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FEDERAL GOVERNMENT DEMANDS STATE TAKE IMMEDIATE ACTION TO HELP STRUGGLING TEXANS WHILE STATE DITHERS, DENYING HHSC REQUEST FOR CRITICAL ELIGIBILITY STAFF

Austin, Texas—The Center for Public Policy Priorities today condemned the Legislative Budget Board’s (LBB) denial of a request from Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to fund hundreds of new eligibility staff for our state’s overwhelmed public benefits system. The new staff would be an essential step toward fixing our system, which cannot process applications timely or accurately. LBB’s denial comes as the state faces an increased need for public safety net services during the worst economic climate in a generation, a demand by the U.S. Department of Agriculture on September 24 for immediate action to take corrective action, and a private class-action lawsuit against the state for failure to meet federal Food Stamp timeliness standards.

“LBB’s denial is stunning. During this deep economic recession, programs like Food Stamps, Medicaid, and CHIP provide a lifeline for millions of struggling Texans. Those new staff are critical to ensure Texas can get help to families when they need it most,” CPPP Senior Policy Analyst Celia Hagert said.

Process for Funding Approval for New Eligibility Staffers

The General Appropriations Act, Senate Bill 1, allows HHSC to request funding for an additional 656 eligibility staffers to deal with anticipated workload and caseload growth during the economic downturn. Thirty days prior to a proposed funding transfer for this purpose, HHSC must seek approval from the Governor, the LBB, and the Comptroller. Unless the Governor or the LBB issues a written disapproval, the request is automatically approved 15 business days after LBB staff concludes its review of the proposed funding transfer and sends its review to the Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, the Speaker of the House, and the Lieutenant Governor. Yesterday, LBB denied the request.

“This need for more staff was thoroughly studied during the legislative session, this request has been pending for some time, and the LBB needs to act to help Texas families,” Hagert concluded.

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The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) is a non-profit, non-partisan policy institute dedicated to improving the economic and social conditions of low- and moderate-income Texans. You can learn more about CPPP at <http://www.cphp.org>.