, kindness, and consideration.



Pennsylvania expects to distribute over \$1.2 billion in federal stimulus dollars in this space. Of that amount, \$655 million was recently made available to all childcare providers in Pennsylvania in the form of stabilization grants.

14. Encourage integrated regional planning to make the transportation system more accommodating for workers and employers (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** In February 2021, PennDOT started Workforce Development Pilot Programs in Chester/Lancaster Counties and Adams/York Counties that connects jobseekers with local employers by providing public transportation access to employment opportunities that are often inaccessible across county lines.
15. Start a rural transportation pilot program. Use fleet vehicles such as school buses to provide other transportation needs when not directly in service. Encourage and incentivize health care providers and employers to provide transportation services (legislative/administrative).
 - a. **Status:** In February 2021, PennDOT started Workforce Development Pilot programs in Chester/Lancaster Counties and Adams/York Counties with local employers to provide public transportation to connect people with jobs that are otherwise inaccessible.
16. Encourage and invest in more affordable housing options (administrative/legislative).
 - a. **Status:** The state legislature allocated \$773 million in affordable housing relief over the last two years. Senator Haywood led an effort that awarded \$54 million dollars of Federal Cares money for rental and homeowner assistance in 2020. He also led efforts to increase funding for the PHARE and Low Income Housing Tax Credit programs to pay for more affordable housing.
17. Enhance state veterans outreach efforts to help coordinate programs for those who are discharged to limit eligibility gaps for social service programs (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) created PAVetConnect.com in 2020 to connect veterans to over 1,500 public and private local and community resources.
18. Support more adult education, job training and outreach programs (administrative/legislative/budget).
 - a. **Status:** Since 2019, appropriations in the state budget for job training and adult education programs have remained largely flat, and no new laws or initiatives have passed by the legislature. However, several administrative reforms have occurred. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) expanded virtual services to job seekers and employers. L&I has encouraged local workforce areas to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams, WebEx, Skype, and Google Meet to facilitate one-on-one appointments, group workshops, and virtual events such as job fairs. L&I also redesigned the PA CareerLink website (www.pacareerlink.pa.gov). Finally, L&I has also added 5,000 free virtual training modules online, now available through SkillUp PA. Pennsylvanians interested in virtual trainings should visit PA CareerLink's website to register. Senator Haywood and the Senate Democratic Caucus continue to advocate for increased funding for these programs.

Executive Summary

To better understand the depth and breadth of poverty and how it affects our communities, Senator Art Haywood conducted the Poverty Listening Tour. After hearing directly from Pennsylvanians struggling to make ends meet, Senator Haywood released his Poverty Listening Tour Report and Recommendations in 2019. The goal of this report is to update policymakers and the public on 18 policy recommendations presented in the previous report. Senator Haywood's office has worked closely with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and Human Services to address the recommendations. By fully understanding key issues, policymakers can craft long-lasting and meaningful policies to reduce suffering and provide pathways allowing individuals to overcome poverty.

Poverty Listening Tour Updates

1. Create an Office of Economic Opportunity under the governor to address economic instability, poverty and deep poverty and seek ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government services that serve low-income individuals (legislative).
 - a. **Status:** Senator Haywood's office is working on legislation to create an Office of Economic Opportunity.
2. Establish the PA CARES Council, comprised of community service providers, legal service organizations, county assistance officers, employers, training and workforce development providers, and state secretaries from Department of Human Services, Department of Community and Economic Development, Labor & Industry, Education, Health, Department of Drug & Alcohol Programs, Transportation, Corrections, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and Aging to advise the new Office of Economic Opportunity (legislative).
 - a. **Status:** Senator Haywood's office is working on legislation to create an Office of Economic Opportunity.
3. Establish the Germantown Poverty Relief Initiative, a three-year pilot program to help single women with children escape poverty. The program would help coordinate government and private workforce development organizations, educators, and employers in Southeast Pennsylvania. It would also provide targeted outreach and marketing; adult education to enhance workforce and academic skills; career and financial coaching; and job training and placement in apprenticeship or permanent jobs (administrative/legislative/budget).
 - a. **Status:** Due to the pandemic, the Department of Human Services did not move forward with the Parent Pathways Initiative. Senator Haywood's office is working to include Germantown residents and organizations in state and federal recovery programs.
4. Improve direct departmental outreach to individuals who qualify for social services to encourage greater program engagement (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) efforts related to this recommendation are on-going. Some initiatives include implementing:
 - i. Direct mailings to Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) recipients from previous years encouraging them to apply and working with LIHEAP utility vendors to inform their consumers about the program.
 - ii. Updates about the expanded child tax credit on the COMPASS website and the agency's line.
 - iii. A new referral policy for Employment & Training (E&T) vendors to make referrals into the program and corresponding benefits.

