



184 N. Lancaster Street, Athens, Ohio 45701
(740) 797-2523 1-800-762-3775
<http://jfs.athenscountygovernment.com>

COMMISSIONERS: Lenny Eliason, Larry Payne, Mark Sullivan
DIRECTOR: Jack Frech
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Contact: Nick Claussen, Community Relations Coordinator
(740) 797-2523

No increase in Social Security benefits means no increase in cash assistance

The fact that Social Security benefits are not increasing for the second straight year means that cash assistance benefits for Ohio's poorest citizens are also staying the same for the second straight year.

Ohio Works First (OWF), the state's cash assistance program, ties its increases in benefits to the federal government's increases in Social Security benefits. So while many people are seeing higher prices and a higher cost of living in Ohio, there will be no increase in public assistance benefits for the second straight year.

"Congress is considering giving Social Security recipients a lump sum payment of \$250 to make up for the lack of an increase, but there has been no public discussion of providing any extra assistance to Ohio's most vulnerable children and families. These families desperately need our help," said Athens County Job and Family Services Director Jack Frech.

In the summer of 2010, Ohio Gov. Ted Strickland issued an executive order providing for a one-time, \$100 payment for Ohio residents receiving OWF assistance. In the executive order, Strickland discussed the current economic problems facing Ohio's poorest residents and the need to help them.

"Our devastating national recession, still high unemployment, and the rising costs of education and transportation have left too many Ohioans struggling to meet the basic needs of their families and children. As unemployment benefits expire, the number of families seeking other forms of assistance will increase. Through the Ohio Works First program, Ohio's TANF cash assistance program is one way Ohio is committed to helping Ohio families meet these basic needs," Strickland stated in the executive order. But while the governor saw the need to provide a small boost this summer to Ohio families, he apparently does not see a need to increase the monthly payments to poor families.

Currently, OWF does not provide enough assistance to get a family up to even half of the federal poverty level. For a family of four, the maximum OWF benefit is \$536 per month. The federal poverty level for a family of four is \$1,838 per month. OWF benefits need to be increased to help Ohio families meet their basic needs.