



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Public asked to pitch solutions for reducing poverty

Act on Poverty event is July 18, 2009

Virginia's Poverty Reduction Taskforce is asking the general public, community leaders and local and state elected officials to recommend strategies for expanding economic opportunity. Act on Poverty conversations will be held July 18, 2009 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. at Virginia Community College System campuses statewide, including New River Community College in Dublin.

“This will be one of the largest conversations devoted to reducing poverty in our communities that Virginia has ever had,” said Secretary of Health and Human Resources and Co-Chair of the Taskforce, Marilyn B. Tavenner. “The public has recommendations that need to be heard. That’s why we’re encouraging elected officials to attend, listen to constituent ideas and share their own.”

The Virginia Community College System, Virginia Cooperative Extension, Virginia Community Action Partnership and the Virginia Department of Social Services are partnering to host and facilitate the conversations, which are free and open to the public; advance registration is not required.

This community feedback is the next step for information gathering by the Poverty Reduction Taskforce, which held the “Rethinking Poverty: Exploring Economic Opportunity for All Virginians” summit on May 7, 2009. The Act on Poverty event will provide the general public a chance to recommend solutions – especially community-based approaches – for reducing Virginia’s poverty rate.

Current data show approximately 739,000 people, nearly 10% of all Virginians, live below the federal poverty line, including 232,600, or 12.9%, of Virginia's children. As of 2007, the federal poverty line was \$10,210 in annual income for an individual or \$20,650 for a family of four. While Virginia's statewide poverty rates are among the 10 lowest in the nation, certain regions are affected much more dramatically than others, with Southwest and Southside Virginia each having rates over 17%.

“I’m from Southside Virginia,” said Secretary Tavenner. “Poverty for a family there is just as difficult as it is for a family in Northern Virginia, but those areas of the state are very different. Every community has its own strengths and economic challenges. The attitudes and people in Virginia are diverse, and the taskforce will benefit from casting a wide net for ideas.”

Richmond attorney Robert J. Grey Jr. is the co-chair of the taskforce. “Ameliorating poverty is a heavy lift, but we can do it with many hands – and not handouts, but by offering a hand up. Improving one’s economic situation begins with personal and family responsibility. It’s equally critical that jobs and training opportunities are in place and accessible. When poverty-fighting measures and supports are available, families and localities use these tools to gain and maintain their economic footing. Act on Poverty is a chance for the community to weigh in on solutions, and we are encouraging community leaders to join the chorus of ideas,” said Grey.

Agents from Virginia Cooperative Extension and Virginia Community Action Partnership are serving as facilitators at each community college. The Family and Children’s Trust Fund of Virginia is supporting the initiative, along with the NGA Center for Best Practices.

Recommendations also may be submitted via e-mail to poverty@governor.virginia.gov.

By mail:
Virginia Dept. of Social Services
c/o Public Affairs
7 North Eighth St.
Richmond, VA 23219

For information on special accommodations, such as visual or language assistance services (translation, sign or interpretation) please contact the Virginia Department of Social Services at 804-726-7106, no later than July 13.

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