5. Seek maximum participation for all eligible benefit programs and encourage voter registration (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) plans to incorporate voter registration for paper benefit applicants by including a reformatted voter registration form in the benefits application, with the assistance of the Department of State. DHS will also include a voter registration pop-up screen that is presented to COMPASS users as they complete the online benefits application. The pop-up screen will direct COMPASS users to register online.
6. Create a public marketing and outreach campaign to destigmatize poverty in our communities; and provide information for accessing resources, including safety net services and job training programs (administrative/budget).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) believes that work to highlight the necessity and value of public assistance programs extends beyond a single campaign. DHS tries to embed this across all communication efforts. DHS is committed to using its platform to highlight the availability of public assistance. During the pandemic, DHS held multiple press conferences (in-person and virtual) to highlight the availability of public assistance. DHS's message throughout the pandemic has been that "these programs exist to help people navigate difficult circumstances and the times that we cannot plan for – exactly what we've collectively experienced since March 2020." DHS has also engaged with other agency partners, stakeholders, and the General Assembly to promote public assistance programs. DHS makes every effort to uplift individual voices and appreciates any connections to help identify stories to profile when they are able. DHS will continue to promote resources and employment and training programs that can support economic recovery.
7. Create a coordinated advocacy system that identifies individuals and families in need of social service interventions; and assign trained case managers to create customized plans for self-sufficiency at every stage and in every need sector (e.g., legal guidance and representation in asserting their rights, mental and occupational therapists, education, and job specialists) (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) implemented contractual changes in 2020 to its Employment & Training (E&T) program that make the program more person centered and needs-based. DHS also recognized the importance of social determinants of health in their clients' overall wellbeing and long-term healthcare utilization. The department is engaged in a process involving Medicaid managed care organizations (MCOs) with grant agreements to enhance information provided (i.e., other benefits received, employment information) to the MCOs. This will assist MCOs in fully managing the care of members.
8. Add workforce development and soft skills – such as resume development, budgeting, and time management – to caseworker training regimens (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services offers Employment & Training (E&T) programs, which are designed to focus on participant employability, including ensuring that participants are prepared to enter the workplace. Each program is required to provide intensive case management services that encompass things like resume building, but also provides teaching and reinforcement of the soft skills necessary for participants to be successful upon entry into the workforce. Participants also work with case management staff to develop employment plans that work to address barriers to employment. Contracted programs are even capable of making connections between participants and licensed counselors to help participants work through the numerous changes in their circumstances as they transition into the workforce. Once these services are provided, participants can access in-house training and credentialing programs in high priority occupations.

9. Require county assistance offices to build, develop, and update databases and post resources to better coordinate benefits with community non-profits, advocacy groups, churches, and faith-based organizations (administrative).
 - a. **Status:** The Department of Human Services, through Act 44 of 2017, awarded grants to establish a statewide 2-1-1 system. While County Assistance Offices (CAOs) collect their own lists of local resources to meet needs not otherwise or fully covered by DHS benefits, CAOs also support the use of 2-1-1 to address these needs. The 2-1-1 system provides locally based referrals and available resources, which are frequently updated.
10. Enact a \$15 minimum wage (legislative).
 - a. **Status:** Pennsylvania's state minimum wage rate has remained at \$7.25 per hour since 2008. At \$7.25 per hour, a worker earns \$15,080 per year. When that worker is the head of a household of more than one person, the state minimum wage equals poverty. The federal poverty level for a one-person household is \$12,760. The federal poverty level is \$17,240 for a family of two and \$21,720 for a three-person household. Most restaurant workers make tipped minimum wages in PA, which is \$2.83 per hour. Senator Haywood is working to increase the state's minimum wage. He is the cosponsor of SB12 with Senator Tartaglione and SB672 with Senator Laughlin.
11. Study the "benefits cliff" that discourages people from working toward self-sustainability due to program income eligibility limits (legislative).
 - a. **Status:** Addressing the benefits cliff remains a priority for Senator Haywood. During the 2019-2020 session, he introduced Senate Resolution 344, directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a study and issue a report on benefits cliffs in Pennsylvania. In 2020, with the support of the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the advocacy of the Coalition for Low Income Pennsylvanians (CLIP), he implemented the Work Expense Deduction for TANF, which allowed low wage workers to continue receiving assistance. The Work Expense Deduction allows those entering the workforce and transitioning from public assistance to keep \$200 more per month of TANF assistance. This increases the low-income working families' available net income and reduces the financial burden experienced with loss or reduction of other benefits. Senator Haywood is working towards comprehensive relief from benefit cliffs with advocates in Pennsylvania.
12. Consider establishing a Pennsylvania Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and how it can be used to reduce long-term poverty, stimulate job opportunities, and reduce dependence on public assistance (legislative).
 - a. **Status:** In August 2020, Senator Haywood partnered with Rep. Sara Innamorato and the PA Budget and Policy Center to unveil an EITC proposal that could put an extra \$500 to \$700 in the pockets of working Pennsylvanians.
13. Enhance state-funded childcare subsidies, and fund childcare at job sites and worker training facilities (legislative/budget).
 - a. **Status:** Over the past several years, Pennsylvania has seen steady investment in childcare programs, allowing for shorter waitlists in the subsidized program and increased participants in the Keystone STARS program. Currently, over \$990 million in state and federal funds support childcare programs under the PA Department of Human Services. In addition to annual state investment and targeted allocation of federal block grant funds, Pennsylvania has received an unprecedented amount of federal dollars through various stimulus acts. In fiscal year 2019-20, a total of \$222 million in federal stimulus dollars were directed to the commonwealth's childcare system, along with \$303 million in fiscal year 2020-21. In the current fiscal year and next,