

Alameda County Income Inequality and the State Budget By Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan

Fifty years after Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty in the United States, children and families in Alameda County are facing difficult times. The wealth of the Bay Area may be rising, but we're seeing some 57 neighborhoods in Alameda County with child poverty rates that exceed 30%. When a child experiences poverty at a young age, it will likely impact them for the rest of their lives.

The children born in the poorest parts of the county have a life expectancy of up to fifteen years less than in other parts of the county. They will also face larger challenges in getting an education and a job. The most disadvantaged children growing up in Alameda County are three times less likely to read at their grade level, and when they grow up, they are six times more likely to be unemployed than in more affluent areas of the county. It's up to us to offer them a brighter future.

That's why we've come together as a county to declare a New War on Poverty in our region with a coalition of community advocates, residents, and service providers. We are looking for champions locally and on the state level. Governor Brown's new state budget is an opportunity for leadership. A successful budget must include restorations to vital poverty-fighting programs in California. These programs, cut during the downturn of 2008, can help lift our families out of poverty in the coming year.

Here in Alameda County, I have identified three key ways to fight poverty in the 2014-2015 California Budget. First, a \$20 million state contribution to CalFresh would bring in \$275 million in matching federal funds for hungry families in our state. Second, a restoration is needed for the 107,000 subsidized childcare and preschool slots that were cut during the Great Recession. And third, the state needs to increase funding for workforce development to help Californians earn a living wage. The need for a state rainy day fund should be balanced against these vital restorations and the ongoing poverty crisis for so many families in our county and our state.

Traditional social safety net services play a crucial role in the fight against poverty. A 2013 report from the Public Policy Institute of California shows that social safety net services like CalWORKs and CalFresh kept 2.8 million Californians out of deep poverty. CalFresh alone reduced the child poverty rate in our state by four points, or 380,000 children, by providing the groceries for families to cook and make healthy meals for themselves.

On the local level, innovative programs like the Family Independence Initiative are helping to lead the way in the fight against poverty by connecting families to resources and giving them

the room to lead their own change. In a two-year survey of their work, families enrolled in the Family Independence Initiative on average increased their savings by a remarkable 120% and increased their earnings by 24%.

Here in Alameda County, we have been working on the Human Impact Budget project to examine the impact of essential services and put a human face on budget numbers. Each year, we put out a Human Impact Budget report with the County's new fiscal year budget, so the County can gain a deeper understanding of how services and service cuts affect Alameda County families, seniors, and children.

It is going to take all kinds of people in this fight – families, business leaders, government employees, millennials, seniors, and service providers – to begin to turn these poverty numbers around. It is a battle well worth fighting for the long term prosperity of our residents.

Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan represents District 3, which includes the cities of Alameda, San Leandro, parts of Oakland including Chinatown, Jack London, Fruitvale and San Antonio neighborhoods, and the unincorporated community of San Lorenzo.