

March 17, 1975

Dear Friend:

The pre-school youngster whose photograph appears on the enclosure is enrolled in our local Head Start program. Before him is a nutritionally-balanced lunch prepared at our new multi-purpose center. Last November he received his semi-annual medical checkup at our community health center.

Three or four years ago, just about the time this child was born, none of this would have been possible.

Yet we are still not able to make him smile.

The reason is not complex: despite the enormous strides we have made in the Fayette region since 1969, a great deal has not yet changed. We had cut unemployment from 68 percent to 29 percent through an intensive campaign to generate jobs and industry. But the economic decline has wiped out a good portion of that gain. The majority of our folks will go hungry this winter, just as they have in previous years.

Except for the fortunate 80 families who will be moving into our new low-income housing project in the months ahead, most of the 10,000 men, women and children in surrounding Jefferson County will endure another cold winter in makeshift shacks with tar paper windows, mud floors and outdoor plumbing.

The plight of our senior citizens is even more pressing. Had 1974 been a "normal" year, we would have been able to provide many of them with a professionally-staffed and furnished senior citizens day care facility. Instead, most of them have had to survive another lonely, isolated year with no one to care or even to cook a hot meal for them.

Yes, we have improved the lot of many poor black folks (and some whites too) in this part of Mississippi. We even generated real hope for the first time in centuries that the heritage of slavery and racial oppression might once and for all be eradicated.

But the nation's financial crisis has hit us hard here in Jefferson County, threatening much of what we have worked so long to achieve. To give you an idea of how close to the margin of survival our people live, the average monthly welfare payment for a family of four is about \$48--and that is after a recent increase for inflation.

I know how difficult it has been for all Americans this past year, but the great majority have never experienced the endless cycle of grinding poverty which so many of our rural folk endure year after year. Until 1974, the Fund and the Town of Fayette were succeeding in the mutual effort to break this cycle with enlightened and strategic programs. Much of that is now in jeopardy unless sympathetic Americans like yourself dig down deep and make a special effort during this trying period to help our poorest folk in this part of Mississippi. Maybe--just maybe--we can make that youngster smile.

Sincerely,



Charles Evers
President