

The Salt Lake Tribune

The Legislature and low-income housing

By drew martinez

Published: January 17, 2012 12:40PM

Updated: January 17, 2012 12:40PM

Many economic indicators are signaling that Utah's economy is headed for a better year in 2012. However, the outlook for Utahns living in poverty is not as bright.

Utah is now faced with nearly 360,000 individuals living in poverty. That's as many people as the populations of Provo, West Jordan and West Valley City combined. With only days until the Utah Legislature convenes, the day-to-day realities of these Utahns should be on all 104 legislators' minds.

The reality of Utahns living in poverty is one of high unemployment, a dragging economy and high costs of goods, with housing one of the largest burdens. In Utah, fair market rent for a two-bedroom apartment is \$769. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities, without paying more than 30 percent of income, a household must earn \$30,775 annually.

A family of four would be classified as living in poverty if their annual income was \$22,350 or less. That's a difference of nearly \$8,500 that a family currently living in poverty would need to make to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Utah.

The realities are bleak for these Utahns, but the people of Utah are ready to accept the challenge to assist their neighbors in their pursuit of stability.

Utah has achieved great successes thanks to the collaborative approach embodied in the state's Ten-Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. Such collaboration has had long-term impacts such as the reduction of chronic homelessness by 69 percent since 2006, along with recent examples, one being the purchase by Volunteers of America, Utah of a home to provide transitional housing for homeless young men.

The people of Utah, along with state government, have shown their commitment to safe, decent and affordable housing for all. With the start of the 2012 General Legislative Session this week, we call on our state legislators



to recommit for this new year. They can show that recommitment by increasing funding to both the Olene Walker Housing Loan Fund, which creates and preserves affordable housing for Utah's low-income community, and to the Pamela Atkinson Homeless Trust Fund, which assists organizations in getting people out of homelessness.

Legislators should also include in the fiscal year 2013 budget the \$500,000 that Gov. Gary Herbert recommended go to homeless shelters. It will take government, nonprofits and for-profits all working together to achieve the cause of affordable housing for all.

Poverty in Utah is real. It doesn't have to be.

Drew Martinez is a policy analyst at Community Action Partnership of Utah, a nonprofit dedicated to achieving socially just public policy that assists Utahns living in poverty in achieving self-sufficiency.

© 2012 The Salt Lake Tribune