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America is failing to help poor children

At a time when the federal government is giving banks \$700 billion in bailout funds, our country has 6.3 million children living in extreme poverty and we are doing little to help them.

The updated report, "TANF: Failing America's Poorest Children," details how cash assistance and food programs are underfunded and do not get families up to even half of the federal poverty level. Shockingly, over the last 11 years, only three states have increased their cash assistance funding to keep up with cost of living increases, and 23 states have not increased their cash assistance funding levels at all.

In Ohio, more than 160,000 children currently rely on the Ohio Works First cash assistance program. At the same time, Ohio has nearly 245,000 children who are living in extreme poverty, which means their family income is at or below 50 percent of the federal poverty level.

Welfare reform placed strict requirements on families receiving public assistance. But this newly-released report shows how people on public assistance fall further behind every year while our government actually reduces cash assistance funding in some states and turns its back on poor people all across America. Government leaders often argue that they do not have the money to increase TANF funding or other programs to help poor people. They say they have to make "tough choices," but the choices almost always leave poor children out in the cold.

Meanwhile, the government chooses to spend money in other areas:

- Financial institutions are allowed to hand out billions of dollars of the federal bailout money to pay for bonuses and special compensation for employees.
- The federal government chose to use more than \$17 billion to bailout the auto industry. That \$17 billion is more than the entire annual federal appropriation for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program.
- States such as Ohio have chosen in recent years to roll back income taxes at a time when state budgets are losing money and welfare programs that poor families rely on are being cut.
- The federal government just chose to spend \$79 million to see if there is water on the moon, while families all across the country don't have water in their own homes.

The assistance programs that are supposed to help our neighbors are failing miserably simply because our government won't adequately fund these programs. Too many families are going hungry. Too many children are living in extreme poverty. We need to greatly increase the funding for programs to help poor people. We need to choose to do the right thing.

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