



Coalition on Homelessness  
and Housing in Ohio  
**COHHIO**

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## **Real Issues Affecting Real Ohioans Examined in New Report**

COLUMBUS -- Amid Washington scandals and the drone of election bickering across Ohio, advocates of the poor gathered today at a crowded south side community center to release their collaborative “Invest in Ohio’s Future” report; and to call on Congress to respond to the real needs of working Ohio families in the areas of education, health care, energy and affordable housing.

The report is a combined effort of COHHIO, the USAction Education Fund, the Center for Community Solutions, Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy (OPAE), and the Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio (UHCAN). The report illustrates how lopsided investment in wealthy America is weakening the infrastructure of working America.

Speaking to a room full of some of Columbus’ poorest citizens, COHHIO’s executive director Bill Faith suggested that “by repealing tax cuts for those making \$200,000 a year, and by repealing some of the corporate welfare tax cuts, Congress would save \$150 billion to address other needs.”

Congress failed to pass legislation to fix problems in the funding formula for Section 8 housing, he said. “This year 700 fewer households in Ohio will receive vouchers than last; next year, 800 fewer will receive them. Congress spends one-third the amount on housing for the poor than it spends on tax breaks for America’s wealthier homeowners. This is clearly headed in the wrong direction.”

John Edgar, Pastor of the United Methodist Church in which the event was held, said he hoped that everyone in the room would “vote for change that makes a difference in poor peoples’ lives.”

Edgar said the church’s 24,000 cardholders -- people eligible for free food and clothing from the church -- represent 75,000 individuals. “We’ve

created a sub-class in our society of folks who are so poor they don't have money for basic needs. Organizations like ours try to stand in the gap, but we don't kid ourselves that what we do is enough. We need fundamental policy changes to ensure that no one is denied the basic resources for life."

Dave Rinebolt, the executive director of Ohio Partners for Affordable Energy said there were 100,000 across Ohio that woke up without heat this morning, because service had been terminated for nonpayment. "Prices are more than double today what they were in 2003," he said. The best approach to providing sustainable and stable energy prices is to invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy, Rinebolt said. "These investments can keep energy dollars in the state producing jobs and affordable energy."

Many more Ohioans woke up this morning without health care insurance, said Kathleen Gmeiner, a consultant for Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio. More than 1.3 million Ohioans lack health insurance, she said, and it's easy to see why: health insurance consumes 25 percent of the average family's income; and wages are growing only at about one quarter the rate of health care costs. Gmeiner said that with a 73 percent increase in health care premiums from 2000 to 2005, "it is becoming impossible for average working people to afford insurance.

"Congress continues to slash Medicaid as if there were no consequences," Gmeiner said. It's time Congress recognizes that health care is a national security issue. More people have died from preventable and treatable illnesses than have died from any terrorist attack, and an unhealthy nation cannot do all that must be done to build a strong democracy."

Mary Sowards brought her son William Guigar, a second grader in Columbus Public Schools, to speak on the importance of federally-funded after schools programs that provide tutoring and other enrichment activities. "My son barely passed second grade," Sowards told the crowd. "Without the extra help these kids need, they won't go very far. There's not much teachers can do with 35 kids in the classroom. The extra help really matters," she said.

Added Angela Lariviere, COHHIO's Youth Empowerment Program Director, "The needs far outweigh the resources. We need to fight to preserve and increase these funds because after school programs become

critical to filling the gap in basic education and skills that our youth need to break the cycle of poverty.”

The report can be found at [http://cohhio.org/info\\_factsheets.php](http://cohhio.org/info_factsheets.php)