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**Online Application Makes it Easier to Apply for Food, Medical and Cash Assistance**

**Cincinnati (Nov. 16, 2010)** Low-income residents who need help with food, medical needs or daily expenses now have an easier path to assistance through a new website with an online application.

The Web site, <http://ODJFSBenefits.ohio.gov>, comes at a time when a record number of Hamilton County residents are seeking food or medical assistance. The economic downturn of the past few years has tens of thousands of residents either out of work or forced to take lower-paying jobs that leave them scrambling to make ends meet.

“We now help about one in six Hamilton County residents with food or medical assistance,” said Moira Weir, director of the county’s Job and Family Services Department. “Many of them are working parents once forced to decide between paying the light bill or putting food on the table for their children. With our help, they have been able to stretch their paychecks a bit further.

“This website makes it even easier for people in difficult circumstances to reach out for help. We are excited because it improves both customer service and efficiency, two things all government units should strive to do.”

In addition to allowing Ohio residents to apply online, the new website features a calculator for new applicants to determine if they might be eligible for help, and a tool for current recipients to report changes to their case information. The website provides access 24 hours a day from any computer with Internet access. After an individual fills out the online application, the paperwork is automatically forwarded to a county caseworker for review. The process is quick, easy and secure. Users who have difficulty with the application can call Hamilton County Job and Family Services at 946-1000 for assistance.

The website is a collaborative effort between the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Foodbanks. A grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture helped fund the site’s development.

“I’ve always said that ODJFS must strive to ‘meet people where they’re at,’” said ODJFS Director Douglas Lumpkin. “This new Web site is an excellent example of that. It will allow us to improve our level of customer service. Because of the recession, many Ohioans are applying for assistance for the first time. Many of them are used to new ways of doing business and are more than happy to apply for services online. Innovations like <http://ODJFSBenefits.ohio.gov> help expedite assistance to those who need it most.”

In Hamilton County, approximately 133,000 citizens receive food assistance and 155,000 citizens receive medical assistance from the Department of Job and Family Services. About one-third of

those people have never received aid before – or at least not in the past five years – and ended up seeking assistance because of the faltering economy.

“Whether they are fortunate enough to access this site from their own homes or they visit a friend’s or the library, this saves them a trip downtown, gas money and parking costs, not to mention any wait that might accompany their visit,” Weir said. “One of my goals for this agency is to be more accessible to the citizens of Hamilton County and this definitely makes it easier to do business with us.”

**About Hamilton County’s Department of Job and Family Services**

The Department of Job and Family Services administers federal, state and local programs for those in need. The Department helps with local child protection, elderly protection, child care, child support enforcement, workforce development, cash assistance, food assistance and Medicaid disbursement. Servicing Hamilton County since 1947, the Department helps hundreds of thousands each year and is accredited by the Council on Accreditation, an international, independent, not-for-profit child and family service accrediting organization.