

The Anniston Star

Editorials

At least it's a start: Another go at reducing poverty

In our opinion
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Alabama has the seventh highest rate of poverty in the nation, the 2001-02 Census says. Approximately 679,000 Alabama residents — 15.2 percent of the state's population — live below the federal poverty line.

So one would think any issue that affected so many Alabamians would be high on the state's legislative list of priorities.

Sadly, it isn't. Simply look at what was done during the recently completed session of the state Legislature to see that.

Was the sales tax on groceries removed? No. Was tax reform instituted so that the state's tax code would be fairer to those at the bottom of the economic pyramid? No.

Was anything done?

Well, yes. The Legislature created the Alabama Commission to Reduce Poverty and charged it to "study and evaluate ... state-supported programs that serve those living in poverty." This study should consider "the economic impact of poverty" and the "current policies and services" provided. The commission will make "recommendations and propose legislation" to address the conditions that it finds.

Those decisions are sound and warranted, but most of this information already exists. It has been collected by groups such as the Alabama Poverty Project, which have spent years pointing out the very conditions that this commission is suppose to "study and evaluate."

Nevertheless, the bright side's worth a look. At last there is a legislatively sanctioned group to examine the situation. More than that, the commission has as members those who "reflect the racial, gender, geographic, urban/rural and economic diversity of the state." Sitting with legislators will be representatives from Alabama Arise, Alabama Community Action Agencies, the state's faith community, the Low Income Housing Coalition, VOICES for Alabama Children and the Alabama Poverty Project.

Perhaps most significant is the inclusion of "two individuals living in poverty," people who will take issues out of the abstract and make them personal.

All too often in this state, committees and commissions are created to pay lip service to situations that legislators would just as soon ignore. Many important subjects have been studied until they disappeared.

However, considering the composition of this commission, this is not likely to happen.

So let's applaud the creation of the Alabama Commission to Reduce Poverty. At least it's a start.