

June 19, 2009

To Whom It May Concern,

Recently your organization was contacted by a researcher from the University of Chicago to discuss a short telephone survey about the current challenges facing social service agencies in outer-urban and suburban areas. At that time, *you were identified as someone who could answer questions about services offered, changing client needs, and basic organizational features* at your site. I am writing to provide you with more information about this study and to invite you to participate.

As you are aware, social services are a critical source of support for working poor families in suburbs and cities. And, as you also are aware, the current economic and fiscal environment poses numerous challenges for service providers. With support from the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program, I am inviting more than 200 service providers in suburban Chicago, Los Angeles, and Washington, D.C. to complete brief telephone surveys that discuss the impact of the recession on program demand and funding. This project builds upon the nearly 2,000 interviews with service providers I have completed since 2005 and analyzed in my recent book *Out of Reach: Place, Poverty, and the New American Welfare State*.

In the next few days, a survey interviewer will be contacting you to arrange a time to complete a short telephone survey that will ask a few detailed questions about service provision at your site. In particular, I am interested in the following:

- Changing client characteristics and needs
- Challenges securing program funding
- Strategies for coping with reduced funding
- Impact of state/local budget deficits on service provision

Your responses to this brief telephone survey will help to create a more detailed picture of social service provision for low-income populations in suburban areas. *All information you provide will be held confidential.* In no way will your responses be made public in a manner that will identify you or your organization. The telephone *survey itself will take only about 10 minutes* and will provide practitioners, policymakers, foundations, and scholars with new insight into the challenges facing providers in suburban areas – areas typically overlooked in our policy discussions.

Because of the volatility in the economy, changing needs for assistance, and uncertainty in funding, *I also am asking that you consider completing brief 4-5 minute follow-up surveys every 4-6 weeks through the end of the calendar year.* By collecting information about funding and service provision over time, this study will be able to generate more precise insight into how the recession is affecting community-based service organizations operating outside of central city areas. **As a modest thank you for completing these brief surveys, I will send you a complimentary copy of my book *Out of Reach* at the end of the study.**

I greatly appreciate your cooperation. More information about this research project can be found at scottwallard.com. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact me at the survey lab (773-702-1155) or by email at sallard@uchicago.edu.

Sincerely yours,

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