

Arkansas Taskforce
On Reducing Poverty and Promoting Economic Opportunity
Retreat
April 13, 2010
Notes from Discussion of Work Group Issues

Community and Economic Development

- Want meeting with AEDC
 - Do in conjunction with Individual Economic Supports Work Group
 - Include Rural Services, ADFA, and Main Street Arkansas
 - Get high level officials from each office

- Access to capital for individuals and small businesses in rural areas
 - Loan guaranty at the Federal level for small businesses; need at the state level
 - Pine Bluff Entrepreneurship Initiative
 - Rather than using tax incentives for one plant, provide support for smaller businesses; is of particular concern in rural areas
 - L3C business model – for-profit entities that have incentive to invest in social enterprises; need tax breaks

- Many low-income individuals are un- and under-banked
 - Civil rights issues – banks not lending money to minority communities
 - Limited financial institution presence in some communities; need incentives to create that presence
 - Banking Development Districts like in Louisiana

- Possibilities re: green jobs
- Access to fresh food/financing for fresh food efforts
- Need poverty impact analysis statement on all policies
- Creative economy
- Broadband
- The Working Poor Families Program has a report out on Strengthening State Economic Development Systems -
http://www.workingpoorfamilies.org/pdfs/WPFP_policybrief_winter2010.pdf

- IDAs
- Affordable rental housing and homeownership opportunities
- Used car purchase programs
 - Bonnie CLAC in NH and Jump Start in Wisconsin, among others -
http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/FamilyEconomicSuccess/~/_media/PDFFiles/FES/affordable_car%20pdf.ashx;
 - Andre Stevens doing something too

Individual Economic Supports

- Have meetings with Phil Harris from DWS re: TANF; Tonya Russell from DHS re: early childhood and child care; Linda Greer from DHS/DCO
- Want meeting on small business/access to capital with AEDC; do with Community and Economic Development Work Group
- Cliff effect of benefits
 - Give examples of what low-wage jobs actually pay and the interaction with benefits
 - Get examples from the focus groups/videos
- TEA
 - Pushing people into low-wage jobs (like CNA)
 - Don't make enough to live on but make enough to lose good chunk of their benefits
 - Need to focus on education and skills and long-term career impacts
 - Is DHS tracking people that leave welfare? What is happening to them?
- Lack of child care vouchers and slots (waiting lists)
 - Last year stimulus dollars reduced the lists
 - But this was also done by taking some people off the list
 - Waiting lists are growing
- Re-entry of folks coming out of incarceration
- Utility Assistance
 - Impact of green efforts on utility costs and need to provide more supports for families
 - LIHEAP only serves 24 percent of eligible families
 - No state funding for LIHEAP and weatherization
 - Co-pays for weatherization program through PSC
- Mandate that landlords not rent substandard housing
- Access to Justice
 - State promote pro bono legal assistance around credit issues, bankruptcy, child custody, domestic violence, and immigration
- Child support
 - Ability to collect, especially when the parent is out of state
- Basic needs are harder in the Delta
 - Grocery stores charge double
 - Access to financial institutions, have to use alternative financial services
- Need easier access to benefits – maybe a universal application
- Garnishments re: debt

Education

- School boards and the role they can play
 - Developing them to be more effective
 - Public meeting laws make it tough for them to get to know each other
 - Better interaction between schools and community, between superintendent and school boards

- School counseling
 - Act 730 – college and career readiness
 - Have met with Dept of Ed about implementation;
 - Concern that they will feed into the same old system
 - Governor’s Career Coaches –
 - Done through Dept of Workforce Ed; has potential
 - Focus just on career readiness and college prep
 - In just 21 counties
 - 500:1 ratio
 - Recommend to expand statewide
 - Void re: kids who aren’t college-ready and how to help them get that way
 - NSLA funding
- Closing achievement gap
 - Smaller class size
 - Parental involvement
 - Proven charter school models
 - More early childhood education
 - In-school health services
 - After school program
- Support for STEM education
- Remediation for higher education
 - Putting adult education and community colleges together
 - Testing issues re: remediation – can be proficient on benchmark and not do well on ACT
- Low-income folks getting access to lottery scholarships
- Support for hard-to-retain students in higher education
 - Achieving the Dream
 - Center for Working Families
 - Career Pathways
- Legislative Task Force re: retention and graduation – bring those ideas up again
- Career readiness in high school – focus on certifications

Health

- What is the effect on states re: the new federal law?
- Infrastructure (providers, facilities); lack of doctors in some part of the state – NW, SE
- Mental health and substance abuse
- ARKids First expansion up to 250% of the federal poverty line
- Questions around health info like doctors not asking patients for information they already have
- Health literacy
- Lack of dental services/providers
- Health issues for adults, including seniors

Taxes

- Low income tax relief
 - State EITC
 - Exemptions from income tax for low income families – still need to fix for single parents with two or more kids
 - Claiming the federal EITC
 - Decreasing the use of expensive RALs
 - VITA sites
- Ways to raise new revenue
 - Soda pop tax
 - Corporate loopholes