

RECOVERY WATCH **Maryland**

*Fighting for Transparency, Equity, and Accountability
in Maryland's Economic Recovery*

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ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS LAUNCH “RECOVERY WATCH MARYLAND” TO ENSURE THAT STIMULUS REACHES THOSE HARDEST HIT

*Recovery Watch Maryland to Ensure Dollars Go to
Workers and Communities Most Impacted by Worst
Economic Downtown Since Great Depression*

Annapolis -- At a press conference held Tuesday, January 19, 2010 in Annapolis, a group of respected advocacy organizations announced the launch of a two-year project entitled “Recovery Watch Maryland” to ensure that the most vulnerable Marylanders benefit from the billions of federal stimulus dollars pouring into the state to spark an economic recovery. Recovery Watch Maryland is launching in the midst of a deep and persistent recession in the state, which was one of only eight in the country whose unemployment rates rose at the end of 2009 and continues to be racked by some of the highest foreclosure rates in the country.

Maryland is slated to receive an estimated \$3.9 billion through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, intended to stimulate the economy and put people back to work. Additional funds may become available if the Senate acts on the \$154 billion “Jobs for Main Street Act of 2010” passed by the House of Representatives last month. Numerous local and state decisions will determine where those funds will be invested. The alliance has been initiated by the Open Society Institute to ensure that those decisions are transparent and that public officials are held accountable for the success or failure of the strategies adopted. The founding organizations of the

alliance – CASA de Maryland, Job Opportunities Task Force, Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute, Progressive Maryland Education Fund, and the Safe & Sound Campaign – represent some of the most vulnerable communities in Maryland and will fight to ensure that the recovery funds are equitably distributed, responding to the particular needs of disadvantaged workers, low-income communities, and people of color, among others. Furthermore, coalition members will work to ensure that the City of Baltimore receives its fair share of recovery dollars since it is responsible for a disproportionate share of the state’s most vulnerable populations.

The two-year effort will include the following elements:

Website: RecoveryWatchMaryland.org is now up and running as the online home of the new coalition.

Monthly reports: The Recovery Watch Maryland “Monthly Monitor” will inform the public about new developments involving federal economic stimulus funds.

Public awareness and outreach: Recovery Watch Maryland will hold public meetings to educate the public and interested constituencies about the federal economic stimulus. The first will take place in Baltimore this spring at a date and time to be announced shortly. These meetings will also help to expand the membership of Recovery Watch Maryland beyond the five organizations that founded the coalition.

Policy advocacy: Recovery Watch Maryland’s most immediate policy priority is to modernize the state unemployment insurance system, which would allow the state to tap into \$126.8 million in unclaimed stimulus funds. Acting to claim these funds would help ensure that workers in need are covered by unemployment insurance, and would help shore up the declining unemployment insurance trust fund, thus easing the tax burden on business. To qualify, Maryland must adopt an Alternate Base Period (ABP); doing so would provide coverage to workers who are currently denied unemployment due to an outdated data collection system that ignores recent work. The state must also adopt at least one more of a slate of reforms, one of which would provide extended benefits to workers who are participating in job training – a logical step during a time of high unemployment. For more details visit www.JOTF.org.

Statements from Recovery Watch Maryland leaders

Gustavo Torres, Executive Director, CASA de Maryland

“People of color and recent immigrants are most vulnerable at times of economic distress. [New data find that the unemployment rate in December was 12.9% for Latinos and 16.2% for African Americans](#). It is critical that state and local governments consider this disparate impact in their decisions about how best to use federal economic recovery funds.”

Jason Perkins-Cohen, Executive Director of the Jobs Opportunities Task Force

“We are urging the General Assembly to act quickly to pass the Governor’s unemployment insurance modernization legislation, strengthening the unemployment safety net for workers in need, and bringing a \$127 million cash infusion to the state. Last year, Maryland took a first step by covering part time workers, but now we must finish the job and provide a win-win for the state, business, and workers.”

Brandon McLeod, Maryland Budget and Tax Policy Institute

“The national Recovery Act has already made the recession shorter and less severe than it would have been without bold action from Congress. 36,000 jobs have been created or saved in Maryland so far as a result. Recovery Watch Maryland plans to work with state and local officials and inform the public to help assure that the recovery dollars get used where they will help the people most severely hurt by the recession.”

Matthew Weinstein, Baltimore Region Director, Progressive Maryland Education Fund

“Working families in Maryland are hurting. They welcome the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that was passed last year, and they also hope that the Senate acts soon to pass the Jobs Act approved by the House last month. The recent [“State of Working Maryland” report](#) found that incomes in Maryland are stagnant and likely falling as unemployment continues to rise, hitting 7.4% in November, up from 5.1% a year earlier. We know that federal economic stimulus funds are the main thing keeping it from going even higher, and we need to make sure those funds are going to hire local residents at living wages with job training and health insurance.”

Hathaway Ferebee, Executive Director, Safe and Sound Campaign

“The availability of stimulus funding changes the outlook during these recessionary times. Rather than warning of doom – our leaders have the opportunity to use this unprecedented infusion of ‘interest-free’ cash to change the way we do business – disinvesting in programs that don’t work (prisons, juvenile incarceration and foster care) in favor of interventions that do – thereby redirecting 100s of millions of dollars to sustain the stimulus-funded efforts and building a strong state economy.”