

# PUBLIC ASSISTANCE CHALLENGE: CAN YOU AND YOUR FAMILY LIVE ON A PUBLIC ASSISTANCE GRANT FOR A WEEK?

New York's public assistance grant has not been increased for 17 years. Families dependent on public assistance are asked to survive on a grant that is less than half the federal poverty line. In order to bring public attention to the plight of New York's poorest families, we are asking public officials, clergy, media personalities, and others to try to live for one week spending no more than the amount allowed by the public assistance grant.

Family Size	<u>One</u>	<u>Two</u>	<u>Three</u>	<u>Four</u>	<u>Five</u>	<u>Six</u>	<u>Seven</u>	<u>Eight</u>
Monthly Amount	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$200.20	\$231.49	\$268.99	\$306.84	\$338.49	\$376.74
Weekly Amount	\$25.85	\$41.31	\$46.20	\$53.42	\$62.07	\$70.81	\$78.11	\$86.94

## Public Assistance Challenge Guidelines:

What are families expected to pay for with their "basic allowance?"

- Transportation - all non-work related transportation.
- Personal Care Items - toilet paper, dishwashing soap, deodorant, disposable diapers, toothpaste, housecleaning supplies, etc.
- Clothing - obviously we can survive for a week without buying new clothing but please include in your expenses the cost of laundry and dry cleaning. Most public assistance recipients do not own their own washers and dryers so please calculate the cost of each load of wash as if you had to use a public laundromat. (For Saratoga Springs, \$1.75 per load of wash; 8 minutes per quarter for the dryer so you can estimate about \$3.00 per load plus detergent. This would probably be higher in New York City.)
- Meals away from home --- any fast food, coffee, etc.
- Items not Eligible for Food Stamps: Households CANNOT use food stamp benefits to buy: Beer, wine, liquor, cigarettes, or tobacco; Any nonfood items, such as pet foods; soaps, paper products; household supplies; vitamins and medicines; food that will be eaten in the store; or hot foods.
- School supplies, books, newspapers
- Parental contributions for school trips, Girl or Boy Scout troop dues, religious contributions
- Telephone service, cell phone fees, internet access, monthly cable fees, pay phone charges - these can be divided by 4.33 to calculate a weekly amount
- Co-pays for prescription drugs; doctors visits, etc.

Items which may be covered by other allowances and food stamps and therefore should not be included in your daily expenditures:

- Rent - although many families are forced to use part of their basic allowance for rent, we will assume that your shelter allowance covers your rent or mortgage
- Food - assuming you spend no more than the USDA "Thrifty Food Plan" amount for food
- Home energy - including heat
- Work-related transportation



**Notes:**

The public assistance "grant" in New York is actually made up of a number of allowances, many of which vary not only by family size but also by county of residence and fuel used to heat your home. Most families on public assistance also receive food stamp benefits. In order to simplify this exercise we will focus only on the basic allowance (sometimes referred to as the Food & Other Allowance or the PreAdd Allowance) that varies only by family size. Since the food stamp benefit calculation assumes that a portion of the basic allowance is used to purchase food, the food stamp expected contribution towards food expenditures has been subtracted from the basic allowances used in this exercise.

Family Size	One	Two	Three	Four	Five	Six	Seven	Eight
Monthly Pre Add Allowance	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$238.00	\$307.00	\$379.00	\$438.00	\$498.00	\$558.00
Expected Food Stamp Contribution	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$37.80	\$75.51	\$110.01	\$131.16	\$159.51	\$181.26
Net Monthly Pre Add Allowance	\$112.00	\$179.00	\$200.20	\$231.49	\$268.99	\$306.84	\$338.49	\$376.74

Note: Expected food stamp contribution was calculated as 30% of income after subtracting the maximum "excess shelter deduction" of \$431 and the standard deduction which ranges from \$134 to \$191 per month depending on family size. Some elderly recipients may have a lower expected contribution because their shelter deduction is not subject to the cap.

Limiting the exercise to the basic allowance makes a HUGE assumption --- that a family is able to pay all rent with the shelter allowance, pay all domestic utilities with the Home Energy Allowance and the Supplemental Home Energy Allowance, pay heating costs with the Fuel for Heating Allowance and cover food costs with the food stamp benefits plus its expected contribution. Since these other allowances and food stamp benefits have not kept up with the increases in living costs, most families dependent on cash assistance are forced to use a part of their basic allowance to cover these other costs and have even less to spend.

Nevertheless, we believe that the basic allowance is so inadequate that even if a family does not have to use any of it to cover rent, utilities and heat AND the family receives the maximum food stamp benefit, it would be impossible to cover basic family needs with this meager amount. Therefore we are challenging folks to give this a try.

**Public Assistance New Year's Challenge**

\_\_\_ Yes, I will participate in the PA Challenge on Jan. 1, 2009

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Organization / Office \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ Town/City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ email \_\_\_\_\_

Return to: Interfaith Impact of NYS, 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203 or e-mail robb@interfaithimpactnys.org.

**This challenge was prepared by the Hunger Action Network of NYS and the Faith and Hunger Network for NYS. Please distribute this as widely as possible.**