



**State of Florida
Department of Children and Families**

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**NEW BENEFIT BANK ALLOWS MIAMI'S STRUGGLING FAMILIES
TO MAXIMIZE THEIR BENEFITS**

~ACCESS Florida and ACCESS Miami join forces to give families as much needed help as possible
by simplifying application process ~

Miami, Fla. - (Friday, February 20, 2009) Department of Children and Families' Chief of Staff Jason Dimitris and **William Porro, Special Projects Administrator for City of Miami's ACCESS Miami** announce the launch of the Benefit Bank at the ACCESS Community Partners Summit at 3 p.m. in the Embassy Suites Hotel located at 3974 N.W. South River Drive, in the Key Largo Ballroom. Resulting from a Memorandum of Understanding signed by then Assistant Secretary Sheldon and City of Miami Mayor Manny Diaz, the Benefit Bank electronically connects the State's and City's application processes and offers clients a common web-based application form for all benefits. Residents will now be able to go to **one location** and complete **one application** to apply for Food Stamps, child care, TANF, Earned Income Tax Credit, Medicaid, School Nutrition programs, Income Tax Preparation, and other services.

“This is a shining example of our community working together to identify common concerns and develop solution that help us better care for our citizens and meet their growing needs,” proudly declared Dimitris. “Taking a fragmented system and turning it into an integrated system will ensure that struggling families are able to get programs and benefits which otherwise might be hard to locate or difficult to secure.”

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Mission: Protect the Vulnerable, Promote Strong and Economically Self-Sufficient Families, and Advance Personal and Family Recovery and Resiliency

“With such troubling financial distress, and with more families turning to government for temporary assistance, now, more than ever, we need customer friendly systems that are efficient and effective,” stated **William Porro, Special Projects Administrator for ACCESS Miami initiative**. “By employing this integrated, ‘open door’ approach to applying for benefits, our community agencies, employers, schools, churches, health facilities and other community partners can offer services to our residents in need.”

The need is greater than ever; many people are applying for benefits who never applied before. The Department has seen a statewide increase of 49 percent in applications for Food Stamp benefits, the largest in the nation. Over the past 18 months, the Southern Region, which serves Miami-Dade and Monroe counties, has found:

- According to available estimates, 29 percent of likely eligible families may not be receiving food stamps.
- A 28 percent increase in the number of Food Stamp clients (from 284,500 to 365,000)
- A 41 percent increase in TANF clients (from 12,545 to 17,688).
- A nine percent increase in the Medicaid caseload
- An additional \$42 million in food stamps benefits and \$2 million in TANF being infused into the community every month

Improving family and economic stability is imperative during these troubled times. When more residents in our community receive the benefits for which they qualify, it’s a win-win for the community, resulting in:

- low and moderate income households getting more money to meet basic needs
- employers having a more stable workforce
- the local economy benefiting from the dollars being spent on consumer goods and services, with a "multiplier effect", stimulating more jobs and spending

Launched in 2001 by Mayor Manny Diaz, ACCESS Miami is the City of Miami’s Anti-Poverty Initiative, and encompasses the year-round programs and services the City offers its residents in order to empower them with access to the financial tools and education that are fundamental to economic prosperity. **ACCESS Miami uses the Benefit Bank to provide assistance to its residents through the 13 Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) Offices providing the opportunity to apply for Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit, among other federal, state and local assistance.**

For more information on ACCESS Miami the public can call (305) 416-2181.

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