

Policy Recommendations

The women of Witnesses to Hunger bring to life the real impact of policies debated and determined on Capitol Hill. Their daily struggles and triumphs, so powerfully represented by their photos and captions, make clear the need for policy improvements that protect vulnerable families and support their efforts to advance. The Witnesses offer examples from their own experience, but the policy implications are national.

Nutrition

- *Simplify Application Procedures:* Simplify procedures for applying for nutrition assistance for children. This includes online applications to reduce paperwork and travel time to WIC or other offices. The women value universal eligibility for school breakfast and lunch as now practiced in Philadelphia.
- *Improve Child Nutrition Program Meal Quality:* The women of Witnesses know how important fruits and vegetables are to their children, and want more of them in school meals, afterschool snacks, and through WIC. Less than a third of Philadelphia schools have kitchens. They recommend that more schools cook fresh and healthy meals on the premises.
- *Benefits that Match the Cost of Living:* The recent increases in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called food stamps) has helped low income families to buy more nutritious foods. The SNAP increase was implemented as a temporary economic recovery provision. The Witnesses hope it can be made permanent, with benefits increased to keep pace with rising food costs.
- *Child Nutrition Program Reauthorization is key:* Many of these improvements can be achieved through an adequately funded reauthorization of Child Nutrition programs, including School Lunch, School Breakfast, the Summer Food Program, WIC, and the Child and Adult Care Food Program.

**Children's HealthWatch
Research shows
WIC and SNAP
benefit families:**

WIC - Compared to eligible children who do not receive WIC due to access barriers, children who receive WIC are more likely to be in good health, to develop within normal limits, and to have sufficient nutritious food.

SNAP – Compared to eligible children who do not receive SNAP, children who receive SNAP are more likely to have sufficient, nutritious food.



Waiting at the Health Center. This picture reminds me of the innocence that my daughter still has, and her hope for the future. Now she is full of hope that she could have a successful future. She hasn't been tainted by the reality of urban living. She doesn't know the difference yet between what should be possible and what the reality is right now, and hopefully she'll never have to know.

–Photo and voice by Crystal Sears

Error! No bookmark name given.Housing

- *Increase supply of Housing Choice vouchers and Protect Affordable Housing:* The mothers in *Witnesses to Hunger* cannot afford decent apartments in Philadelphia at market value rents. The waiting list for Housing Choice (Section 8) rental vouchers in Philadelphia has been closed off and on for years; the wait for Philadelphia Housing Authority public housing is 6-10 years long. Even the inadequate rentals in the neighborhoods depicted in the *Witnesses* photographs take up a large part of the families' monthly budgets.
- *Fully fund Housing Choice for renewal of existing housing vouchers.* In addition, keep private owners in Housing Choice and conditions for tenants safe and decent – fully fund HUD Section 8 contracts with private owners and repairs and maintenance for public housing.
- *Produce and preserve housing for the lowest income people – fund the National Housing Trust Fund.*
- *Invest in Community Development and Programs to Improve Safety:* The women request more funding for group homes for battered and abused women and for runaway teens. They recommend that blighted neighborhoods to be revived through construction of more affordable housing, safe playgrounds and recreation centers. For example, providing increased funding for the YouthBuild program, as recommended in the President's FY 2010 budget, would help young people to get training while building or rehabbing housing, playgrounds, or other community facilities.

**Children's HealthWatch
Research shows
Subsidized Housing
benefits families:**

Compared to eligible children in families who do not have housing subsidies, children in families who have housing subsidies are more likely to have healthy growth for their age.

Health Care

- *Improve and Expand Medicaid for Low Income Families:* Set an eligibility floor for Medicaid below which everyone will be assured Medicaid coverage and out-of-pocket cost protections. For example, coverage for pregnant women, parents and children with incomes up to 150% of the federal poverty line, and childless adults with incomes up to 115%.
- *Ensure Affordability for Moderate Income Families:* To avoid the 'Cliff Effect' where those with moderate earnings are left without benefits, we must ensure there are substantial subsidies available to help them purchase coverage. Key aspects include: upfront subsidies (instead of a reimbursement structure), progressive premium subsidies and out-of-pocket cost protections so that subsidies decrease slowly as income rises.
- *Increase Funding for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment:* Annual appropriations for treatment for children and adults should be increased to allow for expanded access to treatment.

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These recommendations were developed in consultation with the Coalition for Human Needs, Families USA, and National Low Income Housing Coalition.