

For Immediate Release

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Organizations Call on Governor and State Legislators to Target Federal Recovery Act Funds to Those Hurt Most by Recession Openness and accountability should also guide new spending

With hundreds of millions of dollars in federal Recovery Act spending coming to Nebraska, a dozen organizations statewide urged state policymakers today to invest in programs that will give struggling low-income families and unemployed workers new opportunities to succeed economically.

The group, including organizations representing workers, human services providers, and government oversight groups, called on state legislators and the governor to ensure that stimulus money helps stabilize the economy and benefits those hurt most by the recession. The group also urged that spending be done openly, efficiently and with accountability.

“With the economy in recession and so many people in need, we have to make sure that the state focuses some of the stimulus spending to helping those who need the most assistance,” said Mary Beth Rathe, Executive Director of Community Action of Nebraska, “At the same time, we cannot afford for this money to be wasted or misspent. The state must make every effort to spend the money wisely and in a way that lets the public monitor just how effective the spending is.”

The group is calling on state leaders to embrace and apply the ideas presented in a newly released document, Principles for State Implementation (attached), developed by the national Working Poor Families Project and endorsed by 20 national nonprofit organizations. The principles call for states to direct Recovery Act spending to:

- Create jobs that pay a family-supporting wage and provide critical benefits such as health insurance.
- Ensure that a portion of jobs created go to people with low skills and low incomes, to give them a chance to advance economically.
- Invest in infrastructure projects in distressed communities often overlooked in public works decisions and ensure that residents of those communities are given a chance to work on the projects.
- Support training programs for low-skilled workers, who are far more likely to be out of work in this recession. These programs should be carefully linked to high-growth sectors of the economy.

“The Recovery Act gives the state an opportunity to create pathways for low-skill workers to move ahead,” said Rebecca Gould, Executive Director of the Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest. “By assuring a portion of the jobs and training are linked

with new health care, green industry and infrastructure investments we can rejuvenate all areas of the economy and build a stronger workforce.”

The group also applauds the state of Nebraska for launching the recovery.Nebraska.gov website, and encourages the use of the site to assure ongoing transparency with the following efficiency and accountability principles in mind:

- Allocating spending to meet specific goals, including job creation and preservation.
- Using a competitive process in awarding contracts to increase fairness and maximize choice.
- Requiring contractors and agencies to report regularly on how the stimulus funds are being spent and measuring their progress in achieving specific goals.
- Closely coordinating spending among state and local agencies to ensure efficiency.
- Adjusting state policies to take advantage of all federal stimulus funds, including expanded aid for unemployed workers; increasing outreach to ensure eligible Nebraskans receive federal benefits such as child care and food stamps.

The group supports an ongoing open and publicly accountable system to keep people informed of how the money is being spent and whether or not it is meeting the needs of residents.

The Principles for State Implementation were developed by the Working Poor Families Project and have been endorsed by 20 national nonprofit groups concerned about the effective implementation of the federal Recover and Reinvestment Act. For more information on the Working Poor Families Project, its Principles for State Implementation, and a list of organizations endorsing the principles, go to www.workingpoorfamilies.org.

Nebraska Organizations Include:

The Nebraska Appleseed Center for Law in the Public Interest
Rebecca Gould, JD
Executive Director

SEIU Change That Works
Jane Kleeb
State Director

Human Services Federation of Lincoln/Lancaster County
Richard Carter
Executive Director

Opportunity@Work
Annemarie Bailey-Fowler
Opportunity@Work Coordinator

The Food Bank of Omaha
Stephen Gehring

Board Member

A'Jamal, Advocates & Associates

A'Jamal-Rashad Byndon

The Arc of Nebraska

Marla Fischer-Lempke

Executive Director

Community Action of Nebraska

Mary Beth Rathe

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Common Cause Nebraska

Jack Gould

Issues Chair

The Center for Rural Affairs

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Center for People in Need

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Terry Werner

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